A Companion to
Contemporary Art
since 1945

Edited by

Amelia Jones

Blackwell
Publishing

Imagine There's No Image (It's Easy If You Try): Appropriation in the Age of Digital Reproduction

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> *When art becomes independent, depicts its world in dazzling colors, a moment of life has grown old and it cannot be rejuvenated with dazzling colors. It can be evoked only as a memory.*
>
> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1967, section 188

The Politics of the Artifact

Displayed on two plasma screens approximately 40 inches high by 48 inches wide, American artist Bill Viola's *Silent Mountain* (2001; Figure 26.1) depicts a man and woman whose bodily gestures convey a spectrum of emotion from agony to ecstasy. While the emotional pitch is heightened through theatrical gestures, other factors are contrastingly placid: the actors are clothed in common street wear, placed against a mute background, and the video image is unusually protracted. According to Viola, the stillness of this moving image echoes Renaissance religious painting and yet, as he states: "The old pictures were just a starting point. I was not interested in appropriation or restaging – I wanted to get inside these pictures . . . to embody them, inhabit them, to feel them breathe."[1]

While Viola speaks of this work as a kind of spiritual appropriation that embodies and inhabits Renaissance painting, theorist Mark Hansen calls it a form of "creative embodiment." In *New Philosophy for New Media*, Hansen

FIGURE 26.1   Bill Viola, *Silent Mountain*, 2001. Still image from video installation, color video diptych on two plasma displays mounted side-by-side on wall. Photograph: Kira Perov. Courtesy of Bill Viola Studio

further asserts that the series *Silent Mountain* is a part of – *The Passions* – exemplifies a "truly creative" engagement with digital technology that reworks perception and ushers in a new age of image-making, thereby reconfiguring the "correlation of the human with the technical" and exploiting "the potential of information to . . . enlarge the scope of the human grasp over the material world."[2]

While both Viola and Hansen emphasize the way that *The Passions* produces an embodied form of perceptual engagement between the image and its viewer, there is an odd discrepancy between Viola's attribution of his work's inspiration to the art historical past while Hansen speaks of its merit in relation to technology's future. I believe that this contradiction arises because neither the work nor Hansen's assessment of it accounts for the relationship between the disclosure that the digital image makes possible and the *current cultural context* in which it arises.[3] Absent from both is a critique of the work as it exists within an already operating economic, historical, and social environment. In fact, Hansen implicitly rejects just such "culturalism." In the preface, for example, he struggles to

reclaim Walter Benjamin as a media-ontologist rather than a cultural critic, ignoring Benjamin's overarching interest in the reproducible image's relationship to capitalism and politics in favor his "concretely embodied" engagement with film, thus rescuing the postwar theorist as a "beacon of hope that media can continue to matter in the digital age."[4]

At stake is the role of culture in the interpretation of images. Although Hansen's phenomenology of new media, which insists on bodily relations, comes as a relief after years of poststructuralist analyses that understand the image as if it were solely discursive, and while his discussion unfolds the particularities involved in digital-image practices, he neglects what Don Ihde calls "the politics of the artifact."[5] The politics of the artifact is, for Ihde, what is *missing* from the account of *techne* by philosopher Martin Heidegger. Ihde notes that while Heidegger romanticizes *techne* – particularly as it is exemplified in pre-modern technologies and ancient works of art – he ignores the political, cultural, and environmental horizon that constitutes any form of technology. For instance, while Heidegger champions the Greek temple as a fantastic site that "holds open the Open of the world," this same temple is responsible for the deforestation of its local environment just as surely as a power plant pollutes its environment.[6] For Ihde, what distinguishes the temple from the power plant is not, as one might suspect, what each reveals but, instead, the significant cultural assumptions and details that are left out of Heidegger's description of both.

While Hansen resists such nostalgia, his claims for new media are as romantic as are Heidegger's claims for a Greek temple and an old bridge. Both Hansen and Heidegger hope to reclaim a more intimate relationship between nature, technology, and human beings while ignoring technology's cultural context. Today, the primary factor bearing on image technologies (in production, circulation, storage, and output) is the complex influence of capital. Consequently, before Hansen's argument or the work to which he refers can be more fully evaluated, it is necessary to flesh out the image as it is exists within this context.

The Spectacular Image

Situationist theorist Guy Debord's analysis in his 1967 book *The Society of the Spectacle* is a rich account of the image within a capitalist economy of production and exchange. For Debord the reified image is part of a larger phenomenon – the *spectacle*. The spectacle is, while an image, also a symptom of the alienation that it seeks to conceal. Insisting on the politics of the artifact, Debord repeatedly warns that the spectacle – those images produced by and for capitalist profit – erodes and feeds on authentic experience. To complicate this, he warns the naïve viewer against conceiving of the spectacle as *merely* an image, noting that the spectacle is not an image (or images) but an "*affirmation* of appearance and an affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance." Consequently, separation "*has become visible*."[7] This appearance, this visible form is,

however, illusory; it is the separation (negation) of life experience. Ultimately, what the spectacle "achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation."[8]

