

# A Deleuzian politics of hybrid cinema

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Gilles Deleuze's books on cinema, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, offer a complex logic of cinema as an exploration of consciousness. They are resources of new and productive ways to think about film and filmmaking. My intent in the following is to explore Deleuze's cinema theory as it may inform the project of hybrid cinema or experimental diasporan cinema.<sup>1</sup> I draw from the theories of hybridity put forward by Trinh T. Minh-ha, Hamid Naficy, and others, from Deleuze's work on Michel Foucault and with Félix Guattari, and from a critique of his use of Bergson. Most importantly, the film and video works I discuss in terms of Deleuze's film theory themselves offer an intervention in his work. I will look at a number of works in the genre of experimental diasporan cinema, focusing in particular on Rea Tajiri's videotape *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991), John Akomfrah's film *Who Needs a Heart?* (1992), and Atom Egoyan's feature film, *Calendar* (1993).

In these writings the politics that characterize Deleuze's work elsewhere tend to go underground; perhaps disappear altogether. Tendencies such as his fascination with auteur cinema, while often pleasingly non-canonical, seem to inhibit the productive line of his thought. I intend my exploration of this one genre to make the political implications of Deleuze's film theory more explicit, by stressing the collective nature of the forms of memory and perception on which he bases his study.

What Deleuze calls 'time-image cinema' is, he argues, a revolutionary moment in the history of western philosophy, in which

<sup>1</sup> This latter, awkward term is a placeholder for a diffuse genre that is approached by terms such as 'hybrid', 'multicultural', 'exile', 'postcolonial' or 'third cinema'. Debates over these terminologies and the different politics they engage are complex. See, for example: Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York and London: Verso, 1992); Ali Behdad, 'Traveling to teach: postcolonial critics in the American academy', in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (eds), *Race, Identity and Representation in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 40-49; Coco Fusco, 'Stateless hybrids: an introduction', in Papo Colo and Coco Fusco (eds), *The Hybrid State* (New York: Exit Art, 1991); Faye Ginsburg, 'Indigenous media: Faustian contract or global village?', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1991); Stuart Hall, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-37; Hamid Naficy, 'The cultural politics of hybridity', in Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Hamid Naficy and Teshome H. Gabriel, 'Introduction - consuming the other', *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992), pp. i-iii; Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the post-colonial', *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992), pp. 99-113.

it has become possible to make an autonomous image of time. It is distinct from 'movement-image cinema', in which frame follows frame according to necessities of action, subordinating time to movement. In order to derive the revolutionary potential of the new cinema that provides a direct image of time, Deleuze places great importance upon the 'any-spaces-whatever' that came to proliferate after World War II: 'The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe. These were "any-spaces-whatever", deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction. And in these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers.'<sup>2</sup>

Could it be that these are not simply the disjunctive spaces of postmodernism but also the disruptive spaces of postcolonialism; the return of repressed cultural presences to the spaces that had marginalized them? In this case the 'kind of mutant . . . new race' to which Deleuze refers (in terms that suddenly take on a rather xenophobic cast) describes the very real conditions of migration, diaspora and hybridity that characterize the new populations of Europe and North America in the years since the war.

Theories of hybrid cinema argue that a hybrid form, in which autobiography mediates a mixture of documentary, fiction, and experimental genres, characterizes the film production of people in transition and cultures in the process of creating identities.<sup>3</sup> One defining quality of hybrid, or experimental diasporan, films is that they are necessarily produced in a contentious relation to a dominant language: in this sense they are properly termed a *minority* form. The violent spatiotemporal disjunctions that characterize diasporan experience – the physical effects of exile, immigration and displacement – also cause a rupture in notions of truth. Experimental diasporan films, using basically western film forms to speak from nonwestern cultures to a mixed audience, perform this disjunction. They have an archaeological quality that allows it to pose different regimes of truth against each other. They confound official history, private recollection and simple fiction, and point to the lacunae that remain, refusing to be filled by the truth of any of these. I use Deleuze's notions of an archaeology of the image to argue that in experimental postcolonial cinema different orders of image, or image and soundtracks that do not correspond to each other, express the disjunction between official and private memory. In addition, if Deleuze's understanding of perception is traced back to its borrowing from Bergson, these disjunctions within the sense information offered by a film can evoke other sorts of memory that slip from dominant discourse, namely memories encoded in senses other than auditory and visual.

2 Gilles Deleuze, 'Preface to the English edition', *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. xi.

3 See, for example: Fusco; Naficy; Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Kobena Mercer, 'Diaspora culture and the dialogic imagination: the aesthetics of black independent filmmaking in Britain', in Claire Andrade Watkins and Mbye B. Cham (eds), *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives in Black Independent Cinema* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988), pp. 50–61. See also: Peter Hitchcock, 'The othering of cultural studies', *Third Text*, no. 25 (1993/4) for a critique of a definition of hybrid cinema that I propose in 'Of many one: the hybrid state films', *Black Film Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1992), pp. 10–11; 26–7.

4 Gilles Deleuze, 'Preface to the French edition', *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. xiv.

5 See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

6 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 74.

7 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, pp. 254-55.

8 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 503.

Deleuze's concern in his *Cinema* books is not to come up with another film theory; rather, film is the ideal object for his philosophical project. In the introduction to *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* he asserts that he is carrying out an exploration that Bergson would have done, except that cinema did not attain its typical form until after the philosopher's death. Cinema, he argues, is an exploration of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> Hence the bricolage of philosophical languages in these books. Similarly, my concern in using this package of theory is not to find just another way of talking about critical filmmaking, nor to 'apply' Deleuze to a cinematic object. Rather, if cinema is an exploration of consciousness, then these theories must be able to address the production and suppression of consciousness in cinema.

