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Phenomenal Screens:
Thinking Crisis Through Film and Literature

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For Colette and Julian

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Through comparative readings of Émile Zola, James Joyce, and Krzysztof Kieślowski, this dissertation theorizes crisis as a specifically aesthetic phenomenon. Crisis is understood as the product of the constitutive failure of representational regimes to exhaustively render phenomena. More specifically, the dissertation examines the ways in which the failures of literary and cinematic paradigms, genres, and movements regimented by what philosophers call “natural perception”--or perception grounded in pragmatic human activity--generate novel modes of perceiving, affecting, and thinking. This inquiry draws on philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s conception of the “crisis of the action-image,” arguing that the crisis of action is not strictly limited to cinema (as Deleuze suggests), but is in fact an ongoing and generalizable condition of aesthetic forms. In particular, the dissertation works to push at the edges of modernism, reading Zola’s 19th-century *Rougon-Macquart* and Kieślowski’s transition from documentary to fiction on either side of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. It asserts, by way of Zola and philosopher Jacques Rancière, that the works in question constitute “phenomenal screens,” or mediating forms that determine the conditions of intelligibility. Throughout, the

arguments rest on understanding texts in their capacity as phenomenological mediators. Finally, the dissertation concludes that it is precisely this capacity that constitutes the locus of crisis, and thus, crisis as an aesthetic occurrence is always a crisis of the screen. Arguing against dialectical and neoliberal conceptions of crisis, chapter one analyzes the relationship between the crisis of the action-image and the screen. Chapter two asserts that Zola concretizes a crisis of the French realist novel. Zola, the chapter shows, understood works as phenomenologically mediating screens that transform the material they render visible. Chapter three reads Joyce's *Ulysses* in light of Henri Bergson's views on consciousness, arguing that the crisis of the screen in the "Proteus" episode disrupts a detached rationalism that gives way to the phenomenality of the body. Chapter 4 revisits Kieślowski's *oeuvre* in light of Deleuze's comments on exhaustion or *l'épuisé*. It examines crisis in Kieślowski as the generalized inefficacy of volitional acts in the post-war context of Stalinist Poland and its subsequent dissolution.

Introduction

Theories about the nature of crisis have historically had little to do with the analysis of art forms. Crisis, as a subject of inquiry, has largely been left to social, political, and philosophical thinking. To be sure, artists and critics of art have made proclamations about various crises—to see this, one need only reference prominent texts like Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Crise de vers* (1897), Paul Valéry’s *La Crise de l’esprit* (1919), or Paul de Man’s *The Crisis of Contemporary Criticism* (1967). By and large, however, these and similar declarations take the notion of crisis for granted. I argue, in other words, that the question of how crisis operates as a specifically aesthetic problem remains unanswered. *Phenomenal Screens: Thinking Crisis through Film and Literature* analyzes crisis as a specifically literary and cinematic phenomenon in order to demonstrate the concept’s critical value. The dissertation seeks to explicate the nature of crisis by traversing modernism, examining the before, during, and after of this broad artistic designation by reading the works of Émile Zola, James Joyce, and Krzysztof Kieślowski. Exploring modernism at its edges (Zola and Kieślowski) and its center (Joyce), I argue for a film and literary critical understanding of crisis that cannot be divorced from what I call, following Zola and Gilles Deleuze, the phenomenal screen. The screen refers to the capacity of texts to function as phenomenological mediators insofar as their formal elements annex the structures of rationality and intelligibility that condition experience generally. As I explain in great detail in chapter 1, crisis—in the technical sense I advance—is properly crisis only to the degree that texts instantiate radical transformations of these phenomenologically mediating forms.

In addition to the conspicuous ubiquity of “crisis” in contemporary discourse, this study is occasioned by the disproportionate attention the concept has received across disciplines. Great treatises on the subject like Edmund Husserl’s *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) or Jürgen Habermas’ field-defining *Legitimation Crisis* (1973) are bulwarks of a tradition of thinking crisis as a phenomenon specific to the intersections of socio-political, scientific, and economic analysis. Karl Marx’s analysis of capitalism, to cite another prominent example, is similarly indebted to the term inasmuch as it posits capitalism as inherently oriented toward crisis. What such texts share is an interest in the specific workings of crisis insofar as they pertain to a given field of inquiry.

Published in French, the 1976 edition of the journal *Communications*, titled *La notion de crise* (The Notion of Crisis), remains one of the few such attempts to articulate a coherent definition of crisis (though it remains a general theory of crisis rather than one particular to textual analysis). What, from the perspective of the present study, remains applicable is its emphasis on the non-programmatic character of crisis, specifically with respect to the term’s incompatibility with dialectical thinking. Philosopher Edgar Morin’s contribution to the collection outlines what he calls a “crisologie.” Any attempt to produce a science of crisis, Morin believes, requires that one begin with the fact that “[l]a crise du concept de crise est le début de la théorie de la crise” (“the crisis of the concept of crisis is the beginning of the theory of crisis” 162). Such a view remains far removed from popular deployments of the term and helps to explain its elusiveness. Crisis, Morin

insists, is inherently paradoxical, at once eliminating means of action, and becoming the condition of possibility for genuinely radical transformation (160). Like the philosophical innovations of his contemporaries, Morin's "crisologie" breaks with the influence of dialectics in French thought (represented in the issue by Pierre Gaudibert's essay, "Crise(s) et dialectique"). The break with dialectical thinking is in part responsible for the crisis of the notion of crisis. The 19th and 20th centuries, therefore, witness a transformation of the notion of crisis: No longer can crisis be regarded as having a reparative teleology (as one finds, I argue in chapter 1, in Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel). Still, this slim volume of articles, now 40 years old, only begins to provide a coherent account of crisis, leaving more to be desired from a film and literary critical perspective.

How, the present study queries, does crisis function *à travers* modernity as a specifically aesthetic phenomenon? The constellation of Zola, Joyce, and Kiesłowski vivify a tendency spanning the 19th and 20th centuries toward what Deleuze calls the "crisis of the action-image." The term action-image refers to the ways in which representational forms—Deleuze's interests are primarily cinematic—are structured by paradigms of use, utility, and pragmatic activity. As an aesthetic regime, moreover, the action-image reproduces what modernist philosopher Henri Bergson cites as "the utilitarian character of our mental functions, which are essentially turned toward action" (*Matter and Memory* 16). If, in other words, the screen is the mutually constitutive relation of "mental functions" (the structures of thought that govern phenomenal mediation) and aesthetic regimes (the structures of the texts themselves), this dissertation

is particularly focused on the ways in which the action-image persists as the hegemonic modality of this relation.

If the works I select from Zola, Joyce, and Kieślowski put the action-image into crisis, however, they do so in ways unique to their specific contexts. Yet, in their departures from the sensory-motor regimentation of reality, each exposes the action-image's inherently derivative character. As a modality of the screen, the action-image's pretensions of epistemological, ontological, and ethical mastery give way in these texts to subterranean breaks with action. Crisis cracks the edifices of the actual and gives rise to fleeting glimpses of the virtual. Crisis, as I understand the concept, is thus distinct from the tidy dialectical teleologies according to which problems beget their own, inevitable solutions. Instead, as I argue throughout, crisis fractures the problem such that it ceases to be articulable as problem.

If crisis partakes in a singular relation to the modern, then, it lies in the latter's virtual synonymy with cracks and fractures. In a sustained discussion of the term, historian Reinhart Koselleck traces the conceptual history of crisis from the Greeks to the contemporary moment. For Koselleck, crisis comes to signify an impasse of knowing, of critique, and of action that, "becomes the supreme concept of modernity" (376). Only in the last few centuries has the term become a temporal concept: "since 1780," Koselleck explains, crisis "has become an expression of a new sense of time which both indicated and intensified the end of an epoch. Perceptions of such epochal change can be measured by the increased use of crisis. But the concept [of crisis] remains as multi-layered and ambiguous as the emotions attached to it" (358). To my mind,

Kosselleck's claims *vis-à-vis* the modern iteration of crisis as fundamentally linked to epochal shift resonates with literary modernism's tendency to make proclamations concerning the emergence of new epistemes. One need only consider Virginia Woolf's famous assertion concerning the transformation of "[a]ll human relations" (4-5).¹ If crisis augurs the emergence of the new as it accelerates and condenses time, then it nonetheless remains ineffable. As Kosselleck outlines, its many layers have historically comprised theological, medical, political, economic, and philosophical usages.

However, my interest in the term as a specifically aesthetic and exegetical concept lies in the term's Greek lineage. This lineage, as Kosselleck explains, etymologically links crisis and critique in *κρίσις*, meaning "discrimination, decision, or judgment" ("Crisis" OED). This dissertation, then, commits to reading crisis against its uncritical deployments toward a film and literary critical practice of *thinking through* crisis, that is, toward a practice attentive to the ways in which crisis transforms cinematic and textual phenomenality.

Chapter one, "Screens in Crisis: Beyond the Idolatry of the Actual," theorizes the relationship between the crisis of the action-image and the screen. I argue that a criticism predicated on crisis requires that term be understood in terms of the screen, that is, with respect to the ways in which texts relate to phenomenal mediation. Following Jacques Rancière, I contend that texts condition the screen, producing "structures of rationality"

¹ In *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown*, Woolf famously writes, "[...] on or about December 1910 human character changed. [...] All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature" (4-5).

that determine the perceptible and the thinkable. I posit, however, the screen as a site of incessant contestation inasmuch as the hegemonic modality of the screen, the action-image, functions in permanent tension with that which subtends it. Crisis, then, is the expression of this tension. It indexes the failure of the regime of action and its giving way to virtuality, or the production of what Stéphane Mallarmé calls “l’absente de tous bouquets” (250).

I distinguish this theorization of crisis from a dialectical mode of crisis, arguing that the latter remains a dogmatic expression of the actual. Following Friedrich Nietzsche’s critique of dialectical historiography—what he calls “the idolatry of the actual” (72)—I argue that the most prevalent conception of crisis retains a largely dialectical structure. From this perspective, dialectical crisis derivatively posits crises as mere problems begetting inevitable solutions. Only from this incurably optimistic mode of thinking, I further suggest, does one arrive at the neo-liberal conception of crisis as opportunity. In contrast to this aggressively reparative opportunism, I develop a thinking of crisis as critique and demonstrate the way problems emerge from texts as disruptions of the screen that constitute, not happy teleologies, but fundamental encounters that redraw the contours of the phenomenal. The principal task of this chapter, then, is to provide the vocabulary upon which the following chapters are built.

Chapter two, “Émile Zola’s Naturalist Screen and the Crisis of Narration” intervenes in recent scholarship on the naturalist mode of description and argues that Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* novels concretize a crisis of the French realist novel. The crisis conforms not to a politically naive retreat from action and narration as a literary paradigm

(as György Lukács famously insisted), but rather to the demands made by the Second Empire's spatial and temporal transformations on the affective and perceptive dimensions of consciousness. Citing one of Zola's 1864 letters to art critic Antony Valabrègue, I contend that Zola was a writer of the screen par excellence. I further suggest that, largely as a product of his naturalistic conception of the novel, Zola understood works as phenomenologically mediating screens that transform the material they seek to render visible; that is, works of art are, in his words, "une sorte d'Écran transparent, à travers lequel on aperçoit les objets plus ou moins déformés" ("a kind of imperceptible Screen through which one glimpses objects, more or less deformed"; qtd. in Becker 233). If works are phenomenal mediators by which one accesses the world, Zola's naturalism renders this mediation unevenly across the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle. That is, the author's descriptions of milieux, while not wholly departing from his realist predecessors into the ether of modernism, nonetheless depart from the logic of the actual in conspicuous moments of crisis. Indeed, Zola's description—distinct from Balzacian narration—intermittently breaks with pragmatic schemas of representation, fissuring tidy divisions between subject and object and thereby generating its own kind of crisis. Following Deleuze, I refer to these fissures and breaks as a mode of "idiosyncratic surrealism" (*Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* 124). If, as Lukács argues, the 19th-century realist novel emerges on the basis of action and reaction, Zola shows flashes of an alternative descriptive logic, one that signals a challenge to the steadfast epistemological guarantees that had solidified an earlier realism.

Zola's mode of description constitutes a response to a world that is increasingly less legible according to the regime of the actual and the action-image. The urban and, indeed, national transformations that France incurs during the period of the Second Empire have been well-documented in texts such as David Harvey's *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (2003). Yet, Zola's works register a phenomenological inquiry as much as they confirm something of the empirical data concerning the exponential growth of railways, telegraphs, and streets. That is, Zola's Second Empire produces opaque situations and abstruse spaces that prompt the author of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle to opt not for action but for observation and description. I focus throughout on particular characters who become in moments of crisis what Deleuze calls "voyants" or seers, no longer capable of reacting to the world. There remain, of course, the great actors of the *Rougon-Macquart*, figures like Aristide Saccard (*La Curée* and *L'Argent*) and Octave Mouret (*Au Bonheur des Dames*), who set out to act on modern life. My focus here, however, pertains to those characters and passages that illustrate the decline of dialectics, the departure from the logic of upheaval and reparation that characterize the *Bildungsroman*. These expressions of crisis in Zola are concomitant with the diminution of the capacity of a figure to challenge and act upon situations. The concreteness of Balzac's famous "À nous deux, maintenant!," uttered by Rastignac at the end of *Le Père Goriot* (1835), thus gives way to the impersonal ambiguity of the milieu in Zola.

Passages that defy realistic description in Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* occur precisely where description concerns a central apparatus of a milieu. Indeed, Zola's conception of the screen as a deforming mediator is inseparable from the function of the

milieu, particularly insofar as the latter operates according to the mutually constitutive character of the subject-object relation. The well-documented consequence is that the subject is a product of the world of objects, the milieu. However, the readings I provide show that the converse is also true. That is, if descriptions of a squalid cafe, a dark and narrow arcade, or an opulent hothouse function as characterization, then phenomenological experience and physiological description—a character's robustness or lassitude, for example—express the qualities of a given societal field. This circuit of description functions on the basis of a general exchangeability of attributes that defies any tidy division of subject and object. On the one hand, of course, naturalism remains invested in realistic description of the sort Lukács bemoans: relating banal features of an observed reality. On the other hand, naturalism seeks to capture a contravening force, one that ignores the subjective and objective lines with which the real is drawn.

Chapter three, “The Embodied Screen: The Phenomenality of Joyce’s ‘Proteus’ Episode,” reads Joyce’s *Ulysses* in light of Henri Bergson’s views on consciousness, arguing that the crisis of the screen in “Proteus” concerns a disruption of detached rationalism that gives way to the phenomenality of the body. At the heart of Bergson’s thinking lies precisely the tension around which this dissertation is framed: That is, that much of Western thought—everything from scientific axioms to commonsense assumptions—have taken the action-oriented, instrumentalizing tendencies of consciousness as the ultimate basis of knowledge and reality. Bergson rejects the illusion that what is real is reducible to the regimes of a pragmatically oriented consciousness. I argue that Stephen Dedalus undergoes an epistemological crisis that reflects that status of

Joyce's moment, in which the scientific aspirations of human inquiry give way to embodied modes of intelligibility. I contend that Joyce affirms not the stasis of certain positivist aspirations, but the dynamic conception of life as an embodied becoming.

