

## Information, secrets, and enigmas: an enfolding-unfolding aesthetics for cinema

LAURA U. MARKS

- 1 On the avisual, see Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
- 2 Rob Moss, 'This documentary moment', *Media Ethics*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2007).
- 3 Including touch, taste, and smell: by image I mean what is perceptible to the senses, not the visual image alone.
- 4 For a discussion of the psychological effects of the shift from perceptual culture to information culture, through the concepts of Charles Sanders Peirce and Henri Bergson, see Laura U. Marks, 'Immigrant semiosis', in Susan Lord and Janine Marchessault (eds), *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema: Digital Futures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 284–303.

What kind of film is it whose protagonists are forbidden to speak; whose surfaces are avisual, often consisting only of paragraphs of text or tables of numbers;<sup>1</sup> whose climactic moment is the receipt of a file of old documents; whose director laments, 'Nobody wants to talk to [me]. There is nothing to see. . . . What is there to film in any case?'<sup>2</sup> The chances are that it is a film about information.

These days, many of the images that appear to our senses<sup>3</sup> are no more than the effects of the information that generated them. The graphical user interface (GUI) of computers – a set of images that index actions of information manipulation – is directed to our eyes and ears, but this perceptual experience is simply the medium through which we receive information. The functions and aesthetics of GUI have been adapted to many other screen-based media like telephones, games, advertising and – retroactively – cinema. Moving images made for small screens, including television and movies for computers and handheld devices, often require to be read rather than perceptually experienced. Cinema itself, insofar as it invites us to scrutinize it for signs rather than fully perceive it with our senses, is often more like an interface to information than a sensuous experience. Even solid objects such as cars, running shoes and vegetable peelers are spectral emissions of the confident pulse of the marketing and design calculations that produced them.<sup>4</sup> This is to say nothing of those powerful information flows, such as the stock

market exchange, whose visual indicators are mere ciphers. In all these cases, what we experience with our senses is simply the end result of processes of information that are ultimately more significant than perceptible images.

The shift from perceptual to information culture might seem to pose an insurmountable problem for filmmaking and other arts of the perceptible. But as will be revealed in the course of this essay, images are in a position to ‘unfold’ information, and thus to connect it back to the world. I call this new model of the image *enfolding-unfolding aesthetics*.<sup>5</sup> It will be explicated in several Deleuzian registers, including a Bergsonian concept of the image, a Leibnizian concept of the fold, a Nietzschean concept of force and a geological concept of stratification.

For cinema studies, enfolding-unfolding aesthetics proposes a theory of representation and narrative as unfolding. The image unfolds from the world. An additional level, information, sometimes intervenes; so that while information unfolds from the world, the image unfolds from information. Cinematic conventions, insofar as they obviate the necessity of really seeing and hearing a film, operate as information. Narrative convention is one of the information filters that regularize how certain images are chosen from the set of all possible images. To establish this allows us to appreciate the creativity and singularity of many kinds of films, for it allows us to see that even ‘cliched’ unfolding is cliched in a variety of ways: narrative, ideological, action, comic, melodramatic, and so on, are all different kinds of informational filters applied to the infinite set of all images. Thus we can consider genres to correspond to manners of unfolding. National cinemas too can be understood as information filters that privilege certain images to unfold. Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema 1* details the many creative ways filmmakers deal with the relationship between information and image, while remaining in a classical mode that sees this relationship as a whole. A film’s manner of unfolding – that is, its manner of selecting what is significant – is stylistic as well as conventional. Deleuze’s ‘auteurism’ is really his attention to this manner of selection. Thus, for example, Jean Renoir is a director who lingers close to the world (or to what is defined below as the universe of images), selecting not the typical moments of a narrative but the particular moments. Deleuze’s *Cinema 2* addresses filmmakers who attempt to come into contact with the universe of images itself, the Open, despite the constraints with which they necessarily operate.