### Destratification

Discourses are not only restrictive but enabling.<sup>5</sup> While they limit what can be said, they also provide the only language in which to say it. One may be tempted to interpret the powers of becoming or 'lines of flight' that would cut through the layers of accumulated discourse as forces of truth, but they can only be productive if they participate in these discourses. 'Relations between forces will remain transitive, unstable, faint, almost virtual, unless they are carried out by the formed or stratified relations which make up forms of knowledge.'<sup>6</sup> In other words, political (or any sort of) change must be effected in a dance, between strata and lines of flight, of containment and breaking free.

Similarly, Deleuze's work on cinema, like Foucault's work on history, disputes the ability ever to find the truth of a historical event. It is lost in its discursive representation, in the layers of words and things that build up over it. Yet it is only by being inscribed in this way that it can be said to occur at all. We can recreate, not the true historical event, but at least another version of it, by cutting across those discursive layers. 'If we want to grasp an event we must not show it', Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2*. 'We must not pass along the event, but plunge into it, go through all the geological layers that are its internal history (and not simply a more or less distant past).'<sup>7</sup> This is the act of archaeology: combining elements from different strata in order to resist the order that would be imposed by working on one stratum alone.<sup>8</sup> Cinema has the unique ability to deterritorialize the representation of a historical event, to confront the layers with each other and sort through the rubble.

For example: *Who Needs a Heart?*, a film by John Akomfrah of the Black Audio Film Collective, cuts through the discursive representation of the Black Power movement in Britain in the 1960s

and 1970s. The clichéd image of those struggles is present in clothing, hairstyles, parties and slogans on protest signs. However, the absence of dialogue in the entire film prevents the viewer from easily connecting those visual images with official representations of the movement; representations that contain and dismiss it. Instead, music, ambient sound, and an almost perfume-like richness of colour and texture cause the film to elicit recollections on another level – one that circumvents official discourse. *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige*, a video by Rea Tajiri, confronts the hegemonic representations of Japanese–Americans during World War II in fiction films and government newsreels with images of absence, forgetting and evocative trifles that ultimately speak volumes. And *Calendar*, a film by Atom Egoyan, confronts a tourist's commodified images of Armenia with incoherent memory-images from which a profoundly repressed grief erupts.

### Archaeology of the film image

Following Foucault, Deleuze argues that the visual and verbal are different orders that cannot be reduced one to the other. They are two incommensurable forms of truth that confront each other at a given historical moment: 'What we see never lies in what we say, and vice versa'.<sup>9</sup> They approach each other asymptotically, falsifying each other even as they require each other. Cinema, as an audiovisual medium, is the privileged record of the disjunctive quality of 'truth' in a particular historical formation. Deleuze understands the cinematic image to correspond to the Foucauldian notion of the visible, the layer of things in which one can read about a particular stratum or historical formation. In the image is revealed 'the deserted layer where we bury our own phantoms'.<sup>10</sup> (Later I will argue that in addition to these two orders of experience there exist still other, less easily recorded and coded, orders that nevertheless leave their traces in the audiovisual media of film and video.)

Pedagogy, for Deleuze, is the act of revealing the new layer that is in formation, the new combination of words and things that cannot be read in terms of the existing languages. To read/hear the image, then, is to look/listen not for what is there but for the gaps – 'mind the gap!', as notices read in the subways – to look for what might be, in the face of what is not. Films that are hybrid, in that they are forced to use hegemonic languages to speak from positions of diaspora, take advantage of this disjunction between the visual and the verbal. Hence the importance of black screen, the *absence* of image, in *History and Memory*; of barely legible 8mm video footage and distorted voices on an answering machine in *Calendar*.

*History and Memory* attempts to recreate Tajiri's Japanese–American family's memory of their internment in concentration

9 Ibid., p. 64.

10 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 244.

camps during World War II. The tape is both the record and active process of her struggle to reactivate the past from the fragments of available image. Images exist, in newsreels and fiction films, to corroborate official histories of the internment of Japanese–Americans during the war. But the unofficial histories of her family’s experiences cannot be documented, and the few artifacts they have from the experience are silent. Furthermore, inexplicably for Tajiri, those who were in the camps seem wilfully amnesiac; her mother barely remembers a thing about her imprisonment. It is by bringing together visual and audio images that are inadequate alone and contradictory together that Tajiri is able to evoke scenes and events that cannot be reconstructed.

The tape begins with a black screen, and a scrolling text describing a scene viewed from overhead:

. . . Slowly, very, very slowly the ground comes closer as the tops of trees disappear. The tops of the heads of a man and woman become visible as they move them back and forth in an animated fashion. The black hair on their heads catch and reflect light from the street lamps. The light from the street lamps has created a path for them to walk and argue.

*(The spirit of my grandfather witnesses my father and mother as they have an argument about the unexplained nightmares of their daughter on the 20th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor . . .)*

. . . an event that would result in the forcible detainment of 110,000 Japanese–Americans. This description of an image (with no image) is followed by another, this time verbal. Tajiri’s voiceover says:

I don’t know where this came from, but I just have this fragment, this picture that’s always in my mind. My mother, she’s standing at a faucet, and it’s really hot outside, and she’s filling this canteen, and the water’s really cold, and it feels really good. And the sun’s just so hot, it’s just beating down, and there’s this dust that gets everywhere, and they’re always sweeping the floors.

This second description is accompanied by a brief flash of a visual image, of a dark-haired woman filling a canteen. These two sequences, detailed descriptions of events for which there are no images, attempt to replace the images that have ‘happened in the world while there were cameras watching’, or which ‘we restage in front of cameras, to have images of’. They must suffice, for none of the contemporary images – Office of War Information films of the camps, American and Japanese newsreels, or movies like *From Here to Eternity* (Fred Zinnemann, 1953) – can serve as memory vehicles for Tajiri’s family. Tajiri calls upon the spirit of the dead, namely her grandfather, to supply an image, as though the recollection of a community must be drawn upon as a source of images when no



*Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (Trinh T. Minh-Ha, 1989).  
 Courtesy: Cinenova.

others exist. In short, when no image is available, archaeology must be done in order wilfully to create images.