I show that Joyce's intertextual references to Homer serve as a precursor to modernist epistemological crises. In the *Odyssey*, Menelaus' acquisition of knowledge comes only after he cunningly suspends the becoming of the "old man of the sea." The sea takes on the significance of the whole of being whose value for mortals is only made manifest in its suspension. To know is to suspend: Knowledge for these Homeric figures, I suggest, emerges by stabilizing that which is characterized by change. Famously, Plato's Forms are truer than the world of experience precisely because they are atemporal, static paradigms that do not partake of embodied existence. Proteus' association with the sea aptly emphasizes fluidity, change, and becoming. Menelaus only acquires divine knowledge after he holds fast to Proteus. However, if mastery is the cessation of movement, the stilled apprehension of becoming, then it is everywhere deferred in Joyce. Stephen—and by extension, the Joycean subject—is not a heroic conqueror of the Protean becoming of consciousness and reality, but is instead constituted by a tentative groping at the fundamental dynamism of becoming. Crucially, Stephen encounters this alternative phenomenality by way of the body, both haptically and through the body's incessant reminder of its becoming (in references to snot, urine, and other excrement). Joyce's revision of the encounter with Proteus retains the generative valences of the sea and becoming in relation to knowledge and consciousness, but rejects the position of mastery that Menelaus ultimately achieves. Menelaus acquires

divine (self-)knowledge to overcome his stranded epistemological position; he therefore operates according to the screen of the action-image, rendering *what is* according to its utility in resolving an immediate problem. Describing encounters with a protean reality, Joyce figures Stephen's experience, by contrast, as mediated by the embodied screen. The episode, I therefore claim, allegorizes a generalized epistemological crisis, what in his *La Crise de l'esprit* (1919), Paul Valéry calls Europe's "mental disorder."

Chapter 4, "Kieślowski's Cinema of Exhaustion and the Crisis of Action," revisits the films of Krzysztof Kieślowski in light of Deleuze's writings on cinema. I argue that the crisis of the screen in Kieślowski is characterized by exhaustion. That is, Kieślowski's cinema of exhaustion fixates on the generalized inefficacy of volitional acts—or *impouvoir*, to use a Deleuzian formulation—in the post-war context of Stalinist Poland and its subsequent dissolution. This chapter reads the crisis of the screen as it pertains to the notions of the exhausted and exhaustion (*l'épuisé* and *l'épuisement*) in Deleuze's work. Exhaustion, I argue, pertains to a particular mode of the crisis of the action-image. Kieślowski's description replaces the dialectics of action and disclosure with figures whose capacity to act has been diminished. To be exhausted is not only to lack the capacity to act, but to be overcome by the ubiquity of what Deleuze calls the cliché, and, in the context of Kieślowski's work, such incapacity takes on ethical, political, and artistic significance. Read in the context of communist Poland, Kieślowski's ethico-political reflections, his earlier documentary work, and his decision to transition to fiction, are thus theorized as a response to this crisis. This response, I hold, has a generative dimension, since the ineffectuality of the act opens new creative

potentialities against the idolatry of the actual. Indeed, I read Kiesłowski's later work as offering a response to exhaustion by way of an affirmation of the virtual. Thus, this concluding chapter focuses in many ways on the aftermath of the crisis of the action-image and highlights the creative force of the virtual. The chapter substantiates its claims with reference to Kiesłowski's body of work as a whole, giving particular attention to *From the City of Łódź* (*Z miasta Łodzi*, 1969), *The Scar* (*Blizna*, 1978), *Camera Buff* (*Amator*, 1979), and *Three Colors: Red* (*Trois Couleurs: Rouge*, 1994).

Though each of these chapters are deeply indebted to Deleuze's writings, I rely throughout on other thinkers to develop and modify principal theoretical terms, particularly those pertaining to *the action-image*, *crisis*, and *the screen*. In chapter 2, I expand the theoretical scope of these terms, reading Zola through Fredric Jameson, Jacques Rancière, Immanuel Kant, and Karl Marx. Chapter 3 returns to the works of Henri Bergson (who is easily the most significant figure in Deleuze's theorization of the action-image), reading him in the context of Joyce's critique of Aristotelian epistemology. Chapter 4 addresses Deleuze's notion of "exhaustion" in the context of Kiesłowski's cinema as still another mode of the crisis of the action-image.

Chapter 1

Screens in Crisis:

Beyond the Idolatry of the Actual

This chapter defines the titular terms of this dissertation and theorizes their relationship to one another. I argue that the concepts of crisis and what I call the screen are intimately linked. To appreciate their significance for the analyses I take up in the later chapters, however, these concepts must first be rigorously dissociated from their usual meanings because these meanings are derivative of a more fundamental crisis of the screen. In this chapter, I first argue that works—cinematic, literary, or otherwise—constitute screens by determining structures of rationality and intelligibility. Screens, I therefore argue, are by their very nature “phenomenal,” since they establish conditions of experience. I thus understand the screen and its relation to phenomena in a Kantian sense insofar the former produces the latter; screens, as structures of rationality and intelligibility, engender ways of sensing, perceiving, and knowing. Crisis, properly understood, is a crisis of these structures, and it is through the disruption of ossified modalities of rationality and intelligibility that crisis gives rise to new, virtual modes of accessing the world. I then posit that crisis, properly understood, reconfigures the screen, thereby reconditioning the phenomenological means by which the world is grasped. Against what do these reconfigurations emerge? What the works I explore in this dissertation confront is a very specific modality of the screen, namely, the action-image. This term, borrowed from Gilles Deleuze’s writings on the cinema and developed in new directions here, refers to the reduction of the screen to a mere function of action and

utility. More specifically, insofar as the works studied here break with the action-image, they break too with dialectical conceptions of crisis and what Friedrich Nietzsche calls “the idolatry of the actual” (72). This first chapter thus formulates the theoretical import of the encounters staged by the works examined, developing a theoretical vocabulary for the following chapters.

The title of this dissertation suggests that there is something necessary about the theorization of the screen as a means of “thinking crisis.” Indeed, the association of these concepts is indispensable, since the effects of crisis, as I understand the term, and as it pertains to the authors and directors treated here, arise as transformations of the screen. The screen, in the broadest sense, concerns the modulation and production of reality by way of mediation. It is precisely the mediating character of the screen that leads the present discussion to the phenomenal and to phenomenology. With Immanuel Kant’s transcendental schemata, the production of phenomena and indeed reality itself becomes thinkable from the perspective of mediating forms. What it means to be a knowing subject, according to Kant, relates to how subjects internally mediate—and thereby produce—that which lies outside themselves. With Kant, *what is* emerges only as a function of the screen. Yet the Kantian screen, I will show, remains largely indifferent to crisis.

How one theorizes the crisis of mediating forms (screens) depends on what one means in the case of each term. This chapter reads crisis against both common sense and dialectical conceptions of the term. Positioning crisis as a phenomenon best understood in relation to the screen, I provide a theoretical backdrop for the chapters that follow. The

works treated throughout this dissertation stage different facets of a crisis of mediation, namely, the crisis of action. Émile Zola engenders a crisis of the naturalist screen; James Joyce, a crisis of the rationalist screen; Krzysztof Kiesłowski, an exhausting crisis of realism. Each confronts “action” as a mediating regime or screen, though in each case one inevitably encounters the confrontation in entirely different settings and for different historical and artistic reasons. Nonetheless, taken together, these literary and cinematic examples lay bare a particularly modernist reaction to what Gilles Deleuze calls the “action-image.” Throughout, I generalize Deleuze’s understanding of the action-image. That is, though the term itself suggests a specific image or images, the action-image functions as an interpretation of reality identifiable in the very form of works as a symptom of a generalized understanding of the world. As such, I assert that it is critical to regard terms such as “understanding” and “interpretation” not as signaling explicitly cognized sets of views about the world, but rather as referencing the more foundational mediation of reality, i.e., the screen. In the case of the action-image, this mediation remains coupled to the logic of a pragmatically oriented totality, “a whole sensory-motor continuity” (*Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* 213). Against such a totality—and all that it implies—the works studied in these pages resist the hegemony of action in ways specific to the contexts in question.

As screens, the works under examination contest prevailing interpretations of reality, not merely by providing fictional spaces with which to imagine alternatives to the actual, but as the very means by which reality is produced. Jacques Rancière has recently written in *Le Fil perdu* (2014) that fiction is a structure of rationality:

Mais, on le sait depuis Aristote, la fiction n'est pas l'invention de mondes imaginaires. Elle est d'abord une structure de rationalité: un mode de présentation qui rend des choses, des situations ou des événements perceptible et intelligibles; un mode de liaison qui construit des formes de coexistence, de succession et de l'enchaînement causal entre des événements et donne à ces formes les caractères du possible, du réel ou du nécessaire. (11)

But, since Aristotle, we have known that fiction is not the invention of imaginary worlds. It is first of all a structure of rationality: A mode of presentation that renders situations or events perceptible and intelligible; a mode of relationality that builds forms of coexistence, succession, and causal linkage between events and provides these forms with the characteristics of the possible, the real, or the necessary. (My trans.)

Rancière concisely describes here what he calls “le partage du sensible” (typically rendered in English translations of Rancière’s work as “the distribution of the sensible”), and it is largely this theorization of texts as generative of “structures of rationality” that I rely on to describe the contours of what I call the screen. Understood in this way, the screen shapes the very conditions of possibility for perception and intelligibility; it procures its own laws of causality, space, and time. It is in this sense that works cannot help but weigh in on the nature of the real; they “interpret” and “understand” the conditions of reality even when they are not explicitly “about” such topics. As Martin Heidegger asserts, what is central to the work of art is not its representational capacities, but its ontological role in establishing and maintaining intelligibility: “the work as work sets up a world” (*The Origin of the Work of Art* 45).

From this, however, it also follows that the screen is a historically and culturally situated product of works, even as it is also their condition. Far from enjoying the status of an atemporal form of the understanding (Kant), the screen remains subject to becoming. The stability of the screen is an illusion, as there is no “pure” instantiation that

does not incur some insurgent alternative that defies the hegemony of its surroundings. Deleuze makes this point at the climax of *Cinema 1* when he announces the crisis of the action-image in cinema: “Was this [the crisis] not the constant state of cinema? The purest action films have always had value in episodes outside the action [...]” (205). Thus, when I speak of the logic of the screen, I refer to warring tendencies, to struggles for a hegemony of world-making. Indeed, crisis, I will show, is precisely this vibrational inconsistency of the screen insofar as crisis instantiates transformations of structures of rationality. The artists and texts selected for the present study are chosen in part because they exemplify, even exaggerate, the crisis of the screen.

Two theoretical problems structure the following analysis: the question of crisis, but equally, the nature of the screen. The theorization of crisis presents a unique challenge in that the term is at once so readily understandable, even commonsensical, and yet thoroughly ambiguous. “Crisis” is ubiquitous in scholarly and popular discourse—generally signifying a severe and ongoing set of problems—yet its precise signification remains murky. In this sense, its very familiarity as a concept hinders thorough analysis. This proximity is not only a problem in the spheres of media and journalism. In my view, crisis in both critical and popular discourses remain virtually synonymous with dialectics, and it is this convergence of crisis and dialectics that this chapter seeks to address and to challenge. In lieu of a dialectical sense of crisis, I follow Deleuze in advancing a theorization of crisis that is consistent with the contexts in question: Zola, Joyce, and Kieślowski. As I will show, crisis operates not through tidy dialectical movement, but through the short circuits, cracks, and failures of the screen.

To a large extent, my theorization of the screen rests on the analogy of literary and cinematic form with forms governing the experience of reality. For Rancière, works make “events perceptible and intelligible” precisely because they are formal. Works are framed by forms or structures of the real: simultaneity, succession, causality, possibility, necessity, and so on. This point is at the heart of Rancière’s political thought, since, by determining reality, works of art (aesthetics, in his sense) produce and maintain the distribution of the sensible, or that which regiments what is conceivable socially and politically.² As Sean Sayers writes, the distribution of the sensible refers “to the way in which roles and modes of participation in a common social world are determined by establishing possible modes of perception (in this context, ‘sensible’ refers to what is apprehended by the senses). Thus the distribution of the sensible sets the divisions between what is visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible.” (Jacques Rancière 2004). As Sayers notes, Rancière’s understanding of aesthetics is as deeply phenomenological as it is political, since works instantiate the onto-epistemological conditions upon which political acts are predicated. Insofar as works produce the conditions of possibility of the sensible, perceptible, and the utterable, they

² Aesthetics, for Rancière, is thus a kind first philosophy, since it conditions, not only political and social life, but intelligibility itself; as he writes, “The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. Having a particular ‘occupation’ thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. There is thus an ‘aesthetics’ at the core of politics that has nothing to do with Benjamin’s discussion of the ‘aestheticization of politics’ specific to the age of the masses” (12-13).

construe the contours of political possibility. The screen, as I use the term in what follows, refers to this production of intelligibility and its intersubjective (or political) significance.

This clarification becomes decisive in the deployment of my use of the screen in these pages, specifically insofar as it helps address a basic phenomenological question: *For whom?* For whom do the works in this study generate conditions of phenomena? Does the coal mine of Zola's *Germinal* become a beast for Étienne Lantier alone? For the narrator? For the reader? Rancière understands this dynamic as a twofold production of both subjects (how particular subjects come to grasp reality by way of what they can and cannot perceive) and communities (how a general sense of the real and the possible emerges across finite spaces and periods). In Rancière's analysis, however, distributing the sensible is largely a matter of collectivity, which is to say, the conditions of social and political change by way of aesthetics. In theorizing the screen, I follow Rancière on this generalized character of the way works mediate the real and the possible. However, as Rancière's interests lie in the general and collective socio-political significance of the screen, there remains much more to be said about the ways in which specific diegetic and textual description interact with the reader-spectator. It is on this point that I again turn to Deleuze.

The Deleuzian analysis of the split between classical and modern cinema is in many ways at the heart of each of the following chapters. Central to my argument is the idea of the transferability of this crisis to new contexts. That is, in my view, the fissures occurring across cinematic history are generalizable. Cinema is, already in Deleuze's

thinking, a latecomer with respect to this crisis, repeating what has occurred previously in philosophy and literature.³ Yet, it is in the context of the cinema that Deleuze outlines his understanding of the crisis of action, and so it is through cinema that one arrives at a Deleuzian image of crisis.