This essay will explicate enfolding-unfolding aesthetics in relation to films in which the image struggles to emerge from information, focusing on just one way in which life is translated into information: namely, government secrets. I shall discuss two films that take information as their subject, revolving around secrets, surveillance and the kind of information that is produced under duress: the fiction film *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany, 2007) and the documentary *Secrecy* (Rob Moss and Peter Galison, USA, 2008).

5 This model is explored in Laura U. Marks, ‘Invisible media’, in Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (eds), *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), pp. 33–46; Laura U. Marks and Reagan Kelly, ‘Enfolding and unfolding: an aesthetics for the information age’, *Vectors: Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2006), <http://www.vectorsjournal.org> [accessed 14 September 2008]; Laura U. Marks, ‘Experience – information – image: a historiography of unfolding. Arab cinema as example’, *Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2008). Enfolding-unfolding aesthetics structures my forthcoming book *Enfoldment and Infinity: an Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

6 For Bergson, Deleuze writes, image is identical with movement: 'The material universe, the plane of immanence, is the *machinic assemblage of movement-images*.' Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 58–59.

7 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 315.

8 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 3.

To explain enfolding-unfolding aesthetics I begin with simple questions. Where do images, those things that we perceive with our senses, come from? From the universe, infinite and unknowable in itself. Henri Bergson calls the universe the 'infinite set of all images'; Deleuze terms it the plane of immanence and also 'flowing-matter'.<sup>6</sup> I shall sometimes call it the universe of images, and sometimes, as I explain below, the Earth. The universe of images is amorphous, unarticulated and imperceptible as such. The events that occur here are momentary, passing in a flash and leaving no trace – unless they are 'captured' as information or image. The universe of images contains all possible images in a virtual state, and certain images arise from it, becoming actual.

Deleuze's cinema books are an extended investigation of how, from the universe of images, certain images become perceptible to us (or to the more disinterested perception of cinema). Certain aspects of the universe of images unfold directly as what I will call simple images: my glance falls on a fly buzzing on the windowpane, a scent tells me that my neighbour is burning incense, a scrap of memory comes to light. Such images may be slight indeed, but their affective charge is all the stronger because they arise from a relatively unmediated contact with the universe. But many images arise through a second mediation, as noted at the beginning of this essay. My intervention in Deleuze's theory of signs (itself a synthesis of Peirce, Bergson and others) is to insert another plane between images and the universe of images, which I call information: a plane through which the semiotic process passes before images can arise.

So what is information? Broadly, it is the set of images selected for their usefulness by particular interests. Information implies an interested viewpoint that gives form to the formless: a connotation that extends from the mediaeval scholastic Latin definition in the *OED*, 'the giving of a form or character to something', to cyberneticist Gregory Bateson's definition, 'information is the difference that makes a difference' – that is, a meaningful organization of noise into a signal.<sup>7</sup> One of the present-day connotations of information is quantification or regular sampling (by computers, for example), which selects images from the universe of images as material that can be easily worked. Historically all cultures have had ways to codify the perceptible, in order to discriminate in favour of those aspects of the world that are useful as information. 'Even perception . . . is an expression of forces which appropriate nature.'<sup>8</sup> What is unprecedented in contemporary culture is the dominance of information as a plane that shapes what it is possible to perceive. This is why we spend so much of our time not glancing out of (or at) the window, sniffing fugitive scents or stirring up memories, but responding to the images that arrive to us from advertising, public signage, alert sounds and screens of all sorts – images that ask not to be fully perceived but just read or deciphered; for they are images that are unfold from, and index, information. And yet the most important information in our information age does not produce images.

What results is a model of three planes: the universe of images, information and image (figure 1). The universe of images is infinitely vaster than the small amounts of information and images drawn from it: it is the virtual to their actual. Inevitably, too, images and information pass back into the universe of images. As Bergson argued in *Matter and Memory*, past occurrences are no longer actual, but they continue to exist in a virtual state; in other words, they are real.<sup>9</sup> In Peirce's triadic epistemology,<sup>10</sup> the universe of images is a First, a unity unknowable in itself. Information, a Second, implies a struggle by which certain results are actualized, and not others. The image that arises from information is a Third, relaying the universe of images (First) through information (Second). The image points out relationships, teaching us something about how information is selected from the universe of images. Being triadic, enfolding-unfolding aesthetics avoids some of the pitfalls of dualistic theories of representation.

