INHUMAN, ALL TOO INHUMAN:
LYOTARD, NIHILISM AND FILM

by

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Abstract

‘Inhuman, all too Inhuman: Lyotard, Nihilism and Film’ is a practice-led piece of research which seeks to develop Jean-François Lyotard’s thinking, namely his notions of the inhuman, acinemas and the libidinal in the realm of film through an audio-visual methodology. In turn, this research wishes to question the viability of film as a site of resistance against what Lyotard terms the inhuman, as well as its positioning in relation to the textual. Significantly, the function of this written component is not to provide a commentary or analysis of my audio-visual research, but rather to complement this and further interrogate its concerns by other means. Moreover, this work also wishes to examine audio-visual approaches for pedagogy, in turn deterritorializing the boundaries of creative and artistic practice, philosophy and academic research.

Key words: Lyotard, the inhuman, the figural, acinema, the libidinal, the sublime, Deleuze, nihilism, critique of ideology, film theory.

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Table of Contents

Portfolio

The portfolio of six films can be accessed here: https://vimeopro.com/filmuob/oscar-mealia-phd-portfolio

At the time of writing, one of the films 'Who Speaks? Possessing Lyotard' has been published in *In Transition* (Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies, 10.2, 2023). Moreover, the intention is also to display the films as an art installation in order for the films to be recontextualised outside of an academic context. Furthermore, music in some of the films is attributed to Oscar Vinter, the name under which I carry out my multidisciplinary art practice from music, photography to film and poetry.

A Reading Dossier on the Economy of this Text[1]

This preface is intended to pre-warn the reader of the research's disobedience; its refusal to maintain an academic style. This research is infatuated with rhetorical devices; retorsion, irony, hyperbole, ventriloquism, collapsed perspectives, polyphony, different genres and so on. The following notices are intended to orientate the reader. Importantly, these notices are not exhaustive and some contradict each other.

Scepticism

It should be noted that this research did not start from a point zero of a scepticism in the academic economy and its genre of writing. Rather, over the duration of this research, the questioning of the academic genre's ability to do justice to Lyotard's thinking and the research which it animates became a vital current. In this sense, scepticism is both a by-product of the research and one of its modes. As such, this writing refuses to take up the academic genre's precepts and axioms without question.

Genres

Lyotard was not only interested in how different genres can be *just*, that is, testify to difference and phrases without crushing them within pre-established discourse[2], but also how

[1] This preface is an ironic portmanteau of the preface to *The Differend* and the section 'Economy of this writing' in *Libidinal Economy*. Formally, it follows the preface of *The Differend* in using different headings to both expound on different themes in a relatively concise manner, but also contain the arguments of the research. This aphoristic genre or mode of philosophising can be seen to run through thinkers like La Rochefoucauld to Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Adorno on so on.

[2] Lyotard argues that '[w]hat is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, in a politics perhaps, is to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them'. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend*, trans Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) p. 13.

genres can produce different effects and alternative regimes of knowledge.[3] This question of regimes of knowledge is expanded shortly under the section 'Tracing and Mapping' in relation to Deleuze and Guattari. Moreover, Lyotard's concern for justice is seen in a constant attempt to phrase different problems and questions in different genres throughout his thinking.[4] These include the 'stylistic shock' and 'scandalous disregard for the norms of academic argument' during his libidinal philosophy[5], to the anti-biography of *Signed, Malraux,* the 'zero degree style'[6] of *The Differend* and the theoretical-fictions which are oriented towards the inhuman. In this vein, this research uses numerous genres including those of Nietzschean genealogy, astrophysics, the dialogical and the auto-biographical. As such, the use of multiple genres is an attempt to think pluralistically as elaborated by Keith Crome:

> Philosophy offers one way of speaking about things, but is nothing more than one way of doing so, and as the sophist recognises, there are many others. That is why sophistry is the art of the *dissoi logoi*; it is in the *dissoi logoi* that Lyotard finds an idea of language, of the *logos*, freed from its subordination to the theological principle of the unity of meaning. As he says, 'to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general agonistics'.[7]

The Libidinal

This research is concerned with the libidinal, both as an idea and Lyotard's presentation of it in writing. I remain unconvinced however that Lyotard's presentation of the libidinal in texts

[3] Kiff Bamford notes how: 'Lyotard spoke of the choice of genre as another ruse, a way of approaching philosophy differently'. Kiff Bamford, *Critical Lives: Jean-François Lyotard* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017) p.12.
[4] As Rodolphe Gasché writes '[i]f the traditional role of philosophical thought has always been one of establishing a universal genre capable of settling all disputes, the problematic broached by *The Differend* – precisely the kind of conflict for which no universal mediating genre exists – would seem to entail the outright abdication of philosophical thinking.' Rodolphe Gasché, 'Saving the Honor of Thinking: On Jean-François Lyotard' in *Minima Memoria: In the Wake of Jean-François Lyotard* ed Claire Nouvet et al (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) p.31.
[5] Ibid., p.88.
[6] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) xiv.
[7] Keith Crome, 'Lyotard and the Art of Seduction' in *Acinema: Lyotard's Philosophy of Film* ed. Graham Jones and Ashley Woodward (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) p.92.

like *Libidinal Economy* can ever constitute a genre in a normative sense due to its status as a principle concerned with energy and force.[8] That is to say, rather crudely, that as the libidinal exists within systems and genres it cannot constitute one.[9] If I am therefore to speak of a *libidinal genre* or a *libidinal writing*, it would be to refer to the polymorphic and polyvocal mode; in other words, the multiplication and deterritorialisation of genres that Lyotard employs to present and engage with the libidinal in order to circumvent nihilism.[10] Moreover, as David Carroll writes regarding the place of desire within Lyotard's libidinal philosophy: 'Lyotard's reading of Freud stresses the way desire is unbounded – how it disorients, disrupts, transgresses, and transforms everything it touches, continually reversing directions and cathecting itself elsewhere and otherwise.'[11] Significantly, polymorphism presents several problems for the academy. On the one hand, it challenges the primacy of there being one way to write about things within the academy, but also questions the suitability of dominant genres to be just and not carry out violence.[12] To this end, the research not only writes about Lyotard, but attempts to think with his ideas. This research heaves, it sags.

[8] I am sympathetic to Peter Dews who chastises Lyotard for both flirting with turning the libidinal into a system, as well as his seemingly abrupt abandonment of it: '[y]et it is difficult not to feel that, in abandoning the perspective of libidinal economy, Lyotard has jettisoned too hastily a position which should be preserved as a *moment* of any theory whose aim is a philosophical diagnosis of the present. Lyotard's critiques of semiology and its offshoots, of Derrida and above all Lacan, have genuine power, yet this power is dissipated by the very attempt to totalize the libidinal standpoint.' Peter Dews, *Logic of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and The Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 2007) p.170.

[9] In a libidinal sense, genres, systems and frameworks channel energy and intensities. Yet, whilst systems can intensify intensities, they can also dampen, supress and recuperate them. In other words, particular aspects of systems tend towards this suppression, consolidation and reproduction of the same.

[10] Similarly, Bamford's description of Lyotard's intentions of *Libidinal Economy* is instructive here: 'it asks questions through the economy of its writing and challenges the boundaries of genres: how are certain books allowed to behave? When is writing permitted to walk free from the scholastic reiteration of established positions?' Bamford, *Critical Lives: Jean-François Lyotard*, p.85.

[11] David Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida* (London: Methuen, 1987) p.43.

[12] If this notion of an academic genre is to be pursued, surely it must account for the fact that there is not one academic genre and these genres are not static nor total? That each discipline privileges different variants of the academic genre? See footnote 17.

The Acinematic

This research explores Lyotard's notion of acinema and deterritorialises it. To simplify greatly, this research takes up the acinematic as that which is deemed disruptive, improper, excessive and superfluous in the eyes of an economy, cinematic or otherwise. Deemed as examples of misspent energy, the acinematic refuses legitimation and recuperation into an economy, delighting in the 'just for the fun of it'[13] of its sensations. As such, it desires no justifications. My concern with the acinematic follows the libidinal's focus on force as 'disruption and transformation rather than of conservation'[14] which is encapsulated succinctly in Lyotard's metaphor of pyrotechnics: '[i]t is important that the image should go up in smoke after capturing our sense, rather than flow into a reassuring result, tamed, and remaining to be exchanged in markets of ideas and values.'[15] In their essay 'Childish Things', Geoffrey Bennington discusses how Lyotard's concepts such as '"childhood" or "jew"', are concerned with resisting 'all mediation, dialectization, and sublation.'[16] The research takes up acinema as similarly carrying out such a refusal. Furthermore, in the research's rendering of the concept, nothing is *in itself* acinematic. Rather, acinema is in the eye of the *beholder*; the beholder being the ruler of a mise-en-scène and the cinematic, capitalist or academic economies, which legislate what can and what cannot be included in accordance with a set of rules. Crucially then, the acinematic is not a style or genre.

[13] Lyotard, 'Acinema' in *Acinemas*, p. 34.
[14] Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*, p.43.
[15] Susana Viegas and James Williams, 'Why Lyotard and Film?' in *Acinema*, p.13.
[16] Geoffrey Bennington, 'Childish Things' in *Minima Memoria*, p. 203.

The Rhizome

This research is obliquely interested in the Rhizome, an idea (and process of thinking) integral to Deleuze and Guattari's critique of representational thinking which *connects*[17] to Lyotard's critique of representation. It is the contention of Deleuze and Guattari – whom I am taking the liberty of terming collectively 'Delttari'[18] throughout this text, that our way of seeing and interacting with the world is dominated by what they term representational or arborescent thinking. Using the example of the tree, they illustrate that representational thinking is constituted by the notion of an apparent fixed root or origin point from which different branches and leaves develop from and refer back to in a hierarchical way. They *contrast* this mode of thinking (not oppose[19]) with the rhizomatic. A common example of the rhizome within nature are root vegetables including root ginger or bamboo, which grow horizontally.[20] Importantly, a rhizome is something which develops in a non-hierarchical way in any direction and is without a centre or a point of origin. For Delttari, 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.'[21] It is instead a labyrinth. Significantly, as Ansell Pearson writes:

> The notion of the 'rhizome', for example, serves to demonstrate that there is no central controlling agent, or overarching self-positing subject, in a process of complex

[17] The notion of connection is integral to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of desiring machines; like in the rhizome, different desiring machines plug in and connect to other desiring machines.
[18] 'The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closet as well as farthest away. We have assigned clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition.' (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans Brian Massumi, A *Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021) p.1.
[19] A rhizome in their thinking can mimic the arborescent, the two are not antithetical in a traditional sense. Whilst to oppose rhizomatic thinking to representational thinking would be to remain within the representational mode.
[20] Although often included as a rhizomatic vegetable, potatoes are not technically rhizomatic. Rather, from a botanical perspective they are tubers which means they can grow in any direction. A more accurate example of a purely rhizomatic vegetable would be a root vegetable such as a ginger which grows horizontally.
[21] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.5. They add: '[m]ultiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudo-multiplicities for what they are [...] A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows).' p.7.

> evolution [...] The rhizome cuts across linear historical time, both heralding the future (which can come from anywhere).[22]

Tracing and Mapping

To further expand on the disjunctures between arborescent/representational and rhizomatic thinking, Delttari employ the notions of tracing and mapping. Tracing which is a key aspect of representational thinking, is the (metaphorical) act of taking a pre-established position or way of seeing.[23] Thus, this mode affirms the already existing as everything is brought back to recognised forms, ideas and a fixed point.[24] Meanwhile, mapping is the search for something new, and as such its mode is explorative. Or to use an arborescent metaphor, mapping resists the well-trodden path and goes off into the sprawl of the unknown and the wild and in doing so abandons representational thinking and becomes rhizomatic.

As seen in *Anti-Oedipus*, a large extent of Delttari's critique of Freudian psychoanalysis is founded on their contention that psychoanalysis' tendency is to the representational, as seen in their attack on the Oedipal triangle. Part of the problem for Delttari is that such frameworks and discourses used to analyse and produce meaning *precede* the things within the world which we are trying to make sense of. In other words, its ontology is orientated towards the essential and the fixed. As such, things are continually brought back to preestablished and prefigured ideas and origins. For example, in the case of psychoanalysis,

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[22] Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 165.

[23] As Chia-Ling Wang elucidates '[l]iterally, to trace is to copy something which follows a model, much as an X-ray image is the tracing of a human skeleton and organs. It duplicates a given ideal type without creation. It produces the same appearance or inner structure. In tree logic, all evolving expansion can be traced back to the same root. The act of tracing is merely representation. It codes the ready-made configuration with certain routes. Mapping is not like this. Rather than tracing with a fixed route, to map is to act experimentally.' (Chia-Ling Wang, 'Mapping or tracing? Rethinking curriculum mapping in higher education' in *Studies in Higher Education*, 2015 Vol. 40, No. 9, 1550–1559 Accessed 17/1/23 http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.899343) p.1554.

[24] For a more detailed explication of these concepts see Brent Adkins chapter 'Rhizome' in *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

the relation between the mother, the father and the child can be seen to function as the first representation in which everything in an individual's life comes back to.[25] In turn, everything represents something already given. Moreover, as the framework precedes the thing observed it largely only reproduces pre-existing patterns and knowledge formations.[26] This problematic necessitates the creation and use of language, modes and styles which *map*, i.e., that are rhizomatic, instead of using one which tend towards tracing. In this sense, Delttari stay true to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach.[27]

Recognition

Significantly, Deleuze characterises representation as being constituted by a concern for identity, analogy, opposition and resemblance[28]. Like the forementioned oedipal triangle, these aspects of representation serve to bring things back to an originary point through the logic of mimesis, repetition and recognition. The implications of this understanding are profound in relation to knowledge and its production. At its most extreme point, knowledge can only be that which is recognisable in such a schema. Yet, the academy is an open system which allows for variation, and as Deleuze stresses repetition does produce a degree of difference. With this said, recognition inhibits our ability to encounter difference, i.e., the new which falls outside of resemblance. In this sense, this research aims to resist the postulation of knowledge and academic writing as recognition. The writing thus cedes the

[25] 'Once again one is caught', write Delttari 'without a way out: it is simply that the means have been found to render the family transcendent. There we have it – the incurable familialism of psychoanalysis, enclosing the unconscious within Oedipus, cutting off all vital flows, crushing desiring-production, conditioning the patient to respond daddy-mommy, and to always consume daddy-mommy.' Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) p.113.
[26] Significantly, Delttari maintain that there is no such thing as perfect repetition. Rather, there is variation and difference in each movement of repetition.
[27] 'The Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.' Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998) p.571.
[28] See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans by Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004) pp.169-174.

privileged status conferred on it as the legislator of the recognised in its search for new encounters, new rhythms, new genres, new sensations.

Non-identity

Theodor Adorno, a persistent coda for Lyotard founded his negative dialectics[29] on developing non-identity thinking contra identity thinking. Identity thinking for Adorno subsumes the particular under universal concepts. Thus, as Jay Bernstein writes in his commentary on Adorno, a thing becomes known when it is:

> recognised, and so cognised, only when it is classified in some way, when it is shown, via subsumption, to share characteristics or features with other items. Analogously, and by extension, an event is explained if it can be shown to fall within the ambit of a known pattern of occurrence. If it falls within the ambit of a known rule or is deducible from (subsumable by) a known law.[30]

Subsequently, Adorno's non-identity thinking wishes to refigure the temporality of the critical and epistemology, to reject 'the subjects claim to be first' and what he terms a '*Prima Philosophia'*.[31] That is, a philosophy which founds its thinking on searching for the first, the pure and the eternal upon which to found the subject on. This way of thinking, which he also designates as a 'peephole metaphysics' reduces everything it holds as 'secondary' to this first.[32] In turn, as enumerated by Deborah Cook:

> Adorno objects to identity thinking, not simply on the epistemological grounds that it fails to apprehend things, but because it damages things when it effaces their particularity in favour of the characteristics that they have in common with things. Fetishizing concepts, identity thinking imposes a conceptual identity on nonconceptual particulars that does them an injustice because it distorts them by abstracting from everything that makes them unique.[33]

[29] That is, his critique of Hegelian dialectics in the wake of the Jewish Holocaust as seen in the book of the same name, *Negative Dialectics*.
[30] Jay Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.87.
[31] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) pp. 138-9.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the critique of the West* (London: Verso, 2018) p.21.

As the research explores, there is an affinity between this conceptual reduction and the logic of capitalist exchange.[34]

The Pagan

In his engagement with Kant's notions of judgement, Lyotard developed the notion of the pagan. Drawing on the polytheism of the ancient Greeks, the pagan is a thinking of heteronomy and heterodox judgement. Within Lyotard's paganism:

> [b]oundaries are not borders. And the relation with the gods, including the pragmatic relation of discourse, does not obey a pragmatics of border to border, between the two perfectly defined blocks or two armies, or two verbal sets, confronting each other. On the contrary, it is a place of ceaseless negotiations and ruses. Which means that there is no reference by which to judge the opponent's strength; one does not know if s/he is a god or a human. It is a beggar, but it may be a god, since the other is metamorphic, and one will have to judge therefore by opinion alone, that is, without criteria.[35]

In this sense, the pagan designates a movement or a concern with trespass. It calls for a writing and a thinking of flight.

Me(aning)

This research is interested in performance in multiple senses which are not reducible to each other; the performance of systems and economies, the performativity of capital and the performance of research and the researcher[36]. Yet, there is another performance which was brought into relief through the process of this research.

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[34] Pace Lyotard, Bill Readings writes that 'capitalism is characterized in terms of the law of exchangeability; the primary operation of capitalism is one of commodification, of the reduction of materiality to exchangeable objects.' (Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1991) p.102.

[35] Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1985) pp.42-3.

[36] This specific invocation of the performance brushes up next to Judith Butler's as seen in *Gender Trouble*. It refers to how identities form out of the repetition of specific acts. The question is who are we when we speak? In what way is research a performance? How do we get away from the prevalence of a disembodied, *objective* and authoritative academic voice which seeks to elide its situated knowledge and positioning? Furthermore, to appropriate Lyotard here, 'You're not done living because you chalk it up to' performance. (Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, p.vii.)

I am inspired in part here by scholars such as Charlotte Cooper and Bethan Evans who explicitly situate the knowledge they produce as researchers to be embodied and thus refuse to elide the 'I' and adopt the imposture of anonymous objectivity.[37] The question arose in me: why, as an autistic, dyspraxic and dyslexic person of colour with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, do *I* feel consoled by the thinking of primarily dead white philosophers mentioned in these notices?[38] Perhaps one could chalk it up to some sort of Althusserian interpellation - some theoretical Stockholm syndrome? Perhaps. But truthfully, I felt indirectly *recognised* in these thinkers' defense of difference and other ways of being and thinking. A recognition which was liberating; to finally see myself in the affirmative. I read methods, processes, ontologies and concepts such as acinema, the libidinal, the pagan, the rhizomatic, schizoanalysis[39] and negative dialectics and saw that they could produce instructive accounts of my own neurodiversity, or could at least be a starting point for attesting for it. As Readings recounts, for Lyotard the:

> discourse of the human body is only one form of the organic body, which is simply any totalizing mechanism working to homogenize and regulate the elements within it; it's a 'body, of which the elements isolated by their respective functions coordinate themselves for the greatest good of the whole following the rule of the *Gestalt*'. In general, 'organic body' is Lyotard's way of apprehending the totalizing function of an economy in *spatial* terms. Here, the organic body functions analogously to a 'grand narrative', taking disparate elements and reducing them to a homogenous unity, by excluding aberrant impulses and challenging those that are recognized into a singular meaning, the constitution of image and the articulation of images into a narrative progression. Against this, Lyotard evokes an 'anti-cinematics' in which either immobility (too little movement) or extreme agitation (too much movement) give rise

[37] See for example Bethan Evans and Charlotte Cooper, 'Reframing Fatness: Critiquing 'Obesity' in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities ed.* Kidd, Ian James, et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017) p.228.
[38] I refer to Lyotard, Delttari and Adorno.
[39] For Delttari, Schizoanalysis is a mode of analysis and resistance informed by the force and form of schizophrenic delirium (not the content). In schizoanalysis boundaries are collapsed and thoughts connect in new and unrepeatable ways. For example, the personal can quickly become the celestial, the holy, the profane. Or the comedic and the serious may combine. All spheres of human life and hierarchies disintegrate.

> to intense affects or emotions, impulses which resist libidinal normalization within the totality of the organic body.[40]

I gradually came to see my mannerisms, ticks and stimming in all their physical, mental and auditory forms not as affectations, pretentiousness or arrested precociousness, to be again *othered ad infinitum,* but as difference. I saw that my whirring brain, always racing off at every moment down tangents begetting tangents, oscillating between an over-stimulation and under-stimulation of the senses could not be reduced to mere defectivity. I saw in their work encouragements to cease the constant performance of the neuro-normative and the masking and dissimulation of my neurodivergence.[41] I found encouragement to embrace my particular subjectivity and the poorly regulated body that both thinks *too* much and without warning is unable to conjure a thought at all.[42] A body constantly disturbed by myoclonic jerks, the hum of bruxism, depression and anxiety. Words my friends, my enemies, Thus, against the ableism of capital and the academy, this research embraces the neurodivergent. So yes, my

[40] Readings, p.100. This question is also posed under a different guise in relation to desire: ''The real question,' Lyotard suggests, 'which Lacan avoids on account of his Hegelianism, is that of knowing why it is necessary for the drives scattered across the polymorphic body to unite themselves in an object.' Why must the mirror reflect back the prototypical image of an identity rather than its surface remaining a patchwork of intensities?' Dews, *Logics of Disintegration,* pp. 164-5.

[41] For example, there is an interesting convergence here between the Delttarian processes of mapping and tracing, Lyotard's conception of genre and autistic scripting. Scripting is often a soothing and regulatory behaviour which can take the form of echolalia. That is, the repetition of phrases, movements, accents from films, TV programmes, books, music and so. Furthermore, scripting also includes masking, which is the adoption of particular neuro-normative behaviours and uses of language in order to navigate interactions, environments and institutions. In this sense, scripting helps an autistic person exist in certain contexts in the least stressful way possible and may enable the individual to *pass* as a neuro-normative subject. Yet, whilst often pleasurable and useful, there remains a tension between the genres of language and behaviours adopted and the autistic subject. In other words, echolalia can equally be a sign of extreme distress, or the inability to regulate and verbalise something. In turn, to recall a phrase often attributed to Deleuze 'if you are trapped in the dream of the other, you are fucked.' For further reading on autistic scripting see Colleen D. Arnold, *Flipping the Script: Prioritizing the Autistic Voice in the Understanding of Scripting as "Key To Autistic Identity",* 2019, The University of San Francisco, PhD Dissertation, https://repository.usfca.edu/diss/499/

[42] Writing of the conceptualisation of the disabled body in the 19th century, Lennard J. Davis asserts: 'impairments existed, but the impaired body was part of a lived experience, and in that sense functioned. It was not defined strictly by its relation to means of production or a productive economy. But by the mid-nineteenth century, the body *an sich* had become the body *für sich* and the impaired body had become disabled – unable to be part of the productive economy, confined to institutions, shaped to contours defined by a society at large. In this regard, it is possible to see the way that the disabled body came to be included in larger constructions like that of the nation. We have only to consider the cliché that a nation is made up of 'able-bodied' workers, all contributing to the mutual welfare of the members of that nation. (Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and The Body* (London: Verso, 1995) pp.73-4.

dear reader, I am not a *good unified* subject as western philosophy would have it, but my thoughts are everywhere and I am not alone in them.[43]

[43] I have in mind here what David F. Noble explicates as Descartes mission 'to divorce the mind from the body in order to insulate thought from corporeal distortion and make possible the formulation of clear and distinct ideas, the foundation of true knowledge.' (David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*, p .147)

Introduction

A spectre is haunting film studies, the spectre of the visual...

'Inhuman, all too inhuman: Lyotard, Nihilism and Film' seeks to develop Jean-François Lyotard's ideas such as the inhuman in relation to film in a sustained and original way. In turn, this research seeks to question the viability of film as a site of resistance against what Lyotard terms the inhuman, as well as its relation to exchange and theory.

Furthermore, although I wish to situate this research as part of a recent appraisal of Lyotard's thinking[44], especially in relation to film as a medium, Lyotard's theoretical and critical propositions are the starting point of this research. In other words, this research is not an "adaptation" of Lyotard's thought for the screen, and as such is neither wilfully faithful or tendentious. Rather, as a working through of 'Lyotard', or more accurately, a variety of 'Lyotards'[45], it aims to play out his thought, as well as its problematisation of common approaches to film, representation, academia, aesthetics and the political; or to borrow Lyotard's own position concerning his influential *Les Immatériaux* exhibition:

> I would first like to stress that the philosophical character of its conception cannot be expected to extend to its implementation, necessarily inscribed in a given time and space. What interests me in this adventure is to relinquish the traditional medium that the book is.[46]

To this end, my research and chosen audio-visual methodology aims to destabilise the hierarchical relationship between the textual (the book) and the image, namely the logophilic

[44] Namely the work of Margret Grebowicz, James Williams, Kiff Bamford, Ashely Woodward and Graham Jones.
[45] There are arguments that Lyotard was foremost a political philosopher, a philosopher of language, a philosopher of art and aesthetics all of which are valid. Though as Ashley Woodward notes, he can perhaps best be summarised as an anti-reductionist.
[46] Lyotard, *The Interviews and Debates*, ed. Kiff Bamford (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) p.69.

and anti-ocular bias of the academy, aesthetics and (film) theory[47]. Methodologically, the exploration of this tension between theory (the written) and the object of theory (in this case, art and film) will proceed through a mobilisation of the principles of Lyotard's *Discourse, figure* which deterritorialises the boundaries and hierarchies of theory, writing, speech and discourse from the 'figural', affect and the event.[48] Significantly, the film form along with an accompanying written component allowed for a greater examination of Lyotard's notion of the figural. For this research, this called for practice proceeding the theoretical. One of the ways in which this was achieved was through audio-visual experiments and generating accidents and paradoxically pursing non-intentionality. For example, there was an instance in which I found on my phone an accidental recording from within my trouser pocket. The film was entirely abstract: swimming static, blooming reds and fizzing digital noise and muffled sounds. This clip forms the opening of the film *Don't Drown In Me* whilst the *Libidinal Economy* is quoted. Such an approach was necessitated by my intentions to pursue a very "applied" philosophy of film *of and by* experimentation – a relation in which neither art or philosophy are dominant borrowing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasm. Correlatively, it is not a case of a simple reversal – to praise the image above the text, but following Lyotard, to acknowledge that the figural also inhabits and disturbs the text; to pursue difference rather than opposition. As such, my research's interrogations and

[47] See Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure* trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) p.5.

[48] Unlike his contemporary Deleuze, Lyotard did not undertake a sustained examination of film and his associations with postmodernism and its surrounding debates have for a long time obscured his rich and multifaceted work, in particular his writing on technology, art and film; the extent of which has now been made clear in the anglosphere through recent publications such as the six-volume series *Jean-Francois Lyotard: Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists.* Subsequently, I wish to develop Lyotard's ideas and their implications in the realm of film. Moreover, one of the reasons why I am so drawn to Lyotard is because this research is preoccupied with resisting the commonplace subordination of the audio-visual to the textual and the ethical and political implications of this. Significantly, Lyotard's writing on film and his wider thinking provides an instructive starting point to do so, namely in the concepts of figural, the sublime and acinema, rather than presenting a framework to analyse the representational content and meanings of films as seen in theorists such as Metz, Žižek, Mulvey and hooks.

experiments traverse both the textual and the audio-visual are an attempt to resist the primacy of the writing and the supposed mastery of art by discourse and theory. Yet, whether the audio-visual and the textual can actually be equitable interlocutors in practice remains to be seen. This is a problematic bound up with the temptation of collapsing the audio-visual back into a master discourse of the text under the presupposition that they do indeed share a 'common' language. This component – this whirring cog for academic certification - wants to resist such an imposture; it wants a writing as pyrotechnics, a writing of love and hate. It demands excess, style, frisson, all that is denied to it. In this sense, this research is bound to a political and ethical concern for justice: the question of who speaks, and upon behalf of whom and what, and what are the consequences and effects? As such, any traditional analysis or commentary on the films I have created are scant.[49]

Structurally, my research is comprised of three interlocking critiques. Firstly, a critique of capitalist economy and what Lyotard terms as the inhuman[50], which is explored in **Chapter One**. Secondly, a critique of cinematic economy through a mobilisation of Lyotard's notion of acinema running parallel to the first critique in **Chapter Two**. And lastly, as alluded to, a critique of the academic economy and its writing in **Chapter Three**. Linking these critiques are the problematics of legitimation, exchange and the production of meaning, alongside a focus on the singularity of the image, materiality and the event, before various processes of selection and representation. What is meant here by legitimation is more expansive than its usual delimitation within Lyotard's thinking on grand narratives, gesturing towards his thinking on the aesthetic of the sublime and his critique of capitalist exchange. Whereas what is referred to here as *the event*, the singularity of the image and materiality, is that which both

[50] Lyotard, *The Inhuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) p.2.

resists being placed into systems of discourse, communication and representation and in fact exceeds them. That is to say, as Theresa L Geller asserts:

> Materiality, in Lyotard's thinking, is that force of the body (or the signifier) that resists signification. In other words, "the redescription of materiality as not a property of objects, but a resistance to conceptual representation is the starting point from which Lyotard elaborates a politics of the figural.[51]

Running parallel to this is an exploration of various resistances to the formation of a 'rational subject', systems of communication and representation which Lyotard pursued under designations including childhood (*infans*), the unconscious and the feminine which echo and reinforce the concerns of the inhuman. Therefore, following Lyotard, one of the most significant questions this research wishes to explore is how do we testify to these singularities without erasing their affect, force and specificity when subsuming them into systems, discourse and theory? Or more pertinently in relation to film theory and aesthetics: how do we remain on 'the side of the eye', of seeing and the image, which is 'consistently thematised as a lesser being [...] that of falsity; even in its supposed (textual) valorisation? [52] Crucially, the aim here is to neither mourn things past, nor a melancholic attempt to recover some supposed "original" untarnished and free image.[53] Rather, my research will follow a call to go forward in a non-teleological and non-dialectical manner as John Mowitt explains, 'not necessarily "back to the things themselves" but perhaps into the "thick" (or as Lyotard insists, "the thickness," *l'épaisseur*) of things" [...] a threshold where things, like the future itself, are up for grabs.'[54] In relation to the image and cinema, this will be pursued through Lyotard's specific conceptions of sovereignty, acinema and the figural.