For Deleuze, classical cinema, grounded in the sensory-motor regimentation of reality, gives way to image-relations which are no longer governed by a practically-oriented mode of rationality. Deleuze describes the “great difference between classical cinema and modern cinema” in terms of a break from rational harmony:

The so-called classical cinema works above all through linkage of images, and subordinates cuts to this linkage. [...] In short, rational cuts always determine commensurable relations between series of images, and thereby constitute the whole rhythmic system and harmony of classical cinema, at the same time as they integrate associated images in an always open totality. (213)

Both commensurable relations and rational cuts (“les rapports commensurables et les coupures rationnelles” [218]) figure at the heart of classical cinema. Commensurability and rationality, as it pertains to Deleuze’s conceptualization of classical cinema, express, like “totality,” the necessary conditions of the action-image. In other words, the coherence of classical cinema and its governing paradigm (movement/action) depends upon a uniformity of representational regimes. The tacit presupposition of the action-image is that every new instantiation conforms to those surrounding it, past and future.

³ For Deleuze, the crisis, which amounts to the undoing of the reduction of time to a function of movement (action), is a stable feature of Western thought since the Greeks: “Over several centuries, from the Greeks to Kant, a revolution took place in philosophy: the subordination of time to movement was reversed, time ceases to be the measurement of normal movement, it increasingly appears for itself and creates paradoxical movements. Time is out of joint: Hamlet’s words signify that time is no longer subordinated to movement, but rather movement to time. It could be said that, in its own sphere, cinema has repeated the same experience, the same reversal, in more fast-moving circumstances” (xi).

Deleuze first develops his now famous thesis that “the brain is the screen” in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. For Deleuze, the-brain-as-screen emerges when the paradigm of action ceases to be the dominant coordinating logic of image-relations. To my mind, his articulation of this new tendency ushered by modern cinema remains sound; however, it is unclear why the action-image and classical cinema are not similarly positioned, even if in a derivative way, to condition thought (i.e., *le cerveau*). Reading Deleuze in a revisionary mode, I posit that, in fact, the crisis of classical cinema is actually a movement from a screen-brain conditioned on the sensory-motor capacity of the body to one freed of such relations, one capable of forming new structures of rationality. The screening of phenomena, in other words, predates and prefigures the crisis of action. Deleuze, however, is eager to disassociate himself from what he regards in the sciences as an incomplete understanding of the brain, one too grounded in the bodily: “Psychology has a good deal to say about a lived relationship with the brain, of a lived body, but it has less to say about a lived brain” (212).

Somewhat contrary to Deleuze, then, I emphasize the role of the screen on either side of this split between the “lived body” and the “lived brain,” between classical and modern cinemas, and between action and thought. This is less a critique of Deleuze than a matter of emphasis, a reconfiguration of threads already operative in his own thinking. That is to say, the crisis of cinema concerns a conflict across different modalities of the screen-brain. As the image passes out of action toward a creative outside, the modulations of the screen simply vary qualitatively, *i.e.*, with respect to their capacity to create. What I borrow from Deleuze is the notion that classical cinema, and by extension,

the action-image, is a derivative ontological regime, one that remains poor with respect to its capacity to generate new structures of rationality outside of the sensory-motor. As Deleuze relates in an interview toward the end of his life, “the screen, namely ourselves, can be the tiny deficient brain of an idiot as much as a creative brain” (“The Brain is the Screen” 49).⁴ To claim that the screen is subject to increases and diminutions in its capacity to create is another way of stating that the hegemony of the action-image is never total and that one is always dealing with warring tendencies, rather than with absolutes. Such is the case, I argue, in Zola, in whose works one witnesses a crisis of realist narration; in Joyce, where the body asserts its prominence against abstract rationality, and finally, in Kiesłowski, where the mastery presupposed by documentary gives way to the free play and virtuality of fiction.

If, for Deleuze, the action-image corresponds to the coordination of reality under the tyranny of sensory-motor schemata, its rupture instantiates the conditions of thought freed from action and new configurations of space and time. Under these conditions, “[o]ur lived relationship with the brain becomes increasingly fragile, less and less ‘Euclidean’ and goes through little cerebral deaths. The brain becomes our problem or our illness, our passion, rather than our mastery, our solution or decision” (212). The brain is sickly, fragile because it no longer has the assurances of the sensory-motor schemata that has previously coordinated thought and body. The body no longer orients itself according to a predictable spatiality (the Euclidean), and it is not mastery, but

⁴ What is striking here is that here Deleuze aligns the operations of the screen with human subjectivity (“the screen, namely ourselves”); this is not, in my view, a Kantian retreat, but an explicit alignment of the subject with that which it interfaces, i.e., the brain is the screen.

finitude and the termination of agency (death) that structures linkages between images. As I show in the following pages, the loss of mastery (“our illness, our passion”) that characterizes the break with action takes on different forms—modulations of the screen—in Zola, Joyce, and Kieślowski, though each responds to a crisis of action.

In expanding Deleuze's conception of the screen as a brain—or what Deleuze scholar Gregory Flaxman has termed the “prosthetic brain” (184)—I am knowingly enacting a kind of Deleuzian violence⁵ on the *Cinema* books. In Deleuze's formulation, the living brain, the brain *qua* screen, is emphatically an operation of the cinema, one that emerges when the relations of images break the yoke of action. The relations between images cease to be provided in advance by a totalizing paradigm; “there is no longer linkage of associated images, but only relinkages of independent images” (214). The broken linkages of action are reinscribed on the cerebral screen, a “virtual film which now only goes on in the head, behind the pupils [...]” (215).

My ongoing assertion is that the production of “virtual films” can be extended to other media. As film scholars working in a Deleuzian mode are keen to emphasize, much of Deleuze's theorization of the screen as a specifically filmic phenomenon lies in the film cut. The connections reestablished in the cuts or gaps between images are precisely virtual: it is not what is actually in the images, but what occurs between them that

⁵ Deleuze's own conception of reading as the production “monstrous offspring” is oft-cited: “I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed” (Negotiations 6).

reconstitutes the screen. To be sure, the medial specificity of cinema remains in many ways distinct from the other arts. Yet, what aids the transferability of this concept is precisely its virtual character. As Deleuze himself writes, the activation of the screen no longer requires the materiality of film equipment: “without camera, and also without screen or film stock” (215). Crucially, this means that “[e]verything can be used as a screen, the body of a protagonist or even bodies of the spectators; everything can replace the film stock, in a virtual film [...]” (215). The screen requires no material support because its basis is the reactivation of the virtual; it is a means of describing the virtual in the aftermath of some failure of the actual. This is not an anti-materialism. Indeed, “everything can be used as a screen” is the affirmation of materiality, of buildings and objects (Zola), of bodies (Joyce), of places (Kieślowski). Yet, it bears reiterating that what is central to my reading of the screen is its capacity to register the virtual. The particular constellation of texts analyzed in the following chapters perform the double task of, on the one hand, demonstrating the plasticity of the screen and, on the other, communicating its role in transmitting the virtual.

That everything can be used as a screen is a foundational premise that the following chapters expand upon. In my theorization, the screen is not passive (an unfortunate consequence of the language of the screen is that it implies inaction, that which merely receives an image), though it is true that it is a surface onto which the virtual is projected. Crucially, its concomitant role is generative, since it also conditions new image-relations. The screen, then, is both mediator and mediated: it *screens* phenomena both in the sense of the term that one uses when one projects a film—a film

screening—and in the sense that the screen filters and winnows the sensible. Notably, the logic of active and passive (subject and object) break down in thinking the screen—a point that will be further elucidated and explored in the context of Zola in chapter two.

This twofold character of the screen, moreover, illustrates the need for the theoretical assemblage constructed in bringing together Rancière and Deleuze. That is, if Deleuze tends to theorize the way works generate the virtual (i.e., on the brain-screen), Rancière’s focus is on the active consequences of the screen, that is, how the production of new structures of rationality open up new ways of grasping our political and social worlds. Though I largely theorize the works in question borrowing the Deleuzian construal of crisis of action *vis-à-vis* the virtuality of the screen, implicit throughout is the global significance of the screen articulated by Rancière.

Having established the theoretical outlines of the screen, I turn in the rest of this chapter to two subjects: first, the distinction between the screen and form and, second, the analysis of crisis as a guiding concept of this dissertation. I have asserted that the sense of crisis relevant to this project involves the failure of the action-image as a sensory-motor regimentation of the sensible.⁶ More precisely, the works under discussion instantiate ruptures of the actual but also afford glimpses of the virtual. Deleuze’s genealogy of the hegemony of the actual extends from Hegel to classical cinema. The insurgent virtual, however, subtends this hegemony. Crisis dramatizes the tension of actual and virtual, and in each of the following chapters, this drama plays out with different results. That crisis

⁶ Here, I use “sensible” in Rancière’s sense of the term, namely, as that which is available, in actuality or in potential, to experience and to thought.

does not beget uniform responses owes to its immanent, rather than dialectical character. As I show, dialectics has had a monopoly on crisis since at least Kant. Most clearly in the case of Zola—though it remains operative throughout—dialectics gives way to the virtual. I seek to articulate, then, a crisis of the virtual distinct from a dialectics of the actual.

Forms in Crisis

The concept of “form” provides a rough approximation of what I have been calling the screen. My insistence on the screen, however, is meant to capture a broader sense of “form” than is typical of literary and film studies. To read a work in terms of the screen, in my view, is to articulate its formal characteristics at the level of their phenomenological significance. This is another way of formulating what Rancière has stated with respect to aesthetics:

Aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault⁷—as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the pace and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. (13)

For Rancière, then, “aesthetics” is not only a theory of art or beauty, but a return to the Greek sense of *aisthētikos* (“perceptible things”) that prevailed in Europe until the 18th century. From this perspective, there is little distinction between aesthetics and phenomenology, since art generates forms of experience (which condition, Rancière argues, what is and is not politically possible).

⁷ Rancière’s cryptic qualification is likely meant to soften the permanence of the Kantian *a priori*. That is, the Kantian *a priori*, in Foucault’s hands, would likely become products of historical and discursive configurations, thus losing their status as ahistorical and unchanging mediators of reality. Insofar as the screen is a product of historically and culturally specific works, the concept similarly jettisons any pretension to positing timeless phenomenal mediation.

My use of “screen” seeks to similarly emphasize the dual character of works as both representational objects and phenomenal mediators.⁸ As the following readings seek to show, the structure of works are correlative with forms that condition experience. I use “screen” as shorthand to concomitantly refer to the phenomenological sense of form as that which conditions experience as well as the structures of particular works. Understood in this way, the screen is both product and producer of reality, since it is the product of the structures immanent in texts as well as the screen through which the world is apprehended. Indeed, as the later chapters illustrate with reference to specific texts, each these poles are but two sides of the same theoretical coin.

This trajectory of thought concerning form remains distinct, however, from what one finds in Fredric Jameson, whose reflections on the intersection of form and critique remain among the most consequential work on the topic. Jameson’s theorizations decisively fold formal concerns into the phenomenological (insofar as Jamesonian dialectics retains a relation to phenomenology) and are in this sense allied with the present study. While, however, Jameson’s interest aims to construct analogical unities across ideologically maintained gulfs between socio-economic and cultural production, my interest is in symptomatic disunity, that is, in crisis.

What is the significance of this distinction? In his early *Marxism and Form* (1971), Jameson applauds Theodor Adorno, stating that the latter’s writing overcomes atomistic tendencies of critique; specific objects of critique are not, properly understood,

⁸ This approach avoids what in my view is the potential for terminological confusions introduced by Rancière’s “aesthetics.”

isolated fragments of socio-cultural information. Instead, critique is thought that is “marked by the will to link together in a single figure two incommensurable realities, two independent codes or systems of signs [...] spirit and matter, the data of individual experience and the vaster forms of institutional society, the language of existence and that of history” (6-7). Dialectical thought reportedly apprehends, in a unity of opposites, the phenomenal and the material (i.e., “spirit and matter”). Jameson’s most emphatic methodological point is that form (rather than content) furnishes such unity. “What Engels learned from the content,” he writes, “a modern Marxist literary criticism ought to be able to demonstrate at work within form itself” (11). Such sentiment reiterates what Adorno had earlier asserted in such works as *Philosophy of New Music* (1949).⁹

This is far from a simplistic prioritization of form (as if a fresh interest in a work’s formal elements suddenly clears the space for dialectical thinking). That is, Jameson’s concerted interest in *Marxism and Form* is in the categories of thought from which a critique of form issues. The methodological focus on form is essential because through it “the language of causality gives way to that of analogy or homology, of parallelism” (10). These structures of thought—analogy, homology, and parallelism—are the means by which ostensibly unrelated fragments of a socio-economic totality—say, the 19th century novel and colonial capitalism—are posited as features of the same whole. Jameson proposes a criticism that constructs

a microcosm [...] of the cultural continuum—whether that be the formal history of costume or of religious movements, the fate of stylistic conventions or the rise

⁹ Adorno writes, for instance, that “*forms* of art register the history of humanity with more justice than do historical documents” (emphasis added, 37).

and fall of epistemology as a philosophical issue—[and] will include the analogy with the socioeconomic macrocosm or infrastructure as an implied comparison in its very structure, permitting us to transfer the terminology of the latter to the former in ways that are often very revealing. (11)

Formal histories find their parallels in the socio-economic structures to which they relate dialectically. As the basis of critique, this mode of analogistic reasoning avoids the pitfalls of atomistic thinking, which, from the perspectives of Jameson and Adorno, not only remains myopic, but is itself a symptom of a capitalistic form of thought.

Though Jameson is not a primary focus in the following chapters, the question of form remains an organizing concern of this dissertation. On the one hand, then, by briefly revisiting *Marxism and Form*, I seek in the main to highlight a predominant theorization of form against which to articulate the contours of my own. On the other hand, there is nevertheless a deep continuity, a shared *raison d'être*, between what Jameson articulates with respect to form and my own project. The critique of form for Jameson is a matter of rejecting a mode of atomistic thinking in favor of a deinstrumentalized, processual mode of thought (dialectics). Critical methodology, itself struggling against the capitalistic regimentation of thought, finds its answer in dialectical critique. Two poles characterize this struggle: The first originates in the capitalistic reduction of thought and life (in all its variations: atomism, positivism, scientific naturalism, etc), and the second in that which lies behind this regimentation. Herein lies the sense of crisis that the following chapters pursue. The tension between these poles is not a static feature of a particular historical configuration, but instead an ongoing crisis concerning the production of reality. The chapters in this dissertation address competing onto-epistemic paradigms as they emerge in particular constellations of texts and films.

The authors, filmmakers, and philosophers respond to the crisis of thought through formal innovation, though in each case the results are unique to the conditions of the artist-thinker.