Images also become a site for excavation when the sound ceases to corroborate them. Trinh T. Minh-ha, for example, has long worked to make sound falsify the visual archive. In Trinh's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) the audio/visual disjunction consists in realizing, as several women talk on camera about their experiences of growing up in Vietnam, that they are performing themselves. Their hesitation on camera is not 'Asian' shyness but the uncertainty of under-rehearsed actors. As their words simultaneously scroll down the screen, one begins to doubt the women's statements, which have the quality of confessions extracted under torture (or by a filmmaker anxious to capture authenticity). Cut off from their clichéd extension into conventional documentary forms, the visual and sound images become unavailable to the viewer who seeks some sort of authenticity. They underscore the limitations of a film language that insists on examination and truthful revelation.

Other filmmakers divorce the visual from the verbal archive by eschewing full translation into English (or the language of the dominant viewer). Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva Jr exhibits many of his works in Hopi with either no translation or a clearly incomplete one. In *Siskyavi: The Place of Chasms* (1991), an old woman explains to her granddaughter, in alternating Hopi and English, the significance of the ceremonial patterns she is painting. A non-Hopi will comprehend that what she is describing is sacred; but the sacred elements of her speech are not translated; they reside on a different, inaccessible stratum from that on which the English conversation takes place.

Similarly, Egoyan's *Calendar* is structured around the losses that take place in acts of translation. The protagonist (played by the filmmaker) is a photographer whose mode of existence is to replace experience with images. We watch as this character, who like Egoyan is a Canadian photographer of Armenian descent, manages the experience of being in his country of origin by creating images for export. His reason for being in Armenia is to produce photographs of country churches, turning the rustling, fragrant landscape into cheesecake images to be marketed in the West. His wife is a Canadian who still identifies with her Armenian heritage (played by Egoyan's real-life wife, Arsinée Khanjian). In the course of their visit she comes to identify more with the country they are visiting and to become attracted to their native Armenian guide. As though already in thrall to these images with which he is replacing his own presence, the photographer watches through the viewfinder as she disappears into the landscape with the guide, knowing he is losing her to him.

These flashbacks alternate with scenes in which the photographer, back in his Toronto apartment, pursues his perversion of hiring



Arsinée Khanjian in Atom  
Egoyan's *Calendar* (1993).  
Courtesy: ICA Projects.

women who vaguely resemble his wife to come to dinner, excuse themselves on cue, and make an erotic telephone call in their first language, such as Macedonian or Turkish. As the woman-of-the-moment stands next to the church-of-the-month, talking on the phone, they function as two virtual images, of the woman and the country he refused to see.



## Actual and virtual image

Drawing on Bergson's philosophy of duration, Deleuze proffers an image of time as always splitting, like a hair, into two parts: the time that moves smoothly forward, or the 'present that passes'; and the time that is seized and represented (if only mentally), or the 'past that is preserved'. What Deleuze, following Bergson, refers to as the actual image and the virtual image are the two aspects of time as it splits, the actual corresponding to the present that passes, the virtual to the past that is preserved. Thus we see that at the very moment that they diverge, the two types of image create two disjunctive representations of the same moment. ('Image' in Bergson signifies not simply the visual image, but the complex of impressions that a perceived object conveys to a perceiver at a given moment.)<sup>11</sup> An example is home videos of family gatherings. At the moment that the video is shot, the two sorts of time look the same, but the present-that-passes can never be recalled, while the past-that-is-preserved (in the video) becomes the institutionalized representation of the moment. Virtual images tend to compete with recollection images – the memory you have of the gathering that is not captured in the video – and as we know, the power of the former is such that they often come to stand in for our memories.

In effect, the past-that-is-preserved has hegemony over the representation of the event, be it Thanksgiving 1994 or Gulf War 1991. If instead of home movies we think of television news, for example, the political implications of these divergent sorts of image become apparent. Clearly this is not a question of which image is 'true', but of which has a more tenacious representation, and which representation has more continuity with the layer of images that preceded it. Television, cinema and other 'public' images comprise a sort of official history, while the unpreserved present-that-passes is more like unofficial history or private memory. To confront one with the other is to dig between the strata – perhaps finding traces of unofficial or private memories. What Deleuze calls a 'recollection image' embodies a past event that has no match in the recent image repertoire: Tajiri's image of her mother at the pump is an example.

Experimental diasporan cinema digs between strata, using a mixture of filmic languages to tell the unofficial stories of exile, emigrant, or culturally-mixed people. Where multicultural categorizing keeps difference in its place, hybridity is unpredictable and generative. When someone's experience does not fit into the categories provided, it brings back the histories that are repressed – just as a fossilized fragment visibly recalls the forgotten struggles of past generations. Hybrids reveal the process of exclusion by which nations and identities are formed.

Part of this archaeological quality depends upon a certain arresting of movement. The films I discuss here tend to hold the

<sup>11</sup> See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone, 1988), pp. 36–8.