On the cinema of information, Deleuze has some provocative comments. He notes that with the occurrence of new computational and cybernetic automata, the configuration of power shifted: 'power was diluted in an information network where "decision-makers" managed control, processing and stock across intersections of insomniacs and seers'. Automata themselves became characters, like HAL the computer in *2001: a Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968); but people themselves started to behave like computers: 'Rohmer's puppet characters, Robbe-Grillet's hypnotized ones, and Resnais's zombies are defined in terms of speech or information, not of energy or motivity'.<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere Deleuze characterizes conspiracy films as those in which reality is doubled by information, and information, the tool of power, is mistaken for power itself:

9 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991).

10 See Charles Sanders Peirce, 'The principles of phenomenology', in Justus Buchler (ed.), *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, (New York, NY: Dover, 1955), pp. 74–97.

11 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 265, 266.

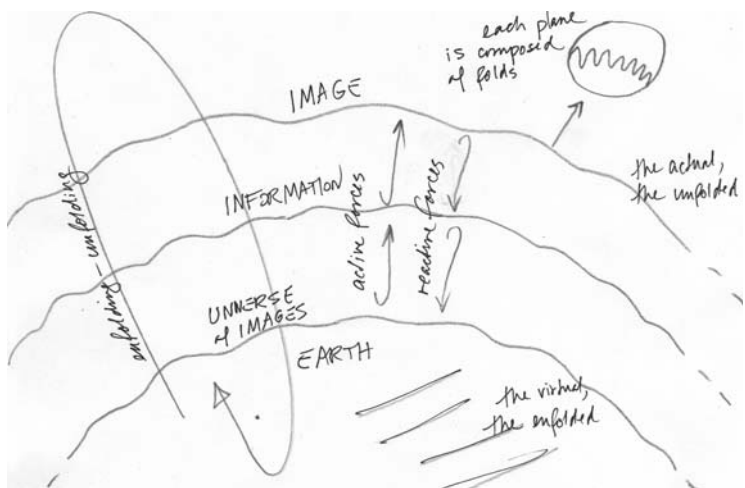


Fig. 1

12 Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image*, p. 210.

13 See Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

14 See, for example, Yvonne Spielman, 'Elastic cinema: technological imagery in contemporary science fiction films', *Convergence*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2003), pp. 56–73.

In Lumet, the conspiracy is the system of reception, surveillance and transmission in *The Anderson Tapes*; *Network*, also, doubles the city with all the transmissions and reception that it ceaselessly produces, whilst *The Prince of the City* records the whole city on magnetic tape. And Altman's *Nashville* fully grasps this operation which doubles the city with all the clichés that it produces, and divides in two the clichés themselves, internally and externally, whether optical or sound clichés and psychic clichés.<sup>12</sup>

A cliché is the image that has been preselected, in an organized fashion, by a regime of information.

Many genres specifically privilege information: the conspiracy film, the caper film, the spy movie. The cinema of the information age observes the transformation of individuals to 'dividuals': the quantification of people according to their usefulness and controllability as information; a principle of 'universal modulation'. In the 1950s a series of films depicted the struggles of 'the man in the gray flannel suit', a corporate worker who was demoted from individual to dividual, and the crisis of masculinity that resulted.<sup>13</sup> More recently a rash of computer-era films feature individuals discovering that they are not even cogs in the wheel but, as in the *Matrix* films (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999, 2003), bits in a system of universal modulation.<sup>14</sup>

The two films discussed here respond to the way information, and the control of information, invisibly structure the perceptible world. *The Lives of Others*, set in the former German Democratic Republic in 1984 and later, depicts vividly how the texture of life contorts under the omnipresent surveillance of the Stasi, the Ministry for State Security. Two of the main characters are lovers, the actor Christa-Maria Sieland and the idealistic writer Georg Dreyman. The Stasi puts them under surveillance with the intent of compromising Sieland and entrapping Dreyman, who is determined to publish an article exposing the high suicide rate in the GDR. (For this task the editor of the West German newspaper *Der Spiegel* gives him a special typewriter, which happens to have a red ink ribbon.) Gerd Wiesler is the Stasi captain who takes on the assignment to observe them.