Debord employs a dialectical method in order to demonstrate that the spectacle conceals the social relations that comprise it. In doing so, *The Society of the Spectacle* operates as a manual for reading the spectacle against itself. Although the spectacle – in *toto* – cannot be seen, it can be apprehended by attending to the shape it sculpts out. Like the glacier around which a rock bed forms, the spectacle forces space and time to take shape around what it alienates. For instance, Debord notes that "[c]apitalist production has unified space, which is no longer bounded by external societies."[9] For Debord, the unification of space is exemplified by the growing tourism industry, which, while promising to unite territories and cultures, equates diverse geographic sites. The spectacle manifests itself in terms of time as well. As opposed to cyclical-mythical or linear-progressive temporality, time is experienced in the age of the spectacle as historical stasis. The spectacle erases "the historical time involved in traversing cultures" while exhibiting "pseudocyclical time" which, as a form of postmodern ritualism, "is in fact merely a consumable disguise of the commodity-time of production."[10]

Besides his polemical exhortations against the spectacle, Debord advocates an appropriative strategy that seeks to get under its skin, to unearth its possibilities while also accounting for the politics of the artifact. The situationist theory of *détournement* is an appropriate point of departure for considering this approach. *Détournement* is the appropriation of "pre-existing aesthetic elements. The integration of past or present artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu."[11] In "Methods of Détournement" (1956), Debord and Gil Wolman note that the purpose of *détournement* is to prove the "impossibility for power to totally recuperate created meanings, to fix an existing meaning once and for all."[12] In this way, *détournement* aspires to nothing more than to speak its own contingency in order to reveal the contingency of the spectacle as well.

In the *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord describes *détournement* (here translated as "diversion") similarly, as a resistant strategy "that cannot be confirmed by any former or supra-critical reference. . . . Diversion has grounded its cause on nothing external to its own truth as present critique."[13] Yet, here, as opposed to in his earlier text, Debord emphasizes the emancipatory potential of appropriation. While the spectacle's function is "to make history forgotten in culture" and to "congeal time," *détournement* provides a way to rediscover "a common language," thus proving a means to reveal "the community of dialogue and the game with time which have been *represented* by the poetico-artistic works."[14] Elsewhere in this essay, Debord suggests that *détournement* can reintroduce the vital relationship between the image and human experience; it "can confirm the former core of truth which it brings out."[15] Debord's notion of *détournement* parallels Hansen's notion of a creative engagement with media, while also

asserting that time and history must be pried from the image (and not merely represented) before an embodied relationship to the image can occur.

Given this possibility, *détournement* is complicated by the fact that, for Debord, the spectacle has no body; it is capital's persona. While the spectacle is both abstract (capitalist alienation) and yet manifests itself concretely (as image), it is neither and both of these; it is a black hole – a zero point of post-capitalist frenzy, *un terrain vague* where what once existed now survives as decay and detritus, feeding on the very capitalist structure it obscures. Following George Orwell's 1948 novel *1984*, and foreshadowing the recent film trilogy *The Matrix*, Debord's "concrete visibility" takes the *commodity-fetish* a step beyond itself. Given this context, how might artists appropriate imagery in order to release time, history, bodily experience? Since capitalism has reached epic proportions, how might artists "take hold" of the spectacle if, as Debord writes, "the society sends back to itself its own historical image as a merely superficial and static history of its rulers"?[16]

Two influential approaches to the commodification of images have developed since Debord's dark predictions emerged in print. The first, known as "postmodern appropriation," was propelled to attention with the 1977 *Pictures* exhibition at Artists Space in New York City. This exhibit featured the work of Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, Robert Longo, Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, and Phillip Smith. Other notables among the postmodern appropriation artists, but not included in the show, are Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Hans Haacke. This work appropriates photographic imagery from commercial culture in order to undercut photography's truth claims, and thereby expose its ideological basis; it involves a critique that, as Debord suggests in his description of *détournement*, reveals the absence at the heart of the spectacle's seeming presence. Like the pop movement before it, yet with critical objectives, this postmodern work delves into the emptiness of the spectacle. As Douglas Crimp, curator of the *Pictures* exhibition, notes in his catalogue essay, "[t]he peculiar presence of this work is effected through absence, through its unbridgeable distance from the original, from even the possibility of an original. Such presence is what I attribute to the kind of photographic activity I call postmodernist."[17]

For example, Cindy Sherman's well known *Untitled Film Stills* series (1977–80) serves as an homage to Hollywood's "B" movies while challenging the separation between self and other, between personal and cultural – distinctions that self-portraiture relies upon. Crimp notes that, "those processes of quotation, excerptation, framing, and staging that constitute the strategies of the work I have been discussing necessitate uncovering strata of representation . . . underneath each picture there is always another picture."[18] Such works puncture the belief in an "original" photographic image via repetition, text, and critical juxtaposition of elements. In refusing the image its authenticity, postmodern appropriation enables a critique of the system of signification that underlies even the most obvious or innocent of images.