12 Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, p. 46.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 63–4.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

15 Deleuze touches briefly upon the notion of film as 'utterable' from Bakhtinian linguistics to critique the bifurcation of subjectivity and objectivity in film spectatorship, arguing that since there are no positions of objectivity within discourse, cinema necessarily deterritorializes subjectivity. *Ibid.*, p. 73. Identification in film, according to this model, is not with a subject but with the act of perception. David Pendleton has recently demonstrated that the Deleuzo-Guattarian model of a subjectivity that is constituted in the vicissitudes of a productive desire makes this sort of identificatory oscillation the norm. See: David Pendleton, 'Beyond subject and object', paper presented at the Society for Cinema Studies conference, Syracuse, 1994. For an excellent discussion of how Bakhtinian semiotics allow film to be understood as encoding a social process, as opposed to the more abstract and individualistic tradition of Saussurean semiotics, see Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 31–4.

viewer in a series of evocative contemplations, where exploration is spatial more than temporal, or where the temporality is located in the circuits of memory rather than the forward motion of action.<sup>12</sup>

## Memory

Images are not neutral reflections, but representations made from an interested point of view. Perception, according to Bergson, is always partial and interested, since it is located in a specific perceiver; it is necessarily embodied, located, and contingent. Subjectivity, then, is *subtractive* insofar as it means a thing is not perceived in its fullness but only in those aspects that interest the perceiver.<sup>13</sup>

Part of what distinguishes the movement image from the time image is that the former accepts the subjectivity implied in the image; it acquiesces to the hegemonic form of perception. 'It could be said', Deleuze writes, 'that the subjective-image is the thing seen by someone "qualified", or the set as it is seen by someone who forms part of that set'.<sup>14</sup> The time image – which should evoke a naked eyeball, powerless to draw upon its resources of memory and common sense – questions everything about how *this* image got to be constructed from a given perception, and thus has to start the act of perceiving all over again. In fact, Deleuze argues, cinema necessarily pulls the viewer between subjective and objective poles, much as in Bakhtinian linguistics each act of enunciation positions the listener/viewer anew.<sup>15</sup>

Egoyan has made a number of feature films devoted to the question of how technological reproductions of images are used as prostheses for memory and for sex. His films centre on the destruction of virtual images, such as family photos and home movies, themselves already the last vestige of memory. These images often also represent the memories of a minority culture. In Egoyan's early film *Family Viewing* (1987), for example, the only remaining images of the young protagonist's Armenian mother, who is dead, are home movies that, having been transferred to video, have already lost resolution. The boy's father, an Anglo-Canadian (who we see on a fragment of one of the films discouraging his wife from speaking to their son in her native language), is now recording sexual games with his mistress over the family videotapes. Pornography is, in some ways, characterized by the reduction of a presence to a deracinated and consumable image: hence the convergence of cultural erasure and the production of pornography in many of Egoyan's works. Yet these images remain volatile, threatening to activate buried circuits of memory.

16 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 221.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 112–13.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

## Fossils

Deleuze remarks that many films made by minorities invoke memory – neither a psychological nor a collective memory, but ‘the strange faculty that puts into immediate contact the inside and the outside, the people’s business and private business’.<sup>16</sup> Because official histories, with their official image repertoires, are often at odds with the private histories of disenfranchised people, it is recollection images – such as the memories of Tajiri’s interlocutors – that must confront the public and the private with each other.

A recollection image is like a fossil in that it embodies the traces of events whose representation has been buried. When recollection images cannot be connected to a present situation, they become ‘strangely active fossils, radioactive, inexplicable in the present where they surface, and all the more harmful and autonomous’.<sup>17</sup> Such traces are inscrutable on their own, but when we cut through the different layers and connect them, they tell a story. *History and Memory* evokes recollection images, fossils of events that have left traces in the memories and forgettings of Tajiri’s parents and the other people she interviews.

Tajiri tells of a bird-shaped wooden brooch that her amnesiac mother wore constantly, made by a now-dead relative. One day in the National Archives, going through a box of documents from the internment camps, Tajiri comes across a photograph of a roomful of people working at long tables, labelled ‘Bird-carving class, August 1941’. The archive – in this case, the literal archive – does not recognize Mrs Tajiri’s private history, but it can tell something about it. Similarly, the bird activates the archive, embodying a recollection that is now lost. The brightly-painted figure, a node to which both official and private histories can be traced, is one of those ‘strangely active fossils’.

## Cliche

The archaeological power of the cinema is its ability to mine images for new information. Deleuze writes, ‘It is a civilization of the cliché where all the powers have an interest in hiding images from us, not necessarily in hiding the same thing from us, but in hiding something in the image’. The cliché is ‘a sensory-motor image of the thing’, an image of this thing that is not seen for itself but only instrumentally.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the cliché, Deleuze values what he calls the optical image. He usefully invokes Eadweard Muybridge’s famous experiments with racehorses to illustrate the difference between cliché and optical image. The cliché is that classic image of a galloping horse, all four legs off the ground and gracefully extended. The optical image is any of those instantaneous shots that

Muybridge captured that revealed the horse in all its ungainly untypicality. Not how you imagine a horse in full gallop looks! Released from a *pose*, with its implicit extension into action, the unclined image depicts an *any-instant-whatever*.<sup>19</sup>

19 Ibid., pp. 5–6.

The optical image ‘replaces its objects’, substituting a virtual for an actual image; not the thing, but a description that replaces and erases the thing. Cinema, in severing clichés from their context, makes the hidden object visible, in Foucault’s sense of revealing what knowledge they constitute. The resulting image (described with examples from Godard and Antonioni) looks rarefied and abstract compared to the richness of clichéd images. But it is really the cliché that is abstract: it uses from the image only what makes sense in the terms of causal connections, instrumentally; and this exists on a conceptual level. As Deleuze puts it, ‘It is grass in general that interests the herbivore’!<sup>20</sup> By contrast, the restraint and thinness of the optical image ‘bring the thing each time to an essential singularity, and describe the inexhaustible, endlessly referring to other descriptions. It is, then, the optical image which is really rich, or “typical”’.<sup>21</sup>