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[51] Theresa L. Geller, '"The Film-work does not think"' in *Gender After Lyotard* ed. Margret Grebowicz (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007) p.148.
[52] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure* trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) p.5.
[53] These are precisely the metaphysical fantasies which Lyotard wishes to deconstruct and critique.
[54] John Mowitt 'Introduction' in Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota) xxiii. This is a call for anamnesis, not archaeology and cataloguing.

Moreover, this research will pursue Lyotard's engagements with film which Susana Viegas and James Williams elucidate as being:

> concerned with the gesture of the work, differentiat[ing] cinema from acinema by taking into account the temporal economy of images and sound, as well as sensuous and affective qualities of films, rather than an intellectualised system of moving images, or an analysis of the images' representational content, or a study of the processes of filmmaking.[55]

In other words, this research is focused on tracing various economies of exchange (the filmic, the theoretical and the academic) along with their particular processes of legitimation and what Lyotard terms as the 'nihilism of conventional movements'[56], that is repetition and sameness which govern them and representation itself.

A "Figscourse" on Methodology[57]

I will now proceed to outline the composition of my research and the rationale behind my chosen method. Firstly, why an audio-visual approach?

Since the turn of the millennium there has been an increasing revaluation of Lyotard's importance to the visual arts, the political and contemporary thinking on time, space and matter. Yet, in this time, what Lyotard charted as the derealisation of time and space during his period of writing on the inhuman has only accelerated through unprecedented media and information over-saturation, the ever-quickening commodification of knowledge and language alongside the proliferation of technologies of real time transmission and infinite memory. As outlined in his essay 'Something like: 'Communication . . . without Communication'', these developments herald a crisis in time and space for Lyotard[58]. Whilst

[55] Susana Viegas and James Williams 'Why Lyotard and Film? in *Acinema,* p.12
[56] Lyotard, 'Acinema' in *Acinemas*, p. 33.
[57] Lyotard's contention that the figural embodies discourse is visually rendered in his book *Discourse, figure* in the chapter title 'Fiscourse Digure: The Utopia behind the Scenes of the Phantasy'.
[58] Lyotard, 'Something like: 'Communication . . . without Communication'' in *The Inhuman,* p.115.

this situation demands new critical interventions and theoretical vigilance in the fields of philosophy, aesthetics, film and the wider arts, Lyotard and others equally call for exploration, resistance and experimentation. As such, my research predominantly takes the form of film.

This research is composed as a portfolio of films of varying lengths, with each piece exploring and orbiting Lyotard's thinking from the inhuman, acinema to the figural. Importantly, some films do so in a formal manner, whilst others are poetic and experimental engagements. For example, *Towards Acinema* is a figurative introduction to Lyotard's idea of acinemas, as that which transgresses the normative cinematic time, narrative, the exchange of images and thus the production of meaning through both excess and scarcity. Furthermore, *CO5A1/FBN2* concerns anamnesis and the undoing of any narrative stability through the promotion of disintegration and non sequiturs vis-à-vis trauma. Additionally, *Don't Drown in Me: A Postmodern Fable* is centred on Lyotard's recurring fable of the death of the sun and the possibility of human life and the body existing after such an event, as well as its implications for thinking and memory, both literally and in a philosophical sense. Such a thematic is placed in dialogue with Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*, namely its highly cinematic opening and notions of force and desire.

Crucially, an audio-visual method has the capacity in conjunction with a written component, to allow for a distinct examination of Lyotard's notion of the figural and the potential to produce different forms of knowledge. As the figural is that which disturbs representation and discursive signification for Lyotard, I wish to explore it without privileging the textual

and an academic mode of writing. In turn, this research seeks to resist what Ben Spatz terms as the 'trope of excess'[59]:

> When philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes that 'language presupposes the nonlinguistic' and that 'law presupposes the nonjuridical' he begins from the conceptual premise that language and law are the first phenomena to be explained while that which exceeds them comes later. This is what I have called the 'trope of excess'[...] a habit of thought in which affordances that ought to be considered primary are rendered secondary to those which in fact ought to be decentered.[60]

This 'trope of excess' has notable parallels to both the figural and Lyotard's conceptualisation of the aesthetic of the beautiful and the aesthetic of the sublime[61], with the latter denoting a regime which precedes rules, communication and theorisation. In other words, the aesthetic of the sublime designates the emergence of the new, with the task being for Lyotard to create an original language to comprehend it without recourse to pre-established frameworks or discourses. Instructively, Spatz also makes a distinction between the written and the audiovisual, contrasting their means and modes of thinking:

> much of what we call philosophy is not more than the development of a particular way of working with the technology of writing [...] The writing way of thinking has become so dominant that today we often simply call it 'thinking', but to be more specific we might use the term logos. With the rise of the audiovisual we are beginning to experience a new kind of thinking, which I will call the video way of thinking.[62]

As such, this research wishes to highlight this so-called 'video way' of thinking, in particular its alternative temporalities. Lastly, Lyotard not only made practical film experiments largely unknown outside of France[63], but during a period at the experimental Vincennes university with Deleuze proposed that students could submit 'art work, film, score, set design'[64] due to a

[59] See Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do* (London: Routledge, 2015)
[60] Spatz, 'The Video Way of Thinking' in *South African Theatre Journal*, 31:1, 146-154, DOI: 10.1080/10137548.2017.1414629 (2018) p.146. I do however disagree with Spatz conclusion regarding a need to reassert logos.
[61] See Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde' in *The Inhuman*.
[62] Ibid, p. 147.
[63] Jones and Woodward, *Acinemas*, p.3. Lyotard made films with the filmmakers Claudine Eizykman and Guy Fihman.
[64] Bamford, *Critical Lives: Jean-François Lyotard*, p.102.

change in the institutional status of the university. Such a possibility Kiff Bamford writes, 'gave recognition to alternative forms of knowledge, forms which escaped the maxim of 'performativity' endemic in the postmodern condition.'[6566] Therefore, whilst such an audio-visual methodology will facilitate an anti-structuralist and anti-semiotic approach that honors both the singularity of film and the figural, it is also capable, I maintain, of producing 'alternative forms of knowledge' as Bamford states.[67]

Introducing Lyotard: A thinker 'on the run'

> 'Lyotard was the antithesis of the philosopher who establishes a position and then spends a career defending it. He wrote like a thinker 'on the run', his views rapidly changing.'[6869]

I will briefly outline Lyotard's philosophical nomadism and its significance[70];

> *Following interests in Stoicism and Zen Buddhism, Lyotard became involved in revolutionary politics in Algeria joining the group Socialisme ou Barbarie, remaining aligned for ten years whilst developing an interest in Phenomenology and Freud. Growing disillusioned with Marxism and Freudianism culminating in his book, Libidinal Economy, Lyotard ended his association with Socialisme ou Barbarie. Yet, despite this philosophical drift from both the systems of Marx and Freud, Lyotard's thought crucially remained anti-capitalist and preoccupied with justice and desire. Lyotard's interest in art came to the fore by way of Kant's aesthetics and critique of judgement, most notably the sublime and the beautiful. This period was similarly marked by a deepening preoccupation with the idea of the avant-garde, with a particular focus on diverse artists such as Newman, Monory and Arakawa. He loved a woman called Dolores. He died of Leukaemia*.

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[65] Ibid.
[66] I take performativity here to designate the striving for greater efficiency, instrumentalisation and frictionless exchange within capital, not say the performativity of gender. See the notice (Me)aning in the Reading Dossier.
[67] Bamford, *Critical Lives: Jean-François Lyotard*, p.102.
[68] Graham Jones and Ashley Woodward, 'Setting the Scene' in *Acinemas*, p.4.
[69] In a similar vein, Kent Still writes:'[i]n *The Differend,* Lyotard notes Kant's contention that philosophy must be forever "alert" (Lyotard's term is *éveil*, Kant's *rege*), on guard against those who would attempt to bring philosophical debate to an end by lulling philosophers into a dogmatic slumber. Indeed, Lyotard claims that justice requires such "wakefulness."' Kent Still, 'Introduction: Minima Memoria' in *Minima Memoria: In the Wake of Jean-François Lyotard.*, ed Claire Nouvet et al (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) xxiii.
[70] Regarding the indeterminacy of Lyotard's own life and thought, Stuart Sim recalls Lyotard's description of thought being like clouds in *Peregrinations*, writing: 'The image captures the amorphous quality of thought, its lack of precise boundaries, that Lyotard considers to be necessary to philosophy, indicative of the flexibility he feels philosophers should exhibit in their approach to the world and its problems. Everything is to be considered as in a state of flux, with the possibility of new states of affairs always tantalisingly present.' Stuart Sim, *The Lyotard Dictionary* ed. Stuart Sim (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) p.36.

This sketch is of course deliberately reductive; compressing a rich politico-philosophical life into a bite-sized narrative, a medium sized paragraph.[71] Yet, whilst being a 'snap shot' of a thinker with a disdain for the rigidities of systematic thought and a devotion to heterogeneity and dissensus, the sketch is a knowing enactment of the mise-en-scène and mise hors scène (the putting out of scene) and their problematics as Lyotard sees them.[72] Expanding the jurisdiction of the mise-en-scène from being merely an artistic activity to the noetic, political, cultural and ethical spheres, Lyotard draws attention to the discriminatory and judicious process of selection and discardment constantly at work to produce and stage not only a scene or narrative, but also the arena for political, philosophical and ethical discussion. This includes the decision-making of what may be included, as well as the literal and metaphorical blocking, choreography of movement, the designation of customs and rules. Thus, the mise-en-scène becomes for Lyotard 'a general process touching all fields of activity, a [...] process of separation, exclusion and effacement [...] a political activity *par excellence*' and in turn, 'political activity' is a 'mise-en-scène *par excellence.*'[73] Significantly, Lyotard's concern with the mise-en-scène is not an advocation of an idealist project, Hegelian or otherwise in which there is nothing outside of knowledge or representation. Instead, central to Lyotard's thought is a defence of the unpresentable or precisely that which escapes representation and that representation represses.

[71] Bennington, for example, asks: '[c]an we avoid constituting as an oeuvre, the oeuvre of a life, these more or less *dispersed* writings, binding their events by making them into a story to be told here and now, gathered around an inaugural secret? Is this not precisely the sort of archaeo-teleological set-up he would have denounced?' (Bennington, 'Childish Things' in *Minima Memoria*, p. 205.

[72] Bamford gives an instructive elucidation of Lyotard's apprehensions towards the genre of biography: '[j]ust as he rejected the simplistic psycho-biographic readings of art by Sigmund Freud, Lyotard follows Malraux's horror at the idea that events in the life of an artist or writer could 'explain' his work. Indeed, Lyotard's desire to wander is always away from the assignation of meaning: the resistance to representation'. (Bamford, *Critical Lives: Jean-François Lyotard*, p.18)

[73]Lyotard, 'Acinemas' in *Acinemas*, p.39.

Furthermore, as the mise-en-scène for Lyotard entails the process of 'separating reality on one side and a play space on the other (a 'real' or an 'unreal' – that which is in the camera's lens): to direct [mettre en scène] is to institute this limit, this frame, to circumscribe the region of de-responsibility'[74], its problematic is precisely that of representation itself. That is to say, representation is constituted by both the division of elements into two orders; inside the frame of representation and outside the frame, and the rules of tradition and 'good form' which legislate what is included and excluded. Thus, representation is characterised by what we could term the twin logic of divide and rule(s).

With this said, I will now return to the above "sketch" of Lyotard through what I wish to term the haunting of the postmodern mise-en-scène. Whilst, as stated, I am not seeking an exhaustive portrait or history here, there are some "significant" omissions from the sketch; Lyotard's first wife, Andrée May, the Heidegger debate, the *differend*, language games, California, a philosophy of Childhood, disagreements with Althusser and Habermas, 1968, the 'event', his seminal exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, anamnesis and the Inhuman to name a few. The typical mise-en-scène, at least in the anglosphere, is that Lyotard was a theorist and sociologist, a high priest of the postmodern who declared the end of grand-narratives. As Lyotard himself noted, texts such as the commissioned *The Postmodern Condition* are unrepresentative of his wider thinking and preoccupations, eclipsing decades of philosophical thought on art, politics and justice which both precede and come after it.[75] Or as Gordon

[74] Ibid., p.38.

[75] 'Has *The Postmodern Condition* effaced or occluded *The Differend*? The answer is yes. The former book effectively provoked a number of polemics. I did not expect that; nor was it what I was looking for. But, on reflection, it is understandable. I mean that, having been presented with the usage of this term, borrowed, as I explained, from American literary criticism and the crisis of modernism in the arts.' Lyotard, *The Interviews and Debates* ed. Kiff Bamford (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) p.105. In another interview Lyotard asserts: 'in the United States I was received as the theoretician of postmodernity and as the postmodernist? oh, my god! For me *The Postmodern Condition* is the worst book I ever wrote, but it was the only one having a certain reception. I don't know why; I can't explain why. My wish is that those people who have the generosity to give some attention to my work would please read other things than this horrible book, because it was just a passage for

Bearn writes, unfortunately 'Lyotard's description of the postmodern condition was at first so frequently taken as an endorsement of that very system.'[7677]

Lyotard as "film theorist"

Lyotard and film have never been an easy fit. Viegas and Williams pertinently ask why 'is there no systematic film theory by Lyotard?' Is it because Lyotard maintained that 'there ought not to be a systematic theory (for anything)'?[78] Perhaps. Moreover, as previously noted, unlike his contemporary, colleague and friend, Gilles Deleuze, Lyotard never wrote sustained texts on film like *Cinema*[79]. With this said, Lyotard's absence in cinema studies remains surprising for arguably the 'most significant aesthetician and philosopher of art of the poststructuralist generation'[80] who was never coy about his love of the moving-image, once asserting 'I adore films, and just about any kind of films'[81]. Yet, whilst Lyotard's writings on film are few, they are not inconsequential excursions into the realm of cinema. Rather, distinguished by their telescopic nature, they have deceptive depth, scope and

me.' Gary A. Olson and Jean-François Lyotard, 'Resisting a Discourse of Mastery: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard' in *JAC*, Vol.15 No.3 1995 (pp. 391-410) p. 410.

[76] Gordon C. F. Bearn, 'Pointlessness and the University of Beauty' in *Just Education* (London: Routledge, 2000, p.232).

[77] Elsewhere, Meaghan Morris in the chapter 'The Man in the Mirror: David Harvey's 'Condition' of Postmodernity' in their book, *Identity Anecdotes: Translation and Media Culture*, critiques the persistent, unfortunate and lazy stereotyping by Marxists such as David Harvey. Morris argues that: rather than attempting to take up Lyotard on his own terms, too often Marxist critiques cast him quite ironically as a postmodernist in league with the likes of Jencks. Such a designation of Lyotard as a postmodernist, elides the powerful force and implications of Lyotard's conceptualisation of the postmodern as something always within the modern. As such, the postmodern is not a new period distinct from the modern for Lyotard, but rather, *the modern at its most modern*. They write: 'we have to say that the postmodern is always implied in the modern because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself. And not only to exceed itself in that way, but to resolve itself into a sort of ultimate stability, such for example as is aimed at by the utopian project, but also by the straightforward political project implied in the grand narratives of emancipation. Modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity.' Lyotard, 'Rewriting Modernity' in *The Inhuman*, p.25.

[78] Viegas and Williams, 'Why Lyotard and Film?' in *Acinemas,* p.16

[79] Nor did Lyotard inspire as Durafour dryly posits 'a whole critical disciplinary trend, nor given, *coram populi*, a new face to cinema studies'. Jean-Michel Durafour, 'Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction' in *Acinemas*, p.17.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

substantial critical richness, proposing radical approaches to the problematics of representation and the mise-en-scène.

Significantly, Lyotard's writings on film are essays not systematic books. Ever the ironist, Lyotard referred to *The Differend* as his 'philosophical book', before claiming that he only wrote four 'actual' books[82], suggesting as Wlad Godzich surmises that 'his prior works, which numbered then some twelve books and a hundred articles, had not been philosophical but something else'.[83] Whether a truthful admission or not, it highlights Lyotard's disavowal of systematic philosophical thought and the privileging of the essay as his preferred mode of enquiry. In this sense, Lyotard subscribes to Theodor Adorno's thesis on the decline of metaphysics in his *Negative Dialectics*, namely that philosophy may only continue through *micrologies* in an era of its own impossibility.[84] With Auschwitz destroying for Adorno the possibility for total knowledge, and in turn total philosophies like the ones which proceeded it, '[m]icrology is the place where metaphysics finds a haven from totality.'[85] Following this, Lyotard writes that '[p]hilosophy as architecture is ruined, but a writing of the ruins, micrologies, graffiti can still be done. This writing preserves the forgotten that one has tried to forget by killing it'.[86] Consequently, 'Lyotard does not present a theory, either for cinema or art more generally' to ensure 'that the field remains open for others to explore, responding to his prompts rather than suffocated by the constraints of a method.'[87] As Lyotard explains, '[m]icrology is not just metaphysics in crumbs, any more than Newman's painting is

[82] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p. xii.
[83] Godzich, 'Afterword: Reading against Literacy' in *The Postmodern Explained* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993) p.110.
[84] 'Our metaphysical faculty is paralyzed' writes Adorno, 'because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience.' Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* trans E.B Ashton (Bloomsbury: London, 2015) p.362.
[85] Ibid., p.407
[86] Lyotard, *Heidegger and the "jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990) p.43.
[87] Bamford, *Critical Lives*: *Jean-François Lyotard*, p.81.

Delacroix in scraps'[88]. Rather, it is a mode of fragmentary philosophical work both drawn to and governed by the '*Ex Minimis',* that is, the minimal or *almost nothing* which resists saying it all, that rejects the position of authority and the declaration of conclusions of "great philosophies". This disclination to anything which signals the termination of thinking, questioning, experimentation or proffers a supposed final say extends to the very notion of theory, with Lyotard viewing it as something reeking of 'monotheism and accounting'.[89] Following his thinking within *Discourse, figure,* it may also be said that theory functions by way of a procedure which renders its "object" and things immobile and flat as if it were a text[90], a notion which shall be returned to throughout this research.

Whilst despite their best-efforts, theories cannot include everything, they are crucially predicated for Lyotard on the position of authority or an authoritative voice. Lyotard refuses such a position, always making clear that he is neither an expert or an authority, but a philosopher. In turn, to philosophise for him is to be open, constantly questioning the grounding of any authority or the intellectual. To do so is to put oneself into a liminal position without recourse to sovereignty, to open oneself up to hazard, error and precarity, to allow oneself to be weathered by the uncertainty and unpredictability of thinking and experimentation. This is a demand not dissimilar to that once sketched out by Franz Kafka: 'The decisive moment in human development is a continuous one. For this reason, the revolutionary movements which declare everything before them to be null and void are in the right, for nothing has yet happened.'[91] Whether this necessitates the appraisal of a sort of theoretical *l' esprit de l'escalier*, it does underscore the temporal status of thinking for Lyotard, the impossibility of a last word; our constant *in medias res*.

[88] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.103.
[89] Jean-Michel Durafour, 'Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction' in *Acinema*, p.17.
[90] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p.3.
[91] Franz Kafka, *The Basic Kafka* (New York: Pocket Books, 1979) p. 237.

Instead of developing a "theory" of film, Lyotard instead follows Deleuze in attempting to reconfigure the traditional and imbalanced relationship between philosophy and art in which film is just another subject amongst others for philosophy to master or use, maintaining that the 'philosopher does not have a privileged access to the meaning of paintings [or art] that he is kind enough to transfer to an inexperienced viewer. To the contrary: artist, beholder and viewer are in a nascent state – there is no rule of composition and there is no rule of viewing the composition.'[92] Therefore, unlike many Lacanian engagements with film who as Jones and Woodward[93] argue only use films to illustrate "Lacanian truths" and theoretical concepts, not treating 'works as interesting or valuable in their own right'[94], Lyotard like Deleuze does not produce 'a mere philosophy of art – in the sense that a movie would be used to illustrate a certain philosophical idea or a certain argument, say ethical or political' but instead allows 'film to have a strong effect on philosophical praxis.'[95] The result is the relation between art and philosophy within their work is no longer a one-way street, with concepts and elements migrating in both directions as Lyotard's expansion of the mise-en-scène illustrates. Lyotard in fact goes further, contending that it is now the avant-garde which carries out the work of philosophy; philosophising by other means.[96] Such an approach alongside his wider philosophy has been met with hesitancy and scepticism in certain quarters:

> [w]e can understand what it was about Lyotard's writings that made the cinema theorists uncomfortable: their refusal to constitute a system (system is closure, capitalisation, hoarding, theorisation), to offer a fully delivered, established global theory; their 'drift' (a Lyotardian word), that one could take for disorder, or see as superficiality […] a fondness for difference, a fidelity to singularities, a passion for dissensus.[97]

[92] Vlad Ionescu, 'On Dialogue as Performative Art Criticism' in *Acinemas,* p.139.
[93] Jones and Woodward's main Lacanian targets are Žižek and McGowan.
[94] Jones and Woodward, *Acinemas,* pp.166-7.
[95] Viegas and Williams, 'Why Lyotard and Film?' in *Acinemas,* p.11.
[96] See the passage "Painting thus becomes a philosophical activity" in 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable' in *The Inhuman.*
[97] Durafour, 'Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction' in *Acinema,* p.23.

Is the entry of Lyotard into film studies therefore tantamount to letting a wolf into the throne room? Hardly, as Lyotard's presence within film theory is not entirely new, with Durafour arguing that 'numerous theoreticians, sometimes those very ones who keep obstinately quiet about it, have openly stolen Lyotard's whole box of methodological and operative tools (the figural), with more or less good fortune.'[98] With this all established, I will now proceed to the first critique.

[98] Ibid, p.17.

Chapter One: The Inhuman, or Towards a Critique of Complexification and Capital

This chapter explores Lyotard's notion of the inhuman, taking it up as a deepening and continuation of his thinking on nihilism, justice and alterity previously pursued under designations such as the postmodern and libidinal economy. Such a traversal or 'drifting movement' is as Emine Sarikartal notes, 'typical of Lyotardian thought'[99] in which problems are reframed and reworked both against and with different currents of philosophical thought in a non-linear and non-dialectical manner.

On first glance the most concentrated presentation of Lyotard's thinking on the inhuman is in the collection of essays *of the same name*, crucially suffixed with the phrase 'Reflections on time'. As Lyotard stresses, the essays which comprise *The Inhuman* 'have neither the function nor the value of a manifesto or treatise' and were originally 'all commissioned lectures, mostly destined for a non-professional audience'[100]. With this said, viewed collectively these essays form a work of speculative philosophy, with each piece orbiting to one degree or another the consequences of complexification and the new technologies for time, matter, thinking and art. I will briefly delineate what is meant here by complexification, time and technology and their entanglements.

Importantly, Lyotard defines complexification as a metaphysical principle[101] in which energy becomes increasingly more efficient. Whilst Lyotard frequently discusses complexification in relation to capitalism and technoscience, complexification is not exclusive to them, but rather

[99] Emine Sarikartal, 'Childhood and education in Jean-François Lyotard's philosophy' in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol 52:1, pp. 88-97 DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2019.1605899 (2019) p.89.
[100] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) p.2.
[101] Massimiliano Simons, 'Jean-François Lyotard and Postmodern Technoscience' in *Philosophy & Technology (2022*), as part of special issue of 'Philosophy of Technology and French Thought' (ISSN: 2210-5441), edited by Alberto Romele and François-David Sebbah.

part of the broader 'cosmic process of complexification.' Consequently, humans are inscribed in the processes of complexification, without the ability to control it, with Lyotard writing:

> The human race is, so to speak, 'pulled forward' by this process without possessing the slightest capacity for mastering it. *It has to adapt to the new conditions.* It is even probable that this has always been the case throughout human history. And if we can become aware of that fact today, this is because of the exponential growth affecting sciences and technology.[102] (My Emphasis)

Now, what does Lyotard mean by time, and what is its relationship with technology? Following thinkers such as Martin Heidegger[103], Lyotard presents a nuanced conception of technology, asserting all 'technology, beginning with writing considered as a *techne,* is an artefact allowing its users to stock more information, to improve their competence and optimise their performances.'[104] In other words, technology for Lyotard is a means of controlling time for humans, functioning as extensions of memory. Historically, writing and narratives have been effective examples of carrying out this task.[105] Lyotard writes in 'Time Today':

> There are many ways of telling a story, but the narrative as such can be considered to be a technical apparatus giving a people the means to store, order and retrieve units of information, i.e. events. More precisely, narratives are like temporal filters whose function is to transform the emotive charge linked to the event into sequences of units of information capable of giving rise to something like meaning.[106]

As such, technology and time in Lyotard's thinking are deeply imbricated.[107] Yet, in essays such as 'Time Today', Lyotard charts how narratives (grand, meta or otherwise) cede to the

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[102] Ibid., p.64.
[103] See 'The Question Concerning Technology' by Martin Heidegger.
[104] Lyotard, *The Inhuman* p.62.
[105] Lyotard frequently used the example of the Cashinahua people's use of a repeating narrative in which 'Every narrator presents himself as having first been a narratee: not as autonomous, then, but, on the contrary, as heteronomous.' Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, p.32. Elsewhere, Lyotard writes '[i]n reciting its narratives, the [Cashinahua] community reassures itself of the permanence and legitimacy of its world of names through the recurrence of this world in its stories.' (Lyotard, 'Missive on Universal History' in *The Postmodern Explained*, p.32.)
[106] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, pp.62-3.
[107] Technology for Lyotard then is a far cry from the parody presented in Janet Horowitz Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* in which rather comically a robot housecat is named after Lyotard and he is described as a 'postmodern theorist', the latter of which I assume would have irked him. He speaks about his frustration of being labelled a not only a theorist, but a postmodern theorist in the interview 'Resisting the Discourse of Mastery': 'First, one misunderstanding is that some people take me to be a

performativity of capital which no longer need such narratives to legitimate its expansion and domination, with Lyotard elucidating '[l]et us say merely that what is called capital is grounded in the principle that money is nothing other than time placed in reserve, available.'[108] In conjunction with performativity, Lyotard claims that new technologies 'constructed around electronics and data processing [...] make the programming and control of memorizing, i.e. the synthesis of different times in one time, less dependent on the conditions of life on earth.'[109] That is, less reliant on a human or embodied storyteller, with new technologies being more efficient at controlling time than human narratives[110]. As noted by Woodward, whilst Lyotard had a limited understanding of technology and information theory, his philosophical provocations do open up avenues for further exploration.[111] The new technologies in question include advanced super-computers, Artificial Intelligence and the rise of algorithmic programmes. Significantly, as Woodward asserts, Lyotard 'sees the 'new technologies' of information, communication, and calculation as an *exteriorisation* of mind: following and extending Heidegger, technologies of this kind appear to be the crystallisation of metaphysics, as the rational, subjective determination and control of beings.

"theorist." I worked in several texts against this idea. I remember in the sixties when structuralist ideology was dominant in France and elsewhere I resisted this way of thinking. It was with a sort of pride (or arrogance) on my part to observe that finally a book like *Discours, figure* - which was completely ignored at the time because it was explicitly against structuralism, not only in terms of linguistic structuralism but even Lacanian structuralism because at that time the Lacanian reading of Freud was similar to Althusser on Marxism - has gained acceptance. I was against this way of thinking, and I am pleased that now readers have discovered this book. I was waiting thirty years - no problem. The point is that I'm not a theorist. Please, don't take the notion of postmodernity as theory. I never used the term postmodernism, only "the postmodern" or "postmodernity"? it's not an ism. The major misunderstanding is to transform into an ism what wasn't at all an ism. I hate isms because I'm not a theorist.' Gary A. Olson and Jean-François Lyotard, 'Resisting a Discourse of Mastery: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard', p. 409.

[108] Ibid., p.66.

[109] Ibid., p.62.

[110] 'Lyotard explains that these ethnocultural narratives were for much of human history the most efficient apparatuses available for memorising and transmitting information and organising space and time. Such narratives store and transmit a stock of memory across generations, and enable a degree of control over the future through the idea of destiny. Destiny assumes that all events are already determined, and unfold according to a pre-established sequence. This idea reduces our sense of contingency about the future, and introduces the possibility that we might be able to gain knowledge, in the present, of events due to unfold in the future.' Ashley Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition:* Reflections on Nihilism, Information and Art (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) p.51.

[111] Ibid., p.146.

Hence an association of these technologies with nihilism; with what that art ought to *resist*.'[112]

Defining the Inhuman

Lyotard speaks of the inhuman in two distinct ways and implores that it 'is indispensable to keep them dissociated.'[113] He writes:

> what if human beings, in humanism's sense, were in the process of, constrained into, becoming inhuman (that's the first part)? And (the second part), what if what is 'proper' to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?[114]

This first inhuman which Lyotard refers to designates the 'inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development (among others)'[115] such as capitalism and progress, which as Woodward elucidates further, 'no longer functions even in the pretence of bettering humanity, but according to the criterion of performativity or efficiency.'[116] This inhuman, Lyotard argues, produces 'new barbarism, illiteracy and the impoverishment of language, new poverty, merciless remodelling of opinion by the media, immiseration of the mind, obsolescence of the soul, as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno stressed.'[117]As such, this inhuman of dehumanisation and subjugation is synonymous with nihilism; 'the devaluation of our existence by contemporary social, cultural, and technological developments'.[118]

[112] Ibid., p.166.
[113] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.2.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition*, p.5.
[117] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.63.
[118] Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition*, p.165.