A more embodied approach to the spectacle emerged from performance and conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s. This work explores the relationship between the image and the performer's (or viewer's) body, resulting in novel practices such as performance and installation art. At times this approach borders on ritual; for instance, the Viennese Actionists, Joseph Beuys, and Carolee Schneemann integrate the image in a complex performance that invests photography and film with significance beyond its representational, commodity, or aesthetic value. Still other artists – such as Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, and Lynda Benglis – integrate the viewer into a video event. These works – often involving only the artist in his studio, and at times using live video – seduce the viewer into participating within the artist's scenario. For example, Acconci's *Command Performance* (1974) incorporates the viewer into a prearranged confrontation with the artist *via* video. The viewer's image is projected onto a video monitor, thus becoming a part of the image-event and, as Michael Rush writes of this work, "everyone becomes a voyeur in this dance of multiple seduction."[19]

At the same time that such works place the image in relation to the body (of the artist and/or viewer), they also risk neglecting the politics of the artifact, the ideological "load" that postmodernism takes as a given. For this reason, Debord warns against works that purport to introduce "life" and "experience" into the spectacle. He writes that "art in the epoch of its dissolution is simultaneously an art of change and the purest expression of impossible change. The more grandiose its reach, the more its true realization is beyond it."[20]

In his 1963 editorial essay entitled "The Avant-Garde of Presence," Debord criticizes both the pop/postmodern strategy of appropriating images from the mass media and the more performative strategy of integrating the image into a live event. He notes that, while the former approach reveals "the absence at the heart of the spectacle," like its Dada precursor, it will eventually "suppress art without realizing it," or, like surrealism, "realize art without suppressing it." More contempt is heaped on latter approach which, for Debord, is "*even worse*, [for it attempts] *to repair its damage by creating a new viewer, one who is active, participatory, and stimulated*."[21] This stimulated viewer is, in fact, called forth by capitalism and its technological mode of production and, thus, exists within and for the spectacle.

Debord's notion of the "stimulated viewer" provides an important caution to Hansen's eager claim for a "new correlation of the human and the technical." Debord writes: "As for the integration of the viewer into these wonderful things, it is a poor little image of his integration into the new cities, into the banks of television monitors in the office or factory where he works. It pursues the same plan, but with infinitely less force, and even infinitely less guinea pigs."[22] Here, Debord suggests that the image and the stimulated viewer exist both in relation to one another and within a larger phenomenon of tele-visual capitalist development. Thus, the politics of the artifact are within – and not merely outside of – both the spectacle and its viewer. In other words, the spectacle, though defined by separation, is not at odds with politics, experience,

or reality. Debord notes that "reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real."[23]

Following this, a practice that seeks to transcend the spectacle must also recover those elements seemingly excluded by it; the idea that the spectacle is entirely at odds with life and authentic experience serves only to reify it. Thus, while Debord notes that in spectacular society the viewer is alienated "to the profit of the contemplated object,"[24] Valie Export's *Tap and Touch Cinema* (1968) – in which the she exposed herself to the public bare-chested except for a curtained box attached to her upper body, inviting people on the street to reach into the box and feel her breasts – reveals the viewer to be integral to the spectacle. Rather than showing the image, *Tap and Touch Cinema* exposes the desire of the viewer for the female breast *as* image, perverting and disempowering the spectacle with affect, sensuousness, and chance, while also exposing the viewer's bodily and psychological attachment to the image. Export's performance of this piece thus revealed the spectacle to be inseparable from the fetishistic experience of the viewer, and the material body to be inseparable from the image. On this point, Timothy Bewes suggests that the reified object (in this case, the reified image) "must be reconfigured so as to incorporate the anxiety towards it." Furthermore, Bewes notes that the "thingliness" of objects and the vitality of subjective experience are not at odds with reification, but within it.[25] By extension, there is an interdependent and reversible relationship between the commodity image and the viewer's subjective experience, as well as the "thingliness" of the object.

In "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," Maurice Merleau-Ponty postulates the "flesh" as the perceptual basis that underlies and mediates the reversible relationship between the viewer and the object viewed. He writes:

> The flesh (of the world or my own) is . . . a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself. I will never see my own retinas, but if one thing is certain for me it is that one would find at the bottom of my eyeballs those dull and secret membranes. And finally, I believe it – I believe that I have a man's senses, a human body – *because the spectacle of the world that is my own* . . . refers with evidence to typical dimensions of visibility.[26]

Following Merleau-Ponty, the "spectacle of the world that is my own" is a fleshy hinge that links the viewer and image. This notion elucidates the potential of an artistic approach that engages with the spectacle, its viewer, and the thingly object by unearthing their common secret – the flesh.

The Reversibility of the Spectacle: Concretism and Durationism

Like Export's *Tap and Touch Cinema*, the work that emerged from Fluxus – a 1960s–1970s conceptual art movement – provides an example of a praxis that

incorporates those elements negated by but latent within the spectacle. Dick Higgins notes that fluxworks include both an "underpiece" (a material element; matter) and an "overpiece" (a representational element; form). According to Higgins, the job of the Fluxus artist is to reveal the underpiece of the representational image.[27]

In his 1962 text "Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art," George Maciunas introduces the term "concretism" to describe the way the fluxwork draws attention to its materiality and, thereby, rejects the notion of pure representation (what he calls "illusionism"). In other words, the fluxwork clings to its specificity. For instance, in Yoko Ono's *Apple* (1966), the artist frames a withering apple. The "content" of the work is organic decay – the action of time upon the object – and not what the apple itself represents. Artists such as Ono, explains Maciunas, "prefer the world of concrete reality rather than the artificial abstraction of illusionism." Thus, a Fluxus artist prefers "the reality of a rotten tomato rather than an illusionistic image or symbol of it."[28]

In a letter to George Brecht written in 1962, Maciunas provides a more nuanced account of concretism, explaining that illusionism and concretism do not stand in opposition but differ by matter of degree. In this letter, Maciunas depicts a cylinder to illustrate his theory. Within the diagram a block of text reads "towards concrete or reality," and is accompanied by an arrow pointing toward the far end of the cylinder while, labeled with the text "towards artificial," another arrow points in the opposite direction. In addition to this, Maciunas marks a point on the mouth of the cylinder "optic" and another, on the opposite end, "acoustic."[29] This chart suggests that the object and its "artificial" representation intersect with the electromagnetic spectrum of light, as well as sound waves, and that these characteristics define the viewer's perception as much as the materiality or immateriality of the object. In this sense, concretism undermines the spectacle's reification of reality by revealing both the concrete object and its representation to be temporary states within a fluid process of transference.