20 Ibid., p. 44.

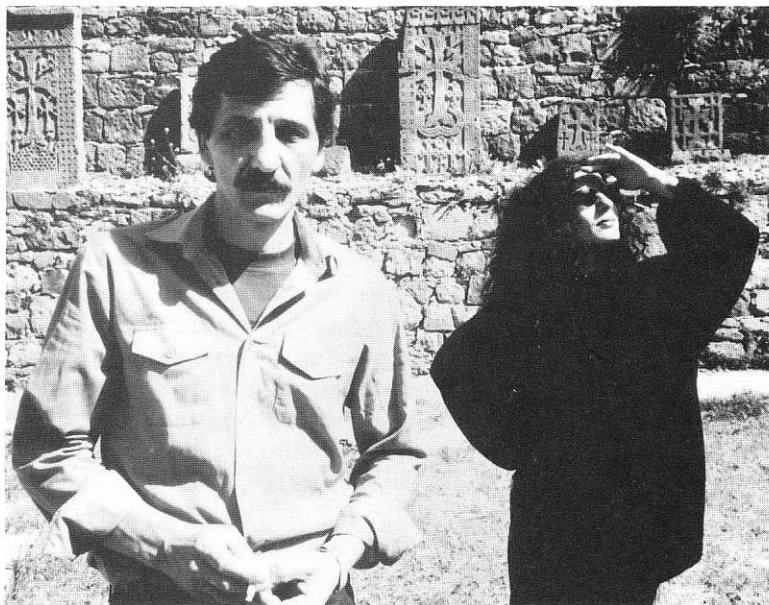
21 Ibid., p. 45.

Empty of already-encoded meanings, the optical image is open to reapprehension and the reactivation of memory. We do not perceive such an image purely in the phenomenological sense, but rather our ‘attentive recognition’ comes into play. Attentive recognition is a Bergsonian term for the way we oscillate between seeing the object, recalling virtual images that it brings to mind, and comparing the virtual object thus created with the one before us. In so doing we create anew, ‘not only the object perceived, but also the ever-widening systems with which it may be bound up’.<sup>22</sup> Engaging with the freshly perceived object, we recreate it in higher expansions of memory and on deeper strata of reality. The emptied-out cliché is one example of failed recognition, with its possibilities for rediscovering lost virtual and recollection images. For example, this describes the form of viewership at work in *Who Needs a Heart?*, since the lack of narrative and of dialogue encourages the viewer to linger on music, visual elements, and details of mise-en-scène, calling upon his or her own subjective experience to amplify the clues given in the film.

22 Ibid., p. 46. Deleuze is quoting Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 127–8.

In *Calendar*, the protagonist is someone who is desperately trying to speed the process of replacing actual images with virtual images. Afraid of the volatility of recollection images and their ability to activate repressed pain, he rigorously controls the process of image construction, as though to speed actual images into their suspension in virtual images. He spends the entire trip to Armenia fixed behind the viewfinder of an 8mm camera, while his wife and her guide and erstwhile lover wander in and out of the frame. When she translates the guide’s information to the photographer, she conveys his disapproval as well: ‘He doesn’t like to tell about this place – he

'He doesn't like to tell you  
about this place . . . you should  
let your eyes discover it'.  
*Calendar* (Atom Egoyan, 1993).  
Courtesy: ICA Projects.



thinks you should let your eyes discover it'. Arsinée tries to convince him to leave his camera and join them for a walk but the photographer is adamant, adding in a retrospective voiceover, 'What I really feel like doing is standing here and watching while the two of you leave me and disappear into a landscape that I am about to photograph'. He defers acknowledging the loss of his marriage, instead wilfully creating images that, should he ever let down his guard and experience them, will awaken painful circuits of memory. Thus the glossy calendar on his wall in Toronto is, to push the metaphor, a mine of radioactive fossils.

The photographer's life revolves around similar processes of substitution. His substitutions are highly fetishistic both in psychoanalytic terms and in the sense that he is seeking to establish a uniform commodity value for all his experiences. His wife's voice, calling long distance, echoes metallically on his answering machine. The women who come to him from the escort service barely resemble his wife. He 'adopts' a child in Armenia and watches a videotape of her. 'She costs me \$28 a month', he tells one of his paid dinner companions: 'Do you have children? How much do they cost a month?'

By their very inadequacy to the actual image, these virtual images set up circuits of memory and longing. This is the trap the photographer sets for himself, and the trap of the optical image. The less that is there in the image, pre-encoded – 'pre-enjoyed' in the second-hand store euphemism – the more there is that can only be

23 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

experienced by drawing upon one's memories as one engages with the image in the present act of perception.

Significantly, when attentive recognition fails – when we cannot remember – it creates. Rather than hooking up with sensory-motor extension, the actual image connects with virtual elements.<sup>23</sup> Attentive recognition is thus a *participatory* notion of spectatorship, whose political potential shouldn't be ignored. If a viewer is free to draw upon her own reserves of memory as she participates in the creation of the object on screen, her private and unofficial histories and memories will be granted as much legitimacy as the official histories that make up the regime of the cliché – if not more. How this process of spectatorship connects with a process of production is another matter, related to the notion of 'intercessors' that I introduce below.

### Memory and the collective

In focusing on diasporan cinema, I have been describing a crisis of incommensurability in which there is a directly political question of the discrepancy between official and private memories. Deleuze describes such a crisis in his discussions of European and North American cinema as well. Here the terms of the crisis are more existential – the helplessness of Antonioni's and Godard's characters confronting strange industrial landscapes, for example; or the free-floating perception that characterizes work of North American structuralist filmmakers such as Michael Snow and Ken Jacobs. The latter, Deleuze argues, formulate a sort of *gaseous* perception that is not tied to subjectivity, but also not tied to any collectivity. Gaseous perception affords not a Vertovian communist utopia but an individualistic one, or, as Deleuze writes, 'Drugs as the American community':<sup>24</sup> it's a gas!