*The Lives of Others* contrasts the worldly, sensuous life of Dreyman, Sieland and their friends with the information-centred life of Wiesler. The space of their apartment is a space in touch with the sensuous world: there they serve food and drink to friends; there people talk, laugh, weep and sleep; Dreyman plays music on the piano; he and Sieland make love and gently touch each other. It is filmed in warm tones that emphasize the perceptual richness of this life and the meaning that arises from it. Wiesler, by contrast, occupies a space drained of perceptual detail. The listening post he occupies in the empty apartment above Sieland and Dreyman's is dark, lit only by the bluish lights of his monitors. Wiesler listens through headphones, straining to extract information from the sounds he hears; his face is immobile, his beautiful and expressive eyes

attempt to veil themselves. The Stasi offices are, needless to say, also sensuously bereft: even meals in the cafeteria are treated as opportunities to gather information about colleagues. Wiesler's spartan apartment is another sign of his quantified life: when he calls in a prostitute, she chides him for not booking enough time.

In *Secrecy*, too, a world of sensuous, material life struggles against a world of information. In its two intertwining central stories, the protagonists struggle to give flesh to the dry documents that conceal state secrets. One story began in 1948: a B-29 bomber crashed while carrying out some kind of secret testing. The widows of the crash victims petitioned to see the classified reports on the accident, but the US Supreme Court threw out the petition, asserting that to reveal the documents would endanger national security. This case, *Reynolds v United States* of 1953, was the precedent for hundreds of other cases that protected classified documents in the name of state security. Fifty years later, Judy Lowther, the daughter of one of the men killed in the crash, manages to find the accident report – on an internet site – and finds that the secrecy for which the US military petitioned was a coverup of simple negligence. The other story is about the legal case *Hamdan v Rumsfeld*, which established that a prisoner at Guantánamo has the right to habeas corpus in his trial – a right that US President George W. Bush had dismissed in a secret memo. The principle of habeas corpus – literally, 'you [should] have the body' – asserts that legal information arises from and affects the material world, something the Bush–Cheney administration ignored in their concerted efforts to bypass public accountability and prevent public access to information. The US Supreme Court ruled in favour of *Hamdan*, but shortly thereafter the Bush administration passed a new law to circumvent the ruling.

People who produce information for the State – like the Stasi's hundred thousand employees and its two hundred thousand informants, according to *The Lives of Others*; or the employees of the CIA and the National Security Administration in *Secrecy* – align themselves with the State's interests and its desire to surveil and control its citizens. These people – vital and fleshly though most of them are – subsist on the plane of information: they identify with it, and they seek to protect it. The bracingly articulate former CIA bureau chief Melissa Mahle tells how she had to conceal the nature of her work from her family and friends, to fake her marriage, to produce for others an image of her life that was effectively a reaction, a decoy from her information life.

These same agents admit that information is slow to adapt. Mahle explains the CIA's intelligence failure in Somalia in terms of conflicting information structures; the CIA's 'need-to-know' protocol (a Cold War information management system) could not deal with the distributed network strategies of Osama bin Laden and his associates. A fascinating montage accompanies this discussion, moving from black-and-white shots of filing cabinets to railway tracks, highways, telephone cables, neural networks and, finally, matrices of numbers – an apt metaphor for

- 15 See Peter Galison, 'Images scatter into data, data gather into images', in Peter Weibel and Bruno Latour (eds), *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art* (Karlsruhe: ZKM, 2002), pp. 300–22. On informational images, see James Elkins, 'Art history and images that are not art', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 77, no. 4 (1995), pp. 553–71.
- 16 Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), p. 9.
- 17 See Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, 'The actual and the virtual', trans. Elliot Ross Albert, in *Dialogues II*, second edition (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 148–52.
- 18 On the plane of immanence, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Minuit, 1991), Chapter 2.
- 19 The dimension of force is fundamental to Peirce's semiotics as well, and informs Deleuze's approach in *Cinema 1*. As well as the cinema books, see Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) for broad accounts of the semiotic process.
- 20 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 40.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–55.
- 22 Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 94.
- 23 Mario Perniola, *Enigmas: the Egyptian Moment in Society and Art*, trans. Christopher Woddall (London: Verso, 1995), p. 6.