The tension between the virtual and what Jameson calls atomistic thought—which I understand to be an extension of the action-image—sets in motion the crises that structure each of the works I examine. Though the focus of this dissertation is organized around a particular constellation of works—each of which revealing different characteristics of the screen in crisis—there are nevertheless scores of artists and thinkers whose works emerge on the basis of thematizing this tension. The work of Marcel Proust, for example, exemplifies the rejection of the hegemony of natural perception in favor of novel modes to relating to oneself and to one’s world (by way of the antipragmatic *mémoire involontaire*). In Proust, prose and narrative description breaks the yoke of action in favor of an aesthetics of becoming. Proust’s style enacts a virtualization of memory, a process unfolding by means of interminable, labyrinthine sentences and paragraphs. In this way, the formal characteristics of his work vibrate with phenomenal significance.

Crisis, I have suggested, is a conflict at the heart of form, of the screen. More specifically, I follow, among others, Stéphane Mallarmé in understanding crisis as a particular mode of failure. For Mallarmé, poetry itself is a function of the failure of language to rigorously exhaust its object; as he writes in *Crise de vers*, if language completely conveyed reality, “poetry would not exist”: “Seulement, sachons n'existerait pas le vers: lui, philosophiquement rémunère le défaut des langues, complément

supérieur” (“poetry would not exist: philosophically it is poetry that makes up for the failure of language, providing an extra extension.”; 242; Lloyd 230). This crisis of language consists in the impossibility of a direct correspondence between word and object (“le défaut des langues”), a problem that is in no way diminished, Mallarmé avers, by the strict prosody of previous generations. In both cases (the pragmatic utilization of language and its regimentation by rhyme and meter) there is an automatization of thought that falsifies its objects. Mallarmé’s answer to the problem that we are not yet thinking is famously musical: “Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l’oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d’autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l’absente de tous bouquets” (“I say: a flower! And, out of the oblivion where my voice casts every contour, insofar as it is something other than the known bloom, there arises, musically, the very idea in its mellowness; in other words, what is absent from every bouquet.”; 250; Johnson 210). Out of the forgetfulness of everyday language and the familiar emerges the absent something that transcends the concrete. As Stephen Cassidy writes, “[p]oetic language, rather than having ‘the function of facile, representative cash,’ rediscovers a prized quality: virtuality” (72). Mallarmé articulates the basic movement of crisis from the actual to immanent virtuality: the emergence of the outside within. A failure of language to exhaustively represent reality—a reality handed over to use and practical ends—conditions poetic alternatives. “L’absente de tous bouquets” aptly describes what, in the aftermath of the failure of the actual, this dissertation seeks to register.

Crisis as Dialectics: The Idolatry of the Actual

Many have argued that the heart of modernism lies both in a radical loss of a former stability in the ideological frames by which existence was once construed and in the subsequent attempts to invent new ways of being. This loss of stabilizing norms, as Max Weber famously states, is nothing less than the “disenchantment of the world,” the triumph of reason over magic, or what Walter Benjamin describes as the disappearance of the artwork’s aura (Shull 62). In this context, forces of mass-production and consumption, technology, and vulgar pragmatism are pitted against the free play of the artist’s creativity. However, modernism, from the perspective of the present study, exemplifies the more specific, ongoing crisis of the action-image as the hegemonic modality of the screen. This articulation of crisis is such that it precedes and follows modernism, and the 19th and early-20th centuries see diverse sets of thinkers articulate this hegemony in varied, but increasingly urgent ways.

In Marx, the sensory-motor reduction of reality is a product of capital. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx writes that “[p]rivate property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it – when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., – in short, when it is used by us” (100). In the present context, Marx’s language evokes Deleuze’s language of the idiot brain. And, indeed, this criticism targets a fateful misinterpretation, one rooted in a capitalistic conception of objects and reality as a whole.

Yet, Mallarmé's point, like Deleuze's, is that in its immanent virtuality, the world is already other than what is disclosed by an apprehension of reality based on use, consumption, and practical interests.

In my view, Marx identifies the obdurate regimentation of the screen by way of the action-image. There is, therefore, a through line from Marx to Deleuze, though it is Henri Bergson that bridges the two thinkers. Deleuze's description of classical cinema in the *Cinema* books relies on an analogy of classical cinema and what Bergson calls "natural perception." Natural perception engenders phenomena as a function of practical interests—the utilitarian demands of existing in an indifferent world in which human beings must struggle and compete for survival. Natural perception, for Bergson, is the world as it emerges through the screen of pragmatic action. Bergson insists that "we must never forget the utilitarian character of our mental functions, which are essentially turned toward action" (*Matter and Memory* 16). This insistence, though not explicitly related to political economy, resonates strikingly with Marx's point above: The hegemonic form of experience has been reduced to a function of use (i.e., action). This reduction is itself already a problem insofar as it is a peculiar limitation of human experience, but there is a larger issue according to Bergson; he writes, "the habits formed in action find their way up to the sphere of speculation, where they create fictitious problems, and that metaphysics must begin by dispersing this artificial obscurity" (16). The error of "fictitious problems" [*problèmes factices*] is what Bergson's philosophy endeavors to correct, since in taking action as its model, thought runs into antinomies (crisis). For Bergson, philosophy (and as I show in chapter 3, literature), must seek out a new basis

for the apprehension of reality. The scope of the action-image ranges from the perceptive and cognitive functions of particular subjects (Bergson) to a far-reaching interpretation of reality rooted in capitalism (Marx). As illustrated in the pairing of Deleuze and Rancière, coupling Marx and Bergson highlights the twofold character of the screen as concerning both subjective experience and objective societal relations.

Again, my critical focus is on the crisis of the screen operating according to the hegemony of the actual and the ways particular works draw out the implications of this crisis. Articulating the precise sense of crisis operative in these objects advances a theory of crisis for film and literary study. And, crucially, rejecting the usual, dialectical sense of crisis lays the groundwork for more subtle readings of texts. At the outset, I asserted that crisis remakes the screen by modifying and disrupting structures of rationality. However, the action-image has produced its own, derivative sense of crisis, one that is largely synonymous with a certain conception of dialectics. Because the meaning of crisis is itself so contested, however, my own deployment of the term requires clarification. Zola, Joyce, and Kieślowski not only reflect general possibilities of thinking beyond the action-image, they instantiate specific attempts to work through and embody the crisis of action. It follows, then, that crisis as a concept must itself be outside the purview of the action-image. Though our common understandings of crisis remain thoroughly linked to action and the actual, artists—particularly those examined here—mobilize crisis toward glimpsing the virtual. Indeed, there are two antithetical conceptions of crisis that are relevant in the context of the forthcoming readings and arguments: *dialectical crisis* and *crisis proper*. If dialectical crisis, still adherent to the logic of the action-image, operates

on the basis of overcoming problems with solutions, crisis proper is that which fractures the problem such that it can no longer be articulated as problem. Only in this latter sense is it adequate to the works under examination here.

Dialectical crisis harbors a certain Hegelian optimism. This optimism stands in contrast to the critical pessimism each of our authors, in varying degrees, espouse. It consists in conceptualizing crisis as merely a temporary problem that will instigate its own solution. Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of the intellectual culture of Hegelianism rests on the identification of dialectics with what he calls "the idolatry of the actual" (72). Nietzsche attacks what he regards as Hegelianism's acquiescence to the actual. For Nietzsche, dialectics applied to history cedes critical thought to a dogmatic acceptance of what is. In Nietzsche's view of dialectics, every historical change, every crisis, is simply the rational unfolding of *Geist*. The actual is thus immune to critique, and every crisis expresses a "success" of history, the movements of a supreme rationality: "If each success have come by a 'rational necessity' and every event show the victory of logic or the 'Idea,' then—down on your knees quickly, and let every step in the ladder of success have its reverence!" (72).

Neoliberal conceptions of crisis have further transformed dialectical crisis such that optimism has cynically been replaced by maximizing profitability, though still the actual reigns supreme. So-called "crisis management" builds crisis into the fabric of financial and social organization as something inevitable but ultimately negotiable, teachable; there are specialists of crisis. Vestiges of Hegelian teleologies converge with what Naomi Klein calls neoliberal "disaster capitalism." Dialectical crisis is thus the

crisis of neoliberalism, since crisis becomes an opportunity to enact what in the prior order of things was politically and economically impossible (though, to be sure, versions of this formulation inhabit Marxist “crisis theory,” particularly before World War II).¹⁰ Milton Friedman understands crises as catalysts for enacting the neoliberal world order: “only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change”; crisis, for Milton, is such that the “politically impossible becomes politically inevitable” (qtd. in Klein 6). Klein aptly summarizes the neoliberal ideology of crisis: “fear and disorder are the catalysts for each new leap forward” (9).¹¹ Crisis in its neoliberal mode remains emphatically linked to banausic concepts of utility, profit, and, most broadly, to action—as evidenced by the capitalist’s clichéd motto, “Never waste a crisis!” Crisis as dialectics, then, betrays its etymological heritage: it ceases to be *κρίσις*—critique, judgement, decision—and becomes a function of maintaining the actual.

¹⁰ Arguably, Karl Marx’s thesis that alternative forms of social and economic order will emerge from the contradictions of capitalism already articulates a version of this mode of thinking. In the 20th century, Marxist thinking on crisis has developed this position further. Samezō Kuruma succinctly articulates, not only the thesis regarding crisis as a motor of the new, but the sense in which an inadequate or limited mode of “cognition” instantiates the crisis on its way to a new regimentation of the thinkable. “Crisis,” Kuruma writes, “in its particular sense, is the collective explosion of all of the contradictions of capitalist production, and as such the outbreak of crisis, from two directions, necessarily brought bourgeois political economy as a science to an end.” This was done in part, according to Kuruma, “by actually thrusting upon political economy *a new problem that was unanswerable from the bourgeois perspective*—i.e. a problem that could only be answered by elucidating the contradictions of capitalist production—crisis exposed in the clearest manner possible the fundamental defect of bourgeois political economy: the class-based limitations of its cognition” (Emphasis added, “An Introduction to the Study of Crisis”).

¹¹ Hegel in the introduction to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, speaks of a “qualitative leap” (6) in similar language: “The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world” (7). A Hegelian sense of crisis—as a sudden generative negativity, or what David Harvey refers to simply as “creative destruction” (3)—has become operative in the logic of global capitalism. This ostensibly odd affinity alone demands a critical interrogation of crisis.

This neoliberal comfort with crisis-as-opportunity requires the consolidation of the action-image. Crisis can only usefully function as an opportunity to innovate from the perspective of the enveloping safety of the sensory-motor. The horror of the world is kept at bay by the distance afforded by the action image; as Deleuze writes,

We see, and we more or less experience, a powerful organization of poverty and oppression. And we are precisely not without sensory-motor schemata for recognizing such things, for putting up with and approving of them and for behaving ourselves subsequently, taking into account our situation, our capabilities and our tastes (20).

Deleuze describes a familiar dialectical scene in which the daily witnessing of unthinkable loss becomes the reparative occasion of taking account of one's situation.

This entirely uncritical state of affairs avoids crisis by remaining within the sensory-motor guarantees of the actual. Heidegger, for his part, has similarly argued that such is the modality of our usual, everyday existence, a general preference for the familiar and disdain for alterity—or what he calls our “mode of fleeing *in the face of it* [being] and forgetfulness *thereof*” (*Being and Time* 69).

Non-dialectically, however, crises, antinomies, and ruptures of artistic forms register different modalities of the screen. Thinkers like Mallarmé and Deleuze open up a way of reading crisis as the generation in the virtual: That is, a sense of crisis that eschews the false mastery implied by the idolatry of the actual. Dialectical crisis, by contrast, seeks to increase the efficacy of the structures of rationality by which the screen is oriented. As I will show, subjective weakness and sickly brains populate the works examined here, and, though their appearances are irregular and uneven, they engender something other than a stable world conditioned by the actual. Each of these objects give rise to ways of thinking and being in the world that entail a rejection of some facet of

dialectical action. In each case, the scope and significance of the crisis of action varies—narrative and descriptive structures (Zola), eidetic and epistemological paradigms (Joyce), and the ethics of representation (Kieślowski)—but each instantiates non-dialectical alternatives to the action-image, atomistic thought, and idiot brains.

As I argue in chapter 4, the actual succumbs to exhaustion because it can no longer transform itself. Such exhaustion is the antithesis of critique since its priority is the maintenance of normativity. This is why, despite the temptation to locate synonyms, the sense of crisis employed here has little to do with the Sublime. Kant's description of the Sublime is indeed a paradigmatic example of the dialectics of self-preservation. In Kant, it is the imagination's failure to grasp an object in the aesthetic experience that conditions reason's grasp of the supersensible (80-81). Thus, the highest form of thought—"Reason's dominion over the sensible"—is given rise to by a kind of "negative condition" ("[t]he satisfaction in the Sublime of nature is then only *negative*") (81). A generative failure conditions the emergence of something other, that is, something not already contained in the prior attempt at apprehending the object. However, the dialectic of the sublime consists in the subject's triumphantly overcoming a failure; it is an utterly recuperative process, since initial failure turns out to be the very means of accessing a higher form of rationality. Deleuze refers to this as Kant's discovery of "discord which produces accord" (*Kant's Critical Philosophy* xiii). It is precisely this classically dialectical image that of failure and recuperation, of problem and solution, that must be distinguished from the transformations inherent in crisis properly understood.

This distinction becomes vital in reading the ways works tarry with the alterity of the virtual—l'absente de tous bouquets—without retreating back into the safety of a hegemonic screen.

Deleuze and a New Sense of Crisis

The following chapters rely heavily on Deleuze's account of the action-image's coming into crisis in the context of the cinema. Indeed, part of the theoretical work of this dissertation lies in demonstrating the analytical utility of reworking Deleuze's description of this crisis in new contexts. However, there remains much to say about the action-image itself. I make the case that this concept is theoretically rich enough to cover the broad scope of this dissertation. Indeed, the action-image fruitfully serves as an umbrella concept that links apparently disparate topics (ranging from, among other things, rationalism to documentary film to Balzac). On the one hand, then, a sketch of Deleuze's account and its implications for the arguments of this dissertation remains to be developed. On the other hand, I will further develop the non-dialectical sense of crisis and its relation to a description of the screen as it struggles to free itself from the action-image.

In the *Cinema* books, Deleuze focuses on one aspect of the screen, namely, the production of a concept of time. The crisis of the action-image appears at the end of the first volume (*Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*) and heralds the emergence of various post-war reconfigurations of cinema (*Cinema 2: The Time-Image*). Crisis, for Deleuze, pertains to time. "If we take the history of thought," he writes, "we see that time has always put the notion of truth into crisis" (126). I turn to the crisis of truth in the context

of Kieślowski in chapter 4. For Deleuze, however, it is Leibniz and the problem of “contingent futures” that is the most immediate example. Yet, as Gregg Lambert explains, crisis has a general historical dimension insofar as there are, within the history of Western thought, “places where the apprehension of time itself gets botched, where its concept loses its way and leads to an impasse [...] According to Deleuze one such impasse occurs when time is confused with space” (12). Though Lambert’s language suggests that the problem of “botching” the interpretation of time is a primarily philosophical or otherwise discursive obstacle, such “botching” concerns the screen, or the conditions of intelligibility that determine the distribution of the sensible. Interpretations of time precede philosophical discourse, and they are coextensive with the becomings of history, culture, and politics.