Conversely, the second inhuman not only resists the first inhuman, but precedes the formation of humanism's 'human', being for Lyotard 'the condition for thought, art, and life'[119]. As Woodward importantly elucidates**,** many have misunderstood Lyotard's defence of this second inhuman as an apologia of an essential "humanness" found within it, or a search for something universally "human". Yet, 'what Lyotard defends and celebrates is not what humanism understood as essential to the human (rationality, autonomy, and so on), but rather what it repressed and sought to eliminate in constructing this supposed essence [...] which Lyotard names in a number of ways: the unconscious, affect, *infantia*.'[120] This conceptualisation of the second inhuman follows Freud's 'undermining of human narcissisms' which reveal 'our continuity with the animal kingdom'[121] as Woodward writes. Such a move aims to show how the sensible, that is, that pertaining to the senses, 'has been devalued against the supposed superiority of the intelligible, that is, *rationality* in the human which had previously been thought to transcend and set us apart from the animal.'[122] In this vein, **Chapter two** positions acinema as a viable defence of this second inhuman: that which is disregarded, deemed necessary to overcome, of no use to totalities, performance, progress, economies and accumulation. All that is dismissed by the mise-en-scène of the *human proper*.[123] This second inhuman is twinned for Lyotard with art which has the capacity to

[119] Ibid., p.5.
[120] Ibid., p.6.
[121] Woodward writes that Lyotard's 'early work on art (*Discourse, Figure* and *Libidinal Economy*), drawing on Freud and Nietzsche, engaging with Sade, Bataille, and Klossowski, and appealing to libidinal energetics, seems to evoke the animal, the bestial and the 'subhuman' qualities in the human; the unconscious, bodily, physical, affective, irrational remainders of the processes of humanisation and socialisation.' Woodward, p.166.
[122] Ibid.
[123] So, is the inhuman our true, essential nature? No, as Williams makes clear '[i]t is important to stress the time-bound aspect of the contribution and the approach to inhumanity in a non-essentialist and non-transcendental manner. For him, the human is relative not only in its resistance to absolute definitions but also in its constant reassessments through the different ways in which it provides an umbrella for Ideas. So he does not deny that essential and transcendental definitions of the human are crucial components of our Idea of the human.' Williams, *Lyotard and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000) pp.126-7. And elsewhere Williams clarifies: 'The inhuman is the limit of the human, thought according to the absolute. It is therefore not a thing or a matter, but that which resists all attempts to close on any given Idea or definition of the human.' p.131.

function as a form of resistance to the inhuman of capital, which will be explored explicitly in the **Chapter two**.

The Fable

One of the chief ways in which Lyotard interrogates the inhuman is by way of a reoccurring fable of solar death as seen in texts such as 'Can thought go on without a body?', 'A Postmodern Fable', 'The Wall, the Gulf, the System' and 'The Grip'. As Neil Badmington writes, the essay as a genre of writing, at least in English 'carries with it connotations of academic convention, assured coherence, disinterested enquiry, and the quiet following of an even quieter set of rules.'[124] These forementioned pieces by Lyotard flout any such norms, functioning closer to interrogative fictions.

In its most distilled form, the fable questions the status and nature of thinking, matter and the mind against the impending solar death in 4.5 billion years' time, probing what a human and their brain, 'or rather the Brain and its Human – would resemble at the moment when they leave the planet forever, before its destruction'[125]. In some versions, the fable is presented as a dialogue between two interlocutors, whilst in another it is the monologue of the system of complexification.

What exactly is the status of the fable? Firstly, as Lyotard notes, it is 'not in itself fictional', but 'rather realistic' due to its credence as a scientific hypothesis[126]. Yet there are some notable inaccuracies. Whilst Lyotard repeatedly posits that the sun will explode in 4.5 billion

[124] Neil Badmington, 'I Ain't got no body' in *Gender After Lyotard* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007) p.29
[125] Lyotard, 'A Postmodern Fable' in *Postmodern Fables* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press: 1997) p.83.
[126] Ibid. p.84.

years, contemporary science puts the number closer to 5 billion, with the sun running out of fuel and expanding into a red giant, and remaining in this state for an additional billion years before 'contracting into a white dwarf.'[127] Yet, despite these numerical and scientific discrepancies between Lyotard's version and scientific consensus, the end result is the same in both: the complete annihilation of our solar system and life on Earth. Therefore, we can come to see that the fable is not Lyotard's vision of the future, nor an attempt to present an accurate scientific prediction or a prophecy of impending planetary destruction, but a highly dramatic device[128] to question assumptions regarding 'humanness', development, the body, matter and time.[129]

Like its scientific antecedents, the fable is informed by the laws of thermodynamics. A cursory description of thermodynamics and its principles of negentropy and entropy is instructive here. First introduced by astrophysicists including Rudolf Clausius and Erwin Schrödinger, negentropy (a portmanteau of 'negative entropy') describes a force for cohesion, stability and organisation within an open system[130]. In highly reductive terms, negentropy is the opposite of the principle of entropy (from the Greek for 'transformation'[131]) which measures the force of chaos, unpredictability and heterogeneity within a given system. As Woodward elucidates further:

[127] Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition,* p.37.
[128] 'As elsewhere in Lyotard's writing, however, we must be careful in not attributing to Lyotard a belief in this metaphysical thesis; he presents it as a hypothesis which allows a critical perspective [...] In short, Lyotard uses a metaphysical 'fiction' in order to facilitate a critique of the socio-political implications of information technology. This metaphysical fiction is drawn in part from Bergson, Stiegler, and a critique of time in capitalism, but principally from Leibniz, and Lyotard tends to refer to it under the moniker of 'the Leibnizian hypothesis'. Ibid., p.45.
[129] 'But, after all, this fable asks not that it be believed only that we reflect on it.' Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables* p.101.
[130] The precision and definitions of 'closed', 'open' and 'isolated' are a point of frequent debate. For example, the Earth can be characterised as both a closed and open system. Closed in the sense that matter cannot leave its system, open in the sense that it both receives and emits energy out of its system.
[131] Ralph Baierlein, 'How entropy got its name' in *American Journal of Physics* Vol. 60, p.1151 (1992) https://doi.org/10.1119/1.16966 [Accessed 4/9/22]

> Energy is distributed in the cosmos such that disorganisation is more probable than organisation. But it happens, against the odds, that some energy forms into organised systems. Closed systems will quickly dissipate their energy and collapse, reverting to the more probable state of disorganisation [...] But open systems – systems capable of exploiting energy from outside their organised structure – are much more stable and can preserve themselves for much longer. Increasing complexity of the organised system allows for greater capacity for the exploitation of external energy, and prolonged preservation of the organisation itself.[132]

This is to say, increased entropy means a greater variability and possibility for energy to present in different forms, states, arrangements and to be more dispersed. Negentropy on the other hand, which Lyotard speaks of interchangeably with complexification[133], energy is concentrated in a certain way:

> I'm granting to physics theory that technological scientific development is, on the surface of the earth, the present-day form of a process of negentropy or complexification that has been underway since the earth began its existence. I'm granting that human beings aren't and never have been the motor of this complexification, but an effect and carrier of this negentropy, its continuer. I'm granting that the disembodied intelligence that everything here conspires to create will make it possible to meet the challenge to that process of complexification posed by an entropic tidal wave which from that standpoint equates with the solar explosion to come.[134]

In other words for Lyotard, with the second law of thermodynamics stating that entropy only increases in the universe[135], one of the principal aims of contemporary development is devising means to adapt and negotiate this inevitability, which he theorises via a transposition of Gottfried Leibniz's concept of the Monad, to which I will return to shortly in relation to the film *Don't Drown In Me*. Seen through a humanist lens, entropy appears like an antagonistic force come to rubbish any desire for rationality, knowability and order.[136] This irreversible and one-directional movement towards greater entropy is neatly encapsulated in

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[132] Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition*, p.13.
[133] The extent to which his use of the terms interchangeably is rhetorical or ironic is unclear.
[134] Lyotard, *The Inhuman* p.22.
[135] '[T]he probabilistic laws of Boltzmann's statistical mechanics assure us, the entropy of the Universe will be always and ever increasing, as per the Second Law of Thermodynamics.' Xinghai Zhao, et al. *The Co-Evolution of Cosmic Entropy and Structures in the Universe*. 2012, https://doi.org10.48550/ARXIV.1211.1677, p.1.
[136] In this sense, entropy and complexification may be seen to find their philosophical corollary in Walter Benjamin's Angel of history and its storm of ruins and catastrophe which propels us the angel forward. See Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999) p.249.

the astrophysicist Arthur Eddington's notion of time's arrow[137], which shares notable similarities to what Walter Benjamin would elsewhere describe as a 'one-way street'[138] which has very specific implications for history, politics and justice. Yet, against this, Lyotard sees complexification 'which for him is functionally identical to a generalised physics which privileges negentropy' rigorously holding its own, fearing '[f]rom the point of view of development [...] the Third World is nothing but a source of entropy for the *autopoesis* [*sic*.] of the great monad' – and would be better eliminated so as not to be an inefficient energy drain on the system'.[139] In this sense, entropy comes to operate as a figure for otherness in Lyotard's work as Woodward identifies:

> [entropy] understood as both that which we must welcome if we are to be open to the creative forces of thought and art, and to which we have an ethical obligation in the forms of cultural, racial, sexual, and other kinds of difference. Lyotard sees technics to a large extent through the lens of Heidegger's thesis on the realisation of metaphysics in 'general physics', and the tendency of the technoscientific and capitalist system to eradicate all otherness through programmed efficiency.'[140]

Not a Metanarrative

As established, Lyotard's fable is not a scientific hypothesis. Nor is it his actual belief or position, but a means to interrogate the status of the human in the face of new developments (in development) and complexification. Despite this, some have taken up Lyotard's fable as a new metanarrative to which "humanity" may orientate itself[141]. Such an interpretation both misreads the fable and its narrative status. For example, immune to nuance, rhetorical

[137] David Layzer, 'The Arrow of Time' in *The Astrophysical Journal*. Vol. 206. pp. 559-569. (1976) 10.1086/154413 [Accessed 20/6/22]
[138] 'In his study on Kierkegaard, Adorno wrote that "precisely what comprises real history" was "the irreversible one-time-ness of the historical facts that is, concrete, particular, transitory nature [...] As Horkheimer wrote Benjamin: "The injustice, the terror, the pains of the past [are] irreparable." History was irreversible, a "one-way street." The transitoriness of nature was the source of suffering, but at the same time, because its essence was change, it was the source of hope. This perhaps provides the key to Benjamin's cryptic statement, which Adorno quoted with affirmation, "Only because of the hopeless is hope given to us."'
Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origins of the Negative Dialectic* (New York: Free Press, 1979) p. 57.
[139] Woodward, *Lyotard and The Inhuman Condition,* p. 86.
[140] Ibid., pp.86-7.
[141] See also Charles Jencks' *What is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1989)

retorsion[142] and wilfully misconstruing the concerns of Lyotard's thinking, Terry Eagleton succumbs to his egregiously counterfactual streak, which always threatens to erupt under otherwise instructive theoretical arguments, asserting that:

> the former socialist militant Jean-François Lyotard continued his inquiries into intergalactic travel, cosmic entropy and the mass exodus of the human race from the earth after the extinction of the sun in four billion years' time. For a philosopher with a distaste for grand narratives, this seemed a remarkably broad perspective. Such had been the gradual darkening of the dissident mind.[143]

Crucially, metanarratives are characterised for Lyotard by their centering of the *human subject*, be it Christian (man is granted redemption), those of the enlightenment (man reaches complete enlightenment/emancipation) or communism (man's alienation is overcome) and so on.[144] Woodward further elucidates the very specific human centric temporality of metanarratives:

> [f]or Lyotard, metanarratives are characterised by a certain understanding of time, which he calls 'historicity' [...] Grand narratives are built around a metaphysics of the subject: they tell of a subject alienated from an originary, utopian wholeness, afflicted with a lack, and they present a *telos*, a denouement of the narrative in which the subject's lack is overcome and the originary wholeness restored. Modern historicity is thus an eschatology: it construes the end of time as a *redemption.*[145]

Therefore, whilst nominally being a narrative, the fable of solar death is significantly one *without* 'anthropocentric bias'[146] as the so-called 'hero of the fable is not the human species,

[142] Retortion is a sophistic mode of critique in which an adversary's language and logic is inhabited and turned in against itself. The following footnote is an enactment of this – to Terry Eagleton. For more on Lyotard's use of retorsion see Keith Crome, 'Retorsion: Jean-François Lyotard's Reading of Sophistry' in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 2003, Vol XlI. Moreover, for Williams it 'is also important to distinguish Lyotard's use of irony and the sublime against Ideas of reason from the postmodern irony adopted by Richard Rorty in *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*.' Williams, *Lyotard and the Political*, p.126.

[143] Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2004) p.50. It is evident that for the moralist Eagleton, the name of the game is not nuanced engagement, but rather misconstrual and bizarre generalisations. Eagleton is not at pains to elucidate what is meant by postmodernism or postmodernist in his text, leaving them to function nicely as nefarious big bad entities in his strawman polemics. In another passage, Eagleton notably accuses Derrida of undertaking *too close* a reading of texts, of paying *too much* attention to the subtleties of texts to the point of being a claustrophobic reader. Whilst I am sure Eagleton has indeed *read* the so-called "postmodern" philosophers he chastises throughout his book, any evidence of actually doing so remains particular scant.

[144] Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition*, pp. 15-16.

[145] Ibid, p.15.

[146] Ibid, p.26.

but energy'[147] itself, as Lyotard asserts. As such, the subject-less fable presents neither redemption nor another metanarrative, only annihilation.

Lyotard's Leibnizian Monad

Before discussing *Don't Drown in Me*, I will give a brief outline of Lyotard's transposition of Leibniz's concept of the monad. Deriving its etymology from the Greek 'Monos' (alone), the monad found its most influential conceptualisation in the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in the 18th century, denoting a singular entity which is indivisible.[148] In 'Time Today' Lyotard writes:

> God is the absolute monad to the extent that he conserves in complete retention the totality of information constituting the world. And if divine retention is to be complete, it must also include those pieces of information not yet presented to the incomplete monads, such as our minds, and which remain to come in what we call the future[...] As consummate archivist, God is outside time, and this is one of the grounds of modern Western metaphysics.[149]

In another passage Lyotard asserts:

> The more complete a monad, the more numerous the data it memorizes, thus becoming capable of mediating what happens before reacting, and thus becoming less directly dependent on the event. So the more complete the monad, the more the incoming event is neutralized. For a monad supposed to be perfect, like God, there are in the end no bits of information at all. God has nothing to learn. In the mind of God, the universe is instantaneous.[150]

Which is to say, with its expansion, absorption of data and increasing complexity, the monad of development in Lyotard's hypothesis is able to ward off the future and all the unexpectedness and unknowability it ensures. Such a process clearly mirrors that of negentropy and complexification, namely the concentration of energy in a particular form or

[147] Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, p.92.
[148] Lloyd Strickland, *Leibniz's Monadology: A New Translation and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014)
[149] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.60.
[150] Ibid, p.65.

system. Following this, as the monad grows in sophistication towards (apparent) totality, the less reliant on the future it is as '[w]hat is already known cannot, in principle, be experienced as an event.' In other words, as summarised in a line repeated in *Don't Drown in Me*; 'time cannot happen to it'. In this sense, as recounted by Woodward, Lyotard sees a correlation between the Leibnizian monad and capital with both:

> aimed at predicting and controlling the future to the greatest possible extent, and thus in effect they are aimed at neutralising events (unpredictable and unforeseen occurrences). The synergistic stock-pilling of information and money is aimed at incorporating all times and events into a programmed synthesis in which nothing escapes mastery and control: in an ideal situation, all future 'events' will be already bought and paid for, insured against loss, programmed, foreseen, and effectively neutralised (insofar as they are no longer 'unforeseen occurrences').[151]

Thus, to once more evoke Benjamin, what capital drives towards whether purposefully or not, is a 'homogeneous, empty time'[152]. Yet, as noted in the fable, the death of the sun presents a supposed definitive limit to capital's process of colonising time and space. Moreover, such a hypothesis hinges on the notion that development and capital need humans for its continued expansion, with Lyotard asserting that capitalism's 'own survival requires that it be fed by a body, which in turn can survive only in the conditions of life on earth, or in a simulacrum of those conditions.'[153] In turn, he proffers that 'one of the essential objectives of research today is to overcome the obstacles that the body places in the way of the development of communicational technologies, i.e. the new extended memory. In particular, this could be the real stake of research bearing on fertility, gestation, birth, illness, death, sex, sport, etc. All seem to converge on the same aim, that of making the body adaptable to non-terrestrial conditions of life, or of substituting another 'body' for it.'[154] Such a move, if

[151] Woodward, p.53.
[152] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p.252.
[153] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.62.
[154]Ibid.

achieved would see capital and development consummate the Cartesian dream of full disembodiment of the 'subject' and its mind from the limits of the corporeal.[155]

Thinking, Suffering, Time

This process of adapting or replacing the human body is problematised by Lyotard and is surmised in the question *can thought go on without a body*? which reverberates in multiple intonations. In the essay of the same name, the figure of He objects to replacing the human body with a computer because they operate on 'binary logic'[156], whereas they argue that:

> human thought doesn't think in a binary mode. It doesn't work with units of information (bits), but with intuitive, hypothetical configurations. It accepts imprecise, ambiguous data that don't seem to be selected according to preestablished codes or readability. It doesn't neglect side effects of marginal aspects of a situation. It isn't just focused, but lateral too. Human thought can distinguish the important from the unimportant without doing exhaustive inventories of data and without testing the importance of data with respect to the goal pursued by a series of trials and errors.[157]

In other words, unlike thinking machines, He maintains that humans are capable of processing information in a spontaneous and improvisational manner, without having to resort to a set of rules or 'programming'. This capacity is equated with what Kant termed 'reflective judgement', 'a mode of thought not guided by rules for determining data, but showing itself as possibly capable of developing such rules afterwards on the basis of results obtained 'reflexively'.[158] Concurrent to the time of writing, computers did not supposedly possess this faculty for He. This description of thinking-machines, who although able to exist

[155] In *The Religion of Technology,* David F. Noble offers a wide-ranging and insightful intellectual history of the imbrication of religion and technology. Noble traces how Descartes desired to 'emancipate the divine part of man from its mortal trappings'. Moreover, Noble elucidates how in 'Cartesian terms, the development of a thinking machine was aimed at rescuing the immortal mind from its mortal prison. It entailed the deliberate delineation and distillation of the processes of human thought for transfer to a more secure mechanical medium – a machine that would provide a more appropriately immortal mooring for the immortal mind.' (David. F *Noble, The Religion of Technology, The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and The Spirit of Invention* (London: Penguin, 1999) pp.144-8.
[156] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.15.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.

after the death of the sun are inflexible in their thinking processes and without 'reflective judgement', does betray a limited understanding of computer science and information theory. Namely, the existence of ternary computers which do not operate via a binary system, one early example of which was created in 1840 by Thomas Fowler.[159] With this said, binary code is the dominant programme of computers owing to their efficiency (both in the use of physical energy, i.e., volts and the numbers of calculative steps) and their reduction of contingency. One way to get around the problematic presented by the binary is simply to replace it with a different system such as ternary code or quantum computing, but such a move at current seems unlikely and undesirable due to the formentioned benefits of binary code. Another solution is He's ironic suggestion of feeding computers Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. However, there remain two other ineluctable problems: that thinking for Lyotard is both bodily[160] and situated whilst being indebted to the second inhuman.

Life as embodiment

Crucially, thinking is situated for Lyotard in multiple senses; in culture, interdependent relationships and communities, coming close to Paul Celan's declaration that 'denken ist danken' (to think is to thank).[161] Owing in part to their shared etymology (*Gedenken*), such a notion marks the essential reciprocity of thought, namely its embeddedness within a community, tradition and culture which Lyotard would elsewhere evoke through Blanchot's

[159] M Glusker, D Hogan and P Vass 'The Ternary Calculating Machine of Thomas Fowler' in *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, Vol. 27(3) 2005. pp.4-22. The first modern ternary computer, Setun, was produced in 1958 by the soviet mathematicians Sergei Sobolev and Nikolay Brusentsov. Moreover, examples of non-binary codes include Malboge and the esoteric Brainfuck and Befunge codes.
[160] Responding to a question regarding écriture feminine and femininity, Lyotard says in an interview: '"Why is there no female philosopher in the Western tradition? There are female writers, artists, and so on, but not philosophers." That's an interesting point. It seems to me the answer is because in philosophy there is a repression of the bodily way of thinking. By "bodily way of thinking" I mean the old difference between anima and animus. Anima is a way of thinking, but in which aesthetical impressions are taken into account; and animus, the opposite, is probably a discourse, a language, sustaining itself by itself with no external reference to the body.' Olson and Lyotard, 'Resisting a Discourse of Mastery', p. 406.
[161] Paul Celan, *Collected Prose* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1986), p. 33.

notion of the infinite conversation[162] and the continual retelling of the Cashinahua relationship to narrative which celebrates community over autonomy.[163]

Thinking is also situated in another significant way for Lyotard: in the nexus of temporality, space and corporeality. Which is to say that thinking remains embodied for Lyotard, restricted to physical bodies which experience pain and loss. In this vein, She asserts in the fable that 'another question bothers me. Is it really another question? Thinking and suffering overlap'[164], before shortly adding; 'the suffering of thinking is a suffering of time, of what happens. To sum up- will your thinking-, your representing-machines suffer?'[165] Simply put therefore, in such a conception, to think *is* to suffer as thinking is conditioned by limits, finitude and embodiment, a circumstance further elucidated by Anthony Miccoli:

> the temporality of suffering allows us to recognize the opportunity for expression. In the most basic terms, we have a limited time to express our thoughts and thus achieve our goals. Lyotard himself points out the ultimate time constraint as the death of the sun. To exacerbate this condition, our own ability to remember is fragile. As time progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to hold onto the experiences and information we have "stored". Our narratives themselves are fragile.[166]

For Lyotard, this atrophic and uncertain nature of memory which Miccoli describes, is the very thing which conditions and enables our ability for expression. Accordingly, Lyotard believes that thinking-machines lack such a capacity as 'its defining code is too static. Because of its ability to store everything it senses and have it available, at all times, it cannot

[162] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, pp.146-7.
[163] In his commentary in *Just Gaming*, Lyotard stresses that the Cashinahua are aware that they are not the originators of the tale, that the narrative is anchored in a relationship with the other, alterity and the future. Such a conception is in sharp contradistinction to the fetishism and pursuit of autonomy in western thought. 'In saying at the beginning, "I am going to tell you what I have always heard," and at the end, "my name is so-and-so," he situates himself in the two forgotten poles – actively forgotten, repressed – of Western thought and of the tradition of autonomy. Those are the poles where one is the recipient of a narrative in which one is narrated, and where one receives a narrative that has been narrated to one [...] This is an essential feature of paganism, in my view, and it is probably what has been the most eradicated in Western thought, not only in Plato, but also in Kant (inasmuch as he succumbs to the fascination of autonomy).' pp.32-3.
[164] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.18.
[165] Ibid., p.19.
[166] Anthony Miccoli, *Posthuman Suffering and the Technology Embrace* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010) p.79.

"suffer" in the same way we do.'[167] However, stochastic processes such as the Markov process can be seen to invert such a (Leibnizian) hypothesis. In such a process, rather than having vast amounts of information to draw on *a la* the complete monad, decisions are made from a small amount of previous data and as such have been described as memoryless.[168][169] With this said, human life is always in medias res; divided and set apart in the intervals of time (a past, a present and a future) rather than in the undivided time of Hegel's monistic absolute[170] or Leibniz's monad. In turn, these intervals of temporality institute an uncompletedness and division of the subject that cannot be overcome. Such logic is elucidated by Martin Hägglund in his excellent exegesis of Jacques Derrida's radical atheism:

> The notion of survival that I develop is incompatible with immortality, since it defines life as essentially mortal and as inherently divided by time. To survive is never to be absolutely present; it is to remain after a past that is no longer and to keep the memory of this past for a future that is not yet [...] This radical finitude of survival is not a lack of being that is desirable to overcome. Rather, the finitude of survival opens the chance for everything that is desired and the threat of everything that is feared.[171]

It follows then for Hägglund that God, (who is immortal and is in Lyotard's own words, the 'consummate archivist [...] outside of time'[172]) is not only dead, but is another name for death, with the desire for immortality not only being undesirable, but life-negating. Seen as such, Miccoli writes that '[t]aken to its ultimate conclusions, the posthuman dream points to a

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[167] Ibid.
[168] Torkel Erhardsson, 'Strong Memoryless Times and Rare Events in Markov Renewal Point Processes' in *The Annals of Probability*, Vol. 32, No. 3B, 2446–2462 DOI 10.1214/009117904000000054 Institute of Mathematical Statistics, 2004.
[169] Writing of the entanglement of memory and information Rancière asserts: '[i]t would seem a foregone conclusion that an abundance of information equals an overabundance of memory. And yet, everything in our present denies that. Information isn't memories, and it does not accumulate and store for memory's sake. It works exclusively for its own profit, which depends on the prompt forgetfulness of everything clearing the way for the sole, and abstract, truth of the present to assert itself and for information to cement its claim to being alone adequate to that truth.' Rancière, 'Marker and the Fiction of Memory' in *Film Fables*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016) pp. 157-8.
[170] 'The German *absolut* is an adjective or adverb, used in much the same ways as the English 'absolute(ly)'. It derives from the Latin *absolutus* ('loosened, detached, complete'), the past participle of *absolvere* ('to loosen [from], detach, complete'), and thus means: 'not dependent on, conditional on, relative to or restricted by anything else; self-contained, perfect, complete'. Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992) p.27.
[171] Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) pp.1-2.
[172] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.60.

"transcendence" rather than embodied awareness, implying that the *need* for connection would eventually be erased, and that we would eventually evolve into a species that no longer relied on technology at all.'[173] If pushed a little further, this fiction arrives at an ironic fulfilment of Friedrich Schlegel's assertion that: 'Every […] human being is always progressively becoming God'.[174] That is, an immortal, deathlike existence. Paradoxically then, even when the thinking-machine or Leibnizian monad has thrown off the yoke of temporality and escaped human time, death still catches and haunts it as it enters into a state outside of time. In turn, it still fails to escape the most human of fates: death. There is a *Deus ex machina*, but it is a deathly, not a redemptive one. It is the fulfillment of the dream of Jean Pierre Melville's character in *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960): 'to become immortal and then die.'

Moreover, whilst the desire to overcome the limits of the human body, (whether that is by means of replacing it with thinking-machines or so on) is of course not a new one[175], its achievement would consummate western metaphysic's dream of immortality, as exemplified in the Cartesian wish for certainty. Only through surpassing the limits of the body, memory, time and community may the 'I' of the cogito achieve the upmost point of certainty. Only when it is removed from the demands of temporality and finitude may it claim its status as a constant, unchanging eternal 'I' free from doubt and its cage of matter. This 'I' would not have a memory in the traditional sense, but a unified and constant self-presence and awareness. But just as an 'everlasting fragrance is a paradox' as Adorno writes, 'so too is an everlasting, self-sustaining human memory. As memory is fundamentally bound by finitude

[173] Anthony Miccoli, *Posthuman Suffering and the Technology Embrace* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010) p.8.
[174] Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum* (1800), quoted in Michael Weston, *Philosophy, Literature and the Human Good* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.13.
[175] It is a persistent thread running through the western philosophical tradition from Plato through Christianity to Descartes and beyond in particular iterations of post-humanism.

and temporality, pain and injustice may be forgotten at any moment.'[176] Unlike this Cartesian desire to access and become like the immortal unchanging mind of God[177], to be a subject for thinkers such as Hägglund and Lyotard is to be precisely *subjected* to time, with survival, suffering and thinking all concomitant.

The Debt to the 2nd Inhuman

For all of his skepticism and critiques of Freud[178], Lyotard retains the notion of the uncanny within his defence of the second inhuman. As already outlined, it is Lyotard's insistence that one of the main goals of current development is devising a means to negotiate the challenges of solar death. In Lyotard's estimation this will be most likely achieved by means of advance computers. Crucially though, these thinking-machines Lyotard proffers:

> will have erased the question of birth, the question of childhood, the question of a certain anxiety concerning the internal rather than external situation. In this case we have to take into account that the relation that we can have with this internal *Fremde* [stranger], this *unheimliche Heimliche* [uncanny familiarity], is the source of every invention, creation, writing – even in science.[179]

In other words, the prospective thinking-machines who are set to inhabit the post-solar universe in Lyotard's hypothesis are without a childhood, which like suffering is to thinking and expression, is the locus of creation[180]. Rather elegiacally Lyotard concludes:

> That is the big difference between an everyday scientist and somebody like Einstein. Unquestionably, Einstein has been a child and has remained a child, and we have to be children if we are to be capable of the most minimal creative activity. If we are sent to space after the explosion of the sun (I don't even know if it will be us), if something is sent to space without this extraordinary complexity [that is precisely the

[176] Oscar Mealia, 'Utopia in fragments; Art and Adorno's negative dialectics after Shoah', MA Dissertation 2015, Goldsmiths College, University of London.
[177] The true and truth for Descartes is that which is unchanging – i.e., God.
[178] As stressed by Bamford 'Lyotard's interest in Freud is as a philosopher; he had no time for, and less belief in psychoanalysis as a practice – 'bullshit' was the impassioned argument he made against his elder daughter's decision to turn away from historical research with the renowned J-P Vernant to become a psychoanalyst.' (Bamford, *Critical Lives*: *Jean-François Lyotard*, p. 77.)
[179] Lyotard, 'Oikos' in *Political Writings*, trans by Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.107.
[180] The rise of AI programmes such as DALL-E-2 which generate art and images complicates such a thesis.