For example, Maciunas's *Kinesthesis Slides* (c.1969) is a work in which "slides" for Fluxus film events consist of nothing more than hollow glass mounts. The mounts are used to frame living matter for projection. Jon Hendricks notes that "one could put any sort of living organism in them to project and watch its movements."[30] Thus, in 1969 Maciunas projected live cockroaches, worms, flies, and caterpillars at a fluxfestival in Stony Brook, New York.[31] It is not clear from textual descriptions whether the *Kinesthesis Slides* operated successfully as "living-transparencies" or annihilated the insects under the hot bulb of the projector. In either case, *Kinesthesis Slides* introduces that which is usually materially abstracted from and by representation into the framed image. Whereas the photograph is an indexical reference to objects and bodies, *Kinesthesis Slides* inserts the referent into the frame itself, pointing to the fact that living matter is not distinct from representation but is constituent with it. *Kinesthesis Slides* reveals the spectacle to be comprised of that which it commonly stands in for,

denies, negates, consumes, and transforms into image – the flesh – as well as the worldly and temporal context in which matter persists, decays, and circulates.

The perceptual basis that underlies both the viewer and image operates in time. Fluxworks allow the quality of time absent from the spectacle to creep into the image and challenge what Debord calls "commodity-time" by refusing to be either an "avant-garde of absence" or, conversely, a performative fusion of the body and image.[32] This Fluxus emphasis on time leads naturally to an interest in *duration* – what philosopher Henri Bergson describes as the time experienced while waiting for the sugar cube to dissolve in water "with its own determined rhythm."[33] In its incorporation of unrehearsed and often empty moments, fluxworks concern the time it takes for things to evolve, but also, per Heidegger's existentialist notion of duration, the well-accustomed ways in which human beings experience time based on custom and social convention, the "everyday ways in which we 'make provision.'"[34]

Debord notes that waiting is at odds with "the abstract desire for immediate effectiveness" and "pseudo-revolutionary common actions."[35] In other words, the viewer's uncomfortable experience of waiting attacks the spectacle at its weak point by worrying its stasis. The audience and performer must literally endure time. Fluxus artists who employ this strategy provide a counterpoint to the immediacy of performance as well as an alternative to the more postmodern appropriative works that imitate the commodity-image while proving a critical commentary though text or context. To summarize, "[t]he critique which goes beyond the spectacle," writes Debord, "must know *how to wait*."[36] Following Bewes' theory of reversibility, duration is within the spectacle and not outside of it. Although the commodity-image seems to deny the time of waiting, decay, and growth by absorbing it within pseudocyclical time, it cannot annihilate duration entirely. Consequently, the viewer's unexpected encounter with duration is often experienced as shock or boredom.[37]

For instance, many of the short works included in *Fluxfilms* (1965) – collected and compiled by Maciunas – play the viewer's anticipation of cinematic time against the concrete time taken by the strip of film as it passes through the projector. In Maciunas's *10 Feet* and James Riddle's *9 Minutes*, the film *is* its time and/or length. Maciunas's *10 Feet* measures the film in feet, while Riddle's *9 Minutes* measures the film with a depicted time-piece that tracks its own screening time in minutes and seconds. Other fluxfilms employ high-speed cameras (running at approximately 2,000 frames per second rather than 64), in order to focus on an otherwise momentary and "inconsequential" incident such that the duration of the event is expanded rather than measured in actual time. These include the anonymous *Eyeblink*, Joe Jones's *Smoke*, and Yoko Ono's *Number 1 (Match)*. Another notable among these films is Mieko Shiomi's *Disappearing Music for Face*, an eight-second sequence of time expanded to eleven minutes depicting Ono's lips fading from a smile to a relaxed state. On the other end of the spectrum, Paul Sharits's *Sears Catalogue* bombards the viewer with an

array of appropriated images (of, for instance, toasters, televisions, cameras, and models). Here, as opposed to the concretism of *9 Minutes*, or the expansion of *Eyeblink*, the temporality of the film is condensed. Yet, in all the fluxfilms the duration involved in viewing is the subject of the film.

In discussing Viola's *The Passions*, John Walsh notes that certain fluxfilms, such as Shiomi's *Disappearing Music for Face*, "anticipate Viola's interest in shifting states of mind."[38] Certainly, both *Silent Mountain* and Shiomi's piece use slow motion to alter the viewer's relationship to the image. Yet, the very different ends to which these works employ this device must be emphasized as well. In *Disappearing Music for Face*, slow motion introduces the time of waiting and viewing – of perception itself – into the cinematic experience such that the viewer's endurance of the film is integral to the work. In *Silent Mountain*, on the other hand, slow motion is used to draw the viewer into the work or, more precisely, to immerse the viewer within the image. Viola's work creates an illusionist space of reflection; the work and the environment of the installation still the viewer as well, immersing her/him into a state of meditation and communion. In *Disappearing Music for Face*, in contrast, the experience of duration is belabored such that the viewer's experience of the concrete time of viewing is foregrounded rather than transcended.