The particular botching driving the crisis of classical cinema involves the spatialization of time. Spatialized time—or time as a function of movement (the regular ticks that describe the surface of a clock face, for example)—conforms to the action-image and its sensory-motor schemata. In Deleuze, the connection between spatialized time and the action-image is largely implicit. To my mind, what he has in view is the everyday sense of time around which pragmatic human activity organizes itself. This “clock time” is the time of the work day or the calendar whose regularity serves practical interests. For Deleuze, such a conception of time stands in stark contrast to what Bergson calls *la durée*.

The crisis of the action-image in classical cinema allows time to reconstrue itself without the need to be anchored in the demands of the useful. Indeed, The Second World War inaugurates a reversal of the spatialization concept of time:

It is possible that, since the war, a direct time-image has been formed and imposed on the cinema. We do not wish to say that there will no longer be any movement [i.e., the basis of classical cinema], but that—*just as happened a very long time ago in philosophy*—a reversal has happened in the movement-time relationship; it is no longer time which is related to movement, it is the anomalies of movement which are dependent on time.
(*Cinema 1* ix emphasis added)

Time, in other words, appears not as a function of spatialized movement, but in-itself.

Though Deleuze's analysis and detailed description of what he calls a "direct image of time" lies outside the scope of this dissertation, the general thrust of his argument in this passage remains central to the analysis of the screen in crisis. That is, the crisis of action begets fresh modalities of the screen as it produces and modulates fundamental categories of intelligibility: time, but also, space, causality, truth, identity, and subject-object relationality. To my mind, classical cinema and its crisis is simply one iteration of the crisis of action, or one form of the screen freeing itself from the demands of the useful. According to Deleuze, classical cinema recapitulates the crisis of time in philosophy (which "happened a very long time ago"). Deleuze clearly has the year 1781 in mind, the year of Kant's first critique. The reversal Deleuze describes is a revolt against the hegemony of the action-image, since the crisis has weakened movement and the sensory-motor schemata as the dominant representational structures of cinema.

The underlying assumption in what follows is that Deleuze's argument regarding the way works transform the screen (i.e., by way of the production of different modalities of time and space) is generalizable. This position, I assert, is not a philosophical problem forced onto the domain of art. The production of the screen has always been a question of figuring reality—artistically or otherwise. Frequently, Deleuze makes recourse to Shakespeare to describe the time-movement reversal. In his book on Kant, Deleuze's focus is on the problem of time's being "out of joint" (Hamlet): "Time is no longer related to the movement which it measures, but movement is related to the time which conditions it: this is the first great Kantian reversal in the *Critique of Pure Reason*" (*Kant's Critical Philosophy* vii). This is again the idea that, in philosophical thought, time had been reduced to space: Spatial metaphors and abstractions harden the means of thinking time, as if time were something belonging to space, and not its very condition (vii). Kant makes time a condition of experience, rather than something subject to it. Kant, Deleuze argues, undoes the metaphorization of time as a function of space, or what Deleuze calls an "indirect image of time" (i.e., a derivative conception of time). As I show in chapter 3, Bergson (*la durée*) and Joyce (stream-of-consciousness) directly confront this reversal. In analyzing the screen, then, I follow Deleuze in moving between discursive contexts, whether literary, philosophical, or cinematic.

The implications of Deleuze's assessment of classical cinema and its dialectical tendencies are many. I explore these implications throughout, turning to them particularly in chapters 2 and 4. As I argue in chapter 2 in the context of György Lukács' appraisal of realism, crisis disrupts the dialectics of action and gives way to alternative modalities of

the screen. I conceive of Deleuze's discussion of classical cinema as an entree into the objects I turn to in the following chapters. The primary representational modes of classical cinema function, for Deleuze, according to a dialectics of action and situation. What is common to each is that an organizing schemata maintains itself despite changes occurring within it. In the "large form" or SAS' (situation-action-new situation), action engages in a duel with "the milieu, with others, with itself" in its movement from encompassing situation, to action, to new situation: "This organic and spiral representation has, as its formula, SAS' (from the situation to the transformed situation via the intermediary of the action)" (*Cinema 1* 142). The small form, or ASA' (action-situation-new action), in which an action "discloses the situation, a fragment or an aspect of the situation, which triggers of a new action. The action advances blindly and the situation is disclosed in darkness or in ambiguity" (*Cinema 1* 160). Deleuze regards both forms as dialectical and therefore as a betrayal of the becoming onto which they are superimposed. As I discuss in greater detail in chapter 3, the phenomenological underpinnings of the action-image presuppose an equality between subject and object, between interior and exterior. The dialectic of the action-image constitutes "a series of duels: duel with the milieu, with the others, with itself": "The situation, and the character or the action, are like two terms which are simultaneously correlative and antagonistic" (142). Inner and outer are effectively correlates within the same system, and their antagonism does nothing to threaten the system itself (as in crisis); quite the contrary, this antagonism functions as the dialectical motor that sets the whole in motion.

What is central to the logic of the action-image is that dialectical forms maintain an organic unity that subsume change to the benefit of an organizing totality. Change in this sense is not real change because the totality admits of only that which conforms to its logic—change as a function of the whole. The action—the would-be unforeseen event—that instantiates a new situation is in fact a reiteration and reconsolidation of the whole. Change—and, indeed, crisis in my understanding of the term—pertains to difference and to a relation to alterity that harbors the capacity to radically reconfigure the whole.

In formulating a hermeneutics of crisis—a non-dialectical sense of crisis—I turn, then, to Deleuze’s reading of cinema’s many transformations, which, as Felicity Colman writes, highlight the incessant differentiation and production of forms:

Deleuze's theory of the cinema directs us to pay attention to the openings that fragment, empty or crack forms [...] So, in the consideration of screen-based forms, Deleuze's cinema dialectic is neither Hegelian nor Socratic, nor is it geared toward achieving antinomies, rather Deleuze engages the dialectic for its binomial mechanism: its devise (sic) of thrust and reversal, the way that a dialectic argues from different modes or poles of energy. In this movement, the action of the cinema engenders different styles and forms of film: the movement engenders the differentiation of form. (21)

Colman’s explanation of the mechanics of Deleuze’s analysis, what she calls “Deleuze’s cinema dialectic,” succinctly describes what, in my view, persists as Deleuze’s major contribution to the study of form generally. Emphasizing crisis as a hermeneutic concept similarly directs critical scrutiny to “the openings that fragment, empty or crack forms.” To my mind, however, there is nothing inherently cinematic about this “cinema dialectic”; it is rather that Deleuze’s methodology (to the extent that this term applies) finds particularly rich explanatory material in the history of cinema. The engendering of formal differentiation, as Colman rightly indicates “is neither Hegelian nor Socratic,” and

it is for this reason that I refer to this process as non-dialectical. This non-dialectical sense of crisis, insofar as it guides my analysis, refers to way disturbances of form shape the phenomenally mediating capacity of the screen.

This Deleuzian framework supplies the means of advancing a notion of crisis applicable to my readings of Zola, Joyce, and Kiesłowski. In varying degree, and by different means, these artists reject dialectical structures in favor of the immanent virtuality of the screen. Not among those thinkers who are committed to salvaging Hegel (cf. Jean-Luc Nancy's reading of Georges Bataille), Deleuze blows open the totalizing tendencies of French Hegelianism while retaining some of its trappings (Devisch 28-9). Crisis begets not a new totality, but instead desediments totality by soliciting responses in the mode of a multiplicity of expressions. Deleuze refers to this absence of regimenting totality, following Heidegger, Blanchot, and Artaud as "the figure of nothingness, the inexistence of a whole which could be thought" (*Cinema 2* 168).¹²

Moreover, the Deleuzian critique of dialectics secures a framework for thinking the ways in which texts break the yoke of the actual. For my purposes, the most pertinent aspect of this critique lies in the rebuttal of the reparative consolidation of the actual at the heart of dialectics. As Deleuze explains, the Hegelian/rationalist posits a process by which the infinite richness of concrete multiplicity becomes subsumed by totalizing abstraction:

In so-called rationalist philosophies, the abstract is given the task of explaining, and it is the abstract that is realized in the concrete. One starts with abstractions

¹² One is not far, in this respect, from Adorno, for whom "the whole is the false" (50). There is, in my view, a conspicuous, though unstated, alignment on this point between Deleuze and Frankfurt School thinkers generally insofar as each regards abstraction as catastrophic for thought (Adorno 50).

such as the One, the Whole, the Subject, and one looks for the process by which they are embodied in a world which they make conform to their requirements (this process can be knowledge, virtue, history...). Even if it means undergoing a terrible crisis each time that one sees rational unity or totality turning into their opposites, or the subject generating monstrosities. (*Dialogues* vii)

Crisis in this derivative sense remains concomitant with the subsumption of the concrete in service of a hegemonic screen. According to this mode of analysis, the remainder, the excessive—in effect, the inexplicable—has no place, since it is by definition impossible. Herein lies the key theoretical difference with an approach like that of Roland Barthes' classical analysis of Flaubert and *l'effet de réel*: For Barthes, the barometer must not stand outside the organizing logic of the text (realism), despite its apparent superfluity. Instead, the barometer indexes the real itself: no escape from the totalizing abstraction is permitted. I posit, alternatively, the disruptive force of the unsubsumable as constitutive of crisis. In place of the One, however, emerges the many. Deleuze's resistance to abstraction is one of the reasons that there is no singular, paradigmatic time-image offered up in the cinema texts, but only a multiplicity of expressive responses to the crisis of action. Indeed, this insistence on immanent multiplicity in place of the abstract prompts Deleuze to regard himself as an empiricist.¹³ Likewise, the mode of analysis I take up in the following pages seeks to read the manifold responses and undulations of the crisis of action.

¹³ Deleuze's sense of empiricism is obviously idiosyncratic: "I have always felt that I am an empiricist [...] Empiricism starts with a completely different evaluation [*vis-à-vis* rationalism]: analysing the state of things, in such a way that non-preexistent concepts can be extracted from them. States of things are neither unities nor totalities, but *multiplicities*" (author's emphasis, *Dialogues* vii).

I therefore see the critical, analytical value of crisis in its resistance to program and organizing totalities that would tame the generative and creative capacities of texts. Crisis, in the sense I use it, becomes an operation of the text and of thought that undermines generally stable categories, which themselves range from the textual (the crisis might involve the instability of literary technique, as in Zola) to the ethical or metaphysical (as in Joyce and Kieślowski). Some screens-in-crisis constitute losses, others, ongoing dilemmas, and still others, flashes of becoming briefly glimpsed between the cracks of utility. What is common to each is the reconfiguration of the norms of the actual. Deleuze and Guattari speak of “an *I do not know*” as “positive and creative, the condition of creation itself” (*What is Philosophy?* 128). An absence of epistemological mastery lays the ground for an intrusion that reprograms the screen, even if temporarily. In Zola, these intrusions are indeed flashes, intermittent and exceptional passages that stand out from a surrounding realism. And while Joyce stages a fitful but steady engagement with the body-as-screen from the perspective of a brittle rationalism, Kieślowski rejects the action-image—over the course of his career-long transition from documentary to fiction cinema—in favor of a screen activated by virtuality. Insofar as the brain has lost the epistemic assurances of the action-image, it has also, for this very reason, reanimated a relation to immanent alterity. Deleuze, who guides this analysis, is for this reason a thinker of the force of chance, or the encounter, which, in the words of Gregory Flaxman, “detour us into more supple lines, aberrant paths and anomalies” (“Politics and Ontology”). As I argue in chapter 4, there are aesthetic and ethical

dimensions of the “I do not know” that characterize the absence of the whole.¹⁴ Crisis makes this absence visible (l’absente de tous bouquets; “the figure of nothingness”) insofar as it minimizes the deadening effects of the actual.

Crisis, as I have defined it, is that which fractures the problem such that it can no longer be articulated as problem. In crisis, structures of rationality constituted by a screen give way to an absence, a figure of nothingness. But it is precisely this absence that gives rise to thought and the generation of new configurations of the screen. The relevant sense of “problem,” then, is that which gives rise to thought in the encounter. I return to the notion of the Deleuzian encounter in the context of Kiesłowski, but it is worth stating at the outset that Deleuze’s definition of the encounter emphasizes non-recognition:

“Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter” (*Difference and Repetition* 139). Extending Deleuze’s analysis, I posit that this “something” is the “problem” disrupted by crisis. The problem engenders thought, which is to say, it disrupts the screen as the very means of its apprehension, thereby creating the conditions for new modalities of the screen.

¹⁴ According to Erich Auerbach, modern literature generalizes the “I do not know,” which increasingly begins to include the author of the work among those who lack epistemic certainty. Virginia Woolf, Auerbach writes in his masterwork, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, represents herself to be someone who doubts, wonders, hesitates, as though the truth about her characters were not better known to her than it is to them or to the reader. It is all, then, a matter of the author’s attitude toward the reality of the world he represents. And this attitude differs entirely from that of authors who interpret the actions, situations, and characters of their personages with objective assurance, as was the general practice in earlier times. Goethe or Keller, Dickens or Meredith, Balzac or Zola told us out of their certain knowledge what their characters did, what they felt and thought while doing it, and how their actions and thoughts were to be interpreted. They knew everything about their characters. (535)

Not only characters, but the authors themselves are no longer commensurate with the actions required to modify situations. The result in modernism is of course the conspicuous staging of one’s not knowing (as indeed I show in chapter 3), and further, the blowing open of the knowledge-action circuit.

This is not a triumphant dialectic by a different name. As Kieślowski's work frequently indicates, nothing guarantees a happy ending. The scenes of crisis examined in the following chapters glimpse a range of responses to the crisis of the actual, all of which, in a general way, remain tentative and ongoing. In each case, the texts examined here contest the hegemony of the action-image by different means, but this hegemony, not subject to dialectical supersession, remains unremitting.

Chapter 2

Émile Zola's Naturalist Screen and the Crisis of Narration

If chapter 1 sought to clarify the foundational terms of this dissertation in view of crisis and the screen, this chapter seeks to put these terms to work in a concrete literary context. I argue that Émile Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* novel cycle relies on a mode of phenomenological description that undermines the organizing logic of dialectical action, or what Lukács calls, simply, "narration." Though by and large Zola's works remain committed this logic—what I have called, following Deleuze, the action-image—they nonetheless occasion—in infrequent, but tremendously significant moments—a break from the hegemony of the actual. In describing these moments, I refer to Deleuze's own description of Zola's work as a form of "idiosyncratic surrealism." Stated in passing, Deleuze largely leaves it to his readers to imagine the meaning of this formulation. Though not properly surrealistic in the sense of the movement that would emerge decades after Zola's death (hence its idiosyncrasy), the term names a break from realism that defies realism's tendency to coordinate description around natural perception. Indeed, I further suggest that instances of this idiosyncratic surrealism speckle Zola's oeuvre and are in many ways the consequence of his naturalism. In describing a milieu, Zola abandons a purely realist mode of description in favor of a naturalism that at times distorts the tidy divisions of subject and object.