> paradox of childhood, I am afraid that this complexity] is not complex enough. In this case, we could call this by the terrible name of mere survival, which is not very interesting. I am not interested in surviving, not interested at all. I am interested in remaining a child.[181]

This thematic of the philosopher child and childhood is taken up again in the final chapter in relation to theory and the writing of the academy. Another crucial dimension to Lyotard's apologia of the second inhuman is the unconscious, which he defends alongside the uncanny and childhood as a wellspring for art, thinking, justice and politics. The question arises, then; can technologists approximate the workings and disturbances of the second inhuman, such as the unconscious within thinking-machines? From a Lyotardian perspective, the unconscious would be impossible to recreate as it is precisely that which escapes the rational, computation, representation and the systemisations of knowledge. As code is conscious and *knowable* it would produce a poor imitation of the unconscious and its workings. Therefore, no matter the possibility of a god-like sophisticated code, the unconscious would remain unproducible for Lyotard as that which is other, outside and disturbs rational systems, notably language itself. [182] Thus, to evoke Lyotard's vital notion of anamnesis: you cannot forget that which was never remembered in the first place; that which escapes or destroys the production of representation.[183] With this said, it is Lyotard's contention that 'modernity presupposes that everything speaks, this means that so long as we can connect to it, capture it, translate it and interpret it, there is no fundamental difference between data and a phrase; there is no fundamental difference between a phenomenon of displacement in an electromagnetic

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[181] Lyotard, 'Oikos', p.107.

[182] This is of course in stark contrast to Lacan's proclamation that the unconscious is structured like a language, which in such a conceptualisation would indeed allow for the transposition of the unconscious into a form of code. This is a great error for Lyotard and is the focus of '"The Dream-Work Does Not Think"' in *Discourse, Figure.* I echo Jay here in arguing that if the unconscious is structured like a language, ultimately, there would be 'no significant difference between consciousness and the unconscious.' Moreover, Jay argues that '[u]fortunately, Lyotard confined his analysis solely to texts in Lacan's *Écrits.* He neglected, however, to examine the more complicated analysis of the eye and the gaze in the seminars included in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.' Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, pp.567-8.

[183] In one instance, Lyotard illustrates what is at stake in anamnesis through the analogy of Dôgen's mirror, a mirror which cannot sustain a reflection and thus breaks. See *The Inhuman*, p.55.

spectrum and a logical proposition.'[184] Such a problematic will be taken up in **Chapter Two,** in relation to film and film theory.

Conversely, one could programme approximations of the effects of the unconscious through the programming of algorithms which generate randomness[185]. But again, the intentional introduction of potential disorder (entropy) into such a precise, controlled and regulated system would be counter to the aims of complexification. Meanwhile, Hans Moravec's paradox details that 'contrary to traditional assumptions, high-level reasoning requires very little computation compared to low-level sensorimotor skills that require enormous computational resources [...] Moravec emphasized that the most difficult human skills to reverse engineer are those that are unconscious.'[186] Moreover, from a technoscientific point of view, it would be extremely unwise to endow a machine with an unconsciousness however impossible from a Lyotardian perspective. To do so would invite inefficiency, error, risk and forgetfulness into the thinking-machine's system which are counter to the principle aims of this thinking-machine; to go on without a body in a postsolar existence and the physical and cognitive limits of humans; to achieve greater mastery and certainty. *Picture the thinking-machine tasked with piloting the ship 'exodus' from Earth becoming overwhelmed for a reason unknown to it when gazing ('processing') the grand vista of space – that something disturbs the cortex of its rational system and deactivates its own life support system? Why*

[184] Lyotard, 'After Six Months of Work' in *30 Years Les Immatériaux* (Lüneberg: meson press, 2015) p.33.
[185] The current consensus is that computer algorithms cannot generate true randomness, as most computers are deterministic, in that producing repeatability and removing randomness are part of its makeup. It would then follow that if you were to subvert this and produce a computer that generates randomness on purpose this would still require an algorithm which would give it the parameters to how to deal with values and data and would thus still remain within the domain of determinism. In a word, you cannot predict the random, the unknowable, the event. However, through atmospheric pressure and the decay of radioactive elements, research has shown that computers may produce pseudorandomness. See Navindra Persaud, 'Humans can consciously generate random number sequences: A possible test for artificial intelligence' in *Medical Hypotheses*, Vol. 65, Issue 2, 2005, pp. 211-214.
[186] Vadim S Rotenberg, 'Moravec's Paradox: Consideration in the Context of Two Brain Hemisphere Functions' in *Activitas Nervosa Superior*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2013, pp. 108–111., https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03379600. pp.108-9.

allow such a risk, even if minimal as space travel is already so high risk – it would be unwise to purposefully introduce risk into such a situation, especially one with the high stakes of transporting humanity (in whatever form it maybe) beyond this galaxy. In Lyotard's thinking on the inhuman, development has no need for the unconscious as unconscious.

Don't Drown in Me

Don't Drown in Me is an engagement with the formentioned concerns of the inhuman, particularly their presentation within Lyotard's fable of the death of the sun; technological development and expansion, bodily transformation and finitude. With this said, the film is not an answer or adaptation of the fable, and in turn cannot be folded neatly back into the philosophical thinking which agitates and animates it, as their relation is not harmonious. In this sense it responds to Lyotard's call not to 'believe' the fable, but rather to 'reflect on it.'[187] Subsequently, the film is not an exegesis or video-essay on and of the fable, but an exploration of the fable through and in a 'video-way of thinking'[188] to evoke Spatz. Therefore, functioning as a filmic peregrination through the collapse and ruins of the cosmos, human flesh, the twilight of memory, love, sex (in multiple senses), childhood, sensation, time and matter, *Don't Drown in Me* draws the personal, the literary, the cultural and the historical into the sphere of Lyotard's fable of solar catastrophe.

Moreover, giving specific attention to the effects of complexification, the film probes Lyotard's forementioned iteration of the monad as an ever-growing totality. Imbued with the processes of entropy, *Don't Drown in Me* as a film-object is intentionally worn away,

[187] Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, p.101.
[188] Spatz, 'The video way of thinking' in *South African Theatre Journal*, 31:1, 146-154, DOI: 10.1080/10137548.2017.1414629 (2018) p.146.

resulting in narratives, continuity and filmic elements becoming more disperse, unclear and abstract as the bonds of connotation and denotation weaken. The film's subsumption of the principles of entropy also bears on the structure of the film, pushing its form closer to that of a rhizomatic thought experiment in which nebulous fables and vignettes beget more fables instead of answers.[189] That is, a form that is nonlinear, features atemporal causation and functions closer to a mobius strip, without clear (narrative) beginning or end. This structure is further compounded by setting the fable against Lyotard's libidinal philosophy within the film. As Woodward traces, 'Lyotard's critique of negentropic technics and defence of entropy are related to his earlier critique of nihilistic, depressive systems and celebration of intense libidinal events. In the libidinal philosophy, we saw that Lyotard revalues the Freudian drives, rejecting the ideal of quiescent energies and stable systems in preference to the production of intensities and systemic transformation.'[190] As such, the libidinal which is enthralled with the maximalisation and intensification of intensities and energy finds an ally in the principle of entropy, wreaking its anarchic deterritorialisation, dissimulation and dysregulation on the figures of He and She, turning their bodies inside out to produce a mobius strip at the beginning of the film. This transformation is signalled through the recital of the first section of *Libidinal Economy*, 'the great ephemeral skin', enacting a sort of

[189] The intention here was to evoke the principle of anamnesis in which something breaks the means or mechanism of recording and representation, and becomes as such unforgettable as they were never recorded in the first place. This is why the different récits appear to be missing key elements of their own story. Perhaps such crucial details overwhelmed the support of oral history. With this said, the stories recounted are themselves not intended to provide answers but further provoke discussion – to usher thought on.
[190] Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition*, pp.86-7.

incantation. [191] These opening lines of Lyotard's so-called 'evil book'[192] are paired with shifting red hues and digital noise. Yet, whilst the libidinal is presented as functioning as an analogous force to the process of entropy[193], it is entangled with the inhuman in the film in other ways. For example, *Don't Drown in Me* feeds upon what Susana Viegas and James Williams describe as *Libidinal Economy*'s 'emblematic' and 'unusually cinematic' nature 'for a work of philosophy, notably in its initial lingering on the unwrapping of a body, in various dramatic scenes of discombobulation by labyrinth'.[194] Whilst it would be overstretching to claim that *Libidinal Economy* proceeds by way of a 'video-way-of-thinking', there are some affinities to be teased out, with its logic and modes other to that of traditional western philosophy (both in its content and style) and that of academic convention. As traced in the book's preface, what Lyotard is pursuing is 'style as politics'[195] in which *affect* and force is championed over normative sentence and paragraph structures and sterile academic prose, resulting in the production of a different temporality (of text) and the exercising of a different rationality.[196] However, there is another significant dimension to

[191] The intention was to position the second half of the opening of the Great ephemeral skin at the end of the film, but to have done so would have given the film a symmetry and balance which was undesired despite its thematic resonances with the fable in its denouement. '[E]xpose the small intestines' alleged interior, the jejunum, the ileum, the duodenum, or else, at the other end, undo the mouth at its corners, pull out the tongue at its most distant roots and split, spread out the bat's wings of palate and its damp basements, open the trachea and make it the skeleton boat under construction; armed with scalpels and tweezers, dismantle and lay out the bundles and bodies of the encephalon; and then the whole network of veins and arteries, intact, on an immense mattress, and then the lymphatic network, and the fine body pieces of the wrist, the ankle, take them apart and put them end to end with all the layers of nerve tissue which surround the aqueous humours and the cavernous body of the penis, and extract the great muscles, the great dorsal nets, spread them out like smooth sleeping dolphins. Work as the sun does when you're sunbathing or taking grass.' Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, (London: Continuum, 2004) pp.2-3.

[192] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, xx.

[193] One could in fact characterise Lyotard's thought as entropic, in that it produces more questions than answers and seeks to destabilise systems and totalities. It does not consolidate, it multiplies. In this sense, the film is shot through with both the contradictions of Lyotard's fable and Lyotard's "body" of work in all its reflexiveness and forementioned drifting.

[194] Susana Viegas and James Williams, 'Why Lyotard and Film? in *Acinema*, p. 12.

[195] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p. ix.

[196] '[I]t is easy to show that it is never a question of *one* massive and unique reason – that is nothing but an ideology. On the contrary it is question of *plural* rationalities, which are, at the least, respectively, theoretical, practical, aesthetic. They are profoundly heterogenous, 'autonomous' as Kant says. The inability to think this is the hallmark of the great idealist rationalism of nineteenth-century German thought, which presupposes without any explication that reason is the same in all cases. It is a sort of identitarianism which forms a pair with a

the libidinal's imbrication with the inhuman. As previously traced, if the body is to survive the death of the sun it must either be replaced or adapted. This is the demand of complexification for Lyotard. In a provocative passage in *Libidinal Economy,* this demand on the body (to be adaptable) is rendered on a smaller, yet no less important scale. In apparent good faith and 'without any condemnation, without any regret'[197] Lyotard writes:

> [L]ook at the English proletariat, at what capital, that is to say *their labour*, has done to their body. You will tell me, however, that it was that or die. *But it is always that or die* [...] And perhaps you believe that 'that or die' is an *alternative*?! And that if they choose that, if they become the slave of the machine, the machine of the machine, fucker fucked by it, eight hours, twelve hours, a day, year after year, it is because they are forced into it, constrained, because they cling to life? Death is not an alternative to it, it is a part of it, it attests to the fact that there is *jouissance* in it, the English unemployed did not become workers to survive, they – hang on tight and spit on me – *en-joyed* [*ils ont joui de*] the hysterical, masochistic, whatever exhaustion it was of *hanging on* in the mines, in the foundries, in the factories, in hell, they enjoyed it, enjoyed the mad destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed upon them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity, the identity that the peasant tradition had constructed for them, enjoyed the dissolution of their families and villages, and enjoyed the new monstrous *anonymity* of the suburbs and the pubs in the morning and evening.[198]

In other words, then, labour and the processes of capital and complexification enact for Lyotard very real and physical changes on individuals' bodies. Whether we categorise these changes as adaptations or inhuman mutilations, they are significantly transformations which produce *jouissance* in Lyotard's account. This passage and its intonation, like others in *Libidinal Economy,* received a scandalous reaction from Lyotard's colleagues and Marxists alike.[199][200] Workers enthralled by their own servitude and domination? *Absolument pas!* Specifically, for Lyotard, the jouissance that the worker experiences is that:

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totalitarianism of reason, and which, I think, is simultaneously erroneous and dangerous.' Lyotard, ed. Kiff Bamford *Interviews and Debates* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) pp.106-7.

[197] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy,* p.110.

[198] Ibid., pp. 109-110.

[199] Simon Malpas, *Jean-François Lyotard* (London: Routledge, 2003) p.93.

[200] Notably, Lyotard's language in *Libidinal Economy* transgresses academic norms, enacting a violence which disturbs systems and its rules, namely against the theoretical text and its expectations to be a discourse which sublates and regulates intensities and the libidinal, rather than fuelling them. However, rather than being gratuitous and provocative for provocation's sake, Lyotard's use of swearing, sexual and violent imagery is in service of his wider contention that Marx gained a perverse pleasure from capitalism (the very thing he subjects to critique) which amounts to the pornographic. Such arguments and their form, language and style were

> of the *repetition of the same* in work, the same gesture, the same comings and goings in the factory, how many penises per hour, how many tonnes of coal, how many cast-iron bars, how many barrels of shit, not 'produced', of course, but *endured*, the *same parts of the body* used, made use of, to the total exclusion of others, and just as the prostitutes' vagina or mouth are hysterically *anaesthetized*, through use through being used, so the worker's ear as described and analysed by Tomatis, who, next to an alternator functioning at 20,000 Hz, peacefully writes his letters and hears the finest noises; and when Tomatis makes his audiogramme study, he notices that the resonant range corresponding to the alternator functioning at 20,000 Hz, is neutralized, *mute*.[201]

The question becomes then, why do individuals remain in this sadomasochistic relation with capital, in which the mutilation, destruction and numbing of our very bodies is desired?[202] What Lyotard is presenting here, like his contemporaries Delttari did a couple of years before in their *Anti-Oedipus*, is a description of desire that is antithetical to that of orthodox Marxism and the western philosophical tradition more broadly. That is, desire as *lack* and *negativity* which functions by means of the representational order.[203] On the other hand, the libidinal is an attempt by Lyotard (like Delttari) to ground desire in *positivity* and affirmation. This reformulation of desire is in part a response to what Delttari identify as the 'fundamental problem of political philosophy' best exemplified in the work of Baruch Spinoza and Wilhelm Reich. In short, '"Why do men fight *for* their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?" [...] why do people still tolerate being humiliated and enslaved, to such

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deemed unbecoming of a philosophical and academic texts when published, having more in common with the experimental writings of Georges Bataille and Kathy Acker which similarly engage with notions of polymorphic bodies, desire and linguistic transgression. Regarding my own use or ironic inhabitation of this language, or as I have termed it in the reading dossier, the 'libidinal genre', the central aim is to draw attention to a continuity between Lyotard's later concerns regarding technology and the body which coalesce under the figure of the inhuman, the excess and impropriety of acinema and his concerns regarding the aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful with his earlier Libidinal philosophy, rather than a mere restaging of its shocking linguistic effects. With this said, the efficacy of such a move remains to be seen.

[201] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p. 110.

[202] Repetition is stabilisation – regulation – knowability – certainty, the eternal return of the same. As Marx identified, within the principle of commodity exchange, sameness is not limited to things being 'identical', but exchangeable this is where the 'sameness resides'. To what extent does capital satisfy the Cartesian ego's desire for certainty?

[203] Conceiving desire primarily in representational terms is insufficient both as a descriptor of its workings and a means to understand it's contours theoretically. Within the representational order (desire as lack) desire works both by means of deferral and ideology. Deferral in the sense that the desire may only be fulfilled *later*. For example, the desire for wholeness in a heaven (monotheistic religions) or the end of alienation (*the idea* communism). On the other hand, this conception of desire is ideological, as any desire which goes against an individual's interest (whether that is their class interest or the interest of their physical body) can be accounted for through the notion of false consciousness, i.e., they were duped and deceived by ideology.

a point, indeed, that they *actually want* humiliation and slavery not only for other but for themselves?' If we were to attempt to answer this question through the traditional conception of desire as lack, this desire for fascism and the inhuman (of capital) could be chalked off to ideological distortions, false consciousness or the efficiency of inescapable state and ideological apparatuses *a la* Althusser.[204] Yet, for Delttari:

> Reich is at his profoundest as a thinker when he refuses to accept ignorance or illusion on the part of the masses as an explanation of fascism, and demands an explanation that will take their desires into account, an explanation formulated in terms of desire: no, the masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they *wanted* fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for.[205]

One way to do so is to reformulate desire as a reality producing machine, as Delttari illustrate. This move from the platonic-religious-representational order (encapsulated in the 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing', they have been tricked by false consciousness) to desiring-machines, not only breaks free from the oedipal triangle, but widens the jurisdiction of fascism as seen in Michel Foucault's preface to *Anti-Oedipus*. Foucault writes that the principal target of the book is:

> not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively – but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.[206]

Lyotard mirrors such a formulation, writing in *Signed, Malraux*, '[w]hether colonialism, fascism and Nazism, Francoism, denatured democracy, Stalinism, it's always the same enemy: the evil that in one-man desires to subjugate and humiliate another, to force the other into baseness, the meanness that seizes the occasion to resist in the name of some illusory cause. It must be confronted on the world's stage.'[207] *Don't Drown in Me* probes this desire

[204] See Louis Althusser's 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008)
[205] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 42.
[206] Ibid., pp. xii-iii.
[207] Lyotard, *Signed Malraux* trans. Robert Harvey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) p.213.

for this inhuman (of domination) as seen from the fascistic desire of the child born of war: 'What do I want? I want your head on a stick, eyes running like honey'. To the murder of their future self in the photographic sequence that is heavily indebted to Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962). What the film wishes to consider in this respect is, if labor and capital already transform the body, a body which will either have to be "overcome" or adapted to live a post-solar existence, should we like Lyotard suggested be dedicating ourselves to the 'work of mourning the body'?[208]

[208] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.116.

Chapter Two: Acinemas and a Critique of a Cinematic Economy

This chapter traces and intertwines the two inhumans with Lyotard's thinking on representation, the event and film by exploring Lyotard's notion of acinemas. I wish to argue that film is uniquely open to nihilism by two distinct routes; exchange and interpretation. Moreover, I will also explore film's capacity to be an ally to the second inhuman (childhood, the unconscious, the feminine and so on), whilst equally functioning as a form of resistance to the first inhuman.

Acinemas, the figural, the sublime

First introduced in his 1973 essay of the same name, acinemas sees Lyotard working through 'the principles of figural aesthetics developed in *Discourse, Figure*'[209] in the realm of cinema as Jean-Michel Durafour elucidates. But what is meant here by the figural? Durafour writes that the:

> *figural* is distinguished from the *figurative* (even if the figurative is the figural 'cooled down'.) While the figurative designates a 'property that applies to the plastic object's relation to what it *represents'*, the figural names that which in the *presentation* of the plastic event is always singular and disruptive. The figural escapes from predictability (otherwise it would be pre-figured), from recognisability, identifiability and referentiality; it escapes from codification, from forms, and from isotopic and pre-established structures. In the figural, the event is welcomed *for itself*, in its *sensible symptomatic* expression. It thereby differs from the regimes of signification and designation, as well as from the *mimesis* of the figurative tradition, in which the plastic event is taken as no more than an (abstract, separate) sign which is *referred to an other* (thing, model) […] It is consequently, *stricto sensu*, impossible *to say* the figural (and still less to define it).[210]

That is, the *figural* is not opposed to the *figurative*, but instead is that which is exterior to representation, form and legibility. Similarly, the figural's force found in the material exceeds

[209] Jean-Michel Durafour, 'Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction' in *Acinema*, p.20.
[210] Ibid, p.18.

systems of meaning. As acinemas is constituted by the logic of the figural, to propose a "concrete" exemplar of either would be to precisely lapse into figuration (rules, forms, particular properties, identifiable, predictability) and in turn, to be distanced from the figural in an instant. Paul de Man explicates this paradox of the concept-example which is instructive here for both acinemas and the figural:

> But can any example ever truly fit a general proposition? Is not its particularity, to which it owes the illusion of its intelligibility, necessarily a betrayal of the general truth it is supposed to support and convey? From the experience of reading abstract philosophical texts, we all know the relief one feels when the argument is interrupted by what we call a "concrete" example. Yet at that very moment, when we think at last we understand, we are further from comprehension than ever.[211]

Subsequently, arguing that a particular film is acinema *par excellence* would amount to turning acinema into a genre, pursuing the logic of formulas and cake baking: *if you include these particular elements like 'X', do this and that: voilà acinemas!* Although such thinking of course betrays what is at stake in acinemas, it delineates a central issue here: the impossibility of pure unadulterated acinema. As acinema is that which overwhelms and disrupts the filmic apparatus for Lyotard; the 'fortuitous, dirty, confused, unsteady, unclear, poorly framed, overexposed', against the controlled flow of the well framed, well composed, well selected film, it marks itself out as *difference*. Yet, as Durafour significantly explicates, 'difference can only be perceived on a homo-audio-visual ground from which it is detached all there is, when difference is all there is when difference makes a *totality*, it cancels itself as difference. When everything is different, nothing is different. It is therefore appropriate to keep the figurative ground, at least in this capacity'.[212] Such a characterisation highlights the contingent and relative nature of acinema. Therefore, a film composed solely of "differences"; ruptures, arrythmias, explosions and so on, a film which makes no apologies for not sporting a narrative, does not necessarily constitute acinema, but instead experimental

[211] Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) p.276.
[212] Durafour, 'Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction' in *Acinema*, p.24.

cinema. One could even propose that like a virus, acinema cannot exist without a representational host, attacking representation from both within and the outside, occupying what Lyotard calls the 'vacuoles, or blocks of time, in the realist-narrative progression'.[213] So whilst pure acinema remains an impossibility, the focus for Lyotard is on acinematic or '*acinematographic*'[214] moments. Moreover, in 'The Idea of a Sovereign Film' Lyotard argues that:

> a filmmaker, if he or she is not a commercial trader of images, carries in him or herself the idea of a sovereign film where from time to time the realist plot allows the presence of the ontological real to pass. This idea must remain an Idea in the Kantian sense, a conception to which no object, here no film, can correspond in experience. There is no sovereign film, since sovereignty is incompatible with an objective totality. A film said to be sovereign would be in truth, an authoritative film, which is to say, its opposite.[215]

Such a gesture crucially allows its critical exploration alongside "mainstream" films as Lyotard himself does in his discussions of *Joe* (John G Avildsen, 1970) and *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979). Thus, acinemas is *not* predicated on an opposition between narrative and experimental cinema.[216]

A Libidinal Coda ∞

Patricia MacCormack makes the pertinent observation that whilst:

> Lyotard does not discuss cinema in *Libidinal Economy* [...] his exploration of libidinality is explicitly visual, and more resonant still with cinema, cuts the world up into minute intensities and inflections born of subtle gestures and movements, as well as close-ups of skin, inorganic objects, and such-like. This form of libidinality seems more cinematic than his work specifically on 'Acinema'. This is perhaps an example of sexuality as cinema, rather than a cinema that evokes sexuality.[217]

[213] Lyotard, 'The Idea of a Sovereign Film' in *Acinemas*, p.64.
[214] Durafour, p.23.
[215] Lyotard, 'The Idea of a Sovereign Film' in *Acinemas*, p. 69
[216] 'Not all experimental cinema is acinema'. Ibid., p.20.
[217] Patricia MacCormack, *Cinesexuality* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008) p.57.

Seen as such, the essay 'Acinemas' can be viewed as descriptive and discursive, whereas *Libidinal Economy* has internalised the propulsion and irreverence of the acinematic. The affinity and reciprocal nature of the libidinal and acinema is drawn out further by Julie Gaillard who comments that the essay:

> 'Acinema' envisions cinema as a libidinal set-up, *dispositif pulsionnel*, a notion elaborated in clear opposition to the Lacanian model of desire which relies on the negativity of a lack that is constitutive of the subject and limits desire to the movement of the signifying chain. Lyotard attempts to overcome this negativity, which opens the space of representation, by substituting for it the positivity of a desire that no longer relies on a foundational lack, but is instead thought dynamically in terms of quantities of energy.[218]

As previously traced, this notion of positive energy is taken up by Lyotard by numerous means, including the figure of the match in 'Acinemas' and the notion of pyrotechnics.

The Sublime and the Beautiful

Central to Lyotard's aesthetics and thinking on the avant-garde is his invocation and critique of Immanuel Kant's philosophy of art, namely the aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime which designate two antithetical regimes of art and judgement. I will now take up acinema as a continuation of Lyotard's thinking on the aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful which I will briefly delineate in order to bring its force into sharper focus.

Lyotard recounts that the aesthetics of the beautiful is governed by the Platonic Idea/Ideal, which following the logic of mimesis is bound up in reproducibility and likeness. For example, beauty = X model, or is embodied in this, or beauty *looks like* this. Similarly, in Kantian terms it is founded on a *sensus communis*; an agreed upon common standard for taste and judgement which appears indelible. Thus, it is the aesthetic of intelligibility, of "good

[218] Julie Gaillard, 'Imaginary Constructs? A Libidinal Economy of the Cinematographic Medium' in *Acinemas*, p.73.

taste", "correct" proportion, ratio, perspective, agreeable subject matter. In other words, it is the aesthetic of example(s), tradition and the well-regulated. Its spirit is seen in the slur frequently directed at swathes of modern art; that it is precisely *not* art *tout court*. *Art remains something else*. Nevertheless, whilst there is a certain aura of fixedness surrounding the aesthetic of the beautiful, it could be argued that this supposed 'fixedness' is in fact one of its constitutive elements, the spell of timelessness, which art itself seems to be seduced by; its belief that art is and will always be *this*.[219] Unsurprisingly, Lyotard is deeply sceptical towards this regime of art, seeing it in part as the reified and naturalised tastes of the academies, the aristocratic patrons, the bourgeoise taste makers, who have shaped art in their own image and class interests.[220] Conversely, the aesthetic of the sublime akin to the figural and acinema is concerned with the indeterminate and insensible, erupting and proceeding without warning, law and rules.[221] As Lyotard explicates, '[i]n contrast to taste, which is possible only insofar as nature, in and outside of the mind, encodes itself in forms and in correct "proportion," the sublime does not owe anything to an encoded writing, nor to a "sensus communis."'[222] So like the figural it cannot be predicted or pre-figured and thus cannot be understood by way of pre-existing concepts, genres, forms, classifications or systems. In contrast, to the *beautiful*, the question which preoccupies it is: 'what is art...*is this art?'*, undertaking investigations into the rules and the limits and boundaries of form, or as

[219] In other words, the permeance and eternal nature of Plato's world of forms.
[220] In short, it is the decrees of a particular class.
[221] The avant-garde illustrates the temporality and some of the characteristics of the sublime. Originally conceived as a small elite military unit which goes *ahead* of the main army into the unknown of the battlefield, the cultural and artistic avant-garde has become synonymous with innovation and experimentation. Disinterested in the avant-garde as an exclusive and elitist body as promulgated by figures like Sant-Simon, Lyotard is fascinated by how the avant-garde proceed without rules or an audience, both of which come retrospectively after the production of the artwork; 'the artistic vanguard knows that it has no readers, no viewers, and no listeners. If, on the other hand, it is saddled with the image of a reader, viewer, or listener, if, in other words, the contour of an addressee is imposed upon it, and this contour filters out the experiments in sound, form, literature, and even theory, that the vanguard is allowed to make, then it will not be able to do anything.' Working without rules or criteria 'not only in matters of truth, but also in matters of beauty (of aesthetic efficacy) and in matters of justice, that is, of politics and ethics' is the essence of what Lyotard calls *paganism.* (Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, pp.10-16.)
[222] Lyotard, *Heidegger and* "the Jews", p.44.

Lyotard has formulated, it is tasked with presenting the unpresentable. Lyotard in fact goes even further asserting that the aesthetic of the sublime's 'incapacity to produce forms inaugurates and marks the end of art, not as art but as beautiful form. If art persists, and it does persist, it is entirely different, outside of taste, devoted to delivering and liberating this nothing, this affection that owes nothing to the sensible and everything to the insensible secret.'[223] Previously, Lyotard had traced the contours of the aesthetic of the beautiful in his earlier libidinal philosophy, with the phrase 'simulacrum' being a designation given 'to the exchangeable, the equivalent [...] and the mirrorical unity of simulacra insofar as language, second-hand (or third-, for Plato) and representative, is used to display these relations'.[224] This notion of simulacrum as sameness will be taken up shortly in relation to exchange and commodity fetishism.