the shift from centralized to fluid, networked forms of communication. Interestingly, considering that one of the directors of *Secrecy* is Peter Galison, the historian of scientific imaging, these shots also gradually shift from photographs of concrete objects to 'informational images' of things that are not normally visible, or not visible at all.<sup>15</sup>

Enfolding-unfolding aesthetics is founded, needless to say, on a theory of the fold. This begins with Leibniz's principle that matter is continuous, such that the smallest element of matter is not a particle but a fold. This principle allows us, following Deleuze, to conceive of matter and the plane of immanence itself as continuous and consistent, like pliant, infinitely large surfaces that are composed of infinite folds.<sup>16</sup> Since the plane of immanence can be thought of as a membrane through which virtualities pass to become actualities,<sup>17</sup> we can consider the actual to be infinitely enfolded in the virtual. In each of the three planes of enfolding-unfolding aesthetics, the universe of images, information and image, an infinity of stuff lies virtual or enfolded.<sup>18</sup> Now and then certain aspects of those virtual events are unfolded, pulled out into the next plane.

A further ingredient in enfolding-unfolding aesthetics is force. In his theory of signs, Deleuze emphasizes that the semiotic process takes place under a deforming force, a pressure exerted on the plane of immanence, a 'will' whereby certain things unfold and not others.<sup>19</sup> What I call images and information are symptoms of a flow of forces.<sup>20</sup> A Nietzschean approach helps us to understand the nature of the forces that unfold and enfold these planes. Force is also the source of the affect that accompanies every movement of unfolding, or refusal to unfold. For a certain virtuality to be actualized – that is, for a fold to unfold – we could say a force 'pushes out' from the plane of immanence at the same time as another force 'pulls out'. Virtualities push through the plane of immanence in an active and creative movement, unfolding, bringing something new into the world. At the same time, established, actual forces 'pull' at the plane of immanence, privileging those things to unfold that confirm an already existing state of things. These are what Nietzsche calls reactive forces.<sup>21</sup> As Dorothea Olkowski emphasizes, 'For Nietzsche, the history of a thing consists of the forces that take hold of it and the struggle between forces for possession, a history that is obscured by the functions that the winning force imposes on the thing'.<sup>22</sup>

Each plane also resists unfolding. As Mario Perniola emphasizes, a fold protects what is unfolded.<sup>23</sup> The struggle is over what gets to remain enfolded, what is unfolded, and who decides. *The Lives of Others* pits the surveillant Stasi, those who would unfold 'the lives of others' into useful information, against the surveilled East German citizens. To evade surveillance, the citizens change their behaviour, adopt subterfuges of enfoldment: to keep their conversation from being heard the writers play loud music while they talk, show each other written messages, or meet outdoors. Remaining enfolded seems like a pretty good strategy, but



ultimately it is a reactive strategy that expends energy on resistance instead of creativity and produces twisted, little images.

*The Lives of Others* gives us to understand that Wiesler, whose profession is to unfold secrets, begins to realize that some things are too precious to unfold. Wiesler is the film's most 'enfolded' character. A man designated by the information world he inhabits as 'HGW XX/7', he comes to long for the active life represented by the couple. He is attracted to the freedom and the loving trust that Dreymann and Sieland share. As artists they are Nietzsche's prototype of the free individual; while as an information worker Wiesler is enslaved (wanting a taste of their experience, he steals Dreymann's book of poems by Brecht). Choosing to protect the couple, he destroys his own career.