Deleuze's theory of cinematic perception should allow him to quite accurately trace the form of the viewing community in the object viewed. Instead he falls into an atomistic notion of perception in which the individual *can* perceive without the assistance of collective memory. I would like to argue, in contrast to this position, that the element of communal experience implicit in Bergson's theory of perception necessarily informs the process of film perception as well. 'Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past'.<sup>25</sup> As Teshome Gabriel points out, the process of viewing of Third Cinema works underscores the collective character of their expression: 'there is a significant continuity between forms of oral tradition and ceremonial story-telling and the structures of reception of Third Cinema. This continuity consists of a sharing of responsibility in the construction

24 Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, p. 84.

25 Walter Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> Teshome H. Gabriel, 'Third cinema as guardian of popular memory: towards a Third aesthetics', in Jim Pines and Paul Willemsen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', p. 185. Benjamin does note however that Bergson had specific interest in rejecting the historical determination of memory (*ibid.*, p. 157).

<sup>28</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 272.

of the text, where both the filmmaker and the spectators play a double role as performers and creators.<sup>26</sup> This collective process, I argue, is simply more explicit, and motivated, in diasporan cinema, which is forced to recognize individualistic narratives to be aspects of hegemonic fictions. Minority media make it clear, by virtue of their strained relation to dominant languages, that *no* utterance is individual.

Let me draw upon Walter Benjamin's critique of Bergson in order to refashion some of Deleuze's ideas about film, memory, and the social. Bergson's notion of *durée*, which is central to Deleuze's theory of time-image cinema, depends upon a person experiencing the passage of time. As Benjamin points out, however, Bergson elides the fact that this experience ends in the individual's death. 'Bergson in his conception of the *durée* has become . . . estranged from history', Benjamin writes. 'The *durée* from which death has been eliminated has the miserable endlessness of a scroll. Tradition has been excluded from it.'<sup>27</sup> This endlessness and estrangement seem distinctly to describe the sort of high-modernist cinema that Deleuze privileges. Such works actualize the experience of the *durée* by not permitting images to extend into action, by cutting off all causal relationships. The wandering character of a Godard film 'has gained in an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction: he SEES so that the viewer's problem becomes "What is there to see in the image?" (and not now "What are we going to see in the next image?")'<sup>28</sup> But, we might ask, what is the point of 'finally SEEING' if there is nothing to see? What is the point of having our clichés and preconceptions blown by the intensity of the time-image experience if we have no subsequent course of action; if, indeed, the time image is all about suspending action? Might there be a more pressing purpose to this act of suspension?

To answer this, let me return to explore the idea of memory. Memory is more like a productive minefield (or bed of fossils) than the limpid reflecting pool that Bergson describes. Benjamin finds Bergson excessively sanguine about an individual's ability to partake in the fullness of experience, moving back and forth between the circuits of perception and recollection with ever-increasing satisfaction, as though at some great phenomenological buffet table. Experience, he argues, necessarily involves a connection with the social character of memory, and this relation is increasingly difficult where the social character of public life has been undermined. Benjamin's critique suggests that among the sorts of causal relationships abjured in the time image is ritual. Ritual depends upon the association of images with history, of individual with community experience. Collective memory comes as a shock: *mémoire involontaire* is not simply the individual unconscious bucking up, but the traces of collective life that inform the structure of perception.

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', pp. 159–60.

Benjamin aligns Bergson's idea of *mémoire pure* with the notion of unconscious memory. Both describe the sort of memory that cannot be called up at will but must be brought on by a 'shock' – whether this be the fragrance of Proust's *tisane* or, for Deleuze, the immobility that forces one to see. Unlike remembrance, Benjamin writes, (unconscious) memory aims not to protect impressions but to disintegrate them.<sup>29</sup> Remembrance actually shields consciousness from experience. It is thus very much like the built-up layers of virtual images that comprise official history. In contrast, memory, one might say, deterritorializes remembrance. It takes a shock to unroot a memory, to create a flow of experience. Such a shock is what Deleuze looks for in time-image cinema. What you 'SEE', then, in the suspension of motor extension, is a little closer to the repressed *collective* contents of memory than simply a phenomenological *Thereness*.

### Sense memory

Let me stress that this memory is not simply individual repressed memory, but a cultural memory. I have been arguing that the memories that are effaced from dominant representations find their representation in the characteristic gaps of time-image cinema. I would like to suggest as well, following Bergson, that the very perceptual forms that encode memory may be revealed as culturally contingent by this shattering effect. The 'shattering of the sensory-motor schema' that characterizes time-image cinema describes a suspension of the usual relations among the senses and their automatic extension into movement. This shattering thus intervenes into the commonsense patterns of sense experience, leaving some space in which perception can be experienced anew. (It is interesting to reconsider the notion of 'common sense' in terms of Bergson's theory of perception: a particular organization of the senses is held in common as the way a particular culture perceives.) Put differently, the suspension unsettles hegemonic forms of perception, creating space for culturally variant forms of perception. Bergson emphasizes that perception takes place in a body (not, for example, a point of consciousness), that the senses act as a whole in the act of recognition, and that the senses 'require education'.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 48.

These arguments support a view that sense experience is learned. It is important to note that in his use of the term 'image' Bergson implies not simply a visual image but the whole of sense information available to a (differentially disposed) perception at a given time. *Matter and Memory* can lend itself to an explanation of the cultural variations by which the senses are differentiated and hierarchized, and thus to reread Bergson's work closely allows us to see what might be revealed between the falling shards that Deleuze's



31 Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', p. 164.

32 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 12.