Exchange, or the nihilism of movements

As traced then, acinema can be seen to have an allegiance to the aesthetic of the sublime. As that which transgresses the conventions of film, acinema is concerned with sterile and errant 'moments', 'events', 'instances', 'movements', 'happenings', 'silences', 'explosions' (both metaphoric and literal) amongst, within and on the filmic apparatus.[225] Thus formally, acinema privileges the breaks over the flow; rupture over unity; dissensus over consensus. Additionally, on what Lyotard termed as the two poles of 'extreme mobilisation and extreme immobilisation', two nodes comparable to a tableaux vivant and lyric abstraction, acinema

[223] Ibid. Whilst retaining particular elements of classical and romantic conceptions of the term, namely, the elicitation of feelings of unease or anxiety, Lyotard conceives the sublime as a "nothing happening" in which one experiences a sort of stupefaction and is unable to take recourse to concept and form when confronted by certain *things* or the *there is.*
[224] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.xvi.
[225] Slow Cinema particularly has a sublimity in Lyotard's sense; the sensation of nothing happening through its abdication of narrative progression and "purpose".

disrupts the exchange of images and thus the production of meaning through both excess and scarcity. In turn, such a 'cinema', as Lyotard writes 'insensibly ceases to be an ordering force; it produces true [...] vain, simulacrums, blissful intensities, instead of productive/consumable objects.'[226] Static and slow cinematic movement, or cinema 'saturated with excessive audio-visual speed' from 'slow cinema to fast editing' has the power Viegas proffers to present ''another story', independent of the official and intended narrative. The hegemony of sovereign powers can be resisted by the danger of sovereign moments'.[227] Viewed as such, acinema is a continuation of Lyotard's critiques of capitalist exchange and representation. That is, it privileges the 'paradoxical *jouissance* of sterile moments', images and sounds which like apparitions or spectres 'go up in smoke after capturing our senses, rather than flow into a reassuring result, tamed, and remaining to be exchanged in markets of ideas and values.'[228] In other words, the acinematic resists being stabilised and bracketed under the rules and forms of the aesthetic of the beautiful. *Is acinema therefore a cinema of ghosts and flames?* Nonetheless, at the heart of acinemas is the resistance towards any 'investment in a combination of interpretation, resolution and judgement' as seen in Žižek's Hegelian-Lacanian framework as Viegas and Williams argue[229]. As a result, '[l]ike the later sublime event, the image of acinema' for Lyotard 'is the last ethical call to resist capitalist exchange and surplus event and to re-intensify the arts without subjecting them to another metanarrative of salvation and redemptive truth over time.'[230] This resistance is inscribed at the centre of acinemas. Furthermore, Lyotard illustrates a constitutive difference between the economy of filmic elements in acinema and cinema through the figure of a match, contrasting productive energies to wasteful ones:

[226] Lyotard, 'Acinema' in *Acinema,* p.35.
[227] Viegas and Williams, 'Why Lyotard and Film?' in *Acinemas,* p.15.
[228] Ibid, p.13.
[229] They write: 'In contrast with Žiżek's Hegelianism for example, Lyotard always resisted investment in a combination of interpretation, resolution and judgement.' 'Why Lyotard and Film?' in *Acinemas*, p.13.
[230] Ibid.

> A match once struck is consumed. If you use the match to light the gas that heats the water for the coffee which keeps you alert on your way to work, the consumption is not sterile, for it is a movement belonging to the circuit of capital: merchandise-math → merchandise-labour power → money-wages → merchandise-match. But when a child strikes the match-head *to see* what happens – just for the fun of it – he enjoys the movement itself, the changing colours, the light flashing at the height of the blaze, the death of the tiny piece of wood, the hissing of the tiny flame. He enjoys these sterile differences leading nowhere, these uncompensated losses; what the physicist calls the dissipation of energy.[231]

Mirroring the logic of capital then, cinema seeks to use 'the minimum resources for [the] highest effects, leaving no waste behind.'[232] Whereas, acinema 'responds to the need to create sounds and images just for the sake of '*il y a*' or 'it is', for the sake of an event outside of time and of sensations for themselves rather than for judgement and exchange. In acinema, sterile moments are not eliminated or avoided.'[233] Thus, refusing to take part in the exchange of images or the economy of filmic effects, acinemas wishes to remain celibate.[234] Pascal Bonizter once dismissed acinema as 'puke'[235], and he was ironically correct in an unintended sense. As *figuratively* speaking, acinema is concerned by the leftovers, waste, things which would ordinarily be discarded or even digested, made useful, nourishable, things that the well-functioning cinematic body cannot swallow, sublate, keep under control, keep down, process, cannot help but regurgitate or cannot metabolise into a well-formed narrative. Such a litany equally parallels the resistances of the second inhuman against the first inhuman; the irrational, childhood, the sick, the feminine, the unconscious, all that which has been deemed other and useless to the goals and furthering of reason, progress and capital. Crucially, Lyotard is not promoting an *arte povera* with the concept of acinema, calling for the

[231] Lyotard, 'Acinema' in *Acinemas*, p. 34.
[232] Viegas and Williams, 'Why Lyotard and Film?' in *Acinemas,* p.14. To clarify, Lyotard wishes to draw our attention to the unique parallels of the production of cinema as a capitalist commodity and the principle of capitalist exchange: the smallest investment possible for the biggest returns.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Let us not forget that the 'economic', 'economy' or 'economical' are by-words for value for money, reasonableness, effectiveness, efficiency, sensible investments after all.
[235] Durafour, 'Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction' in *Acinemas,* p.21.

repurposing of sequences that did not make the final cut of the film; to engender them with a usefulness to the process of exchange. Instead, Lyotard takes up Georges Bataille's conception of the sovereign in the sphere of film in relation to acinemas, with the sovereign being 'an experience or an existence which appears, happens, without relation to any law by which it could claim or demand to be 'what it is.''[236] Therefore, like the aforementioned impossibility of pure acinema, a 'truly sovereign film remains an Idea in the Kantian sense, unachievable if by achievements we mean absolute sovereignty. But in brief moments, the sovereign image reveals the limits of the law. It therefore unveils that opening that is the 'space' of the *differend*. If this remains, at one level, a deauthorisation, it also remains a 'difficulty' for the authority of the law.'[237] Thus acinema demands the creation of sounds and images which refuse the legitimation of narrative, content in their pointlessness and lack of validation, made 'just for the fun of it'.[238] [239] Yet, how do useless images violate the law of exchange?

The exorbitant, or use, exchange, value

Commodity fetishism, as Marx defines it, is simply mistaking the "thing" – 'first of all the commodity, and later all the other "things" of which capitalism consists – for the *productive social relation* which is the essence of commodity society.'[240] Furthermore, in volume 1 of

[236] Lyotard, 'The Idea of a Sovereign Film' in *Acinema*, p.62.
[237] Peter W. Milne, 'Authorisation: Lyotard's Sovereign Image' in *Acinema*, p.114.
[238] Lyotard confessed that in his youth he wavered between three different dream professions; a painter, a historian or a Dominican 'monk', only to become a philosopher. His work is arguably governed by something akin to monastic asceticism. Whereas a monk is chaste and celibate, closing themselves of from the temptations of the secular world in order to dedicate oneself to God's mission, Lyotard remained chaste in his refusal to think without recourse to an 'outside', a sovereign or grandmaster, master-narratives or tastes which would legitimate thinking. In this configuration, to be celibate is to think without a "god" and instead to think for the joy of thinking, without validation or permission, instead for the mere sensation of experimenting, or like the match in Lyotard's analogy of acinema.
[239] Lyotard, 'Acinema' in *Acinemas*, p. 34.
[240] David Goldway, 'Appearance and Reality in Marx's *Capital*' in *Science & Society*, Vol.31, No.4, 'A Centenary of Marx's "Capital" (Fall, 1967), p.434

Capital, Marx writes that a 'commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.'[241] So, what does Marx's analysis show? Well, unlike classical political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who claimed that the commodity's exchange value arose naturally, emanating from within itself, Marx concludes that it instead arises out of their position and relation to other commodities in an economy of exchange.[242] Subsequently, for Marx, '[t]he mystical character of the commodity does not therefore arise from its use-value.'[243] Following this, he asserts that commodities are not produced for their "usefulness", but rather their *exchangeability,* and therein lies their "value". Yet, Lyotard's invocation of capitalist exchange and commodity fetishism in 'Acinema' aims to subvert and disrupt the principle of capitalist production and exchange he sees as inherent to cinema. Under the sub heading of the 'nihilism of movements', Lyotard details an image's inscription into a system of production, exchange (we can of course add narrative too):

> This oppression consists of the enforcement of a nihilism of movements. No movement, arising from any field, is given to the eye-ear of the spectator for what it is: a simple *sterile difference* in an audio-visual field. Instead, every movement forward *sends back* to something else, is inscribed as a plus or minus on the ledger book which is the film, *is valuable* because it *returns* to something else, because it is thus potential return and profit. The only genuine movement with which cinema is written is that of value. The law of value (in so-called 'political' economy) states that the *object*, in this case the movement, is valuable only in so far as it is exchangeable against other objects and in terms of equal quantities of a definable unity (for example, in quantities of money). Therefore, to be valuable the object must move: proceed from other objects ('production' in the narrow sense) and disappear, but on the condition that its disappearance *makes room for still other objects* (consumption). Such a process is not sterile, but productive; it is production in the widest sense.[244]

[241] Karl Marx, *Capital Vol 1* (London: Penguin, 1976) p.163.
[242] Tony Aspromourgos, 'Adam Smith's Treatment of Market Prices and Their Relation to 'Supply' and 'Demand' in *History of Economic Ideas*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2007, pp. 27–57.
[243] Marx, p.164.
[244] Lyotard, 'Acinema' in *Acinemas,* p.34.

Moreover, as explicated in 'Acinema', images and other filmic elements are made to cohere together, into what Readings describes as a 'unity of an organic body, a totality' which homogenises and excludes 'aberrant impulses and challenging those that are recognized into a singular meaning, the constitution of image and the articulation of images into a narrative progression'[245] in a way that is analogous to a grand narrative. This 'totality' is achieved by the aforementioned process of the mise-en-scène in Lyotard's specific sense. As such, we can come to see that the:

> *film*, strange formation reputed to be normal, is no more normal than the *society* or the *organism*. All of these so-called objects are the results of the imposition and hope for an accomplished totality. They are supposed to realise the reasonable goal *par excellence*, the subordination of all partial drives, all sterile and divergent movements to the unity of an organic body. The film is the organic body of cinematographic movements. It is the *ecclesia* of images: just as politics is that of the partial social organs. This is why mise-en-scène, a technique of exclusions and effacements, a political activity *par excellence*, and political activity, which is mise-en-scène *par excellence*, are the religion of the modern irreligion, the ecclesiastic of the secular.[246]

Like the commodity for Marx then, Lyotard illustrates that images and sounds within a traditional filmic economy are valuable for their exchangeability, which is also true of the images that populate social media feeds, in which the smooth flow of one image or video after another is privileged over the singularity or the excess of a single image which a totality or system cannot subordinate. In the words of Readings, 'capitalism is characterized in terms of the law of exchangeability; the primary operation of capitalism is one of commodification, of the reduction of materiality to exchangeable objects.'[247]Acinematic elements would therefore resist this movement within the filmic economy in being 'sterile', useless, purposeless, unexchangeable singularities. This apotheosis of the exorbitant was key to Lyotard's explication of the libidinal vis-à-vis political economy. In the glossary to *Libidinal Economy*, the book's translator Iain Hamilton Grant defines the exorbitant as having 'no

[245] Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*, p.100
[246] Lyotard, 'Acinema' in *Acinemas*, p.39.
[247] Ibid., p.102

equivalent', and is as such 'inevaluable and unaccountable.'[248] Functioning with a logic akin to anamnesis (that which cannot be forgotten because it was never remembered in the first place), the exorbitant maintains an 'asymmetrical' position to capital, with Grant writing:

> [e]xchangeability of money and goods in capitalism also operates a generalized equivalence which establishes the value of goods. Every good on the market has a price, but certain objects resist being turned into a good. Thus Klossowski has it that political economy can offer no equivalent for intensities, highlighting an asymmetrical relation between capital and libidinal economy. Political economy forecloses the libidinal, claiming, in conjunction with Augustine, that if a thing cannot be exchanged, it has no value and consequently does not exist, it is not on the market.[249]

In other words, as previously traced, owing to its lack of value, resistance and inability to cohere into a useable or functioning element in the normative cinematic apparatus, the acinematic remains anathema to the principles of exchange.

Colour, matter and sovereignty in *Don't Drown in Me*

As I have traced thus far, Lyotard's concept of acinema is part of his broader concern within his philosophy of finding and celebrating means of disrupting (often just momentarily) exchange, mastery and the domination of instrumental reason over art. For example, in the essay 'Conversation and colour', Lyotard notably characterises the 'aim of painting' as rendering 'presence, to demand the disarming of the mind. And this has nothing to do with representation'[250]. This is a procedure like acinema that upholds the sovereignty of what Lyotard terms 'pictural matter' which includes colour, the line and the stroke of a painters' brush.[251] But how can colour achieve this so-called 'disarming of the mind'? In his commentary of Lyotard's writing on artists such as Barnett Newman and Karel Appel, Herman Parret asserts that 'Colour is the core of the pictorial substance' for Lyotard.

[248] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, xvi.
[249] Ibid., xvi.
[250] Lyotard, 'Conservation and Colour' in *The Inhuman*, p.151.
[251] Ibid., p.152.

Continuing, Parret argues that Lyotard's chosen artists' 'apology of colour reveals how matter-colour requires the suspension of the mind's formatting activity and brings about a feeling of stupefaction and obedience.' This suspension or disarming occurs through colour's ability to exert 'its power to affect feeling by removing itself from its context, conjuncture, intrigue, as from any other intellectual, intelligible, deductive disposition. With colour, one is on the side of matter. His aesthetics of material presence is "prior to" forms.'[252] In other words, as colour precedes form and the categories of the intelligible it does not offer itself up easily to mastery and in fact resists it. In turn, colour does not readily become just another thing stripped of its affect and materiality and reduced to an object of knowledge. Significantly then, as Grant elucidates:

> the colour that will become the treasure of painters is not in physical-sensorial perception, nor in the identification of a chromatic value that tradition, habit, discourse, or communication convey - it escapes historical and cultural time since it is written into childhood time, the time of pagan sanctity, the time of painters. Modalised by painting, colour has the privilege of sound - the chromatic nuance as timbre - or of odour - the chromatic shade as fragrance. It is thus that painting promises to render presence - neither by representation, nor technique, nor diegetics, nor voluntary memory, but rather by trial, dispossession, obedience [...] Powder, the pastel and its dust, ashes, oil, thinners, and pigments, these materials are the enigma and the miracle of presence.[253]

Crucially, unlike its mobilisation in the aesthetic of the beautiful, colour does not represent[254] in Lyotard's thinking, being instead 'an appeal to presence beyond representation.'[255] The appreciation of this material presence is at the center of the sequence in *Don't Drown in Me* in which Catalan children invoke various colours. Importantly, the colours are allowed to be just that – colours, serving no denotative, symbolic or representational purpose or function,

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[252] Iain Hamilton Grant in Lyotard, *Miscellaneous Texts II: Contemporary Artists* trans by. Vlad Ionescu (Leuven: Leuven Press, 2012) pp. 34-5.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Common codification of colours in western art includes; green = envy, red = passion, love, intensity, white = purity, innocence, virginity. In this sense, we are habitually desensitised to the materiality of colour. In this vein Lyotard writes: 'It is precisely of this skill that discursive education and teaching deprive us: to remain permeable to the floating presence of the line (of value, of colour). From the very beginning our culture rooted out sensitivity to plastic space.' Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p. 212. See also Goethe's influential *Theory of Colours.*
[255] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.152.

attesting to the formentioned 'there is' or '*il y a*'.[256] Moreover, the children's incantation of colour, and the delight it evokes mirrors that of Lyotard's figure of the match in 'Acinema'. In other words, the colours and the joy they elicit are exorbitant and other to systems of exchange, be it cinematic, capitalistic or the aesthetic of the beautiful.[257] Like the acinematic, they flash up momentarily before disappearing. To elucidate this further, we can take recourse to the distinction given in Lyotard's conceptualisation of the event. Concomitant with his notion of the aesthetic of the sublime, Lyotard speaks of the event being divided between a '*It happens*' and a what happens?[258] The 'it happens' refers to the event in its immediacy before its passing, inscription and codification into cognition, discourse or a system to produce meaning and turn it into an object of knowledge.[259] As Simon Malpas stresses, the 'difference between 'something happens' and 'what happens' is crucial. To be able to say 'what happens' is already to have understood the meaning of an event, to have drawn it into consciousness and fitted it into a genre or genres of discourse.'[260] As we have seen, this is the movement which neutralises the future in all of its unexpectedness seen for example in the figure of Leibnizian monad and the fable. What is already known cannot be experienced as something happening or new. As Simon Malpas traces, the secondary *what is happening?* which dominates the *it is happening* is circumvented in the aesthetic of the sublime:

> What draws Lyotard to Newman is the apparent simplicity of his work: his paintings often consist of little more than one or more vertical lines set onto washes of a single colour. This minimalism expresses for Lyotard a resistance to the social conditioning

[256] Viegas and Williams, *Acinemas,* p.14.
[257] Williams further elucidates Lyotard's position: '[w]ith Cézanne, there is a refusal to allow the work to fit into a preestablished network of exchange, that is, a given set of formulae governing painting. In their place, there is the desire for the painting to be an object in itself, with no outside reference: 'no longer counting as a message, threat, plea, defense, exorcism, morality, allusion, in a symbolic relation, but counting as an absolute object, freed from a transferential relation, indifferent to the relational order, active only in the energetic order, in the silence of bodies.' (Freud selon Cézanne': 85)' Williams, *Lyotard and the Political*, p.74.
[258] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.90.
[259] Lyotard sometimes speaks of this split as a difference between the '*quid*' and the '*quod*'. Lyotard writes '[b]efore asking questions about what it is and about its significance, before the *quid*, it must 'first' so to speak 'happen', *quod*. That it happens 'precedes', so to speak, the question pertaining to what happens.' Ibid.
[260] Malpas, *Jean-François Lyotard,* p.101.

> of capitalism and the humanist idea that art should represent the world or tell a story about it. He argues that a 'canvas by Newman draws a contrast between stories and its plastic nudity . . . What can one say that is not given? It is not difficult to describe, but the description is as flat as a paraphrase . . . There is almost nothing to "consume"'. The response to a Newman painting is thus instantaneous. One is confronted by an image that needs no time to take in or interpret, which alludes to no hidden meanings, and seems to conceal no complex technique to be deciphered. And yet this image arrests the viewer, stopping them in their tracks and eliciting a sense of the sublime.[261]

In other words, in Lyotard's schema, colour short-circuits the movement in which its materiality would be annihilated and reduced to an object of knowledge, an exchangeable image or an image amenable to theoretical interpretation.[262] Returning then to the Catalan colour sequence, its affect is admittedly limited as the children appear to conjure colours at will through logos, a tool of mastery par excellence. The sequence therefore *gestures* towards the affect of the material, rather than producing it. Its intention then is to explore Lyotard's contention that the 'abstract does not act through a simulacrum-effect, but by means of the organization of its material alone.' [263]

The Return upon the Return in Cinema

> 'And then coming back was the worst thing you ever did.'[264]

If acinema is twined to the logic and movement of the sublime as I have pursued it, how does the aesthetic of the beautiful regulate the productive cinematic economy? In 'Acinema' Lyotard outlines the crucial notion of the figure of the return in which symmetry, balance and repetition are produced:

> Now, what are these syntheses but the arranging of the cinematographic material following the figure of return? We are not only speaking of the requirement of profitability imposed upon the artist by the producer, but also of the formal requirements that the artist weighs upon his material. All so-called form implies the

[261] Ibid., p.100.
[262] Malpas continues: '[i]n the case of Newman, and avant-garde art more generally, the eventhood of the works stages the refusal of art to be reduced to political propaganda or commodity.' Ibid., p.101.
[263] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.247.
[264] Lyotard, 'Return upon the Return' in *Toward the Postmodern* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995) p. 192.

> return of sameness, the folding back of diversity upon an identical unity. In painting this may be a plastic rhyme or an equilibrium of colours; in music, the resolution of dissonance by the dominant chord; in architecture, a proportion. Repetition, the principle of not only the metric but even of the rhythmic, if taken in the narrow sense as the repetition of the same (same colour, line, angle, chord), is the work of Eros and Apollo disciplining the moments, limiting them to the norms of tolerance characteristic of the system or whole in consideration.[265]

As discussed in the introduction, the mise-en-scène as Lyotard conceives it involves this conscious ordering and sorting of different elements in various spheres from film, justice to the political. This process of curation is paramount for the figure of the return; achieving a desirable rhythm and rhyme. That is, a rhythm which is balanced, satisfactory and comforting, not *uncanny*. Importantly, what is meant here by comforting has nothing to do with content, such as the absence of tension or violence for example. Rather, it is the effect of selecting and constricting filmic elements to achieve a particular idea and produce resolution in a very particular sense. Lyotard observes that:

> [c]inematic movements generally follow the figure of return, that is, of the repetition and propagation of sameness. The scenario or plot, an intrigue and its solution, achieves the same resolution of dissonance as the sonata forms in music; its movement of return organises the affective charges linked to filmic 'signifieds', both connotative and denotative, as Metz would say**.** In this regard all endings are happy endings, just by being endings, for even if a film finishes with a murder, this too can serve as a final resolution of dissonance. The affective charges carried by every type of cinematographic and filmic 'signifier' (lens, framing, cuts, lighting, shooting, etc.) are submitted to the same law of a return of the same after a semblance of difference; a difference that is nothing in fact, but a detour.[266][267]

In other words, style and extravagance in both its visual and sonic forms are *permitted,* as long as it remains governable, controlled and in aid of something else; as long as it remains

[265] Lyotard, 'Acinemas' in *Acinemas,* p.36.
[266] Ibid, pp. 36-7.
[267] One can move further into the deceit of the ending in a Blanchotian sense. Endings in films, books, songs, belie the impossibility of *our own* deaths, our own endings which we can never experience. Or as Simon Critchley writes; 'Death is radically resistant to the order of representation. Representations of death are misrepresentations, or rather representations of an absence. The paradox at the heart of the representation of death is best conveyed by the figure of *prosopopoeia*, the trope by which an absent or imaginary person is presented as speaking or acting, a form which indicates the failure of presence, a face which withdraws behind the form which presents it. […] Thus, if there can be no phenomenology or representation of death because it is a state of affairs about which I can find neither an adequate intention nor intuitive fulfilment, then *the ultimate meaning of human finitude is that we cannot find meaningful fulfilment for the finite*.' Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing,* (London: Routledge, 2009) p.31. See also Maurice Blanchot's 'Literature and the Right to Death' in *The Work of Fire*.

returnable, exchangeable, useable and within the limits of agreed upon taste. For the traditional cinematic economy governed by the return upon the return, there is nothing more suspicious than style for style's sake, or when style becomes a perverse excessiveness. Such a position is typically expressed by way of the style over substance "criticism". This framing demands that 'style' knows its place and remains within the limits of the laws of exchange and the aesthetic of the beautiful. If it is to exist, style must be redeemed by substance. Diagnostically at least, we are in Derrida's kingdom here and his critique of western metaphysics, which I will not rehearse fully. But simplifying greatly, western metaphysics, and by extension language and the concepts which falls under its auspices, are governed by a hierarchal opposition in which presence, truth and immediacy are desired over the ephemeral, matter and appearances.[268] This movement (and process) of the return upon the return which Lyotard's describes has its corollary in the biblical parable of the prodigal son. The son despite all their wastefulness and errant ways, is forgiven by the unconditional love of the father. Rather than being cast out by the father, the law (the mise-en-scène), the worldly excesses of the son are recuperated by way of a sort of Hegelian *aufgeben*[269] to produce a moral lesson. Capital, as many have long observed, similarly functions by *recuperating* resistance, otherness and difference as the situationists would have it.[270] The non-sensical, excessive and oblique are allowed as long as their lack of sense is meaningful. *Are you*

[268] In their introduction to Derrida's *Dissemination*, translator Barbara Johnson writes 'Western thought, says Derrida, has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs. evil, being vs nothingness, presence vs absence, truth vs error, identity vs. difference, mind vs. matter, man vs. woman, soul vs. body, life vs. death, nature vs. culture, speech vs. writing. These polar opposites do not, however, stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it [...] In other words, the two terms are not simply opposed in their meanings, but are arranged in a hierarchical order which gives the first term *priority*, in both the temporal and the qualitative sense of the words. In general, what these hierarchical oppositions do is to privilege unity, identity, immediacy, and temporal and spatial *presentness* over distance, difference, dissimulation and deferment.' Barbara Johnson 'Translator's Introduction' in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (London: Althone Press, 1997) viii.
[269] '[A]ufgeben essentially means to cancel or abolish and to preserve or retain.' Glenn Alexander Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) p. 238.
[270] See for example 'Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation' trans. Ken Knabb in *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, California: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006)

enjoying your little performance? Your Hegelian-Lacanian dress-up? In André Gide's incarnation of the parable, *Le retour de l'enfant prodigue*, the prodigal notably returns unrepentant, still wishing to achieve their goal of exuberance and pleasure; their Dionysianism immutable. The writer Wallace Fowlie argues that Gide's parable asks 'whether the Law is suitable for all men'[271], a questioning which runs parallel to Lyotard's invocation of Bataille's sovereign, which we should *return to* briefly. As previously mentioned, the sovereign is, for Lyotard, something which occurs 'without relation to any law by which it could claim or demand to be 'what it is''[272] and in doing so, reveals the 'limits of the law' even just for a brief moment due to its incommensurability.[273] In this 'brief moment', the unpresentable is made present, in turn demonstrating what Lyotard maintains as 'the fundamental problem' or representation; 'the exclusion and foreclosure of all that is judged unrepresentable because [it is] non-recurrent.'[274]

In the portfolio, the film 'FBN2/CO5A1' is primarily concerned with the various genetic conditions which Charlie (the subject of the film) has, namely the titular COL5A1 and FBN2 genes. COL5A1 is a sub-gene of the group of connective disorders Ehlers-Danlos Syndromes (EDS), denoting the Classical type, resulting in the production of faulty and ineffective collagen, the protein tasked with forming the structure of the body; muscles, organs, skin, bone, ligaments. Complications from EDS and its comorbid conditions can vary from mild to death; gastrointestinal dysfunction and failure, cardiovascular irregularities, spinal instability to name a few. Similarly, FBN2 is a gene whose effects include blindness, subluxations and scoliosis. As connective tissue is vital to the very foundation and structure of human biology, an interrogation of its disorders, as well as medical and childhood trauma readily lends itself

[271] Wallace Fowlie, *André Gide: His Life and Art*. (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1965) pp. 57–67.
[272] Lyotard, 'The Idea of a Sovereign Film' in *Acinema*, p.62.
[273] Milne, 'Authorisation: Lyotard's Sovereign Image' in *Acinema*, p.114.
[274] Lyotard, 'Acinemas' in *Acinemas*, p.39.

to the forms of acinematic intensity, arrhythmia and acedia as Lyotard conceives it: the undoing of any (narrative) stability through the promotion of disintegration, non sequiturs and the interruption of disparate elements. Or in Lyotard's terms, acinemas privileges the 'breaks in flow and resistances to ordered conditions'.[275] In very real terms, the film explores Charlie's disordered body whose various different elements do not work together: *an acinematic body?* Throughout the film, the body is deliberately atomised with only one full length body shot present. Hair, eyes, ears, mouths are scrutinised, some encompassing the whole frame, with the camera lingering on the body through close ups or portrait paintings by Charlie saturated with pain, disease and ruptured identities. Similarly, the mouth is rarely seen to be speaking, and if it does there is either no sound or the audio is disjointed, mis-matched or desynchronised, hinting at a rupture in time and space between the visual and audio elements – a deauthorisation. Along with jump cuts and an agitated frame, this bifurcation of the sonic and visual was constructed to create a traumatic time of dislocation and misplacement. Yet, despite the apposite subject matter and these techniques, 'FBN2/CO5A1' conforms to a traditional cinematic economy and is shaped by the movement of the return upon the return. For example, we get a circular and symmetrical ending and beginning: the candles of a cake are blown to life at the beginning, then blown out at the end.[276] Meanwhile the inclusion of chapters neatly demarcates one story from the next. In this respect, it is limited as a filmic internalisation of the principles of anamnesis or an exercise in happening upon the acinematic due to its pursual of unity.[277]

[275] Viegas and Williams, 'Why Lyotard and Film?' in *Acinemas,* p.12.
[276] On reflection it has similarities to the cut in *Lawrence of Arabia* where a match is blown out cutting to a sunrise. Yet, in this instance it is short-circuited, heading straight to the denouement of the film both figuratively and literally: the extinguishing of the flame/life. Does this qualify as an unconscious homage as Orson Welles outlines? See the next section.
[277] But with this said, are there sovereign moments? In places I believe so.