Recognition is a form of unfolding that is often forced. Celebrity and other kinds of public recognition are crass because they unfold not the individual in all his or her complexity but information about that individual that has already been filtered in terribly predictable ways. Similarly, surveillance is the State's power to articulate selected aspects of the lives of the people under surveillance. In turn, their lives take the shape of the interests of the State. In *The Lives of Others* a few aspects of Sieland's life matter to the Stasi: she is a celebrated actress; she is connected to the subversive writer Dreymann; she is attractive; she wants to continue her career; she is addicted to illegal drugs. This is the shape Sieland takes on the plane of information. Using its selective knowledge against her, the Stasi forces her to conform to her information shape by making her inform against Dreymann and give sexual favours to the Minister in order to maintain her career and her access to pills. In the film, her only creative recourse against the violence of this information unfolding is suicide – the tragic strategy of radical enfoldment. But the withholding of recognition can also be a form of murder, as it is for the playwright Janka in *The Lives of Others*. Blacklisted by the State, he loses his public identity as an artist. He takes this punishment of forced enfoldment to its darkest conclusion: like Sieland, he kills himself.

Filmmakers have many aesthetic strategies of unfolding and enfoldment, either with or against the grain of information, and of tapping the affective flow that accompanies these. A fiction film's power is to emphasize the emotion and affect that respond to these revelations, through music, gestures, affection-images. So in the final shot of *The Lives of Others*, when Wiesler learns that Dreymann has acknowledged his kindness and sacrifice, his face, so carefully expressionless throughout the film, opens like a flower. A documentary may seek to extract affects from the smiles, tears and moral struggles of its informants, as *Secrecy* does. But a documentary about information has few other surfaces to unfold, since the visual nature of its object is generally textual. So the makers of *Secrecy* added animation, that least indexical of time-based images. Papers stamped 'Secret' float in space like lost souls. Ruth Lingford contributed rough, woodcut-like animations whose transformations capture the affects of secrecy, fear and violence. A farmer's hoe becomes a gun, and



- 24 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, '10,000 BC: the geology of morals', in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 40–56, and passim.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- 26 On radioactive images, a variant of what Deleuze calls the fossil-image, see Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 71–6.
- 27 Jean-Dominique Bauby, *Le scaphandre et le papillon* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1997).
- 28 Deleuze and Guattari, '10,000 BC: the geology of morals', p. 40.
- 29 In this stratum, information is what Deleuze and Guattari (using the linguist Hjelmslev's terms) call the form of content.
- 30 Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the societies of control', *October*, no. 59 (1992), pp. 3–7.

the farmer becomes a dog menacing a captive, then a prison guard pulling the prisoner on a leash. Any of us, these fluid images suggest, is capable of the cruelty of the Americans at Abu Ghraib.

The final element of enfolding-unfolding aesthetics is geology. Deleuze and Guattari refer sometimes to the fundamental plane as the plane of consistency, 'the Earth, the absolutely deterritorialized'.<sup>24</sup> Their geological conceptualization of the world is a massive plane (one could think of it as a curved planetary surface) from which, in the passing of time, strata differentiate themselves, give rise to certain events, and eventually are transformed or crumble away. The Earth is that from which all images emerge and to which they all return.<sup>25</sup> To double the Bergsonian 'set of images' with the Earth adds denseness and heaviness to Bergson's luminous, quasi-mathematical concept. When information and image fold back into the universe of images, they return to a state of latency and undifferentiation: they enrich the soil of the Earth (and make it potentially radioactive) with the prospect of a future unfolding.<sup>26</sup> The Earth is the repository of what Bergson calls the present-that-passes: all those past presents piled up like leaves, compressing, decomposing, in an infinite compost heap. *La mémoire qui se réduit en cendres* (memory as it reduces to ashes): that, in the words of Jean-Dominique Bauby, is what the Earth feels like to most of us.<sup>27</sup>

In a given era, Deleuze and Guattari write, certain strata arise from the Earth, giving form to matter and constraining the way this form can be expressed. Strata have double articulation, as Deleuze and Guattari explain in geological terms. The first articulation chooses molecular units upon which it imposes forms: in geology, this is sedimentation. The second articulation establishes stable structures and constructs the molar compounds or substances in which they are actualized: in geology, this is folding.<sup>28</sup> In the new stratum that has arisen in our age, image is articulated by information.<sup>29</sup> When information intervenes, image no longer directly expands from the universe of images but is the product of quantification. The information society is a society of control, which quantifies its objects in order to subject them to universal modulation.<sup>30</sup>