33 Naficy, 'The cultural politics of hybridity', pp. 152-3.

'shattering' precipitates. Since perception in his model is plastic and instrumental, variable according to culture and local need, I would suggest that it provides a way to theorize relations of perception and memory as they are specifically informed in different cultures. The 'tactile' is one such component of sense memory. As the story 'bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand',<sup>31</sup> so does film encode the sense memories that do not find their way into verbal discourse. Deleuze offers the example of the pickpocket's hands in Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959) to demonstrate how tactile perception might function in film.<sup>32</sup> I would suggest that tactile (and other sense) memories are most important to those who do not have access to conventional speech in film. Hamid Naficy writes that it is especially important to consider the non-audiovisual ways that exiles experience audiovisual media: 'The exiles produce their difference not just through what they see and hear but through their senses of smell, taste, and touch. Indeed, these aspects of the sensorium often provide, more than sight and hearing, poignant reminders of difference and of separation from homeland.'<sup>33</sup>

The originary fossil-like image in *History and Memory* – the image that encodes lost memories – is that of the woman filling the canteen at a pump. It is Tajiri, reenacting her mother's sole memory from the internment camps. The second time the image plays, as the woman kneels in the dust, we hear the sound of water splashing; she rinses her face with a grimace of relief, as though this visit to the pump were her only respite from the days of imprisonment, dust and waiting. Her mother's only memory, then, is a *tactile* memory,



*History and memory* (Rea Tajiri, 1991). Courtesy: Jane Balfour Films Ltd.

of the heat rising and the coolness of water on her hands and face. The film alludes to this level of perception through image and, especially, the gurgling sound of the running water: the memory is encoded audiovisually. The space that is beyond discourse in *History and Memory* is also one that the colonizing images of the US newsreels could not touch: a private sense memory, held in safe keeping.

### Powers of the false

Deleuze's politics can be summarized without too much simplification as privileging that which enables the new to come into being. This principle underlies his desire to argue ways in which the time image may supersede the movement image, insofar as the ~~former~~ <sup>latter</sup> represents already-dead discourse and the ~~latter~~ <sup>former</sup> the freedom from fixed discourse that enables new perceptions. These politics align with the various politics of diasporan cinema in the most general sense that diasporan peoples are people in the process of transformation, whose self-expression is impossible within hegemonic discourse. Thus the power for people in the process of becoming is the 'power of the false', an assertion that will not privilege *their* experience as truth either, only undermine the hegemonic character of official images, clichés, and other totalizing regimes of truth. Powers of the false capture the fraught relationship with dominant languages that groups have when they are emerging into political identity. John Akomfrah upholds such a will to transformation when he criticizes the imperative that black cultural workers submit to particular political ends: 'People assume that there are certain transcendental duties that Black filmmaking has to perform. . . . Because it is in a state of emergence its means always have to be guerrilla means, war means, signposts of urgency. When that begins to inhibit questions of reflection – doubt, skepticism, intimacy and so on – then the categorical imperative does exactly what it is supposed to do – it imprisons.'<sup>34</sup> In contrast, creative falsification at the level of the image itself can have political power.

In the cinema, 'powers of the false' are at work when there is no single point that can be referred to as real or true. Recall that in our forking model of time, of present-that-passes and past-preserved, there can be no objective record of the past. The past is preserved among various discursive strata that confront each other with incommensurable truths. Power of the false describes the indiscernibility between actual and virtual images constituted around the splitting of time. Deleuze calls the complex of such indiscernible images a 'crystal-image': the original point at which real and virtual image reflect each other produces, in turn, a widening circuit of real and virtual images like a hall of mirrors. 'Sometimes it is the film

34 John Akomfrah, quoted in Coco Fusco, 'An interview with the Black Audio Film Collective: John Akomfrah, Reece Augiste, Lina Gopaul and Avril Johnson', *Young British and Black: The Work of Sankofa and the Black Audio Film Collective* (Buffalo: Hallwalls, 1988), p. 51.

35 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 76.

which takes itself as its object in the process of its making or of its setbacks in being made', Deleuze notes, that acts as this sort of catalytic crystal, reflecting its could-have-beens in the complex of its virtual images.<sup>35</sup> *Calendar*, *Who Needs a Heart?*, and *History and Memory* are constructed around the setbacks that block them: the events that prevent the production of images stimulate circuits of memory. To recall the image of fossil that I borrow from Deleuze's writing on Foucault, these points across which virtual and actual regard each other actually function as fossils, preserving the 'radioactive' quality of the original contact.

### The people

Deleuze's conclusion to the question of political cinema, repeated without elaboration so often throughout his writings that it becomes a cliché itself, is 'If there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet'.<sup>36</sup> Political cinema reaches an impasse in the discovery that there is no revolutionary proletariat for it to represent – for if such an organized force exists, it is already inscribed in modern political institutions, and thus for Deleuze cannot be an agent of the new. However, I prefer to borrow his theorizations to look for the temporary nodes of struggle that *do* define particular peoples as capable of action. We can pinpoint these struggles by looking for the ways they are denied speech: 'The moment the master, or the colonizer, proclaims "There have never been people here"', Deleuze writes, 'the missing people are a becoming, they invent themselves in shanty towns or in camps, or in ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, keeping Foucault's criterion of visibility in mind, we may look most for a people to be inventing itself when the colonizers are busy explaining, apologizing for and normalizing their existence. This is the *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990) approach to Native American history; the wartime patriotic musicals; the coverage of 'riots' (not rebellions) on the six o'clock news; the glossy calendar images of bucolic countryside. By contrast, gaps and silences point to sites of the emergence of the people.