In chapter 1, I argue that the screen is comprised of the mediating conditions that determine the appearance of phenomena. Zola had himself already begun thinking the

role of mediation in terms of the screen, or “L’Écran.” Zola similarly theorized the screen as that which mediates *what is* according to the demands of a milieu. In an 1864 letter to Antony Valabrègue, he writes:

Je me permets, au début, une comparaison un peu risquée : toute œuvre d'art est comme une fenêtre ouverte sur la création ; il y a, enchâssé dans l'embrasure de la fenêtre, une sorte d'Écran transparent, à travers lequel on aperçoit les objets plus ou moins déformés, souffrant des changements plus ou moins sensibles dans leurs lignes et dans leur couleur. Ces changements tiennent à la nature de l'Écran. On n'a plus la création exacte et réelle, mais la création modifiée par le milieu où passe son image. (qtd. in Becker 233)

I am taking the liberty, from the beginning, of making a somewhat hazardous comparison: Every work of art is like a window opened onto creation; there is, encased in the window frame, a kind of imperceptible Screen through which one glimpses objects, more or less deformed, suffering changes more or less perceptible in their contours and colors. These changes depend upon the nature of the Screen. There is no longer exact or real creation, but creation modified by the milieu through which its image passes. (My trans.)

Here Zola is interested in creation, but that of a deformed, potentially monstrous kind—that of the idiosyncratically surreal. Reality passes through the milieu and gives rise to images that suffer a transformation (which is not the same as images of suffering, although these abound in Zola). When, in the passages I examine below, Zola puts dialectical narration into crisis by turning away from realism (“On n’a plus la création exacte et réelle”), he thereby enacts what he posits in his letter to Valabrègue, namely, a thinking of the milieu as screen. This chapter therefore explicates the ways in which milieux in Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* generate structures of rationality that break with the action-image, particularly where the screen produces deformed, suffering images.

As a structure of rationality (in Rancière's sense), the screen in Zola operates most profoundly in its capacity to distort rigid boundaries between subject and object. Reading *Germinal* (1885), I posit that Zola's naturalism leads him to soften the divide between subject and object erected by previous realisms. The milieu in Zola becomes both subject and object: it is at once what is perceived and the subjective conditions of perception. To further elaborate this point, I turn to *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), in which characters are subjected to experiences that dislodge the narrative focalization of an observer in favor of phenomenological description. As one finds elsewhere in Zola, space—in this instance, the department store—recalls corpses, haunting presences that threaten rationality by dint of their potential return. In the following section, I argue that any thorough analysis of *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873) must account for the sublime character of the spaces Zola describes. Florent encounters an uncanny Parisian space, one that layers incompatible spatial logics and produces a phenomenology of space-in-crisis. Similarly, *La Curée* (1872) succinctly illustrates a tendency operative throughout the *Rougon-Macquart*, namely, Zola's deployment of the "as-if" and the role of subjective seeming. Zola's tendency to emphasize the mediated status of his description (by way of so many literal and figurative screens) underscores his divergence from an action-oriented realism (so succinctly posited by Lukács). Zola, I conclude, remains situated between a more or less closed system of realism and an emergent modernism. The distortions of form and the blurring of subject and object wrought by his naturalism, I argue, enact a crisis that is constitutive of the naturalist screen.

Action, Narration, and the Onto-epistemic Significance of the Screen

It is easy to dismiss Lukács' now infamous assessment of 19th-century European literature. His polarizing literary history unfolds along neat, dichotomous demarcations that betray a Hegelian mode of thinking largely incompatible with the phobia for binary thought common to critics today. Among other sins, he is accused of problematically bifurcating early and late 19th century authors by pitting the authors he extols—principally Balzac—against those he denigrates—Flaubert and Zola. While the former are lauded for their engagement with socio-historical forces, the latter are accused of mere spectatorship (“Narrate or Describe?” 116). With such staunchness in his approbation of totality and correlative criticism of modernism, Lukács' bygone sense of narrative today appears indefensible, or, at the very least, uninspiring.

Why, particularly at the outset of an analysis that seeks to emphasize Zola's innovation, begin here with Lukács? As a preliminary response to this question, one could note that Lukács' philosophical and political commitments often lead him to reflect on the theme of this dissertation, crisis. In general terms, that is, he is a theorist of crisis, particularly as it pertains to the 19th century. More precisely, I argue that Lukács' intuition about the shift that is instantiated in naturalism identifies a turning point in the 19th-century novel largely defined by a departure from action and narration toward observation and description.

Lukács' seminal essay, “Narrate or Describe?” (1936) notoriously distinguishes narrative from description: the former is associated with activity, causal links, and

transformation; the latter with passivity, superfluity, and stasis. Narrative puts characters in a social, political, or economic context in such a way that those characters have at minimum the potential to act on and transform themselves and their environments. Description, by contrast, retreats from the dialectical relationship between actant and totality. Indeed, description is emphatically non-dialectical and results, on Lukács' view, in a chaos of perspective:

The author's point of view jumps from here to there, and the novel reels from one perspective to another. The author loses the comprehensive vision and omniscience of the old epic narrators. He sinks consciously to the level of his characters and sometimes knows only as much about situations as they do. The false contemporaneity of description transforms the novel into a kaleidoscopic chaos. (133)

The novel's descent into perspectival and formal chaos is here evaluated and rejected, not in-itself, as it were, but rather analogically.¹⁵ It fails to replicate in its artistic production the structure of political struggle and historical transformation. It is on this point that all but the most die-hard Hegelian-Marxists part ways.

What does remain plausibly intact in Lukács' analysis, I argue, is his basic assertion regarding the paradigmatic shift from dialectical narration to non-dialectical description. The two central questions to which I will seek to respond are thus as follows: What is the philosophical (and in a broad sense, political) import of this transformation in the novel? How does non-dialectical description manifest itself in Zola? Beyond his

¹⁵ Cf. the discussion of Jameson in chapter 1.

initial intuition, Lukács is of little guidance. The task here, then, is to disclose in Zola's texts the workings of a crisis of dialectical narration as it gives way to non-dialectical description. Such an approach promotes an appreciation of the phenomenological depth of Zola's project in the *Rougon-Macquart*; beyond his vocation as a describer of French society, Zola sought, by way of his deployment of the milieu and the screen, an entirely new mode of phenomenological description.

Around the time that he began work on his *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, Zola himself writes briefly on how he conceives the difference between himself and Balzac. In "Différences entre Balzac et moi" (1869), he describes his forthcoming works as departing from the social toward the scientific "Mon oeuvre sera moins sociale que scientifique" 'My work will be less social than scientific' (V, 1736; My trans.). How he distinguishes the social from the scientific is idiosyncratic but telling: For Balzac, "Un écrivain doit avoir en morale et en religion et en politique une idée arrêtée, il doit avoir une décision sur les affaires des hommes" ("A writer must have, in morality, religion, and politics, a fixed idea, he must have a judgment regarding the affairs of men"; V, 1736; My trans.). That an author must have a decision or judgment on society is linked for Zola to an "idée arrêtée," a fixed or predetermined idea; Balzacian realism, it is worth noting, is by this definition antithetical to dialectical movement. If Balzac strove to "peindre les hommes, les femmes et les choses," Zola responds by subjecting (scientifically, in Zola's sense) "les hommes et les femmes aux choses" (V, 1737). In the former, the method is notably descriptive and passive, while the latter is reactive and dynamic; Lukács, of course, holds the inverse to be the case. Moreover, what this distinction reveals about

Zola is his continued reflection on the inescapability of mediation. To subject the men and women of his novels to things, as he puts it, is to figure subjectivity in terms of mediating role of milieu. This insistence on the role of mediation figures at the heart of his deployment of the screen.

As I develop in chapter 1, Deleuze famously posits a break between “classical” and “modern” cinema, situated historically around the Second World War. Classical cinema is governed according to what Bergson—from whom Deleuze draws his inspiration—calls a “practical simplification of reality” (72). This regime—or screen—of sensory-motor or natural perception admits of only that which conforms to its logic of action and reaction, cause and effect, in short, practically oriented movement.¹⁶ For Deleuze, this paradigm of representation, the dogmatism of the action-image, comes into crisis when its shortcomings are made visible by its inability to incorporate radically new circumstances. Explaining his assertion that the Second World War marks a paradigm-shifting break, he writes: “The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe” (xi). The resulting “loosening of the sensory-motor

¹⁶ Deleuze’s interest in breaking with action and the act emerges from his Bergsonism. As Bergson develops through his philosophical works, pragmatic activity conditions reality: We perceive and think only that which facilitates our doing. To quote Bergson: “We had to live, and life demands that we grasp things in their relations to our own needs. Life is action. Life implies the acceptance only of the *utilitarian* side of things in order to respond to them by appropriate reactions: all other impressions must be dimmed or else reach us vague and blurred. I look and I think I see, I listen and I think I hear, I examine myself and I think I am reading the very depths of my heart. But what I see and hear of the outer world is purely and simply a selection made by my senses to serve as a light to my conduct; what I know of myself is what comes to the surface, what participates in my actions. My senses and my consciousness, therefore, give me no more than a practical simplification of reality” (author’s emphasis, 103).

linkage” makes way for a mode of description regimented not by movement and space, but by time. For Deleuze, that is, cinema’s postwar transformations and experiments are best characterized by its decoupling of time from natural perception; time ceases to be a function of action and reaction, thesis and antithesis, and takes on an independent existence that finds expression in cinematic form.

It is not difficult to see in Deleuze’s configuration the outlines of the dichotomy that informs Lukács’ infamous question: narrate or describe? As I explain in chapter 1, Deleuze attributes to the movement-image precisely the kind of dialectical mechanism that Lukács extols in a figure like Balzac. Lukács’ analysis of realism posits a crisis, but attributes it to a failure of political commitment on the part of Flaubert and Zola, who merely “stand aloof as critics of capitalist society” (119). Lukács, like Deleuze, emphasizes the temporal ramifications of crisis, though he derides the break from the action-image: if action and narration partake of the temporality of history and revolution, description “contemporizes everything,” reducing characters and settings to an “illusory present,” mere “still lives” (130). Equally striking is the fact that Lukács and Deleuze share the fundamental insight that the disruption resulting from these crises of representation are epistemological in nature. In Deleuze, new representational configurations emerge on the basis of an encounter with spaces for which there are no longer sense-making regimes. Lukács laments this loss and denounces description for

freeing experience from the yoke of action and thereby depriving characters and readers alike from an epistemologically secure and oriented relation to society and text as knowable totalities.¹⁷

Zola's mode of description, I posit, emerges as a particular response to a world that is increasingly less legible according to the clichéd regime of action. The urban and, indeed, national transformations that France incurs during the period of the Second Empire have been well-documented in texts such as David Harvey's *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (2003). Yet, Zola's works register a phenomenological inquiry as much as they confirm something of the empirical data concerning the exponential growth of railways, telegraphs, and streets. That is, Zola's *Second Empire* produces opaque situations and abstruse spaces that prompt the author of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle to occasionally deviate from the action-image in favor of observation and description. Deleuze accounts for the collapse of action instantiated by Italian neo-realism as a passage from action to seeing: "This is a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent [de voyant, non plus d'actant] (2). Characters have become voyants or seers, no longer capable of reacting to the world; as Deleuze writes,

the situation [the character] is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides, and makes him see and hear what is no longer subject to the rules of a response or an

¹⁷ In general, Lukács' preference is for a literature that lends to the world a determinate structure of rationality that becomes transparent to the reader. His Hegelianism with respect to epistemology is clear here; the nature of knowledge is such that it has a narrative structure: "The reader takes confidence from the author's omniscience and feels at home in the fictional world. If he cannot foretell the events, he feels confident about the direction which the events will take because of their inner logic and because of the inner necessity in the characters. Perhaps he does not know everything about the future progress of the action and the future evolution of the characters, but in general *he knows more than the characters themselves*." (emphasis added, 129)

action. He records rather than reacts. He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action (2).

Here the dialectics of upheaval and reparation that characterize the *Bildungsroman* are no longer operative. So too has the capacity of a figure to challenge and act upon a situation. The concreteness of Balzac's famous "À nous deux, maintenant!," uttered by Rastignac at the end of *Le Père Goriot* (1835), gives way to descriptions of milieu in Zola in which distinct dialectical sides become far less prominent. To be sure, Zola is not "post-action," yet action is always conceived as a result of a mediating milieu, and the milieu, as I illustrate in what follows, remains largely indifferent to the sensory-motor and utilitarian interests of subjects.

Jameson begins his discussion of Zola in *Antinomies of Realism* (2013) with the assertion that his analysis will follow the theorization of Zola that Deleuze offers in the first of the cinema books, *Cinema 1: L'Image-Mouvement* (1983) (45). It is in this text that Deleuze offers the following formulation:

C'est le naturalisme. Il ne s'oppose pas au réalisme, mais au contraire il en accentue les traits en les prolongeant dans un surréalisme particulier. Le naturalisme, en littérature, c'est essentiellement Zola : c'est lui qui a l'idée de doubler les milieux réels avec des mondes originaires. Dans chacun de ses livres, il décrit un milieu précis, mais aussi il *l'épuise* et le rend au monde originaire : c'est de cette source supérieure que vient sa force de description réaliste. (Author's emphasis, 174-175)

[Naturalism] is not opposed to realism, but on the contrary accentuates its features by extending them in an idiosyncratic surrealism. Naturalism in literature is essentially Zola. He had the idea of making real milieux run in parallel with originary worlds. In each of his books, he describes a precise milieu, but he also *exhausts* it, and restores it to the originary world; it is from this higher source that the force of realist description derives. (Author's emphasis, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* 124)

That realism and naturalism coinhabit the same space in Zola's works is undeniable. The more controversial point—the point the remainder of this chapter will seek to substantiate—concerns realism's relation to naturalism's "idiosyncratic surrealism" (or "le surréalisme particulier"). Deleuze's idea of the doubling of worlds—similar to what Jameson refers to as a stereoscope, and what I later refer to as Zola's creation of "depth"—helps explain the relationship between the actual and the screen in Zola. If naturalism accentuates the features of realism, it does so in part by putting the hegemony of the action-image into crisis. I read what Deleuze calls "des mondes originaires" as the virtual dimensions of the milieu that break with the sensory-motor descriptions of reality. In describing milieux—the mine, the department store, or the markets—Zola layers the actual atop a subterranean virtual. I focus in the present analysis on Zola's description of the screen in crisis, moments when the virtual breaks the surface of the actual.