When information that has been kept secret finally becomes accessible, or unfolds, as image, it is often in the form of an index, that most earthly of signs. Both *Secrecy* and *The Lives of Others* rely often on indexes. In *Secrecy*, grainy photocopies of the documents of the B-29 crash are the slim thread that unfolds all the events leading to the crash – weak mechanical parts, unopened parachutes, skull fractures – into a chillingly banal set of information. Fifty years later, what happened during that crash, the set of images that remained enfolded all this time, is finally, though only partially, brought to light as the family members, lawyers and filmmakers tenaciously 'pull open' historical folds in the information the CIA wished to keep enfolded.

*Secrecy* and *The Lives of Others* dwell on state evidence that piles up until it begins to resemble the strata of the Earth itself. Both films feature

panning shots of seemingly endless rows of filing cabinets reaching to the ceiling (figure 2). After the fall of the GDR, the State made public its secret files on thousands of citizens. Dreymann goes to the Stasi ‘Research Site and Memorial’ to read his declassified files, which a clerk lifts down from one of hundreds of massive filing cabinets (figure 3). As he reads, with increasing incredulity, the evidence of his life under surveillance, the years of impacted information which the Stasi extracted from his life with Sieland, finally unfold as images. A red thumbprint on the last page of Wiesler’s report reveals that it was the spy who protected Dreymann. Wiesler hid the typewriter, with its red ink ribbon, that would have condemned the writer to death.

*Secrecy*, too, attends closely to the index’s moment of visibility. In the documentary, all manner of archival materials – film, television, paper, newsprint, photographs – are reshot with attention to their medium of origin. Unlike some documentaries that flatten all their materials assembled from different media into a common substance, *Secrecy* emphasizes that each artefact is a prize wrested into visibility. Paper documents are filmed in slanting light, with sound emphasizing their



Fig. 2.  
*Secrecy* (Rob Moss and Peter Galison,  
USA, 2008).



Fig. 3.  
*The Lives of Others* (Florian  
Henckel von Donnersmarck,  
Germany 2007).

31 I thank Sharon Kahanoff for this observation.

slight roughness and the sticky materiality of the ‘Secret’ stamped onto them. The documents become physical characters, with substance and heft, as their secrets are revealed.

In an index, information and image touch, like two sides of a coin.<sup>31</sup> Indexes are affective because of this intense moment of contact between planes. Fifty years after the B-29 crash, Patricia Reynolds chokes on tears when she tells of finally seeing the report of her husband’s death: ‘For some reason reading this report . . . brought it to reality’. Lowther, the daughter of another of the men who died in the crash, describes as an embodied experience how she received the documents of his death in a manila envelope, sat down at home to read them, and was physically overcome by the revelations they contained. Thomas Blanton of the National Security Archive at George Washington University relates an event he witnessed at the opening exhibit of the Soviet archives in Moscow in 1992. ‘Suddenly there’s a big commotion and a guy comes down the stairs on a stretcher, an old pensioner with his medals from the great patriotic war, grey hair and beard, old and gaunt. He said, “I knew that Stalin and Molotov had signed that deal with Hitler and Ribbentrop. But right up there they had it and I could actually see it, and I passed out.”’ In all these cases, the index makes a connection between information and hitherto lost events; and this connection is realized affectively, in the body.