Notes on the homage

One concentrated example of the return upon the return is the homage.[278] In a 1982 talk to French film students, Orson Welles declared with typical bombast and humour that 'the most detestable habit in all modern cinema is the homage... I don't want to see another god damn homage in anybody's movie, there are enough of them which are unconscious.'[279] As Rashna Wadia Richards elucidates, 'homage is associated with reverence, adulation, even worship' and sketches its feudal roots and spirit of deference.[280] For Richards, after the break-up of the dominance of the Hollywood studio system, homage was an integral practise of many younger filmmakers. They write that 'starting in the late 1960s American filmmakers "wore their erudition in matters cinematic proudly and indulged in homage, reference and intertextuality." Since then, homage has been used regularly for demonstrating cine-literacy as well as ciné-love.'[281] Importantly, Richards also notes how the '[a]cademization of cinema allowed for the development of a film canon or a widely accepted catalog of classic films that would be worthy of paying homage to'.[282] In other words, something akin to the aesthetic of the beautiful is extant within cinema, motoring silently in the background, gradually coalescencing different Kantian *sensus communises* of what a great film is. Thus, when people think of the cinematic, they typically bring to mind a very particular version of

[278] We could also include here the easter egg and films which serve as nothing more than a three-hour call back or three-hour adverts for the next. *We say this without condemnation*. See the video-essay 'The Marvel Symphonic Universe' by Every frame a Painting, in particular its discussion of the phenomenon of "Temp" music. Moreover, on the point of Marvel, I maintain that Martin Scorsese is too hasty in foreclosing what Cinema *is* from a Lyotardian perspective. See footnote 269.
[279] The talk was filmed by Pierre-André Boutang and Guy Seligmann at the Cinémathèque Française and is accessible for free in the Cinémathèque's online archive.
[280] 'The word came into usage in Middle English, and it was borrowed from Norman French. Homage then signified a feudal ceremony that allowed a vassal to acknowledge his allegiance publicly to his king or lord. The vassal openly submitted himself in worship of and service to his master, who promised to protect him. In feudal law, it also denoted a system of land tenure whereby a tenant paid homage to their lord. Over time, homage came to imply an acknowledgment of superiority and the act of expressing respect toward such superior authority.' Rashna Wadia Richards, *Cinematic TV: Serial Drama Goes to the Movies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) pp.31-2.
[281] Ibid., p.34.
[282] Ibid.

cinema. Within the homage, prosody and repetition reigns, not the paratactical. *We say this without any condemnation.*[283] Who can deny the particular *jouissance* of repetition, the familiar, the same, the legitimate?[284] The *jouissance* of film feasting on itself? *We say this without any condemnation.* As Patricia MacCormack argues in *Cinesexuality*, '[a]n opinion of cinema is vindicated by the ways in which images 'fit' into our taste. 'I don't like' is more correctly 'I can't or won't like it' based on what 'I have liked'' previously.[285] We all have our own little aesthetic of the beautiful within us. *We say this without any condemnation.*[286]

Furthermore, the divergence between the aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime is one way of entering into Lyotard's distinction between the classical and the (post)modern. In conservation with Jean-Loup Thébaud, Lyotard describes the classical as:

> a situation in which an author can write while putting himself at the same time in the position of a reader, being able to substitute himself for his own reader, and to judge and sort out what he has accomplished from the point of view of the reader that he also is […] Whereas in what we call modernity, he no longer knows for whom he writes, since there no longer is any taste: there no longer is any internalized system of rules that would permit a sorting out, the dropping of some things and the introduction of some others, all of this before the fact, in the act of writing.[287]

Simply put, if we generalise this principle from writing, the modern work of art precedes an audience, whereas the classical already has one in mind. Turning briefly to the portfolio of films for example, *Towards Acinema* was made as a so-called 'primer'. That is, a short piece to introduce the central tenet's of Lyotard's concept of acinema for an audience unacquainted with his philosophy. In other words, it was made for the thesis, not by it. As such, it had a

[283] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy,* p.110.
[284] 'Repetition legitimises', a phrase popularised by the musician and music educator Adam Neely springs to mind. But also conversely, the repetitious acts of autistic stimming which are soothing, pleasurable and subversive in their affront to the norms of bodily movement. What bliss: jouissance, jouissance, jouissance...I would like to thank here the neuro-queer autistic artist and writer Laurie Green for their thinking on autistic desire. Their work can be found here: https://lauriegreen.substack.com/
[285] MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p.40.
[286] Obviously, it can be said that I myself am engaging in a form of homage to the loquacious libidinal Lyotard, but this tactic is equally a continuation of the deterritorialization of the figural within the text and the audio-visual elements of my thesis.
[287] Lyotard, *Just Gaming,* p.9.

preconceived audience in mind with its central purpose being to lay a theoretical foundation.[288] With this said, there are particular elements which could adhere to acinematic impulses; such as the first instance of audio in which two voices sing lines from 'Labelled with Love by' the band Squeeze. It remained in the film *just for the fun of it*.[289] As outlined by Lyotard in 'Acinemas', 'effacements and exclusions form the very operation of mise-en-scène.'[290] *How neat of you. You have spoken of an irreducibility between your films and his philosophy. Yet, you give enough parallels between the two, perhaps not too many to seem auspicious, but enough indeed. A fine ratio. Your films are good, helpful failures. Obedient ones. You pick them up when they are needed before placing them back into your store cupboard of examples. Watch them go, moving effortlessly around an economy of Lyotard's ideas. But a related question bothers me*– can academic writing ever be sublime? Can it ever be modern in this radical sense? Moreover, returning to the question of acinema and the avant-garde, Lyotard maintained that 'to experiment means, in a way, to be alone, to be celibate. But, on the other hand, it also means that if the artefact produced is really strong, it will wind up producing its own readers, its own viewers, its own listeners.'[291] Therefore, this type of art would abdicate from any normative involvement in a tradition. Or as Peter W. Milne asserts:

> [t]he 'critical function' of any art, including cinematic art, would appear to lie precisely in its power to reverse and disrupt what might be thought of as its 'proper' or normal function – that is, in undoing the representational and narrative laws that give it its appeal and its authority. The critical function of such work is to release the viewer from the various economies (of capital, desire, meaning) in which he or she is situated, to undo the power of those economies, for however brief a time. Such a task would appear to fall largely to those works that refuse these economies, the very meaning, in many of Lyotard's texts, of the avant-garde.[292]

[288] But isn't this where the acinematic lies? In the 'vacuoles' of realism and convention?
[289] Lyotard, 'Acinemas' in *Acinemas*, p.34.
[290] Ibid., p.37.
[291] Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, p.10.
[292] Milne, 'Authorisation: Lyotard's Sovereign Image' in *Acinemas*, p.106.

A brief genealogy of philosophical nihilism

Having traced the nihilism of exchange in that things are not valued in their own right but as elements to serve a function and proceed before and after another thing, I will now explore how film is open to the nihilism of interpretation. Whilst I will not present an exhaustive genealogy of philosophical nihilism, a cursory history will prove instructive for understanding Lyotard's critique of representation, as well as understanding his forceful abandonment of critique altogether in his libidinal philosophy.

The term itself and its implementation as a philosophical concept has undergone several transformations and iterations, a metamorphosis which is traced concisely by Simon Critchley[293] who notes that the general consensus of the first formal use of nihilism philosophically is Jacobi's infamous "Letter to Fichte" in 1799. In the letter, Jacobi decries Fichtean Idealism as nihilistic; as following Kant, it truncates any higher realm of truth which was previously accessible by the faithful. Here, the nihilism that Jacobi accuses Fichte of has the general tenor of impoverishment, voidness, negativity and nothingness per its Latin etymology of *nihil* which we are familiar with. *But thus entered Zarathustra*...

No other philosopher is as deeply associated with the term nihilism than Friedrich Nietzsche, an association plagued with misunderstanding and misappropriation. As recounted by Adorno, Nietzsche adopted the concept 'presumably from newspaper accounts of terrorist acts in Russia. With an irony to which our ears have been dulled in the meantime, he used the word to denounce the opposite of what it meant in the practise of political conspirators: to denounce

[293] Critchley's *Very Little...Almost Nothing* contains a highly instructive philosophical history, elucidating its divergence from nihilism as it is found in Russian Literature.

Christianity as the institutionalized negation of the will to live.'[294] But how so? Whilst in Jacobi's initial formulation the charge of nihilism is equated with the partitioning off of a so-called "higher" plain or transcendence, nihilism for Nietzsche is not merely the renunciation of transcendence as found in Christianity, but is the very consequence of the Christian-moral interpretation of the world.[295] Such an interpretation is nihilistic in the eyes of Nietzsche as it proposes that the values, morals and source of meaning lies not in our mortal, finite world, but rather in another one. That is, one that is *supersensuous*, both literally and philosophically *metaphysical* (above, beyond, after...) which is the "true world". Or as Critchley explicates, the Christian 'interpretation of the world is driven by a will to truthfulness [...] That is to say, Christian metaphysics turns on the belief in a true world that is opposed to the false world of becoming that we inhabit here below.'[296] Such a "two-world" schema produces a manifold of nihilistic consequences and ethico-political ramifications. Firstly, such a conception negates our *immanent* lives, in that they only have meaning in relation to a *transcendent*; yet at the same time, this *life* is also a corrupt, fallen version of the "true" and "real life" promised in heavenly salvation. In turn, death is elevated above our existing life of *becoming* and appearances, or in Nietzsche's summation, 'Christianity is a hangman's metaphysics'.[297][298]

In his ironic critique 'How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth', Nietzsche aphoristically charts the metamorphosis of what he views as a great error of western philosophy'; the

[294] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p.379.
[295] Critchley, p.10.
[296] Ibid., p.8.
[297] Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990) p.65. Whilst such an interpretation of the world may at best be seen to legitimatise humanitarian action, any such action is always-already undercut by the notion that not only the "real world" is yet to come, and *this* world is untrustworthy and only truly changeable by the second coming of Christ: the foundation of Christian eschatology.
[298] At current there are instructive debates about the positioning of Nietzsche as an environmentalist thinker[298], though in a superficial sense it is not hard to see why many Environmental philosophers take recourse to him: 'There is no Planet B', a common environmentalist slogan, is congruous with his critique of the "two-world" conception of life after all. See Andrew Nolan Hatley, "Anthropocentrism and the Long-Term: Nietzsche as an Environmental Thinker. " PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2016. Accessed: 10/10/21 https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/3700

institutionalisation of the division between a lower world of appearances and the "Real world", or what I have been referring to as the "two-world" conception of life. Starting with what he claims as the 'oldest form of the idea', the "real world" as conceived by Plato, in which such a true world is 'attainable to the wise'[299] who dedicate themselves to attempting to return to the rim of stars and realm of forms from which humans have fallen. After which, he claims that such a Platonic conception 'becomes Christian', in that the "real world" is unattainable right now, but is 'promised to the wise, the pious, the virtuous man'.[300] Then in Nietzsche's history comes the idea's Kantian mutation, in which the "real world", or in Kant's formulation, *pure reason,* exists but is shut off in order to ensure both epistemological certainty and 'the primacy of practical reason'[301]. Fichte of course inherits such a move, and in turn, as we have already recounted is charged with nihilism by Jacobi. Afterwards comes its Positivist variation spearheaded by Auguste Comte and 'his religion of humanity' in which a transcendental "real world" is unattainable, but alike to a Marxist promise of Utopia, a positivist paradise will eventually manifest itself on earth (if we only follow the priesthood of sociologists).[302]

Therefore, as I have just retraced, western philosophy (including Christianity) for Nietzsche has been marked by nihilistic "two-world" ontologies and has been eating off this platonic *plato* ever since, as seen in the thinking of Descartes, Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel and Marx

[299] Nietzsche, p.50.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Critchley, p.7.
302 Against this Nietzschean genealogy, I think it is important to bear in mind Michel Foucault's notion of scattered origins, in which different ideas and ways of thinking come to coalescence and become compacted in neither an arbitrary nor deterministic way, but nonetheless come to be passed off as natural or as common sense, rather than a neat genealogy or traceable lineage. For an instructive discussion of Foucault's genealogical suspicion see Rudi Visker, *Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique* (London: Verso, 1995) With this said, whilst Nietzsche's genealogy may be critiqued on these grounds, what is significant about his sketch is how succinctly illustrates as Ansell Pearson elucidates how 'the causes of nihilism lie in our faith in the categories of reason by which we have measured the value of the world in accordance with categories that refer to a purely fictional world.' Pearson, *Viroid Life*, p.161.

amongst others, who reformulate such an exegesis of the world in their thinking in various ways, with the essential ontology of the "two-world" division ultimately remaining intact.[303] Moreover, the account of nihilism I have presented has been restricted to an examination of what is commonly referred to as *religious nihilism*, a vector of nihilism more broadly bound up with exegesis, meaning, historicity (or the question of the future) and transcendence. My use of "exegesis" here aims to draw upon the biblical and metaphysical connotations of interpretation in a Nietzschean sense. In other words, one of the very consequences of interpretations, valuation, theory, abstract thought and philosophy more generally, like religion, *is* nihilism itself. Or as Williams and Crome argue, the 'belief in a meaning implicit in events is essentially theological. It supposes that behind the scenes, so to speak, and occupying a position of transcendence, there is that which gives meaning to everything. Following Nietzsche, Lyotard argues that because this belief is theological it is nihilistic.'[304]

Whilst the form of the two-world ontologies I have surveyed has predominantly been narratological and teleological,[305] two-world ontologies are not limited to narrative. Crucially, what I have delineated is also the metamorphosis (and equally the lack of) of the conceptualisation of representation and representational space. I will now proceed to trace the institution of this two-world division *vis-à-vis* representation and film theory.

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[303] In his speculative history of spirit, Hegel retains the religiosity of two-worldism, reformulating it as a question of the *future* and the *state*, or in other words, as a worldly historical event to come. Whereas, for Marx and Engels, man is alienated and dehumanised from its true nature by capitalism and as such argue that 'this alienation makes revolution a moral necessity as it destroys freedom and dehumanizes people', with Communism being 'the positive transcendence of. . . human self-estrangement, and therefore [is] the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore [is] the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being'. See Roger Paden, 'Marx's Critique of the Utopian Socialists' in Utopian Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2002), p. 82 and Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts 1844* (Chelmsford, Massachusetts: Courier Corporation, 2012) p.102.

[304] *The Lyotard Reader & Guide, ed*. Keith Crome and James Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) p.7.

[305] "Man" is alienated in some form from its "true" essence, source of meaning, place or *Being* and so on, and must reunite, attain, or ascend to this *truth* through various programmes and strategies of reconciliation, revolution and redemption.

Acinema against representation

As recounted by Bill Readings, Lyotard conceptualises the 'theatrical-representation apparatus'[306] by way of the *costruzione legittima* of the Italian Renaissance. Such an apparatus is constituted by 'three limits or divisions: of stage from backstage, of stage from auditorium, of theatre from world'[307]. Using the example of Filippo Brunelleschi's box, a viewing device that allows people to see the Baptistery from within the doorway of Florence cathedral by way of a mirror, Lyotard configures representation as an issue of seduction. Representation functions by way of seduction rather than illusion, as Lyotard maintains that the 'subject who looks into [Brunelleschi's] box, if he is not mad, knows very well that he is not looking at the Baptistry itself. For those who sit in the theatre the same applies. We, who look at this scene from Piero's school, we well know that it is not of the order of *trompe l'oeil,* and it is not even illusion, it is seduction in the proper sense of the term: one is divided from oneself [Lat. *seducere*], there is a scission.'[308] Moreover, for Lyotard, the mirror within Brunelleschi's box 'fulfils the same function as the cinema screen.'[309] As in the case of cinema and theatre, the viewing subject is *inside* the apparatus (the auditorium), thus 'the effect is not one of illusion, but of seduction.'[310] This analysis has several consequences. Namely, it rejects the procedure common to critiques of representation of "revealing" an ideological falsity, or the "truth" behind an image and instead focuses on 'its *performance* as an apparatus.'[311] Understandably, such a move by Lyotard has led to comparisons with Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* ("defamiliarisation" technique) as seen in Peter W. Milne's

[306] Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (Oxford: Routledge, 1992) p.93.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Lyotard, 'Painting as a Libidinal Set-up' in *The Lyotard Reader & Guide*, pp. 321-2.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid., p.94.
[311] Ibid.

commentary on Lyotard's notion of the sovereign image. Writing pace acinema and the hyperreal Milne asserts:

> The viewer is thus freed from the authority of the image in a way similar (and indeed linked) to acinema's power to free the viewer from phantasy in the libidinal texts. Perhaps one could go so far as to suggest that the hyperreal image makes it impossible to efface the fact that the image (and therefore any narrative of which it purports to be a part) is constructed, is not in the least 'natural'. If the construction of such an image is indeed a political act (and even the political act '*par excellence*'), it's role here becomes impossible to forget. This means that one's role or place with regard to this construction also cannot be forgotten. This could be linked to what Lyotard elsewhere calls 'the Brechtian aesthetics of distanciation', that is, the hindering of the audience's ability to identify itself with the characters or actions of the scene and the ensuring need to accept or reject what is portrayed at a conscious level.[312]

From this perspective, acinema (in particular its highlighting of the discriminatory process of selection at work in the mise-en-scéne) does indeed appear to be in allegiance with Brecht's alienating effect. Yet, such a reading limits both the scope and force of Lyotard's critique. As elucidated by Readings, Lyotard's turn to the performance of the apparatus is precisely that which distinguishes it from the likes of Brecht, an assertion which needs to be qualified:

> Much of the difficulty in understanding Lyotard's work comes from the fact that we tend so easily to slip back into the language of illusion in thinking about representation, the language that Lyotard is precisely trying to elude. This characteristic turn away from issues of falsity to questions of performance distinguishes Lyotard's analysis from that of a certain radical dramatics, drama as ideology critique, in which the limit between stage and auditorium is breached (to ask 'who speaks'?) or where the limit between stage and backstage is breached to show the apparatus by which the images is constructed. These cases correspond to the classical moves of cultural ideology critique by which the spectator and image are referred back to the mechanism by which they are constructed and positioned. In each case, however, the limit that separates the 'de-realized' space of the theatrical apparatus from the outside is preserved. Lyotard claims that contemporary capitalism has developed to the point where it can itself make profit from breaching the limits interior to the theatrical apparatus.[313]

Thus, although reflexive and performative in a very particular sense, Brecht remains all too enthralled by the representational apparatus. His defamiliarisation strategy in fact maintains the theological set up of an inside and outside, or in a metaphysical sense, the two-world

[312] Milne, 'Authorisation: Lyotard's Sovereign Image' in *Acinemas*, p.109
[313] Readings, pp.94-5.

division. That is, his drama functions as a critique of ideology revealing the "truth" of social relations behind the veil of false-consciousness and other misrepresentations, in turn, only putting into question 'particular representations of reality, but not representation as such.'[314] But as Lyotard argues in *Des Dispositifs pulsionnels,* contra Brecht and Adorno that '[w]e have the advantage [...] that we live in a capitalism that is more cynical, more energetic, less tragic. It places everything (including the backstage apparatus of 'exploitation') in representation, representation is self-reflexive (as in Brecht) and present itself. . .The walls, the entry, the exit, remain.'[315] Hence in Readings' conclusion, 'Capitalism has caught up with Brecht, as it were.[316] Therefore, while they may share some political affinities, for the former revolutionary socialist Lyotard, the 'work of the avant-garde is thus not to produce left-wing art but to produce an 'anti-art that will deconstruct representational space.''[317] That is to say, Lyotard wishes to disrupt and subvert representational structures, not offer absent meanings or reveal the so-called truth of images. As Readings importantly continues, that which 'is explicitly 'off stage', outside, is staged in that it can only be thought in terms of its potential representation on stage, as the referent of a discourse. The real is the representable. The real is reduced to the absent object of a representation. The result of which is that the *real* or "reality" remains ultimately "excluded", only appearing "in the inside of the theatre only as the absent meaning of the representation, the dead god, the 'Great Zero' as Lyotard calls it.'[318] However, it should not be glossed over that 'the move which appears to denigrate representation as secondary to the real is in fact the establishment of the rule of representation, by which the real is merely the absent original of the representation. Being is merely the absence upon which meaning is constructed. This is, for Lyotard, the theology of

[314] *The Lyotard Reader & Guide, ed*. Keith Crome and James Williams, p.6
[315] Lyotard, *Des Dispositifs Pulsionnels* (Paris: Bourgois, 1974) p.111.
[316] Readings, p.95.
[317] Ibid., p.91.
[318] Ibid., p.96.

representation'.[319] Consequently, as we have seen in our explication of religious nihilism, what is seen to give representation its meaning is precisely that which is not included in representation itself. Such is the logic of representation.

Towards the Two-Worldism of Theory

In 'The Unconscious as Mise-en-scène' Lyotard makes the powerful and far-reaching assertion that Freud's conceptualisation of the unconscious arises out of the representational space and aesthetic found in the Viennese theatre and opera of his day.[320] In doing so, Lyotard wishes to argue that Freud's formulation of the unconscious is theatrical and in turn, theological in its set up.[321] That is, in a reductive sense, the unconscious; that which is outside of signification is able to manifest itself as representation and in representation (dreams) as "signs" and may be subsequently analysed, decoded or understood in the quest to reveal the "truth" behind dreams. Whilst this obviously vulgar description could be limited to actual so-called vulgar Freudianisms, psychoanalysis as Lyotard reminds us, 'is first of all an interpretative method. In any interpretative method there is the presupposition that the data to be interpreted simultaneously display and conceal a primary message which the interpreter should be able to read clearly.'[322] Crucially, Lyotard's conviction that psychoanalysis (which is so often used to analyse representations: painting, theatre, literature, film, poetry, sculpture) is itself built on a theatrical-representational apparatus, should not be untethered from the discovery that within this very same set-up, it is fictional figures, primarily Oedipus and Hamlet as Lyotard and others have illuminated who are both the 'privileged objects of the Freudian reflection' and 'are valuable also and above all as operators for the elaboration

[319] Readings, p. 96.
[320] Lyotard, 'The Unconscious as Mise-En- Scène' in *Acinemas*, p.51
[321] Readings, p.96.
[322]Ibid., p.45.

of the theory'. Or indeed, as Lyotard continues, 'art is [...] that from which psychoanalysis draws its resources for work and understanding.'[323] An irony, like the Cheshire cat – all too happy to elide itself: the voice which dare not speak its own name, lest it loses the power of speech.[324] Yet, instead of disavowing Freud and psychoanalysis in toto, Lyotard notably turns to Freud's notion of drive, in a move termed by Julie Gaillard as 'Freud vs Freud and Lacan'[325] in order 'to dismantle the commonly held conception that psychoanalytic theory holds to the opposition between truth and deceit and reality and fantasy and that it endeavours to fix interpretation in the manner of medical science.'[326] Such a procedure is borne out fully in Lyotard's critique of Lacan found in *Discourse, Figure*, particularly against the Lacanian assertion that the 'unconscious is structured like a language', a dispute as Woodward and Jones argue centred on 'the nature of art [...] the nature of *film* as an art.'[327][328]

As Theresa L. Geller explores in her perceptive essay, 'The Film-Work Does Not Think', Lyotard's radical displacement of the unconscious and the fantasy figure in *Discours, Figure* has been greatly overlooked. Lyotard's description of the unconscious and fantasy is an explicit attack on Lacanian orthodoxy, which as Geller argues has a hegemony over 'psychoanalytic approaches'[329] to film and fantasy:

> the account of fantasy Lyotard offers goes against the central tenets of Lacanian theory, but, in doing so, provides film theorists with the tools to parse out the structural phenomena at work in both fantasy and film in ways not allowed for by the

[323] Lyotard, 'Freud according to Cézanne' Trans by Ashley Woodward and Jon Roffe in *Parrhesia* Vol. 23, 2015, (pp. 26-42) p.27.
[324] This is the paradox of replacing one representation for another in interpretation. As it does not have an original name – is the fact that its name cannot be spoken that which gives it the power of speech and representation.
[325] Julie Gaillard, 'Imaginary Constructs? A Libidinal Economy of the Cinematographic Medium' in *Acinemas*, p.74.
[326] Lisa Trahair, 'Aberrant Movement and Somatography' in *Acinemas*, p.186
[327] Graham Jones and Ashley Woodward, 'How Desire Works: A Lyotardian Lynch' in *Acinemas*, p.164.
[328] Lacan himself writes: '[w]hen you have been dead long enough, you find yourself being summed up in three lines of a textbook – though where I am concerned, I'm not too sure which textbook it will be.' Jacques Lacan, *My Teaching* (London: Verso, 2008) p.3. In this research, Lacan gets his three lines and some. Does this work give a fair overview of Lacan's ideas? No, as I am viewing Lacan through Lyotard's gaze.
[329] Theresa L. Geller, 'The Film-Work Does Not Think' in *Gender after Lyotard* ed. Margret Grebowicz (New York: SUNY Press, 2007) p.141

> semiotic impulses of Lacan and his epigones. More importantly, Lyotard introduces the grounds upon which a specifically nonsemiological approach to film (as fantasy) can emerge. Lyotard's revolutionary claim, "that the dream is not a discourse, because the dream-work is intrinsically different from the operations of speech," as he himself states, "runs directly counter to what I believe to be Lacan's interpretation, as well as counter to the current tendency to stuff all of semiology into linguistics". In fact, film theory has imbibed this Lacanian semiology so deeply, and for so long that it has been reified in the notion of a "film language", a central principle of Cinema Studies today.[330]

From a Lyotardian perspective then, film studies and film theory are not only shot through with two-world ontologies, particularly of the semiotic, structuralist and Lacanian variety, but this remains one of the dominant modes.[331][332] Such an approach to films is typified in treating them as "texts" to be "read" (reducing them to a rational system of discourse) and in turn deciphered.[333] Against the algebraic impulse so common place amongst film criticism, Lyotard wishes to iterate that "reading" *is not* seeing, with the process of interpretation not being a case of hieroglyphics; translating the erroneously termed "visual language" of a given film or art work in to a linguistic one, nor is it the case of reducing the film to its machinations.[334] He argues: 'the given is not a text, it possesses an inherent thickness, or rather a difference, which is not to be read, but rather seen; and this difference, and the

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[330] Ibid., pp.141-2

[331] An interesting attempt to rework semiotics against Lacan is Guattari's a-signifying semiotics. See Gary Genosko 'A-signifying Semiotics' in *The Public Journal of Semiotics* II (1), January 2008, pp. 11-21 for a concise overview.

[332] Martin Jay argues in his philosophical history of anti-ocularism in western thought how: Lacan's revision, as it were, of psychoanalysis profoundly influenced a wide variety of French intellectuals from Marxist political theories like Louis Althusser to film critics like Christian Metz. And even when feminist like Luce Irigaray challenged the gender implications of his work, they retained – indeed, intensified – his critique of the visual constitution of subjectivity.' Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994) p. 331.

[333] It should be noted that one of Lyotard's misgivings about structuralism is its tendency towards totalisation and colonisation. That is its promotion of the phenomenological to the status of the ontological. With this said, I believe he is aware of the gains of structuralism such as its stringent critique of objectivism. For a judicious exploration of different currents of French structuralism see Peter Dews' *Logic of Disintegration*.

[334] One such early proponent of "reading" film is Roland Barthes, who as Jay notes: 'claimed that despite the importance of the denotative, analogical power of the filmed image, its connotative implications, most explicitly foregrounded by the use of montage, permitted a decoding somewhat akin to that of literature. Such an approach would have to emphasize the metonymic structure of film narrative, which would require uncovering it syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic means of signification (a distinction to be explored shortly in Metz's work). But even though films drew on many different connotative systems, Barthes concluded, "there is perhaps beyond all this a great 'language' of the human image-repertoire. That is what is at stake."' Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, pp.456-7.

immobile mobility that reveals it, are what continually fall into oblivion in the process of signification.'[335] The treatment of art and the world more broadly as a text is for Lyotard deeply platonic (and thus nihilistic) as already elucidated, as it proceeds from the belief a division between appearance and reality, or in other words, the sensible and the intelligible.[336] Jay, makes the interesting argument that the:

> semiological attempt to expose the workings of cinema's reality effect, which Barthes cautiously defended in his interviews of 1963 and 1964, went hand in hand with the Brechtian project of exposing devices and providing audiences critical distance from the spectacle before them. Rather than visual experiences based in the analogical redemption of physical reality, films became texts to be decoded.[337]

Yet, following this, in order to decipher the world as a text, one would have to occupy a position of transcendence, or at least some higher vantage point (if we are to continue to indulge in these spatial metaphorics) from which to view it. In *Discourse, figure* Lyotard denies this procedure in which scaffolding is erected that elevates the seeing subject *sub species aeternitatis* from which they can see the "whole" and subscribe meaning. What a delightful conceit, a marvellous fiction. But as Lyotard remonstrates, seeing is deeply bodily, corporeal and embedded. Therefore sight:

> is always situated, and that is to say, it is always limited and partial, never wholly able to possess either its object or itself. What we see, we see from a certain point of view, which hides as much as it reveals, and that is constituted at it fringes by half-glimpsed lateralises, as much a part of the visual field as its focus. Vision contains, then, an ineliminable opacity. This opacity is not, however, equivalent to mere obscurity and rending, the darkness of a perception waiting to be illuminated by intellection; rather, it is constitutive of vision and contains its own truth.[338]

I would argue then that one of the most significant questions Lyotard's work poses for film theory and aesthetics more generally is: how do we remain on 'the side of the eye', of seeing

[335] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p.3.
[336] Can I refuse the position of the good diagnostician or the good detective in which each element is a piece of evidence, each scene a crime?
[337] Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p.464.
[338] Crome and Williams, *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, pp.24-5.

and the image which is 'consistently thematized as a lesser being [...] that of falsity'[339], even in its (textual) valorisation? Such a problematic necessitated the choice of a so-called dialogic methodology, one centered on the pivot of the text and the audio-visual. Lyotard's own commitment to this demand, as seen in the figural and his tactic of dissimulation, (which is in an effect a deterritorialisation of the "two-world" ontology) are interrelated, with both attempting to account for how materiality, force and affect are not opposed to discourse and signification, but rather inhabit and disrupt representation. In other words, the figural is 'both without and within'[340] discourse, shaping, confounding and undoing it, a relation of continuity and fine degrees exemplified by the comma in the book's title, a 'non-oppositional juxtaposition' or 'hinge or what he'll later call the hyphen'[341]. It is in this way that the figural 'explains the capacity of the event to remain outside the grasp of structures and yet to work within them. For Lyotard, a painting is figural in the way it always goes beyond descriptions of it and theories about it.'[342] Continually, it is precisely in the *figure* that the sensible may exist within discourse, but as a singularity without a so-called signifier equivalent, the figural cannot be taken up into a chain of signification.[343] In this respect, as Durafour notes, it 'thereby differs from the regimes of signification and designation, as well as from the *mimesis* of the figurative tradition, in which the plastic event is taken as no more than an (abstract, separate) sign which is referred to an other (thing, model).'[344]

In light of this, Lacan does indeed disavow a conventional Euclidean model of a two or three-dimensional spatial set up alike to the theatre in favour of pursuing complex topologies of contorted, twisted and distorted planes. However, his famous assertion and its semiotic-

[339] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p.5.
[340] Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p.7.
[341] Geoffrey Bennington, 'Go figure' in *Parrhesia* Vol. 12, 2011 (pp.37-40) p. 37.
[342] Crome and Williams, 'Introduction' in *The Lyotard Reader & Guide*, p.15.
[343] Jean-François Lyotard, *Acinemas*, p.18.
[344] Ibid.

structuralist imperative inhibits any theoretical gains of such a move and inadvertently instates a theatrical-like apparatus (an inside and outside) in the form of the text. As such, Lacan, like large swathes of theory, remains all too linguistic, semiotic, metaphysical...all too theological, logocentric if you will...all too inhuman and nihilistic in its dismissal of the sensuous, the visual, the sonic and material in favour of discourse, meaning, *truth.* In turn, the "true" object and source of meaning remains situated in the "outside" of representation in the so-called transparent, rational and privileged loci of the text which functions as a master-discourse. Moreover, Lacan's procedure, as Williams explains, only reasserts the:

> division of the world into subject and object thus gives the subject a priority that is ethical as well as epistemological, in the sense that the world appears to the subject as a series of objects for its use and disposal. Objects are not seen to have any meaning or worth in themselves, but have worth only insofar as they are used as means to meet the ends of knowing and willing subjects.[345]

Seen as such, Lacan's rationalisation of Freudian psychoanalysis is wholly in keeping with the enlightenment's quest for truth and ultimate certitude, a goal pursued in part by attempting to turn everything into an object of knowledge which will be brought into greater focus in **Chapter Three**.[346]

[345] Woodward, *Nihilism in Postmodernity* (Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group Publishing, 2009) p.61.
[346] There is another significant dimension to Lyotard's antagonism with Lacan; what he and Deleuze described in a joint letter as a repressive influence over the department of psychology at Vincennes. They claim a Stalinist purge was carried out at his behest which saw the firing of several teachers: 'Those in charge of the psychoanalysis department, who carried out these sackings, declare in official texts that they are acting on the instruction of Dr. Lacan. He is the one who inspires the new statutes; he is even the one to whom, if need be, candidacies will be submitted. He is the one who is calling for a *return to order*, in the name of a mysterious 'matheme' of psychoanalysis.' Lyotard and Deleuze, 'Concerning the Vincennes Psychoanalysis Department' in *The Interviews and Debates*, p.39. In their biographical and philosophical history of Deleuze and Guattari, *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, François Dosse details the ongoing civil war in the university in 1974: 'the neighbouring department of psychoanalysis, which was structurally linked to philosophy, was told to toe the line and reorganize under the iron rule of the EFP administration, and thus of Lacan, via his son-in-law, Jacques-Alain Miller [...] Managed from then on by [Miller], the department of psychoanalysis ay Vincennes supported strictly orthodox Lacanianism. Lacan had warned his students in 1969: "You will find your master." Naively, they thought he was referring to Pompidou, but he meant himself. Psychoanalysis at Vincennes reverted to an ordered structure vanquishing radical politics and reinstating hierarchy. The "putsch" succeeded, and Lacan defined the syllabus according to his view of what Freud would have wanted, namely, the teaching of linguistics: "*linguistics* – which we here know to be the most important thing'. Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) pp. 348-9.