Hybrid cinema doubts the assumptions that structure conventional films about minority history, fiction and documentary alike: namely that there is an intact oral history out there waiting to be tapped, recorded, and proffered to a community. While such work is important, it assumes that a history can be unproblematically reconstructed, given resources and a respite from censorship. But, to put it crudely, only certain statements are possible within a given discourse, and to make a film in which history is continuous is to concede to the naming power of those statements. As Akomfrah

36 *Ibid.*, p. 216.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

38 Akomfrah, quoted in Fusco, 'An interview with the Black Audio Film Collective', p. 51.

says, 'The triumphalist vision of race and community operates on the assumption that there is essentially a core of affect that is structured around oratory, around song – giving it an irreducible unity . . . . You become aware that the diasporic is an act of will and memory because there are very few institutions that can substantiate that presence . . . . These are acts of will and memory and the very mode of remembering is essential for any historic project and I am not talking about just the very obvious mode of remembering history.'<sup>38</sup> Black Audio films *Who Needs a Heart?* and *Handsworth Songs* (1986), like *Calendar*, *History and Memory*, and other works of hybrid cinema, will fictions and silences to fill in the place of dysfunctional memory.

### Intercessors

Cinematic archaeology is not a question of exhuming the 'authentic voice' of a minority people – for that would be a unitary voice and, in fact, it would simply replicate the transparent domination by which a minority is forced to speak in a minority voice. The minority artist, by contrast, dances along the border. He/she must undo a double colonization, since the community is colonized both by the master's stories and by its own, that have been translated and annexed by the colonizer. The photographer in *Calendar* fails in this respect initially: he buys into the dominant culture's image of what is Armenian, slotting the photographs of churches into the known quantity of calendarishness, while valiantly repressing the efforts of his other images to speak. 'The author must not', Deleuze writes, 'make himself into the ethnologist of his people, nor himself invent a fiction which would be one more private story.'<sup>39</sup> Conventional documentary participates as much as fiction cinema in the instrumentality of the colonizer's language, all the more so when it seems to have got hold of an 'authentic' quality in the colonized culture. Instead minority filmmakers, Deleuze argues, must destroy myths from the inside.

Hybrid forms which undermine the dominance of any single genre are best able to set up myths, destroy them, and create them anew. Hybrid cinema is not a cinema of 'positive images' or corrective representations. Like Tajiri, Egoyan, and Akomfrah, filmmakers such as Masayesva, Pratibha Parmar and Isaac Julien from Britain's Sankofa workshop, Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman, and Inuit videomaker Zacharias Kunuk work to create myths, to deny information about their cultures even as they spin stories.

The agents of hybrid cinema are what Deleuze calls 'intercessors', real characters who 'make up fiction'. These are not the docile informants of documentary, but resistant characters who dispute the filmmaker's construction of truth at every turn: Kazuo Hara's

39 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 222.

power-hungry subjects, Trinh's evasive interlocutors, even Jean Rouch's characters with their own stories to tell. In *History and Memory*, it is Tajiri's amnesiac mother, whose memory consists only somatically, in the pain caused by denial and in the memory of water. The filmmaker goes digging herself, makes up stories, indeed becomes a surrogate rememberer.

Storytelling crosses and recrosses between private life and politics, making the boundary between them impossible to locate. As Benjamin suggests, storytellers' knowledge is of a different order from that which passes as official information. As 'the communicability of experience decreases', as official knowledge diverges from community experience (or vice versa), the storyteller's practical information becomes increasingly rare and precious.<sup>40</sup> Old people are thus repositories of virtual images; their death is like the loss of a past-that-is-preserved. Their stories, again, are like those 'radioactive fossils' that cannot be explained in terms of the geological layer on which they are found.

The interspersors in an act of filmic storytelling deterritorialize the image, by taking and recombining from existing image repertoires. In *History and Memory*, Tajiri's mother's single recollection image is of filling the canteen; her father remembers only the theft of their house; nobody recognizes the Office of War Information footage of the Poston camp (and the sound track plays a melancholy version of 'I Only Have Eyes for You'). But from these Tajiri is able to weave, to fabulate, a story through the telling of which the family regains their memory and the filmmaker herself achieves an identity. Memory, Deleuze writes, is a 'membrane, a double becoming' that constitutes anew both filmmaker and community; 'the people who are missing and the I who is absent'.<sup>41</sup> The storyteller's knowledge is collective: 'Story-telling is not an impersonal myth, but neither is it a personal fiction: it is a word in act, a speech-act through which the character continually crosses the boundary which would separate his private business from politics, and *which itself produces collective utterances*'. In *History and Memory*, Tajiri reconstitutes herself, as well as the community of Japanese-Americans whose story of imprisonment was historically erased, in the process of looking for her mother's memories and the collective memories they metonymize.

In his work with Guattari, Deleuze is the champion of smooth space, of a multiplicity that dissolves the static lines of striated space. Thus it seems most un-Deleuzian that his books on cinema stick to the hierarchy that puts individual creative geniuses first, storytellers second. In the hybrid, or experimental diasporan, films discussed here, the filmmaker acts not only as author but as specific intellectual, participating in local struggles against the dominant regimes of knowledge production.<sup>42</sup> The hybrid film is in a position to do archaeology, to sort through the rubble created by cultural

<sup>40</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The storyteller: reflections on the work of Nikolai Leskov', in Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, pp. 84-7.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, pp. 221-2 (italics in original).

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. xxvii.

43 *History and Memory* is distributed by Women Make Movies, New York, tel. (212) 925 0606, and Jane Balfour Films Ltd., London, tel. (071) 267 5392. *Calendar* is distributed by Zeitgeist Films, New York, tel. (212) 274 1989, and ICA Projects, London, tel. (071) 930 0493. *Who Needs a Heart?* is distributed by Black Audio Film Collective, London, tel. (071) 267 0846.

dislocation and read significance in what official history overlooks. In the process, it simply produces briefly and contingently, the knowledge of a community in diaspora.<sup>43</sup>

I am grateful to many people for valuable conversations in the course of my work on this article, including David Rodowick, Lisa Cartwright, Mark Betz, Helen Lee, Walid Ra'ad and Hamid Naficy. I thank the Banff Centre for the Arts in Banff, Alberta for time and space to mull over these ideas.