Most information never unfolds; instead it returns to become part of the Earth. The index is a kind of sign that is so material it arises to perception only at the point when it is ready to return to the Earth. *Secrecy* emphasizes this reenfolding when interviewee Steven Aftergood, from the Federation of American Scientists’ Government Secrecy project, describes the billions of documents destroyed every year. As he speaks we see a huge shredder pull reams of paper into its enormous maw (figure 4). ‘The financial cost of secrecy grew by a billion dollars to an unprecedented \$7.5 billion in a single year’, Aftergood continues. ‘That’s the size of a budget of a cabinet-level government agency.’ Backlit, the shredded pages scatter like leaves; the next shot shows them compressed into huge bricks. Secrets return to the Earth literally, as landfill, and the lives they touched will never be known. In *The Lives of Others*, the secrets of the Earth unfold when Dreymann learns, years later, that his apartment had been under surveillance. When he finds the microphone and follows its cords to every room, ripping them out of the wallpaper, this small event is like the Earth erupting to reveal secrets that had been buried within it long ago.

If secrets are folds, the goal of thought is not to unfold a secret and reveal the truth, but to recognize how the secret constitutes knowledge by virtue of being enfolded. Mario Perniola argues this, drawing on Deleuze’s conception of thought as explication or unfolding. From an etymology of the term *explicare*, ‘it follows that knowledge is not simply the revelation of a secret, nor the illumination of something that was obscure, nor lastly the expounding of a concept given *a priori*, but the



Fig. 4.  
*Secrecy* (Rob Moss and Peter Galison, USA, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Perniola, *Enigmas*, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

drawing out, the unwinding, the ex-expression of something that is tangled, wound up, gathered in'.<sup>32</sup>

Secrets only confirm the power of those who possess them. Perniola prefers the concept of the enigma, which escapes the control of anyone. The enigma is that point of resistance/emergence that is 'capable of simultaneous expression on many different registers of meaning, all of which are equally valid, and it is thus able to open up an intermediate space that is not necessarily bound to be filled'.<sup>33</sup> An enigma is a point on the plane of immanence that can never be unfolded once and for all. The virtual yields actualities according to pressures on it that are always specific. Such is the crashed aircraft in *Secrecy*: it is a secret insofar as the US government covers it up. But the film reveals the crash to be an enigma, which has repercussions in many different registers: for the widows, the subsequent legal petitioners, the military engineers, the unopened parachutes, the ground where the aircraft crashed, and the filmmakers themselves. Similarly, the tragedy of *The Lives of Others* is that things the State deems secrets, such as Janka's suicide and Sieland's addiction, are actually enigmas.

Enfolding-unfolding aesthetics values the constant movement of unfolding and enfolding and critiques the forces that try to still the movement in order to regulate the production of images. The endless process of unfolding and enfolding is life itself. Politically, the model I am proposing distinguishes between a free life, in which individuals (human and non-human) ourselves actualize certain aspects of the universe of images; and an enslaved life, in which we react to information, or to those images already actualized for us. Given that the fundamental nature of the unfolding and enfolding universe is constant flow, trying to stay enfolding or 'below the radar' of information is a form of suicide. Given the ubiquity of regimes of information, a better strategy is to cultivate enigmas. An enigma, we

34 Here I am imposing a folded model onto Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche. See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 68–72.

might say, retraces its historical path in the cycle from the universe of images, to information, to image, back to the Earth, to be unfolded in a new way, or to stay latent. This movement of enfolding is a way of understanding what Nietzsche calls the Eternal Return.<sup>34</sup> All that is past returns to a state of virtuality, which may unfold again, *not* to confirm an existing state of things but to destabilize it – as when a buried secret comes to light. Cultivating enigmas is a radical strategy of remembering; and of forgetting, which is sometimes the more creative act.

Screen theory can ask images where they came from: did they unfold from information, or from the universe itself? It can trace the process by which an image unfolded from information, and by which that information in turn unfolded from the universe of images, asking at each point: Why did it unfold this way? If this image is here, what images remain virtual? As posited above, the most interesting films are those that bear the traces of their own unfolding. We can now add that the most intriguing of these are films that unfold not truthfully, but enigmatically. When so much of our experience occurs at the level of information, screen theory can evaluate the ways in which films struggle to bring information into the perceptible; but, even more importantly, it can respect how cinema cultivates enigmas, images that will never be done with unfolding.

My warmest thanks to Sharon Kahanoff, ace research assistant; to Ian Buchanan and his colleagues and students at the University of Cardiff; and to Richard Coccia and the Coccia family.