Fantasies of film

Since psychoanalysis has 'played such an important role in the theorization' of 'sexual difference', 'fantasy' and significantly 'the interpretation of film and its attendant pleasures'[347] as Geller explicates, it is therefore unsurprising that so many theorists (particularly feminist ones who came to the fore in the 1980's) are mindful of the 'profound similarities' between fantasy and film. Namely, how both 'are intensely present to sensory perception' and 'turn upon the significance of *mise-en-scène,*'[348] and have subsequently sought to explore the numerous and radical potentialities of such a relation. Yet, as elucidated by Geller, 'the paradigm in film studies has clearly been that version of fantasy compatible with the structuralist imperative to locate the meaning of fantasy in the text.'[349] Perhaps too, *the visual* and *the sonic* as it has been designated within film studies has only been that which have been deemed amenable to linguistic analysis. Against this orthodoxy of textual analysis and the so-called semiotic imperative[350], Lyotard wishes to turn to the figural and develop an 'anti-structuralist methodological strategy for "interpretation"'.[351] Such a strategy of course orbits the assertion *contra* Lacan, regarding the nature of the unconscious, that 'the dream is not the language of desire, but its work'[352], which itself arose out of Lyotard's analysis of fantasy as conceived by Freud. In it Lyotard asserts 'the simultaneity of figure and discourse that is consistent with the (il)logic of fantasy. By dividing up the formation of fantasy into a tripartite system of figure-image, figure-form, and figure-matrix' whilst showing 'the impossibility of putting fantasy's mechanisms into discourse while nonetheless providing a nominal framework

[347] Geller, '"The Film-Work Does Not Think": Refiguring Fantasy for Feminist Film Theory' in *Gender after Lyotard*, p.139.
[348] Ibid., p.140.
[349] Ibid., p.145
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid., p.147
[352] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p.233.

that points to its parts and what they manufacture'.[353] Where does this therefore leave the status of interpretation? Well, at least for the Lyotard of *Discourse, figure*, interpretation would 'work in the same way as the dream: neither commentary nor metalanguage, it is before all else an operative practice that does violence to the manifest organization of language, to its syntax and articulated signification.'[354] Reorientating interpretation in this way would involve moving from approaching film as an object to extract meaning from, or to be mastered and ordered, towards the experience of them as events which disturb our understanding of both representation and ourselves as rational subjects. Namely, this strategy necessitates a shift in our critical attention from the *why does it happen?* to the *it happens?* of the sublime. Congruous with this is Geller's argument that:

> Lyotard turns to film [...] to demonstrate the way the singularity of events can be made to congeal with the force of time, very much like Butler's explanation of gender unity as a set of repeated acts that congeal over time. Cinema is usually edited temporally to force the set of images into a coherent narrative whole. Yet, cinema, as Lyotard argues in "Acinema," contains the potential to make time work against the drive towards coherent representation. This is because film operates along the lines of fantasy, bringing us closet to the "drive 'itself', the representation of absence. [355]

In a similar sense to which we can assert that the sublime is "useless" (as it cannot be turned into an object of understanding, knowledge or cognition), an event may be unusable to a system of knowledge, in that it may overwhelm and resist representation. Yet, despite this resistance and because of it, the event for Lyotard is not a nothing, but a no-thing which proceeds our models of conceptualisation:

> Events are conceived of here as energetic intensities that resist recuperation into utilities. A utility is, we say, something that is good for something and which can be used or used up. Thus, a utility belongs to a totality of relationships; it is something that has a certain function within a given system. The energetic intensity of what Lyotard calls 'events' makes them unpredictable and unstable, and hence they cannot be incorporated into a system: they are, in other word, of no use. As a consequence of its usefulness, a utility disappears into its function. In other words, the being of a utility is always already inhabited by negation. For example, a tree is useful insofar as it can be turned into something else – it's being a tree is negated and from that

[353] Geller, 'The Film-Work Does Not Think', *Gender after Lyotard*, p.142
[354] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p. 383.
[355] Geller, 'The Film-Work Does Not Think' in *Gender after Lyotard*, p.149.

> negation a table or a chair is made. These things are useful in turn insofar as they are directed towards a certain task and absorbed in it […] In contrast to a utility, which calls for negation, an event calls for affirmation and can only be affirmed, since it is singular and un-exchangeable.[356]

Lyotard's own refusal of turning events into utilities orbits Emmanuel Levinas' meta-ethical project of the Other, which is in many senses a radical overthrowal of the traditional subject-object relation of western philosophy that Lacan adheres to.[357] The shift here is of course from objectification towards passability. Yet, unlike some of the thinkers who engage with nihilism philosophically, such as Heidegger and even Nietzsche himself, Lyotard maintains that the nihilism of systems and representation is unavoidable, that there is no outside to it, no overcoming of its horizon. As to posit any outside to nihilism would only be to intensify it, to once again instate the division between *now* and a *beyond* which is the source of so much nihilism. Thus, apace Adorno's claim that the 'true nihilists are the ones who oppose nihilism with their more and more faded positivities, the ones who are thus conspiring with all extant malice, and eventually with the destructive principle itself. Thought honors itself by defending what is damned as nihilism.'[358] Lyotard I believe took up this demand, advocating for experience instead of mastery, affirmation not negation - the sensuous over the text.

[356] Crome and Williams, *The Lyotard Reader & Guide*, p.8.
[357] In *Deleuze and Fascism* however, the argument is made that Levinas's ethics of the other does not extend to certain groups, namely Palestinians. See Erin Manning 'Waltzing the Limit' in *Deleuze and Fascism*: *Security*: *war: aesthetics ed.* Brad Evans and Julian Reid (Abingdon, Routledge, 2013) p. 118.
[358] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 381.

Chapter Three: Critique of the Academic Economy

This chapter continues the research's critique of capitalist exchange and the defense of the second inhuman and the acinematic, but with a particular emphasis on what I have termed as an academic economy.[359] Moreover, this section gestures towards what some scholars have extracted from Lyotard's thinking on childhood and termed 'a-pedagogy'. To these ends, this chapter orbits questions including: what are we doing when we *write*[360] about film? How do we resist anti-ocularism in film theory? And, how do we think and write with the body?

Theory as fiction and an Academic genre

I will first consider Lyotard's position on the status of theory and its consolidation as a genre in Lyotard's thinking. In conversation with the philosopher Jean-Loup Thébaud, Lyotard questioned the status of theory, asserting '[b]ut I do wonder more and more: Is there a real difference between a theory and a fiction? After all, don't we have the right to present theoretical statements under the form of fictions, in the form of fictions? Not *under* the form, but *in* the form.'[361] Such a conception is not dissimilar to Jacques Rancière's notion of the documentary as a genre of fiction. In a 2017 interview, Ranciere asserted:

> [f]or me fiction doesn't mean the invention of imaginary beings but the creation of a certain structure of rationality, a structure for presenting facts, characters and situations, for connecting events, let's say. There is fiction everywhere, even in the news that we hear every day. So fiction in general is what creates a sense of reality [...] The question is not, "Is it real?," but: "What kind of reality is at play here?" It is not, "Is it real?," but: "How is it real? What does this kind of reality mean?"'[362]

[359] The academic economy I speak of is an abstract and figurative concept.
[360] My use here of 'write' is expansive and is informed by Spatz's notion of a what is so often called thinking is merely a particular form of thinking associated with writing.
[361] Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, p.5.
[362] Conversation held on 30 March 2017, at Minard Ghent, as part of the Courtisane Festival 2017 with Stoffel Debuysere. In the framework of the research project 'Figures of Dissent' (KASK / School of Arts Ghent, HoGent). A transcript of the interview is accessible here: https://www.sabzian.be/article/on-the-borders-of-fiction

That is to say, for Rancière, fiction includes the frameworks we implement and create in order to produce not just narrative, but also meaning.[363] As such, theory can be upheld as a fiction in this sense. Yet, if it is going to cohere as a legible and convincing fiction, theory must adhere to particular rules and include specific elements, thus Lyotard's expanded notion of mise-en-scène is at work here. In this vein, Lyotard writes in the section 'Economy of this writing' of *Libidinal Economy,* that 'the formal properties of a strict, that is to say an axiomatized, theoretical discourse: the most elementary of the rules which allow the establishment of these properties is binary exclusion: either a statement is acceptable, or it is not (in a multi-value calculus of statements, this meta-operator of exclusion continues to operate no less)'.[364] After this succinct descriptor of the mise-en scène of the academic text, Lyotard posits that 'the *theoretical genre*, which boasts the aforementioned formal properties. Let's recall its pulsional properties: like narrative-figurative discourse, it allows of an organic totality; but this is not situated on a reference, it is situated on the text itself; like abstraction, it requires the immobilization of its client; but it also requires his disaffection.'[365] Therefore, as explored previously in relation to film by way of acinema and capitalist exchange, things are deemed appropriate and of value for inclusion if they help achieve particular ends whether that is production, exchange or a particular effect. In relation to the theoretical genre, this could include statements which maintain a consistent tone and conform to the expectations of a particular style. With this said, the process of immobilisation mentioned by Lyotard requires further elucidation.

[363] Elsewhere Ranciere asserts: 'in general, "fiction" is not a pretty story or evil lie, the flipside of reality that people try to pass off for it. Originally, *fingere* doesn't mean "to feign" but "to forge". Fiction means using the means of art to construct a "system" of represented actions, assembled forms, and internally coherent signs.' Jacques Rancière, 'Marker and the Fiction of Memory' in *Film Fables,* p.158.
[364] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.244.
[365] Ibid., p.247.

Theory as immobilisation

In keeping with the incendiary tone of *Libidinal Economy*, Lyotard makes several ironic, but no less provocative assertions within the book regarding the entanglement of theory, jouissance and death. Chief amongst them is Lyotard's claim that '[t]heory is the *jouissance* of immobilization.'[366] What is meant by this exactly? Lyotard elucidates further that '[i]deally, a theoretical text is an *immobilized* organic body: satisfying the formal properties of consistency, saturation, independence of axioms and completeness as regards the domain of reference.'[367] In such a set-up, Lyotard characterises the theorist as a hunter who 'faces the things presented to him as immobile or immobilizing, as if he were in front of *prey*. Prey is an organic body prevented from movement: the envelope of live flesh turns silent and numb. The client's *jouissance* of this requires both its organicity and its death.'[368] In turn, the object and the theoretical text come together as an '*dispositif*: an organic body, unified and condemned to death through immobilization (the victim), onto which is connected, under the name of the client, and through the intermediary of an effaced, unrecognized medium, the Brownian motion of the partial pulsions.'[369] In other words then, things exist for Lyotard within theoretical discourse as dead, immobilised things rid of their materiality; their movements and vitality restricted. Yet, despite this Lyotard also maintains that 'signs are not only terms, stages, set in relation and made explicit in a trail of conquest; they *can also* be, indissociably singular and vain intensities in exodus.'[370] Or as Rodolphe Gasché argues: '[u]nderstood as events, phrases "do" things.'[371] Here Lyotard can be seen to be in agreement with Maurice Blanchot and Deleuze who both argue for the materiality of language. Blanchot

[366] Ibid., p.243.
[367] Ibid., p.244.
[368] Ibid., p.245.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.49.
[371] Gasché, 'Saving the Honor of Thinking: On Jean-François Lyotard' in *Minima Memoria*, p.28.

writes '[m]y hope lies in the materiality of language, in the fact that words are things, too, are a kind of nature – this is given to me and gives me more than I can understand. Just now the reality of words was an obstacle. Now it is my only chance.'[372] Meanwhile, on Deleuze's embrace of non-sense and language as matter, Helen Palmer asserts '[t]his affirmation of linguistic materiality consists of a shift in focus from the semantic content of the word to its material properties: a word's sound and shape are the most obvious and common examples. The word 'shift' is important. Deleuze and the futurists (both Italian and Russian) share a desire to liberate, radicalize and reconfigure language. The nature of this manipulation is at once both radically destructive and radically creative; it is based on a critique of reason and an ensuing celebration of language for its own sake.'[373]

Moreover, whilst having a different emphasis, assertions regarding the metaphorical death of things upon entering into discourse are not new, particularly within French thought. For example, Blanchot, whose influence stretches across various intellectual currents including post-structuralism and post-phenomenology, argued that a peculiar negation takes place in language.[374] Blanchot argues in his seminal essay 'Literature and the Right to Death' that in 'speech what dies is what gives life to speech; speech is the life of that death, it is "the life that endures death and maintains itself in it."'[375] Blanchot elucidates this process further, writing:

> [i]n a text dating from before *The Phenomenology*, Hegel, here the friend and kindred spirit of Hölderlin, writes: "Adam's first act, which made him master of the animals, was to give them names, that is, he annihilated them in their existence (as existing creatures)." Hegel means that from that moment on, the cat ceased to be a uniquely real cat and became an idea as well. The meaning of speech, then, requires that before

[372] Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death' in *The Work of Fire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 327.
[373] Helen Palmer, *Deleuze and Futurism*: *A Manifesto for Nonsense* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) vi-viii.
[374] Like Lacan, Blanchot was influenced by Kojeve's reading of Hegel and his labor of the negative elucidated in his lectures at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes between 1933 and 1939. See Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges In French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) p.57.
[375] Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death', p.327.

> any word is spoken, there must be a sort of immense hecatomb, a preliminary flood plunging all of creation into a total sea. God had created living things, but man had to annihilate them. Not until then did they take on meaning for him, and he in turn created them out of the death into which they had disappeared [...] and man was condemned not to be able to approach anything or experience anything except through the meaning he had to create.[376]

That is to say, what Blanchot wished to demonstrate is how the essence of things within language is not merely their deferral or différance, but the 'things nonexistence'[377] produced through negation. Giving the example of a cat, Blanchot writes, '[t]o name a cat is, if you like, to make it into a non-cat, a cat that has ceased to exist, has ceased to be a living cat, but this does not mean one is making it into a dog, or even a non-dog [...] the word "cat" is not only the nonexistence of the cat but a nonexistence made *word*, that is, a completely determined and objective reality.'[378] Yet, we ask: are we not always-already within a process of negation? Too deep and too far gone? *Of course, and we do not deny this.* In film, something material, whether that is a face or a rock, has been shot in accordance to the mise-en-scène of the filmmakers and other individuals (producers, cinematographers, gaffers and so on) to be placed amongst other images and sounds within the totality of a film. This film is then destined to take on another life as a commodity.[379] But just a commodity? No, not only a commodity for profit in an economy of capitalist exchange, but also an *object* of study and analysis in criticism, theory and academic economy and also an object of love, as we shall shortly explore. In turn, these criticisms, commentaries, analyses, and theories produced by good academics circulate the economies that are academic publishing. These papers become

[376] Blanchot is quoting from Kojève here. Moreover, a footnote elucidates further that Kojève 'in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* [...] demonstrates in a remarkable way how for Hegel comprehension was equivalent to murder.' Ibid. pp.322-3.
[377] Ibid., p.325.
[378] Ibid. Blanchot gives an alternative example in another passage: 'I say, "This woman." Holderlin, Mallarme, and all poets whose theme is the essence of poetry have felt that the act of naming is disquieting and marvelous. A word may give me its meaning, but first it suppresses it. For me to be able to say, "This woman," I must somehow take her flesh-and-blood reality away from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her. The word gives me the being, but it gives it to me deprived of being. The word is the absence of that being, its nothingness, what is left of it when it has lost being-the very fact that it does not exist.' p. 322.
[379] This description has greater credence with non-computer-generated images. Yet, even computer-generated images are produced to fit into a sequence and thus partake in a cinematic economy.

currency to satisfy University management and HR departments. They rush forth to the cry *publish or perish*...the academic transmutation of the Cartesian cogito. I publish therefore I am? *Yes, we are naïve, childish, but we are not prelapsarians or Platonists and do not dream of a world free from negation, representation and production.*[380] Lyotard explicates such a bind: [w]anting to promote oneself as partisan of the event, or to predispose oneself to the event, is still an ethical delusion. It is a property of the bestowal to dispossess us- one cannot predispose oneself to dispossession [...] One cannot cross over to the side of the primary processes: this is merely a secondary illusion.'[381] Lyotard notes the process of negation elucidated by Blanchot in *Discourse, Figure*, writing: 'Saussure does not cease to stress this very misrecognition in the order of language [*langage*]: the system language [*langage*] is what is "passive," unconscious, "involuntary," almost "fatal." [...] A generative passivity, then, for the negation that operates in the system, both outside and preceding the subject, encroaches on the latter's prerogative to act. The subject cannot experience this negation since it is inherent in his or her experience of language [*langage*]'.[382] Commentating on this argument by Lyotard, Peter Dews asserts '[i]f this distinction is accepted then any attempt to absorb the exteriority of the perceived world into the interiority of language – Lyotard's target is Hegel, but the argument applies equally to Derrida – must be seen as falling prey to a 'logophiliac presupposition'. 'It is all very well to affirm that everything is sayable,' suggests Lyotard, 'this is true; but what is not true is that the signification of discourse can gather up

[380] Arguably, this starting point of negation here is arbitrary, we could go back further and speak of a labor of the negative in relation to the materials crushed and processed to create the make-up on an actor's face. But why stop there? Why not start at the negation of the fertilisation which led to their birth. Or further back still, the big bang? But, as iterated earlier, this research is uninterested in origins, infinite regressions, pure experience or a world without negation. The question is rather, why particular negations instead of others? And why? And in whose and what name? Why not affirmation? For Williams, one of the main lessons of *Libidinal Economy* is the 'point will never be to eliminate political structures. The main concept of libidinal economy, dissimulation implies that structures are always necessary. But, equally, they are always open to the unpredictable occurrence of intensities. Libidinal economy is a strategy that seeks to loosen structures and to open them up to new possibilities defined as new connections with other structures through unpredictable occurrence of intensities defined as feelings and desires.' Williams, *Lyotard and the Political*, pp.138-9.
[381] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p.18.
[382]Ibid., pp.26-27.

all the sense of the sayable. One can say that the tree is green, but the colour will not have been put into the sentence.' Language may be seen as the *phenomenological*, but not as the *ontological* ground of the perceived world.'[383] In other words, whilst we may experience a lot of the world and ourselves as subjects in and through language, crucially the world itself is not language. Lyotard thus implores against the semiotic impulse to treat the world as merely a system of signs, decrying semiotics as nihilistic and a 'religious science *par excellence*'. As such, it is for Lyotard:

> haunted by the hypothesis that someone speaks to us in these givens and, at the same time, that its language, its competence, or in any case its performative capacity transcends us: the very definition of the unconscious we find in the boldest semioticians, Lacan, Eco. Thus the sign is enmeshed in nihilism, nihilism proceeds by signs; to continue to remain in semiotic thought is to languish in religious melancholy and to subordinate every intense emotion to a lack and every force to a finitude.[384]

One of the consequences for viewing the world in such a manner is 'material is immediately annihilated. Where there is a message, there is no material' only dematerialization'[385]. In turn, Lyotard asks 'is this dematerialization the equivalent of what capital does in matters of sensibility and affect? Is it also simply an abstraction of pieces of the pulsional band, its dissection [*decoupage*] into comparable and countable parts?'.[386] Such similarities between semiotics and capital will be explored explicitly shortly. Significantly then, discourse, language and theory can be seen to partake in such a process of producing meaning borne out of annihilating and immobilising singularities and materiality.[387] Yet, with this established, how does *jouissance* come into it? Famously in Lacanian theory *jouissance* designates enjoyment which goes *beyond* the pleasure principle which is socially regulated. Thus, it

[383] Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, p.142.
[384] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p. 48.
[385] Ibid., p. 43.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Whilst he figural wishes to work against such a procedure; 'discourse implies the domination of textuality over perception, conceptual representational over prereflexive presentation, rational coherence over the "other" of reason. It is the realm of logic, concepts, form, speculative reciprocity, and the symbolic. Discourse thus serves as the locus of what normally passes for communication and signification in which the materiality of signifiers is forgotten.' Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 564.

transgresses limits and has the status of an idea in the Kantian sense. This notion of excess is reflected in the commonplace decision to retain the term in translation, being *more than enjoyment* and subsequently without any equivalent in English.[388] Lyotard appropriates the term divesting it of some of its elements customary in its Lacanian usage including a split between a "masculine" and "feminine" jouissance which became the subject of critiques by feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous.[389] As we have seen, Lyotard accents the concept in various ways. In some instances, it denotes an intensity which is non-productive pace acinema:

> Adorno said that only truly great art is the making of fireworks: pyrotechnics would simulate perfectly the sterile consumption of energies in *jouissance*. Joyce grants this privileged position to fireworks in the beach sequence in *Ulysses*. A simulacrum, understood in the sense Klossowski gives it, should not be conceived primarily as belonging to the category of representation, like the representations which imitate pleasure; rather, is it to be conceived as a kinetic problematic, as the paradoxical product of the disorder of the drives, as a composite of decompositions.[390]

This form of jouissance is borne out in the glee of the child who strikes the match 'just for the fun of it'.[391] On the other hand, as traced earlier in relation to Lyotard's claims of the transformative effects of capital on the worker's body and the pleasure derived from this mutilation, there is a *jouissance* which is in kinship with sadism and repetition. It is in this sense I take up Lyotard's assertion that 'theory is the jouissance of immobilization.' Thus, re-joining Blanchot's thesis of the death of things in language with Lyotard's assertion that theory immobilises, theory is *necrophilic – it is the fucker of dead things,* to speak in the scandalous parlance of *Libidinal Economy*. *It is the trembling hand of king Midas, conferring critical value on everything it touches.*[392] Things become both *dead* and *useful* as objects

[388] Li-chun Hsiao 'Thanatos Gains the Upper Hand: Sadism, Jouissance, and Libidinal Economy' in *Concentric: Studies in English Literature and Linguistics* Vol. 29.1 (January 2003): (pp. 47-66.) p. 49.
[389] Jouissance is similarly key to their notion of *écriture feminine*.
[390] Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.35.
[391] Ibid., p.34.This phrase has inadvertently become a sort of maxim for this research.
[392] Williams for example gives a vampiric description of description of theory, writing: '(viewed libidinally) [it] takes pleasure in immobilising and sucking dry its prey through a repetition of the same.' Williams, *Lyotard and the Political*, p.42.

through their very inclusion within theoretical discourse, thus Lyotard's gleeful argument that what 'gives you a hard-on, theoreticians'[393] is immobilisation. Pursuing this argument further Lyotard intuits in theory the coalescence of repetition (i.e. legibility, mimesis and jouissance) and power, asserting:

> [b]ut it is the same thing with fucking; there is no assurance that these labours procure intensities, nor that intensities happen to occupy their work. Theory's pretension is similar to lover's demands: there ought to be clear signs; they may be equivocal, the demand is that they be legible, even if this requires a double reading. And it is clear that this legibility required by the erotic or the theoretical implies replication: signs are clear when, through repetition, they permit the inference of a syntax and a lexis, when they permit prediction and anticipation. The theoretical pretension is a pretension to power [*pouvoir*], like every sign-based demand for love.[394]

Seen as such, the desire to know, or what the documentary theorist Bill Nichols terms epistephilia, i.e., the pleasure derived from knowing, takes on another dimension.[395] But meaning is not solely the product of tragedy, vengeance and (non)perversion, but love too. Like that of the lepidopterist and taxidermist, theory is the love of the dead thing, maintained and enclosed in the framing of discourse.

The Orphic Gaze of Theory

One can take recourse to myth to elucidate the bind between language, love and things. Blanchot for example, continually returns to Orpheus who is 'guilty of impatience'[396] for turning and facing Eurydice. The cost of Orpheus's turning, seeing, knowing, is of course Eurydice dying her second death. How about another example. In Celine Sciamma's *Portrait of A Lady On Fire* which leans heavily upon the myth, there is a scene in which characters debate the status of Orpheus. One claims that Orpheus makes the decision of the *poet* not the

[393] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.243.
[394] Ibid., p. 257.
[395] See Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) p.178.
[396] Blanchot, 'Orpheus's Gaze' in *The Space of Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989) p.172.

lover, and wants the memory of Eurydice – wants to retain and hold onto the *idea* of Eurydice, not her flesh and blood. Thus, Orpheus chooses to turn and in doing so condemns Eurydice once more to death. The lover's choice would be not to turn, they maintain. *What are you suggesting with all of this? That the one who truly loves never looks? Never turns to annihilate Eurydice?* Perhaps. But that would be to suggest too much and not enough. To make a semiotic bed and lie in it.

The Narcissistic Gaze of Theory

How about another myth, another analogy, a different type of love? This time Narcissus the hunter, who's own gaze immobilises himself? Whose love traps himself in an unbreakable loop? Like Narcissus's gaze, Lyotard argues that theory is a closed system, writing:

> The closed body of the theoretical text gives rise, as a model, to this same *jouissance*. Its tautologous perfection gives rise to the enthusiasm of fidelity in replication. Ideally at least, it goes well beyond biological reproduction, where effects of similarity due to the mixing of genetic codes are not only not excluded, but are inevitable. The organic theoretical body fulfils its mimetic function through parthogenesis. There is an affinity between the theoretical and the *virginal*. The psychoanalysts will say: the theoretical implies the denial of sexual difference. But in our eyes, this difference is suspiciously semiotic. We say: it implies the denial of disparities, of the heterogeneities of stases and distances which energy travels through; it implies the denial of polymorphism. It needs a form, a good proper form.[397]

This closed body returns us not only to the notion of a regulated body whose totality is well regulated pace the mise-en-scène and acinema. But also, Lyotard's idiosyncratic appropriation of Leibniz's monad, a structure which is hypothetically self-contained and needs nothing from the outside such as difference and contradiction. Adorno wrote in his *Minima Moralia* that '[t]here is no love that is not an echo'.[398] But if this love is repetitious,

[397] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.248.
[398] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans E.F.N Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974) p.217. Commenting on Adorno's line, Alexander Garćia Düttmann writes '[i]f one takes echoing to be standardized, deceptive, or evidence of a spell, one will probably hear the gnomic phrase "Echo reconciles" as an apodictic statement'. Alexander Garćia Düttmann '"Echo Reconciles"' in Poetic Critique: Encounters with Art and

mimetic... are we to abandon this way of loving? *You are saying theory is deathly, theory kills, love kills, theory immobilises, love and theory is a citadel of mimesis. We get it, so go on physician, heal thy self! Your black pot boileth over. Each grapheme a beam sharper than the last.* Yet for Lyotard, this is only the half of it. Theory is not beyond redemption for Lyotard (and if it was, who are we to say so?) Lyotard argues that '[w]as this what we had to learn: that the movement towards coldness and death is burning hot? that intensities are not tied to 'life', but may be mobile or fixed on no matter what theme or piece of the great patchwork, including those which, like theoretical discourse, demand extreme coldness and dead replication? We are not saying that this is an error, a perversion, an illusion, an ideology. If mimesis gives you a hard-on [*vous fait bander*], gentlemen, who are we to object?'[399] Theory too can be a site of intensities, of difference and the new for Lyotard. In this vein, he continues:

> [n]othing enters the system that wasn't there already, that doesn't have its double, that is to say its model. This mimetic relation encourages dreams of the Augustinian *similitude*. They differ only as metaphor differs from metonymy, as dependence upon a primary model, received, revealed, transcendent, deviates from the condition of possibility (axiomatic) that the theoretician *gives himself* as the transcendental authority judging every new statement.[400]

As explicated in the reading dossier, this doubling belongs to what Deleuze terms the Image of thought (which includes *recognition*), a mode of reason and knowledge in which things are posited as delimited and are merely versions of a type or an *Idea* in a platonic sense. As established there, recognition for Deleuze, brings things back to a supposed originary point or model. 'Such is the world of *representation* in general' he writes, '[w]e said above that representation was defined by certain elements: identity with regards to concepts, opposition with regard to the determination of concepts, analogy with regard to judgement, resemblance

Literature ed. Jan Lietz, Jutta Müller-Tamm, Michel Chaouli, Simon Schleusener (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021) p.63.

[399] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.250.