Zola's Phenomenology: Deforming the Subject-Object Split

The innovation of the naturalist description was to absolutize the mutually constitutive character of the subject-object relation. The subject is a product of the world of objects, the milieu, but the converse is also true. In Zola's novels, milieux are described through the filter of environmentally determined characters. Indeed, the work of art is itself subject to the conditioning of a particular experiential frame or temperament; as Zola famously remarks in *Le Roman expérimental*, "Il est certain qu'une œuvre ne sera jamais qu'un coin de la nature vu à travers un tempérament" (111) 'It is certain that a work of art will never be anything other than a corner of nature seen through a temperament' (My trans.). Free indirect discourse further blurs the distinction

between subject and object, since, in fusing with the subjective framing of the characters, objectivity becomes (inter)personalized in the milieu. To be sure, Gustave Flaubert deploys free indirect discourse far more frequently and consistently than Zola. In each author, the usual division between narrative and characters at times becomes unclear. In Zola in particular, this conflation extends to the point that characters appear even to borrow language from the text's narrator. What makes Zola's the pertinent use of free indirect discourse for the present analysis, however, is its relation to the milieu-as-screen. That is, Zola's blurring of the subject-object distinction is, to my mind, a logical extension of his naturalistic sense of objectivity; though the milieu determines subjects, it is at the same time, as described phenomena, determined by a subject or "temperament." As Jameson asserts, Zola's work "looks less like an account of the destiny of anthropomorphic characters than it does an immense collection of distinct phenomenological spaces" (76). Indeed, in Zola, phenomenological space is the product of subjectivities always already themselves determined by the spaces within which they encounter the world.

Jameson (rather unexpectedly¹⁸) turns in passing to phenomenology to describe what is fundamental to Zola's novels. This reference usefully suggests that, when it concerns spaces in Zola, one is never, strictly speaking, referring to abstract or geometrical space. Though "phenomenological" suggests description, it is distinct from realism's detailed description or the creation of what Auerbach calls a "true portrait of

¹⁸ Unexpectedly, because his analysis has hitherto been emphatically Deleuzian (as opposed to phenomenological) in its desubjectivized sense of affect.

contemporary society” (510). Spaces, and the characters that occupy them, emphatically defy realistic description at critical points throughout the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, even if realism is the predominant mode surrounding such moments. Space in Zola is phenomenological insofar as its existence depends upon an experiential frame of one who experiences. At the same time—and this is the paradoxical foundation of Zola’s work—these spaces are themselves the very means by which experience emerges. Herein lies the technical sense of *milieu* in Zola: The term signifies at once subjective and objective, means and end, form and content. In this sense, descriptions of a squalid cafe, a dark and narrow arcade, or an opulent hothouse function as characterization, just as a physiological description—a character’s robustness or lassitude, for example—expresses the qualities of a given societal field. This economy of description functions on the basis of a general exchangeability of attributes that defies any tidy division of subject and object. On the one hand, of course, naturalism remains invested in realistic description of the sort Lukács bemoans: relating banal features of an observed reality. On the other hand, naturalism seeks to capture a contravening force, one that ignores the subjective and objective lines with which the real is drawn. It is this latter movement, this bubbling up of crisis, that is of interest here.

To be sure, the importance of the phenomenon in question has little to do with its frequency. *Germinal* (1888), which, on the whole, sustains a realist, action-driven narrative, nonetheless offers concrete examples. Chapter 1 concludes with the following paragraph; Étienne Lantier has just arrived at le Voreux and ponders the coal mine before him:

Quand il eut repris son paquet, Étienne ne s'éloigna pas encore. Il sentait les rafales lui glacer le dos, pendant que sa poitrine brûlait, devant le grand feu. Peut-être, tout de même, ferait-il bien de s'adresser à la fosse: le vieux pouvait ne pas savoir; puis, il se résignait, il accepterait n'importe quelle besogne. Où aller et que devenir, à travers ce pays affamé par le chômage? laisser derrière un mur sa carcasse de chien perdu? Cependant, une hésitation le troublait, une peur du Voreux, au milieu de cette plaine rase, noyée sous une nuit si épaisse. A chaque bourrasque, le vent paraissait grandir, comme s'il eût soufflé d'un horizon sans cesse élargi. Aucune aube ne blanchissait dans le ciel mort, les hauts fourneaux seuls flambaient, ainsi que les fours à coke, ensanglantant les ténèbres, sans en éclairer l'inconnu. Et le Voreux, au fond de son trou, avec son tassement de bête méchante, s'écrasait davantage, respirait d'une haleine plus grosse et plus longue, l'air gêné par sa digestion pénible de chair humaine. (III, 1142)

Étienne picked up his bundle but lingered a while longer. He could feel the icy blasts of wind on his back while his chest roasted in the heat from the fire. Perhaps he should try at the pit all the same, the old man might be mistaken; and anyway he was past caring now, he'd take whatever they gave him. Where else could he go, what else could he do, when so many people round about were starving and out of work? Was he to end up like a stray dog, a dead carcass lying behind some wall or other? And yet something made him hesitate, a fear of Le Voreux itself, out here in the middle of this open plain that lay buried in thick darkness. With each gust the force of the wind seemed to increase as if it were blowing in from an ever-widening horizon. No dawn paled the dead sky; there was only the blaze of the tall blast-furnaces and the coke-ovens, turning the darkness blood red but shining no light into the unknown. And Le Voreux, crouching like some evil beast at the bottom of its lair, seemed to hunker down even further, puffing and panting in increasingly slow, deep bursts, as if it were struggling to digest its meal of human flesh. (14-15)

Étienne's concern, his uncertain future interrogated in free indirect discourse, folds into a description of the external world. Initially grounded by Étienne's experiential frame, the description in this passage transitions gradually toward a third person, narratorial perspective. It is as if Étienne's encounter instigates the narrator's description of the environment, which itself becomes a cruel beast (*bête méchante*). In a formulation that resembles Heidegger's writings on mood, Étienne's fear is vague and foreboding; it has nothing to do with immediate details of the action (i.e., finding work), since this is

decided (he is resigned, we are told, to accept “n'importe quelle besogne” or to face his ruin). Zola indicates that something beyond immediate practical concerns is at stake here. By way of something not yet identified—something troubling, “une hésitation”—the pit is disclosed as a determinate force of the milieu. That is, that the mine is a devouring beast is true not only for Étienne, but for the phenomenality of this space generally. It would not suffice, therefore, to explain away Étienne’s fear in this passage as a harbinger of the coming catastrophe, as mere foreshadowing (that is, as a function of the narrative).

Indeed, in Zola, there is often something more at work in language than what is *prima facie* figurative. When descriptions indicate that, say, the mine, department store, or food market *seems* thus and so, the force of this seeming should not be assumed to be “merely” the work of simile or metaphor. Such seeming, in other words, is phenomenological rather than merely figurative, counterfactual, or rhetorical. This is the case particularly where it concerns the description of a predominant feature of the milieu. Thus, when one reads in Zola that le Veroux “lui semblait avoir un air mauvais de bête goulue, accroupie là pour manger le monde,” the description should be regarded as conveying qualities pertaining to a state of affairs in general, and not merely as something belonging to the experience of a specific observer. The figurative, then, is not “merely” figurative—in the sense of being less real; on the contrary, its work is to objectively describe a mode of being-in-the-world. Zola’s use of figurative language as it pertains to subjective experience describes a virtual, subterranean life of individuals and society more generally.

Zola's conflation of subject and object can at times be quite explicit, particularly where finite spaces have an ontologically determinate relation to characters. Later in *Germinal*, for example, the breakdown M. Hennebeau experiences upon learning of his wife's latest infidelity is instructive. This episode, which occurs as thousands of striking workers encroach upon M. Hennebeau's bourgeois residence, ironically emphasizes a private crisis laying siege to the manager's comfortable position even as the public order for which he is responsible unravels just outside his door. Throughout the chapter, Zola imbues an inventory of banal objects and spaces with ontological significance. But, it is in Paul's room—the space that accommodated his wife's infidelity and his nephew's betrayal—that exterior space takes hold of subjective interiority:

Machinalement, M. Hennebeau, qui voulait voir, remonta au second étage, dans la chambre de Paul: c'était la mieux placée, à gauche, car elle permettait d'enfiler la route, jusqu'aux Chantiers de la Compagnie. Et il se tint derrière la persienne, dominant la foule. Mais cette chambre l'avait saisi de nouveau, la table de toilette épongée et en ordre, le lit froid, aux draps nets et bien tirés. Toute sa rage de l'après-midi, cette furieuse bataille au fond du grand silence de sa solitude, aboutissait maintenant à une immense fatigue. Son être était déjà comme cette chambre, refroidi, balayé des ordures du matin, rentré dans la correction d'usage. (III, 1439)

Wanting to observe what was going on, M. Hennebeau made his way up to the second floor and, without thinking, into Paul's bedroom: being on the left-hand side of the house, it was the best place because it afforded a clear view down the road as far as the Company yards. And there he stood, behind the shutters, overlooking the crowd. But once again his attention was caught by the state of the room: the wash-stand had been tidied and cleaned, and the bed was now cold, its crisp sheets neatly tucked in. All the rage he had felt that afternoon and the furious row he had conducted in total silence inside his own head had now given way to an immense fatigue. His whole being was like this room, cooler, swept clean of the morning's filth, and restored to its usual state of propriety. (355)

M. Hennebeau's being has become room-like, and, in particular, it has become like the room that has assailed him for much of the day. One could presume that all of the objects encountered in the room are merely reminders of the illicit acts that took place there, but Zola gives no indication of this. Indeed, Zola's tendency is to avoid describing psychological effects apart from their material supports. Instead, the objects and the room itself seize his being, reducing him to the exhausted superficiality of bourgeois hypocrisy. That is to say, M. Hennebeau's defeat is embodied, not only, and not even primarily, in a physiological sense, but in a phenomenological sense that, anticipating Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, is coextensive with his surroundings (a spatiality conspicuously coded in terms of bourgeois wealth).¹⁹ Moments such as these collapse the division habitually erected between subject and object, emphatically concretizing the generality that, in Zola, such divisions are always already collapsed.

Such description, despite some similarities, is engaged in something quite different from what one finds in the limit experiences of a figure like Sartre, whose fiction is finally concerned with individuals and their relations to the world. Roquentin experiences reality stripped of its usual or cliched ontological determinations, but this event remains grounded in this character's subjectivity; Nausea is the visceral response to not-being-at-home in the world, but it remains emphatically personal, particularly as it functions as the gateway to authenticity. In Zola, the distortions encountered by a given

¹⁹ Heidegger's analysis of equipmentality in *Being and Time*, particularly his analysis of objects within rooms, is apt here: "What we encounter as closest to us (though not as something taken as a theme) is the room; and we encounter it not as something 'between for walls' in a geometrical spatial sense, but as equipment for residing" (98).

character are not simply emblematic of a quality belonging to the character, since such apparent mirages are there objectively (that is, as a phenomenological structure of that which appears). In the case of our last example, M. Hennebeau's experience discloses the world of the bourgeois as full of contradiction; the very being constitutive of the bourgeois milieu, Zola indicates, is like a neatly made bed upon which incestuous infidelity has taken place.

From Behind the Screen (and the Return of the Dead)

Things are made more complicated by the seeming problem that the amorphous boundaries between perceiver and perceived often make it difficult to determine the precise origin of any given focalization. Jameson usefully provides a comparison with early film, suggesting that, camera movement in early film, though always motivated by a circuit of action and information, frees itself of the yoke of a specific diegetic perceiver; "Zola," Jameson notes, "still seems to need a point of view" (51). Zola's camera, to extend the comparison, still has a human body. That Zola "still needs" a character's point of view aptly suggests that he is in some sense situated between realism and an emerging modernism, but also, more pertinently, that his style is internally conflicted, torn between two tendencies. These poles belong, Jameson argues, on the one hand to a perceiving character, and, on the other, to a third-person other. The result is

a deplorable, or opportunistic, and at least wholly unregulated displacement of the narrative center from one participant to another in all of Zola's novels. But this particular doubling of perception, in which the aesthetic perspective of the painter does not replace that of the explorer-protagonist, but rather imperceptibly slips in beside it, in a kind of stereoscopic view which is no doubt initially multi-dimensional, but which, we will argue, ultimately tends to release its sensory

material from any specific viewer or individual human subject, from any specific character to whom the function of observation has been assigned. (56)

Perception in Zola is an unregulated stereoscope, which, by a process of doubling, frees it from the anchor of a specific perceiver. Jameson's suggestion that Zola's stereoscopic description emerges on the basis of a deplorable failure to regulate the narrative center is not necessarily at odds with the present argument, which sees the absence of a center as constitutive of naturalism and its aims. More generously, however, one might instead aver that the demands of the naturalist screen are such that a center is no longer possible, and that naturalism bridges the stylistic modalities of previous realisms toward an emerging modernism. More importantly, Jameson's analysis elucidates a fundamental characteristic of Zola's novels, namely, the sense in which description tends to center neither on a contingent subjective perspective nor that of an ostensibly objective narrator, but rather on the position of a third, undecidable perspective. If the stereoscopic character of Zola's naturalist screen involves the subject and object dissolving into one another, Zola's artistic challenge is to register this dissolving.

Strictly speaking, then, the encounter²⁰ of the department store that opens *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883) belongs not to the subjectivity designated by the character of Denise, but to a larger intersubjective field. No doubt, this field is constructed in such a way as to suggest something of the ostensibly essential nature of French bourgeois women, but the narrator also relates that the department store metonymizes Paris itself,

²⁰ As developed in chapter 1, "encounter" here should be understood in the Deleuzian sense as that which gives rise to thought.

since it is “la lumière et la vie de la cité” (III, 414). Characteristically, then, Zola provides the organizing apparatus that structures a milieu by way of a character’s focalization. Yet, as the example of Lantier’s first coming upon the pit in *Germinal* indicates, there is a sense in which the encounter outstrips the perceiver’s capacities. The subject is accustomed to images, but Zola strives to register something prior to a given image—the screen itself. The character as anchor is in crisis in a trivial sense (Denise finds herself overwhelmed by the spectacle of the department store), but Zola puts realist representation itself in crisis by trying to represent the non-representable, that is, the milieu as the condition of possibility for any particular image. The focalizing frame is overwhelmed precisely because it comes into contact with its own condition. This line of thought, rendered in Kantian terms, would suggest that overwhelming disruption results not from contact with the thing-in-itself (i.e., that which lies beyond perception as such), but instead—since disruption, distortion, and deformation constitute any mode of perception through the milieu-screen—the source of crisis results from an encounter with the violence of form (i.e., *a priori* forms of intelligibility). Far more than the “reality” of description as a mode of giving details about objects, Zola’s interest is in the reality of a screen that defies exhaustive representation. “There is no longer exact or real creation,” to quote again Zola’s letter to Valabrègue, “but creation modified by the milieu through which its image passes.”