Digital Liquefaction

The fluxworks discussed above reveal the multiple ways in which those elements abstracted and alienated by the spectacle can be located within it. Do digital media alter or extend this reversibility in a significant way? Do they differ, fundamentally, from prior forms of media? Jonathan Crary ponders these questions when he asks: "Have we entered a non-spectacular global system arranged primarily around the control and flow of information, a system whose management and regulation of attention would demand wholly new forms of resistance and memory?"[39] The difference between Shiomi's *Disappearing Music for Face* and Viola's *Silent Mountain* speaks to the changes that have occurred in relation to the media image from the 1960s to the present. The commodity-image is no longer a part of an alienated yet reversible dialectic; it exists within a larger flow of information. It moves. In the following two sections I explain how digital media enable a new relation between the viewer and the image, yet are also related to prior, analogue practices. Furthermore, I seek to explain why this continuity allows the spectacle to enter into image-making praxis as a malleable form in its own right.

The interactivity afforded by postwar systems of image production takes advantage of the spectacle's reversibility, and, as in the examples discussed above, brings the viewer into its loop. Hansen suggests that digital media involve a new relationship between the image and subject and, ultimately, a new

subject, arguing that with digitization, "the image can no longer be restricted to the level of surface appearance, but must be extended to encompass the entire process by which information is made perceivable through embodied experience. This is what I propose to call the *digital image*."[40] Digital technologies enable and reveal this radical integration of body and image to be inherently flexible, thus creating, as Arjun Appadurai notes of late capitalism in general, new forms as well as "new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds."[41] For instance, advances in digital projection and image-assembly have altered the status of the image such that it now appears in ways and forms that surpass previous definitions. The image is itself in a state of becoming, existing as only one component within an ever-expanding flow that includes the viewer, but also the gallery and the architectural environment.

In contrast to Hansen's notion of the *digital image*, Philip Rosen argues that the indexicality of photography and film (their capacity to register an imprint of what lay before the camera lens) is not lost but transformed into the digital flow of images; digitization, he argues, "cannot mean the obliteration of referential origins."[42] While Hansen sees the digital image as producing a radically new subject, for Rosen the malleability of the digital image alters the index by placing it in a new context. Bernard Stiegler notes that this hybrid form of the "analogico-digital image-object" (what he also terms the "discrete image") "may contribute to the emergence of new forms of 'objective analysis' and of 'subjective synthesis' of the visible – and to the emergence, by the same token, of another kind of belief and disbelief with respect to what is shown and what happens."[43]

The spectacle has metastasized. No longer defined entirely by the dialectic of alienation/lived experience (as in Debord's description), it is marked by its apparitional flow that operates in and around the index, the local, and the focal, thus producing forms that are an amalgamation of analogue and digital, or that reflect on the analogue through digital means. This characteristic is what I call "digital liquefaction." The relationship between the image and the viewer's subjective experience no longer appears to be oppositional; rather, the mutability struggled for by an earlier generation of artists emerges as the condition of the image. The photo-happenings of French artist Jean-Philippe Baert thus turn the gallery into a projection booth, a theater, and a darkroom. In the process, Baert creates what he calls a "TV imprint" or "image fossil" by passing a monitor in front of photographic paper and developing the image as part of his live performance, resulting in neither an "authentic" experience nor pristine photographs: both are debased through their dependence on each other.[44] In Baert's *Coagulation* (2002; Figure 26.2) – a short video of a well-known French newscaster with a photographic print of this same figure eerily doubled over the screen image – the newscaster's face becomes a hollow shell as the photograph serves to mask the positive video image, thus emphasizing the mute black background rather than the figure's formal coherence. This strategy reveals the

FIGURE 26.2 Jean Philippe-Baert, *Coagulation*, 2002. Still image from video installation, video three minutes and 15 seconds. Courtesy of the artist

ephemeral ground of the image, which nonetheless emerges from a river of information that seems to "coagulate" into a meaningful picture.

Other artists find the organic and the indexical *within* the digital image. For example, Vietnamese American photographer Binh Danh works with both digital files and the photocopy process to create a negative, which he then places on the surface of a leaf for an indefinite amount of time (it may take up to a month for the image to emerge). This process is rooted in Danh's desire to link the scientific quest for knowledge, as well as the political quest for power, to the unhurried and circular tempo of organic processes. In *Mother and Child* (Figure 26.3), from his series "Immortality: The Remnants of the Vietnam and American War" (2001), Danh printed journalistic photographs of Vietnam culled from books and the Internet onto leaves and encased them in resin, merging the documentary, the digital, and the organic into an overarching techno-organic system. Danh writes of this process as a way of revealing "elemental transmigration: the decomposition and composition of matter into other forms."[45] His work speaks to the possibility of linking disparate cultures by way of technology, as well as the effects of war, as part of a cosmic process – liquefaction in the best and worse sense.