[400] Ibid., p.251.

with regard to objects.'[401] For Deleuze, one of the consequences of the Image of thought and *thinking as recognition* is that we fail to encounter and account for the new. Its mode is: this looks like this so it must be true, with the true being an unchanging thing already established. Or, this is not this, so cannot be included as knowledge. In such a process of thinking, things are reduced to the ratio of their sameness to other things. For example, a chair is a chair only in that it shares characteristics of a universal idea of a chair, and as such, the chair's difference is negated.[402] Furthermore, Deleuze argues that this so-called Image of thought and reason as recognition, treats the world as something which is readily amenable to representation, which we as *thinking subjects* are at the centre of.[403] As traced in **Chapter 2**, this problematic is taken up in Lyotard's thinking through the aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime which designate two ways of accounting for the new in regards to judgement in aesthetics as well as in the political. Whilst the beautiful reduces the new to pre-existing ideas and criteria, the sublime necessitates the creation of idioms which would do justice to the new and surpasses previously held notions. Yet, as Lyotard gleefully asserts, if one finds pleasure in the return upon return, or jouissance in repetition, mimesis and the pre-determined, 'who are we to object?'[404] Not I. However, as Lyotard writes at a much later juncture in his thought: '[i]f humanity does not preserve the inhuman region in which we can meet this or that which completely escapes the exercise of rights, we do not merit the rights that we have been recognized. Why would we have the right to freedom of expression if we had nothing to say but the already said?'[405] Such a freedom is linked to the differend as Rodolphe Gasché writes: '[r]ather than proceeding to established rules, thinking is properly

[401] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.174.
[402] Yet, the concern here is not only chairs, but images too.
[403] Deleuze's charge is also that we take things for granted in numerous ways; we do not put into question particular concepts and ideas, and we see things just as things to objectify, critique and exchange as commodities.
[404] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.250.
[405] Lyotard 'The General Line' in *Postmodern Fables*, p. 121.

thinking only in the absence of preestablised rules. Its fate, therefore, is necessarily linked to the differend – that is, to the task of phrasing what cannot be said.'[406] Moreover, one of Deleuze's principal targets in his critique of the Image of thought is Descartes and his famous presupposition, *cogito, ergo sum*, which universalises the faculty of thinking to all subjects. As such, thinking (and a particular type of thinking) is taken as a given and self-evident.[407] That is, following Platonic thought, thinking is not only naturally allied to the good and the true, but these ideas of goodness and truth are to be found in a suprasensible realm (the realm of forms) not in our world as per the nihilistic splitting of the world into two spheres elucidated previously. Lyotard's fable of solar death, pace his thinking on the inhuman should be taken up in a similar manner. That is, of seeking to bring into question ideas of the human and the human as a thinking subject which are taken for granted. *You have spoken of poets and lovers in different intonations and given numerous examples, and yet, you wish us to permit you to indulge in another?* Deleuze writes: 'In very general terms, we claim that there are two ways of a creative power, capable of overturning all orders and representations in the name of a creative power, capable of overturning all orders and representations in order to affirm Difference in the state of permanent revolution which characterizes eternal return; and that of the politician, who is above all concerned to deny that which "differs", so as to conserve or prolong an established historical order, or to establish a historical order which already calls forth in the world the forms of its representation. The two may coincide in particularly agitated moments, but they are never the same.'[408] Returning to the discussion of the status of Orpheus' gaze, what if Orpheus is the poet in this sense? That he wishes to both

[406] Gasché, 'Saving the Honor of Thinking: On Jean-François Lyotard' in *Minima Memoria,* p. 48.
[407] Greg Lambert explains concisely: 'In other words, I must already have an idea of what thinking looks like in order to recognize my own subjective process, as distinct from the processes of memory and perception, and then to be able to communicate a sign of this process to others in a form that corresponds to their own image as well. Intrinsically, therefore, thinking is already bound up with an image that, in turn, provides the conditions for producing the signs of recognition and the expression of thinking.' Greg Lambert, *In Search of a New Image of Thought: Gilles Deleuze and Philosophical Expressionism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) p.1.
[408] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.64.

keep Eurydice as flesh and blood and see her in that moment – what if he wishes to transgress the law? That he thinks his love for Eurydice could defeat and overcome the pronouncement of the gods? Does he remain in hubris? Can the theorist have their cake and eat it? As traced by Williams, Deleuze presents one way out through the tactic of affirmation which 'transforms the activity of negation into something positive.'[409] Being that which differs rather than opposed to negation, affirmation 'is destruction by chance, not by necessity; it is negation by differing and multiplicity, not by opposition.'[410]

Critique as mastery

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that every theory and critique, is in need of an object.

Dew writes that in 1972, Lyotard concludes:

> that the very concept of critique implies an unjustifiable claim to pre-eminence over what is criticized: 'critical activity is an activity of selection: a certain experience, a certain declaration, a certain work, a certain libidinal position is displayed in its insufficiency, denied therefore, seen from the standpoint of its limit and not of its affirmativity, challenged to match up to the object of desire of the critic, in other words, to infinity, to universality, to necessity. . . .from where does the critic draw his power over what is criticized? he *knows* better? He is the professor, the educator? so he is universality, the university, the state, the city, leaning over childhood, nature, singularity, the dubious, in order to raise it to his own level? the confessor and God helping the sinner to be saved?[411]

Lyotard's concern here is not only questioning the legitimacy of authorities, but of 'displacing or complicating Platonism, of unveiling the pragmatic principles by which it plays its game of truth [...] to expose the machinery and machinations by which that discourse that is philosophy produces itself as a true discourse, a discourse of truth, on truth, rests on an appeal to sophistry'.[412] Therefore, what Deleuze and Lyotard's philosophies both

[409] Williams, *Lyotard and the Political*, p.50.
[410] Ibid. p. 53.
[411] Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, p. 246.
[412] Crome, 'Lyotard and the Art of Seduction' in *Acinemas*, p.93.

agitate for, to various degrees, is the abandonment of the image of thought in order to think the image. Their work calls for the departure from modes in which the *framework*, recognition and representational thinking takes precedence other the thing. As seen in Lyotard's declaration that 'the fundamental problem is the exclusion and foreclosure of all that is judged unrepresentable because non-recurrent'[413], pace Deleuze's critique of the Image of thought– the question becomes; how do we account for difference and the new without recourse to *Ideas*, the already-known and authority? How do we proceed without the figure of the master to explain everything away, no originary (platonic) representations or an aesthetic of the beautiful to refer things back to?[414] To go forward, as Lyotard wrote in the catalogue for *Les Immatériaux* exhibition, with '[n]o heroes, no myths'[415][416]?

Capital and theory are cousins

The academy and capital share numerous similarities for Lyotard, namely both are objectifying forces in which one reduces things to objects of knowledge, the other to commodities. Writing *vis-à-vis* art criticism, Lyotard contends:

> [m]aterials to dematerialize and to *make signify*. Do you really believe, say the white thinkers, that the Nôh actor, moving forward with his feet together, sliding over the stage floor as though he were not moving at all, means nothing? It is a sign, it is in the place of something else, there is a code, and the addresses know it, or in any case, even if it is unconscious, it exists, and we semiologists, Jesuits, Stanleys, conquerors,

[413] Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.39.
[414] As previously explored; something already known cannot be experienced as new, a notion that can be extended into the realm of interpretation: 'Why does Lyotard describe the inclusion of *Man's Fate* among the works upon which all French students seeking higher education would be tested as an "embalming"? In effect, it produces a market for interpretations that try to wrap up (*emballer*) an author's work for those seeking a reliable and definitive guide that provides rules for future readings- readings that would pass the test, as it were. Such attempts at authoritative interpretations attempt to fix the *corpus* in a static condition, a fixing assumed to be preservative, assuring the fabled literary immortality. Yet, by providing authoritative rules for reading, it assures instead that the work will not have been read'. Kent Still, 'Introduction: Minima Memoria' in *Minima Memoria*, xix.
[415] Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London: Penguin, 2014) p.158.
[416] Edward Said was attuned to the circularity which characterises myth, writing in *Orientalism* '[f]or a myth does not analyse or solve problems. It represents them as already analysed and solved; that is, it presents them as already assembled images, in the way a scarecrow is assembled from bric-a-brac and then made to stand for a man.' Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 312.

> we will only have triumphed when we are in a possession of this code and are able to *remake it, simulate* it – the model of all semiology is not *The Purloined Letter*, it is *The Gold-Bug*.[417]

This is a process further explicated by Readings who writes, 'capitalism is characterized in terms of the law of exchangeability; the primary operation of capitalism is one of commodification, of the reduction of materiality to exchangeable objects.'[418] Such a process mirrors the procedure of enlightenment rationality turning everything posited into a secure object of knowledge for greater certainty and truth, of placing and reducing the sensuous, the image and that which is outside of language into a system of discourse *à la* theory.[419] Meanwhile, as Crome and Williams argue, the move which renders the world 'knowable', is at the same time that which 'devalues' and 'it is this that constitutes its nihilism.'[420] Vincent Descombes, who like Lyotard, was involved in the political and philosophical milieu of Socialisme ou Barbarie, noted the curious and rare consensus between Hegel and Heidegger who both believed 'the pursuit of a truth has the character of absolute certainty marks the inauguration of modern philosophy.'[421] A conviction which Woodward further elucidates by way of Manfred Frank: 'This desire for truth as absolute certainty is the ideal of Enlightenment rationalism, neatly encapsulated by Frank: ''Enlightenment" means to transform anything merely posited, anything merely believed, into objects of secure knowledge.'[422] Of course academia and the university (from the Latin *universitas* and *universus,* meaning simultaneously the whole and the act of bringing together) could be seen

[417] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.44.
[418] Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*, p.102
[419] As Williams elaborates further 'theory is co-extensive with a certain function within capitalism – the function that aims to identify a thing in order to reproduce it: 'To think something, is to be able to think it, to produce it and reproduce it. There is no first time, repetition is primary since it is included in the very constitution of the element: concept, commodity. If it is not repeatable, equally exchangeable, it is not an element of the system'. The purity of theory and its concepts is then ruined by the libidinal and economic aspects it conceals within.' Williams, *Lyotard and the* Political, p.42.
[420] Crome and Williams, '*Introduction: Philosophy'* in *The Lyotard Reader and Guide,* p.28
[421] Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans by L. Scott-Fox and J.M Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) p.1.
[422] Woodward, *Nihilism in Postmodernity*, p.16

to be very much a part of the accumulation of knowledge, or previously some slow march by the enlightenment towards epistemological monism. Though as intuited by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*[423] in his tracing of the changing status of knowledge, if a monist spirit remains it is perhaps conditioned more than ever by commodification and instrumental reason, particularly in education, rather than some epistemological idealism which seems increasingly more naïve.

For Lyotard, both theory and capital are characterised by repetition, '[c]apital is also mimetic, commodities producing commodities, that is to say, being exchanged for commodities, the same commuted into the same according to an immanent standard, Sraffa's, for example. If 'knowledge' can become a force of production, as Marx said, it is because it always has been, and is, insofar as it is the construction of identities and systems for their reproduction. Capitalist production is this construction of the conditions of repetition-capacity [*pouvoir*]: to produce in order to produce, to sell in order to sell, series, chains, standards, etc.'[424] Moreover, as previously explored by way of Narcissus, theory, Lyotard maintains 'dreams of what an ill-formed expression would be only to dispel the danger. Innovation is allowed only insofar as it will give rise to the repetition of the theoretical model as a self-immobilizing organism. (Just as capital takes new quantities or qualities of energy into account only insofar as it can repeat its axiomatic of equal exchanges on them.)'[425] Yet, with this said, there remains for Lyotard a key difference between theory and capital. Whilst 'the relationship is close, capital is as old as theory, as old as the West in matters of the determination of identities. Some objections, however: capital does not stop, whereas theoretical discourse tends towards its immobilization; capital is also an elusive, perverse body, theoretical

[423] 'The scenario of the computerization of the most highly developed societies allows us to spotlight (though with the risk of excessive magnification) certain aspects of the transformation of knowledge and its effects on public power and civil institutions'. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 7.
[424] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.250.
[425] Ibid., p.251.

discourse closes itself up into a beautiful organic body: don't these propositions highlight disparities, making the analogy impossible?'[426] In other words, in the parlance of Lyotard's aesthetics, theory wishes to be beautiful, whilst capital desires to be sublime.

[426] Ibid.

Conclusion? The Child, or inhuman all too inhuman

Throughout this research, I have explored how Lyotard critiques and complicates notions of mastery, exchange and meaning, whilst defending difference, singularities, alterity, matter and heterogeneity through various ideas such as the figural, the inhuman, acinema, the sublime and the libidinal.[427] Importantly, this is borne out of an ethical position for Lyotard in which the aesthetic, the political and the just are perpetual sites of struggle and negotiation without end or unequivocal rules, measures or laws to take recourse to.[428]

Significantly, a key aspect of Lyotard's apologia of alterity pace the inhuman is *childhood*, speaking of it as a debt 'which we never pay off. But it is enough not to forget it in order to resist it and perhaps, not to be unjust. It is the task of writing, thinking, literature, arts, to venture to bear witness to it.'[429] Yet, how can we be indebted to childhood? Firstly, Lyotard wishes to complicate the commonplace notion that childhood is merely a developmental phase one passes through, reconfiguring it as a figure which persists and haunts the humanist's conception of the human and systems more generally. In this sense, it refuses Christianity's well-known plea to do away with 'childish things' in 1 Corinthians, 13:11.[430] He asserts, 'it is a matter of traces of an indetermination, a childhood, persisting up to the age

[427] Emine Sarikartal notes a congruity between some of these concepts positing: 'the figural and the libidinal have in common their insistence on difference, on disorder, as a fundamental element that has a constitutive relation with the regulated system or the structure. With the concept of paganism, as well as the post-modern and the differend, Lyotard is pursuing the same idea in a different manner in forthcoming years: the constitutive negativity of the disorder does not underline the idea of unchaining and unbinding (as it does according to the logic of primary process expressed by the figural or the libidinal), but it points out the idea of plurality and minority. One can thus say that Lyotard is passing from a libidinal reading of disorder to a 'minoritarian' one.' Emine Sarikartal in 'Childhood and Education in Jean-François Lyotard' in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2020 Vol, 52:1, pp. 88-97, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2019.1605899. p.92.

[428] This is contra the dominant conception of the political and justice in western thought since Plato in which 'the problem of politics consists only in observing the correct model, which the model of the Good, in fashioning the human community. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same principle is to be found in the political philosophies of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and modernity.' Lyotard, 'Time Today' in *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, p. 279.

[429] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.7.

[430] New King James Version.

of adulthood.'[431] Such a conceptualisation of childhood rejects the temporality which characterises modernist understandings of progress and emancipation, which as Emine Sarikartal writes 'suppose that the human spirit is immature in itself and should be shaped or formed by a dialectical process, upon which it would build its autonomy.'[432] In other words, such conceptions of the human posit that we pass from a state of ignorance to one of sophistication, freedom and power. Lyotard outlines this typical movement in the introduction to *The Inhuman*:

> If humans are born human, as cats are born cats (within a few hours), it would not be . . . I don't even say desirable, which is another question, but simply possible to educate them. That children have to be educated is a circumstance which only proceeds from the fact that they are not completely led by nature, not programmed. The institutions which constitute culture supplement this native lack. What shall we call human in humans, the initial misery of their childhood, or their capacity to acquire a 'second' nature which, thanks to language, makes them fit to share in communal life, adult consciousness and reason? That the second depends on and presupposes the first is agreed by everyone. The question is only that of knowing whether this dialectic, whatever name we grace it with, leaves no remainder.[433]

In other words, we are not born as rational subjects in the humanist's sense, but rather inhuman and therefore must undergo a process of becoming human through socialisation, culture, education and so on. In such a process of maturation or *becoming human*, one supposedly overcomes the condition of childhood.[434] Yet, crucially childhood for Lyotard designates not just 'as the rationalists have it, an age deprived of reason', but a 'condition of being *affected* at a time when we do not have the means – linguistic and representational – to name, identify, reproduce, and recognize what it is that is affecting us. By childhood, I mean

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[431] Ibid., p.3.
[432] Sarikartal, 'Childhood and Education in Jean-François Lyotard', p.94.
[433] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p.3.
[434] 'This theme of childhood recurs in the idea or the ideology of emancipation. Born children, our tasks would be to enter into full possession of ourselves. Master and *possessor*, as Descartes put it, thus insisting on the act of seizure, an act to be carried out on the set of existing things (called nature). But master and possessor of what *in us*, if we are fully emancipated? Would some childhood remain, after childhood? Something unappropriated after appropriation has carried out its act of seizure so that we have becomes owners in our own right? Kant defines Enlightenment as the emergence of mankind from its self-imposed immaturity' Lyotard, 'The Grip (*Mainmise)*' in *Political Writings* trans Bill Readings & Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) pp.148-9.

the fact we are born before we are born to ourselves. And thus we are born of others, but also born to others, delivered into the hands of others without any defenses. We are subjected to their *mancipium'*.[435] Therefore, what Lyotard speaks of as Childhood is a movement or *happening* of dispossession, hence associations with the unconscious and the sublime in which our faculties of reason, representation and identification are overwhelmed, disarmed or rendered useless.[436] Furthermore, as the figure of 'childhood is the time of the singular and indeterminate event' for Lyotard as Sarikartal elucidates, it 'cannot be situated in a chronology of life, nor sublated by its histories. It is elusive not seizable, even if it does not pass.'[437] That is to say, there is something about childhood, something inhuman, that resists being recuperated into discourse and systems. Sarikartal elaborates an aspect of this haunting:

> childhood in Lyotard's late writings becomes especially linked up with the feeling, the affect, the pathos. Therefore it is an aesthetic conception of childhood, since according to Lyotard the term 'aesthetic' refers directly to *aisthesis*, the Greek notion of sensation in contrast to *noesis*, intellection. Thus, the tension between the sensible and the intelligible, the indeterminate and the systematic, that we find in Lyotard's texts since *Discourse, Figure* is not lost but pursued in various forms. Indeed, in his final writings, Lyotard conceives infantia as a silent feeling that haunts the articulated discourse, which attempts to put it away.[438]

That is to say, being on the side of the sensuous, childhood is that which is both other to discourse and what discourse and systems feed upon, with Lyotard elaborating: 'The capacity to feel pleasure and pain, affectivity, *aisthèsis*, is independent of its possible articulation…. This time before the logos is called infantia'.[439] Hence 'why Lyotard describes childhood in terms of debt. The debt of childhood is never erased, never paid off, because there is no common measure between childhood as alterity and system as identity.'[440]

[435] Ibid., p.149.
[436] Lyotard writes: '[A]n 'infancy,' thus, which would not be a period of the life cycle, but an incapacity to represent and bind a certain something" Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, p. 17.
[437] Sarikartal, 'Childhood and Education in Jean-François Lyotard', p.95.
[438] Ibid., p.93.
[439] Lyotard, 'The Affect-Phrase' in *The Lyotard Reader and* Guide, p.109.
[440] Sarikartal, 'Childhood and Education in Jean-François Lyotard', p.95.

Against Mastery

Moreover, there is another sense of Lyotard's conceptualisation of childhood which is instructive here: namely its designation as something other to mastery and exchange. Paradoxically, Lyotard's iteration of childhood calls for patience. Yet, as Karin Fry notes in their elucidation of childhood in Lyotard's later thought, the form of patience Lyotard agitates for is one that refuses instrumentalisation and pragmatism. Fry asserts, '[w]hile the adult seeks practical answers quickly, the child has less pragmatic concerns. The demand for patience in the philosopher may not fit well with the need to be "child-like", since children typically lack the patience which Lyotard is describing. Yet, Lyotard's concern with childhood and patience is strongly connected to an openness and willingness to explore without a pragmatic goal in mind, which many adults lack.'[441] In framing patience in such a way, Lyotard charges the dominant conception of rationality in western thought with impatience, as seen in 'Time Today':

> we must distinguish two ways of assuming the questioning, according as the stress is or is not placed on the urgency of the reply. The principle of reason is the way of questioning which rushes to its goal, the reply. It involves a sort of impatience in the single presupposition that in any case one can always find a 'reason' or a cause for every question. Non-western traditions of thought have a quite different attitude. What counts in their manner of questioning is not at all to determine the reply as soon as possible, to seize and exhibit some object which will count as the cause of the phenomenon in question. But to be and remain questioned by it, to stay through meditation responsive to it, without neutralizing by explanation its power of disquiet.[442]

Although Lyotard has Judaism in mind, he also sees similar understandings of time exercised in the thought of Levinas, Derrida and Deleuze which all demand openness, passibility and are attuned to indeterminacy.[443] Therefore, whilst the reply designates that which is

[441] Karin Fry, 'Lyotard and the Philosopher Child' in *Childhood & Philosophy*, Vol 10, No. 20, 2014, (pp. 233-246) p. 243
[442] Lyotard, 'Time Today' in *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, p. 278.
[443] Ibid.

articulated in discourse and speech as a response to an event or *aisthesis* in order to produce meaning and exercise mastery, to think for Lyotard is to be disturbed and to listen and think through and 'question everything, including thought, and question, and the process.[444] To question requires that something happen that reason has not yet known. In thinking, one accepts the occurrence for what it is: 'not yet' determined. One does not prejudge it, and there is no security. Peregrination in the desert.'[445] As such, one remains in the site of *infantia* and childhood when one experiences something but is both without the capacity to articulate this affect in discourse, and resists the urge to master.[446][447] One of the consequences of allying philosophy to childhood is to 'avoid an understanding of philosophy grounded in technological rationality in which practical mastery is the goal. For Lyotard, philosophy is fully political by providing a small voice against the loud and overwhelming push toward practicality, efficiency, and the discourse of capitalism.'[448] In other words, to philosophise for Lyotard is not to accumulate knowledge, but to be in a state of receptivity and questioning hence Lyotard's assertion that '[c]hildhood is the monster of philosophers. It is also their accomplice. Childhood tells them that the mind is not given. But that it is possible'[449], in turn, rethinking the status of the philosopher as the philosopher king as the master of knowledge

[444] Lyotard's interview 'Resisting the Discourse of Mastery' provides an instructive discursive presentation of his position on mastery. He asserts for example: 'that system of questioning and answering in order to find a system of answers. This is mastering, to make language work exclusively for answering, which is a very perverse notion of language.' Olson and Lyotard, 'Resisting a Discourse of Mastery', p. 405.
[445] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p. 74.
[446] Similarly, regarding the figure of the intellectual Lyotard asserts: 'There ought no longer to be 'intellectuals', and if there are any, it is because they are blind to this new fact in Western history since the eighteenth century: there is no universal subject-victim, appearing in reality, in whose name thought could draw up an indictment that would be at the same time a 'conception of the world''. Lyotard, 'Tomb of the Intellectual' in *Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) pp. 6-7.
[447] Despite these good intentions, as Gary A. Olson notes in his introduction to his interview with Lyotard: despite Lyotard's campaign against mastery and certitude he himself fails to escape such a discourse in this interview. He uses strong declarative sentences and is very definite in his views. Words such as precisely (which occurs nineteen times), impossible (fourteen times), obvious, and exactly saturate his discourse. Often he declares, "it's true that," and once he says, "There is no argument. There is no doubt." Such language is incommensurate with that of someone who insists that we must escape traditional, patriarchal discourse.' Olson and Lyotard, 'Resisting a Discourse of Mastery, p.393.
[448] Fry, 'Lyotard and the Philosopher Child', p. 235.
[449] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained*, p. 100. As many have pointed out, the original French title of the book translates as The Postmodern Explained to Children.

per its platonic incarnation, in which the goal is to return to the realm of forms and transcend this world[450]. An integral part of achieving transcendence is freeing oneself from the temptations and things of this world, the flesh, the sensations of the body, community, energetics, the libidinal, even love, to become wise. However, not all love is dismissed by Plato such as 'platonic love'[451], whilst '[t]rue love is a meditation on 'ultimate things'[452]. *Here you go again, speaking of love*. Yet, what are the problems with the asceticism demanded by Plato? What concerns Lyotard (and this is not exclusive to Platonism) is that it privileges a particular conception of freedom which is guaranteed through knowledge, writing:

> [e]mancipation consists of establishing oneself in the full possession of knowledge, will, and feeling, in *providing oneself* with the rule of knowledge, the law of willing, and the control of emotions. The emancipated ones are the persons or things that owe nothing to anyone but themselves: Freed from all debts to the other.[453]

This description of autonomy given by Lyotard borders on the grand solipsism of the monad explored pace the inhuman and in *Don't Drown in Me*. In other words, that which is indivisible, self-sufficient and with no need for the outside and others is 'a rationality [that] does not deserve its name if it denies its part in the open passibility and uncontrolled creativity there is in most languages, including the cognitive' for Lyotard.[454] Does an audio-visual approach help us stay on the side of aisthesis and the second inhuman (that of childhood) and avoid this rationality, instrumentalisation and mastery? Not necessarily, there are no guarantees. Why then dedicate oneself to the impractical such as philosophy as

[450] In this vein, Fry writes: '[t]he idea that philosophy is a humble witness to the lack of meaning and the need to name it contrasts sharply with the idea of the philosopher as master of knowledge.' Fry, 'Lyotard and the Philosopher Child', p. 235.
[451] Whilst in contemporary parlance, platonic love has gained a positive sense, particularly in regards to thinking heteronormativity and modern friendship, such an appraisal belies its original metaphysical thrust; that one must free oneself from. Or as Julian Young writes '[p]latonic love is a particular form of the philosophical life and, as such, the beginning of a return from exile.' Julian Young, *The Death of God and The Meaning of Life* (Oxford, Routledge: 2007) p.17.
[452] Julian Young, *The Death of God and The Meaning of Life*, p. 18.
[453] Lyotard, 'The Grip' in *Political Writings*, p.150.
[454] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p. 73.

Lyotard defines it? To the impractical concepts like acinema? Perhaps it lies in the disjuncture between what Fry identifies as the crucial difference between reflection and theory in Lyotard's thought[455]; one denies instrumental reason and the devaluation of the sensual, whilst the other performs it. Lest we forget that Lyotard maintained that theory 'reeks of monotheism and accounting'[456] due to their imbrication with 'universal discourses that seek to ground themselves hierarchically and place their discourse above all others, such as in the case of Platonic discourse, or the sciences. Theory of this type demands mature experts [...] While theoretical knowledge demands memorization of facts and other practical skills, the resistances to philosophy involve putting aside the demand for practicality.'[457] Such a notion of uselessness of philosophy is explored in Lyotard's recounting of Socrates's discussion with Alcibiades in which philosophical wisdom, like childhood and the acinematic, is revealed to be something which cannot be exchanged.[458] Call it ill-advised, foolish, minimal, pyric or pyrrhic then, but impracticality becomes a means of resistance against mastery and capitalist imperatives of results, efficiency and performativity. Therefore, what are we doing when we write about film? What is Lyotard's lesson? Suggestion? Gesture? Challenge? Imperative vis-à-vis the world and film? These, I feel, are not the appropriate words and phrases for it. Yet, with this said, Lyotard is not advocating for a bilderverbot – one which forbids the production of theory, nor for the total abandonment of the study of signs[459] and symbolism, but a call to think, as 'thinking' for Lyotard, 'is not

[455] Fry, 'Lyotard and the Philosopher Child', p.241.
[456] Jean-Michel Durafour, 'Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction' in *Acinema*, p.17.
[457] Fry, 'Lyotard and the Philosopher Child', p.241.
[458] For Lyotard like Socrates, wisdom is not possession. He writes '[f]or Socrates, the neutralization of Alcibiades' logic is the sole aim in view; for this neutralizing would, if it succeeded, mean that Alcibiades has realized wisdom is not the object of an exchange, not because it is never sure of itself, is always lost and always needs to be found again, the presence of an absence, especially because it is itself an awareness of the exchange, a fully aware exchange, an awareness that there is no object, but only an exchange. Socrates seeks to trigger this reflection by suspending Alcibiades' logic, which takes wisdom to be a having, to be a thing, a *res*, the reifying logic of Alcibiades and also of the Athenians.' Lyotard, 'Why Desire' in *Why Philosophize* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013) p.34.
[459] This point in made clear by Williams who asserts: 'Lyotard argues that dissimulation operates as a counter to the structuralist claim that any occurrence, linguistic or otherwise, takes place in a meaningful logical structure.

mastering an object but begins with the ignorance of its object in order to find it.'[460] As such, thinking becomes for Lyotard, as previously traced, a vertiginous task without heroes and myths, no grand intellectual, expert master to explain and diagnose everything away. No originary (platonic) representations, guides, aesthetic of the beautiful or criteria to refer things back to. The shift here is crucial; it calls for affirmation, not negation and emphasises that '*being in the world* is more important than *knowing the world*.'[461] It is a call to remain a student, a child, forever.[462]

Listen then. Look and feel for a moment. Do you hear the sizzle of the match? The crackle, the hiss, the bubbling of the wood? Just for the fun of it? '[t]hat's it, yes, yes, yes, yes.'[463] Just for the fun of it.

In other words, he seeks to oppose the view that any event is a signifier, the meaning or, more properly, the signified of which can be analysed to a wider structure of signifiers and signifieds. Everything must then take its place in a pre-given logical system that regulates the ways in which meaning emerges. The nature of this counter is not to deny the possibility of analysing an event in this way, but to claim that it is also possible to look at it in another way that is not consistent with a pre-given system. Thus there is not an opposition between sense and the senseless, but a more complex relation of senses, matter and affects [...] This opposition to meaning does not necessarily have to take place in the context of poststructuralism'. Williams, *Lyotard and the Political*, p.44.

[460] Sarikartal, 'Childhood and Education in Jean-François Lyotard', p.94.

[461] Roland Barnett, 'Recapturing the Universal in the University' in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol 37:6, pp. 785-797 (2005) p. 795.

[462] How is this achieved? One such tactic outlined by Williams is active passivity. They write: [a]ctive passivity, in the sense of a strategy designed to let things affect one unconsciously, is a logical conclusion of the drift away from the subject and from systematic control.' (Williams, *Lyotard and the Political*, p.62.)

[463] Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.262.

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