FIGURE 26.3 Binh Danh, *Mother and Child*, from the series "Immortality: The Remnants of the Vietnam and American War," 2001. Chlorophyll print cast in resin. 10×8 in. Courtesy of the artist

Appropriating the Spectacle by Working the Screen

Today, artists are able to appropriate and manipulate the flow of memory-images (and the associations that ensue from various combinations of it) rather than *an* image, thereby revealing "another kind of belief and disbelief with respect to what is shown and what happens."[46] As Stiegler notes, digital media's malleability makes a new order of meaning possible. For instance, the fact that analogue films and photographs circulate as digital information in forms unimagined previously means that these cultural artifacts, and the memories that they evoke, coagulate into a new order of memory. This further complicates the dichotomy of spectacle/viewer eroded by the Fluxus artists. Not only is the spectacle reversible, underwritten by the flesh (of the world and my own), it now constitutes, erases, and rewrites cultural narratives as it circulates. Furthermore, the flexibility of the digital image means that the spectacle can bend back to meditate on itself.

According to Stiegler, memories based on fictional or unlived events are advanced by digital technology – particularly with its ability to store and repeat memory-objects.[47] This is what Stiegler terms "tertiary memory." "First memory" is, for phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, consciousness of a present moment that is already past (perception), while "second memory" is the recollection of a past event *as past* (imagination); both are rooted in their relation to a past event. Distinguishing tertiary or third memory from first and second memory, Stiegler notes that although third memory is mediated by technology, it allows previously stabilized memories to be modified. This mnemonic function is linked to the development of time-based storage media beginning in the nineteenth century (e.g., the gramophone, film, and photography). Digitization marks a new stage in this process by allowing former memory-objects to be reformulated into algorithms and circulated in a manner unknown in the analogue age.

In certain contemporary works, the screen is the site where memories converge. For instance, French artist Pierre Huyghe's *The Third Memory* (2000) (Figure 26.4) is an installation that reworks memory as if it were a substance like clay or paint. This installation digitally combines film footage from the 1975 feature film *Dog Day Afternoon* – which tells the story of a bank robbery based on an actual event in which John Wojtowicz organized a heist in order to secure funds to help his lover, Ernest Aaron, secure a sex change operation – with Wojtowicz's restaging of the hold-up for Huyghe's camera. In an adjacent room, these two "memories" of the event are accompanied by newspapers and television accounts from the period, as well as letters by Wojtowicz protesting Warner Bros.' copyright claim on "his" story. The third memory is all of these accounts or, rather, it is the shared yet unlived memory of the event by way of media. Furthermore, as the viewer witnesses Wojtowicz's attempt to wrangle his experience of the event from its media depiction, the spectacle rises like a specter that is challenged and battled on its own ground.

FIGURE 26.4   Pierre Huyghe, *The Third Memory*, 1999. Still image from video installation, double projection, beta digital, video on monitor, nine minutes and 46 seconds. Co-production: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'art Moderne, Service Nouveaux Medias and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, with the participation of the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Myriam and Jacques Salomon, Le Resnoy, Studio national des arts contemporains. Photograph: Jon Abbott. Courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery

Reading *The Third Memory* through Debord's theory of the spectacle, Jean-Charles Masséra argues that, through his process of reenactment, Wojtowicz lays claim to the consciousness of his life – a consciousness that was lost to Hollywood. According to Masséra, Wojtowicz literally reappropriates his existence. *The Third Memory* thus enables "a form of disalienated self-representation."[48] I find, more importantly, that *The Third Memory* reformulates the viewer's memory of the film narrative by combining Wojtowicz's reenactment of the event with other media accounts. In this way, *The Third Memory* reveals that its *Dog Day Afternoon* narrative is as flexible as the non-linear digital process used to assemble the images. What is also interesting, as Stiegler's theory suggests, is the way in which the Warner Bros. version of the story informs Wojtowicz's memory of the hold-up. On this note, Huyghe notes that "what is interesting today is that, of course, [Wojtowicz's] memory is affected by the fiction itself."[49] Yet *The Third Memory* resists the process of mnemonic accommodation; Wojtowicz's

first and second memories are actively reconfigured through his reenactment of the event as event. In the process, the spectacle is taken up as a third memory as well; the dreaded threat of alienation and the attendant longing for authentic experience are staged by Wojtowicz, who struggles to liberate himself from the media depiction of his life.

In Scottish artist Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), the screen is not a battleground but a celebrated site, a public manifestation of third memory. This installation consists of a suspended screen, 20 feet wide, set diagonally in the middle of a gallery. Alfred Hitchcock's film thriller *Psycho* (1960) is digitally projected on the screen at the rate of two frames per second (rather than the cinematic standard 24 frames per second), and thus the film runs for approximately 24 hours. *Twenty-Four Hour Psycho* is about memory and the associations it evokes. Christine Ross notes that the work initiates a struggle with memory; it "activates, in the viewer, perceptual and memory dysfunction." For Ross, this dysfunction is productive: "as the viewer struggles with memory and identity formation, she or he enacts the loss of the paternal [which the film stages] and, with this, a mode of perception more porous to imaginary constructions."[50] The point of *24 Hour Psycho* is, for Ross, the way that it forces the viewer to struggle with the corporeal limits of perception. The viewer's perception becomes the resistant focal point around which the flood of imagery must navigate. That said, *24 Hour Psycho* is about more than the relationship between memory and perception. The work concerns third memory – that is, the way that these infamous images circulate *as* memories and, in doing so, create a collective and shared history. Viewers watch the infamous scene of Marion Crane in the shower as if it were a common language. On this point, Gordon notes:

> I was interested in allowing the micro narrative to become disengaged from the original version, and to let it exist in real time alongside our memories and anticipations of what we think we are about to see. . . . At the same time, we are aware of a new narrative being constructed using the same information as the original.[51]

Jim Campbell's *Illuminated Average #1: Hitchcock's Psycho* (2000; Figure 26.5) is another take on the thriller. Campbell scanned each frame from *Psycho* and, from this information, generated one stunning backlit print that incorporates the entirety of the film. Unlike photographs, which rely upon a spectral chain of luminance in order to link an illuminated moment past to its future moment of viewing, this digital image ghosts by averaging. If the viewer looks closely, each instant in the film is contained within this one image: Marion checks the rearview mirror as she drives away from her crime; a patrolman raps on the window; a lamp-lit room at the Bates Motel; a room with stuffed birds peering from the wall; seen from a voyeuristic angle, Norman attacks Marion in the shower; blood seeps down the drain; a car is hauled trunk-first from the swamp. Clearly, Hitchcock's *Psycho* is about memory and how film remembers. Campbell's work is about how we remember film.

FIGURE 26.5 Jim Campbell, *Illuminated Average #1: Hitchcock's Psycho*, 2000. Averaged over one hour and 50 minutes (entire film), light box with duratrans print. 30×18 in. Courtesy of the artist

Rather than capitalizing on the screen as the site where third memories take shape – as in the examples by Huyghe, Campbell, and Gordon – Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist challenges the screen and the mediating relationship it enables, particularly between the female figure, on one side, and the gaze that seizes, embraces, and gives meaning to the figure on the other. In many of her works, such as *Sip My Ocean* (1996), the camera collides or smashes into the objects before it. When viewed, the effect is like a collision between the screen and the objects depicted.[52] This confrontation is approached allegorically in Rist's *Ever is Over All* (1997), a video installation in which two digital-video images overlap unequally at the gallery's corner accompanied by a sound track with a lilting voice. The right panel is reminiscent of an impressionist landscape while the image on the left depicts a brightly clad woman walking down the street carrying what appears to be a long stemmed flower, joyfully skipping as she smashes the car windows along her path. The car window – a glass screen separating inside and outside – falls to the flower, acting as a metaphor for the screen that mediates gender.

In other works, Rist approaches the screen in a manner that suggests a *temporal* barrier. At moments this temporal barrier is shattered, overleaped, or infiltrated and, consequently, the art work confronts *its own* history. For instance, in her *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* (1986), Rist presents her own

hysterical movements – enabled by digital speed and cuts, ultimately losing vertical and horizontal hold – to the camera/gaze, her figure trapped in an eternal present. Concomitantly, the work's sound environment condenses John Lennon's opening lyric to *Happiness is a Warm Gun* (1968) to one line. Peggy Phelan writes of this work: "Thinking of video as a kind of living anthology still pulsing with the history of its earlier forms, Rist encourages her viewers to reconsider the traditional concept of the past and the dead as somehow over, gone, vanished."[53] For Phelan, the memory of the song, but also of Lennon's brutal assassination, resonates for the viewer. Like *The Third Memory*, this work alters the viewer's understanding of an event through the manipulation of mediated, unlived memory-objects that are, in this case, aural. However, while the lyrics evoke a mythical time-past, the figure remains suspended in a technological glitch, unable to transcend the temporal barrier.

In these examples, there is an acknowledgment that appropriation involves staging a confrontation with memory. On this point, Rist writes: "There are different kinds of clouds: those I have seen, and those I imagine. The clouds I imagine (most clouds) I have never seen. The vast majority of clouds are those which others have seen or have imagined or will one day imagine."[54] Here, Rist explains the difference between perception (clouds I have seen) and imagination (clouds I imagine). Yet, her description of clouds resonates with unlived, mediated memories as well. For instance, the sky and clouds are reminiscent of an earlier work, Ono's *Sky TV* (1966), which consists of a television monitor that, through live video, depicts the sky above the gallery. Rist's words also refer to Lennon's *Imagine* album which, released five years after Ono's *Sky TV*, begins with the lyrics: "Imagine there's no Heaven/It's easy if you try/No Hell below us/Above us only sky."

Rist openly acknowledges her debt to Fluxus, particularly Lennon and Ono, and her mediated memories of these previous artists' imaginings.[55] These "tertiary clouds" – clouds seen in a gallery's television, heard on a phonograph, or merely heard *about* – only come to visibility against a screen. The screen is what reveals or, when unaddressed, obscures the relation between memories perceived, those imagined, and third, mediated memories. Complicating this, the screen also represents and is a physical manifestation of the media and its spectacular control of third memory. In her work, Rist stages a confrontation with the screen and, in doing so, the spectacle is summoned and shattered in order that alternative cultural narratives might emerge through its cracks.

Conclusion

The manipulation of digitized analogue material allows a new relation between past and present to emerge. For instance, in *The Third Memory*, Huyghe reveals the economic struggle over the cultural appropriation of Wojtowicz's story and

emphasizes the homosexual love story. Rist, in *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much*, gestures to the contradictory – feminist, sexual, and political – implications of Lennon's "warm gun." However, Viola's *The Passions* assumes an affiliation with a Renaissance past without fully engaging it and, furthermore, without allowing the present in which the work was created to speak of its own contingency and context. *Silent Mountain*, for instance, leaps over the historical and cultural divide that might allow the present conditions, as well as the particularities of the religious painting to which it refers, to show up. For, although the emotive figures speak to the conflict of religious faith in the political realm today – as witnessed in the current "oil wars," the release of Mel Gibson's 2003 film *The Passion of The Christ*, and the resurgence of Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Hindu fundamentalism – this "renaissance" is, although imbedded in the work, overpowered by its immersive affect.

Bewes notes that "[t]he concept of globalization represents the 'totality' in a simplified, intellectually graspable but politically immutable form – like the concept of God in an earlier epoch."[56] This statement implies that, today, the notion of globalization stands in for God. At the same time, the popularity of Viola's work (and Gibson's film) suggests that God stands in for globalization. In either case, the longing for totality – be it economic or religious – in the face of modernity's disintegration is satisfied by spectacular immersion, thus offering an antidote to postmodern fragmentation. Technically speaking, *Silent Mountain* gives the viewer this sense of totality through image-immersion. The edges blur; the screen fades. Viola notes that in his earlier work he used scale to create an immersive effect. He writes that upon discovering the liquid-crystal-display (LCD) flat screen (as opposed to the cathode ray tube screen): "I found myself falling into the image, getting lost in its aura. . . . This provided the final link I needed to realize that immersion is not dependant on scale, that it has to do with some other property of the image."[57] The effect sought by Viola in religious painting and found by him in the immersive quality of the screen is, I contend, central to the underlying theme of *The Passions*. Yet, in order for this shared longing for totality to show up as such, the mutable screen upon which the image forms – and, by extension, the boundary that separates and mediates perception, imagination, and third memory – must be recognized.

No longer merely a backdrop, the screen is both a locus and metaphor for artists who manipulate third memories. Of these, the spectacle is the third memory par excellence. It is the narrative of a shared anxiety for and against fragmentation; it is the longing for liberation from economic and experiential image-domination; it is the shadow-story of Disney, Warner Bros., and Nintendo. Engendered by the current stage of capitalism, the digital image allows the spectacle to become an artifact in its own right. The spectacle's threat of domination – as well as its related dialectic of alienation and authentic experience – casts its shadow upon the screen of the present and, as such, is ripe for appropriation.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 Viola (2003), 199.
2 Hansen (2004), 267–8.
3 The fact that the classically expressive figures in Viola's *Silent Mountain* are depicted in street-clothes might be interpreted as an oblique reference to the contemporary context in which the work functions.
4 Hansen (2004), 1.
5 Ihde (1993), 111. Ihde attributes the phrase "politics of the artifact" to Langdon Winner. For more on the relationship between photography and poststructuralism see my essay: Dore Bowen, "Hysteria and the Helio-Trope: On Bodies, Gender, and the Photograph," *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism*, vol. 26, no. 4 (January 1999):13–16.
6 Heidegger (1971), 45. See also Heidegger (1977), 32.
7 Debord (1983), section 10.
8 Ibid., section 3.
9 Ibid., section 165.
10 Ibid., section 168:149.
11 Knabb, ed. and trans. (1981), 45.
12 Khayati (1981), 171.
13 Debord (1983), section 208.
14 Ibid., section 187.
15 Ibid., section 208.
16 Debord (1981), 37.
17 Crimp (1993), 111. See also Singerman in this volume.
18 Crimp (1984), 186.
19 Rush (1999), 53.
20 Debord (1983), section 190.
21 Ibid., section 191.
22 Debord (2002), 141.
23 Debord (1983), section 8.
24 Ibid., section 30.
25 Bewes (2002), 110.
26 Merleau-Ponty (1968), 146 (emphasis mine).
27 Higgins (1984), 69–70.
28 Maciunas (1988), 156.
29 This drawing (plus notes) can be found in Conzen-Meairs (1997), n.p.
30 Hendricks, ed. (1988), 362.
31 Ibid.

32 Debord (1983), section 147.
33 Bergson (1991), 205. See also Bergson (1998), 9–10.
34 Heidegger (1962), 140.
35 Debord (1983), section 220.
36 Ibid.
37 Walter Benjamin writes that film initiated a shock effect in its viewers. "The specta-tor's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film." Benjamin (1968), 238. In this light, it can be argued that fluxfilms contrast the now outdated "shock effect of the film" with the pre-mechanical experience of duration.
38 Walsh (2003), 60.
39 Crary (2002), 464.
40 Hansen (2004), 10.
41 Appadurai (1996), 3.
42 Rosen (2001), 307.
43 Stiegler (2002), 152.
44 On this issue, see Auslander (1999), 53.
45 Danh (2003), CD-ROM.
46 Stiegler (2002), 152.
47 This summary of Husserl's arguments is from Stiegler (2001).
48 Masséra (2000), 139.
49 Cited in Huyghe (2004), n.p.
50 Ross (2001): 28–33.
51 Cited in Ibid.
52 Amelia Jones writes of Rist's confrontational relationship with the screen as aiding in a "para-feminist" notion of the body and identity that challenges the binary structures of sexual difference. See Jones (forthcoming).
53 Phelan (2001), 44–5.
54 Rist (2001b), 130.
55 See Rist (2001a), 8–28.
56 Bewes (2002), 7.
57 Viola (2003), 203.

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