Zola’s task is an impossible one insofar as he seeks to represent the screen itself. He is nonetheless able to metaphorize the role of perceptual mediation in its capacity to both give shape and to distort. Perception here is emphatically a perceiving-through. Zola

uses motifs of curtains, steam, light, glare, lace, and, of course, windows to thematize visual mediation. As an author committed to understanding his work in terms of the mediating capacity of the screen, he often places his characters in positions to highlight the fact of perceptual mediation. Indeed, this strategy functions to remind the reader of the ubiquitous significance of the screen. Precisely where Denise encounters the milieu in all its conflagrating, mechanical sublimity, Zola accentuates the role of mediality, vivifying that which is “in the middle” (the *mi-lieu*) between perceiver and perceived:

Mais, de l'autre côté de la chaussée, le Bonheur des Dames allumait les files profondes de ses becs de gaz. Et elle se rapprocha, attirée de nouveau et comme réchauffée à ce foyer d'ardente lumière. La machine ronflait toujours, encore en activité, lâchant sa vapeur dans un dernier grondement, pendant que les vendeurs repliaient les étoffes et que les caissiers comptaient la recette. C'était, à travers les glaces pâlies d'une buée, un pullulement vague de clartés, tout un intérieur confus d'usine. Derrière le rideau de pluie qui tombait, cette apparition reculée, brouillée, prenait l'apparence d'une chambre de chauffe géante, où l'on voyait passer les ombres noires des chauffeurs, sur le feu rouge des chaudières. Les vitrines se noyaient, on ne distinguait plus, en face, que la neige des dentelles, dont les verres dépolis d'une rampe de gaz avivaient le blanc; et, sur ce fond de chapelle, les confections s'enlevaient en vigueur, le grand manteau de velours, garni de renard argenté, mettait le profil d'une femme sans tête, qui courait par l'averse à quelque fête, dans l'inconnu des ténèbres de Paris. (III, 414)

But on the other side of the road the deep rows of gas burners at the Ladies' Paradise were being lit. She drew nearer, once more attracted and, as it were, warmed by this source of blazing light. The machine was still humming, still active, letting off steam in a final roar, while the salesmen were folding up the materials and the cashiers counting their takings. Through windows dimmed with condensation she could make out a vague profusion of lights, the confused interior of a factory. Behind the curtain of rain this vision, distant and blurred, seemed like some giant stokehold, in which the black shadows of the stokers could be seen moving against the red fire of the furnaces. The window displays had become indistinct also, and nothing could now be seen opposite but the snowy lace, the white of which was heightened by the frosted glass globes of a row of gas jets. Against this chapel-like background, the coats were bursting with energy; the great velvet overcoat trimmed with silver fox suggested the curved outline of a headless woman, running through the downpour to some festivity in the mysterious Parisian night. (28)

It is as if Denise has glimpsed the milieu directly. Her perceptual field is shaped and distorted by a medium; indeed, Zola again emphasizes mediation (“à travers les glaces”; “prenait l’apparence”; “l’on voyait passer”; “on ne distinguait plus”). The department store seems the only source of light amidst an otherwise dark and damp environment. The play of light and shadow from the gas lamps evokes something of a magic lantern, but Zola’s preferred metaphor is the furnace house, a suitable image for its suggestion of feverish consumption. Far from a sober and realistic characterization brimming with superfluous detail, this passage relates a kind of stupefied daydreaming, the very objects of fantasy—the department store and its agents—mutate before our (Denise’s) eyes: firemen operating the furnace transmogrify, giving way to a racing, if headless, debauchee.

If Zola provides an illusory image (“cette apparition reculée”), its vague and confused appearance would be too hastily attributed to a function of Denise’s perceiving. As I argue above in the case of *Germinal*, the character’s focalization is quickly dropped, serving as something of a pretext to enter into the milieu without the anchor of a specific figure. In such scenes, Zola avoids agential perceiving in favor of passive voice and the third person. The department store “*prenait l’apparence* d’une chambre de chauffe géante” (emphasis added), leaving the question of for whom it has taken this appearance ambiguous. Within the furnace house, shadowy figures come and go, but Zola makes no special effort to indicate that this is uniquely a feature of Denise’s hallucinatory vision. No doubt, Denise is a kind of implied spectator, but as merely implied, she functions for

Zola as a means of making description available for an indeterminate, third-person perspective: “on voyait passer les ombres noires des chauffeurs.” This “on” (about which more below) is in principle open to anyone. Zola’s interest, again, remains less in the psychological workings of an individual, than it does in the naturalist screen or milieu as an intersubjective field. This encounter, then, serves as a kind of establishing shot, but what it establishes, far more than anything factual about the locale in which the action of the novel will take place, is the mediating role of the screen through which each of the characters’ subjectivities will be constituted and organized. If Zola employs literal modes of perceiving-through in this passage (e.g., peering through a foggy window), it is only to call our attention to a more fundamental form of mediation—that of the *le Bonheur des Dames qua milieu*. Moreover, Zola’s vivid visual images further draw our attention to the fact of visual perception.

Of course, the department store milieu has a classed and gendered specificity, and Denise has a privileged role as the figure that Zola will use to describe the world of the department store and, by extension, Paris. This is another way of making the obvious point that the naturalist screen is not an ahistorical or empty form. In circumstances analogous to the becoming-room of M. Hennebeau, the world of objects—the department store—overcomes Denise. While in the former case it was superficial bourgeois mores that colored the space of things, here space is imbued with the virtues of domesticity that will ultimately set Denise apart from her peers. Indeed, she is an interesting case in Zola’s oeuvre as she functions in the logic of the text as evidence of the innate goodness

of women.²¹ The third and last department store transformation that Zola presents in this sequence is that of *un phare*—a beacon of pure intentions and the fulfillment of motherly familial duty:

Denise, cédant à la séduction, était venue jusqu'à la porte, sans se soucier du rejaillissement des gouttes, qui la trempait. À cette heure de nuit, avec son éclat de fournaise, le Bonheur des Dames achevait de la prendre tout entière. Dans la grande ville, noire et muette sous la pluie, dans ce Paris qu'elle ignorait, il flambait comme un phare, il semblait à lui seul la lumière et la vie de la cité. Elle y rêvait son avenir, beaucoup de travail pour élever les enfants, avec d'autres choses encore, elle ne savait quoi, des choses lointaines dont le désir et la crainte la faisaient trembler. (III, 414)

Denise, yielding to temptation, had come as far as the door without noticing the raindrops falling on her. At this time of night, the Ladies' Paradise, with its furnace-like glare, seduced her completely. In the great metropolis, dark and silent under the rain, in this Paris of which she knew nothing, it was burning like a beacon, it alone seemed to be the light and life of the city. She dreamed of her future there, working hard to bring up the children, and of other things too, she knew not what, far-off things which made her tremble with desire and fear. (Nelson 28)

In Zola, the encounter with the milieu partakes in a temporal mode that stretches out into the future whilst the threat of catastrophe looms incessantly. Potentiality is thus a highly ambivalent concept, since it is not merely a relation to the future; it is the ever-renewed risk of a past state of being re-emerging and devastating present intentions. The futural dimension of the theory of “hereditary taint” shows up precisely at the level of intentionality and acting on the world, which, with naturalism, has been imbued with ubiquitous uncertainty. The past is a corpse that might at any moment return to disrupt

²¹ As Hannah Thompson writes, Denise is evidence of Zola’s “vision of idealised femininity,” especially insofar as “Denise is modest, hard-working and caring; she nurtures and protects her brothers whilst remaining uncorrupted by the illicit desires of those around her” (57).

one's plans. Zola literalizes this lesson²² in *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), and here again in

Denise's encounter he reanimates a corpse:

L'idée de cette femme morte dans les fondations lui revint; elle eut peur, elle crut voir saigner les clartés; puis, la blancheur des dentelles l'apaisa, une espérance lui montait au coeur, toute une certitude de joie; tandis que la poussière d'eau volante lui refroidissait les mains et calmait en elle la fièvre du voyage. (III, 414)

The thought of the dead woman under the foundations came back to her and she felt afraid; she thought she saw the lights bleeding; then the whiteness of the lace soothed her, a feeling of hope sprang up in her, a real certainty of joy, while the soft rain, blowing on her, cooled her hands, and calmed her after the excitement of her journey. (Nelson 28)

The architecture itself partakes in the destructive power of the milieu. "Cette femme morte" refers to Madame Hédouin, the deceased wife of Octave Mouret who died under mysterious circumstances. The murderous intrigue surrounding Mouret's acquisition of the department store establishes the relationship between his ruthless capitalist entrepreneurialism—the rise of the department store and the woman as consumer—and its constitutive misogynistic impulse.²³ Either side of this tension emerges in the unity of a single thought: Bleeding lights and white lace; fear and hope. Similarly, the spectre of the dead woman, as used-up object of capitalist accumulation, lends the department store

²² Cf. *Germinal*. Recall that Étienne frequently worries about the discovery of the body of the soldier, killed by Jeanlin Maheu, who is buried in the mines. Likewise, the threat of the returning corpse, bloated by water (cf. *Thérèse Raquin*) appears after Étienne defeats his rival, Chaval. Florent is haunted by the memory of the woman who dies in his arms (particularly, her bloody body) on the barricades in *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873).

²³ This impulse is particularly visible in the following passage: "Sous la grâce même de sa galanterie, Mouret laissait ainsi passer la brutalité d'un juif vendant de la femme à la livre: il lui élevait un temple, la faisait encenser par une légion de commis, créait le rite d'un culte nouveau; il ne pensait qu'à elle, cherchait sans relâche à imaginer des séductions plus grandes; et, derrière elle, quand il lui avait vidé la poche et détraqué les nerfs, il était plein du secret mépris de l'homme auquel une maîtresse vient de faire la bêtise de se donner."

a cryptological thrust. Zola's fondness for imbuing spaces with thematic significance follows quite readily from naturalism as a method, since this latter is predicated on an inevitably spatialized environment. It is possible, then, to speak of the naturalist screen as a product of the built environment, since it is through buildings that the milieu achieves actualization in space. Zola's characters not only occupy spaces, they see, think, and affect through them. Blood runs down the lights, and Denise's fear is in the blood-red mortar of the Bonheur des Dames itself: "La peur qu'il y avait, depuis le matin, au fond de la tentation exercée sur elle, venait peut-être du sang de cette femme, qu'elle croyait voir maintenant dans le mortier rouge du sous-sol" ("The fear which she had mingled with the temptation she had felt since the morning came perhaps from the blood of that woman, which she fancied she could see in the red cement of the basement"; III, 408; Nelson 22).

In this and similar passages, Zola describes something in the milieu that resists the realist gaze and overwhelms it with an illegible alterity. Such description, in my view, is a function of what Zola refers to as the screen's capacity to create deformed and suffering images ("la création modifiée par le milieu [...] objets plus ou moins déformés, souffrant des changements plus ou moins sensibles dans leurs lignes et dans leur couleur") (qtd. in Becker 233). Zola undermines the position of the neutral observer, since, as Jameson explains, "the world multiplies and pullulates over against the observing subject" (61). If the means by which reality is construed remain organized at all, such means are constantly threatened by an impulse that will dissolve sense-making. Murder in Zola communicates this annihilation; death allegorizes the destruction of orderability as such,

rather than that of a specific order of the world. It is this threat that structures *La Bête humaine* (1890), that is, the return of belligerent non-sense as homicidal frenzy. As such, in Zola, intentions and schemes are frequently disrupted by some unforeseen obstacle, and the illusion of the world as open to human mastery is shattered even if it is also obliquely celebrated.

The Sublime Space of the Belly

Jameson, for his part, finds in Zola a “vindication of affect theory” such that new modes of perceiving and affecting are made available in a novel way. For this reason, no doubt, he is attracted to Zola’s famous symphonie des fromages. “[I]n *Le Ventre de Paris*,” he writes, “we are merely being trained in this new sensorium, forming new habits of perception in accordance with the new realms and dimensions of bodily reality thereby opened up to us” (59). Jameson’s language evinces something of the life-affirming side of affect theory, with its interest in the body and the New, but, by the same token, *Le Ventre de Paris* remains grounded in an experience of defamiliarization and epistemic shift.

David Harvey’s work does much in the way of explicating the material conditions grounding the epistemic agitation incurred by the city dweller:

the effects on the sensibilities of Parisians were legion. It was as if they were instantly plunged into a bewildering world of speedup and rapid compression of space relations. The Second Empire experienced a fierce bout of space-time compression, and the contradictory effects of this (particularly with respect to space and place) were everywhere in evidence (114).

The Halles are particularly suited to demonstrate this “bout of space-time compression,” as so much surrounding the carrefour was altered by Second Empire renovations. Indeed, Zola’s lengthy descriptions of Florent’s meanderings repeatedly include the major thoroughfares modernized during Haussmannization. The rues de Turbigo, Pierre-Lescot, de Rivoli, Berger, des Halles, du Pont Neuf, and the boulevard Sébastopol were all transformed during the first phase of Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s renovations around the Croisée de Paris. This first phase of demolition and reconstruction was realized between 1853 and 1859, thus overlapping with the period of the novel (1857-1860). This temporal framing emphasizes the newfangled sense of the now. Indeed, it is on the Rue de Rivoli, the first street to be fully redeveloped, that Florent most thoroughly loses his bearings (“s’égara tout à fait”). Florent finds himself overwhelmed, unable to flee the almost phantasmagorical scene, in which he succumbs to the proliferation of streets and foodstuffs:

Il n’eut plus qu’une pensée, qu’un besoin, s’écarter des Halles. Il attendrait, il chercherait encore, plus tard, quand le carreau serait libre. Les trois rues du carrefour, la rue Montmartre, la rue Montorgueil, la rue Turbigo, l’inquiétèrent : elles étaient encombrées de voitures de toutes sortes ; des légumes couvraient les trottoirs. Alors, il alla devant lui, jusqu’à la rue Pierre-Lescot, où le marché au cresson et le marché aux pommes de terre lui parurent infranchissables. Il préféra suivre la rue Rambuteau. Mais, au boulevard Sébastopol, il se heurta contre un tel embarras de tapissières, de charrettes, de chars à bancs, qu’il revint prendre la rue Saint-Denis. Là, il rentra dans les légumes. Aux deux bords, les marchands forains venaient d’installer leurs étalages, des planches posées sur de hauts paniers, et le déluge de choux, de carottes, de navets, recommençait. Les Halles débordaient. Il essaya de sortir de ce flot qui l’atteignait dans sa fuite ; il tenta la rue de la Cossonnerie, la rue Berger, le square des Innocents, la rue de la Ferronnerie, la rue des Halles. Et il s’arrêta, découragé, effaré, ne pouvant se dégager de cette infernale ronde d’herbes qui finissaient par tourner autour de lui en le liant aux jambes de leurs minces légumes. Au loin, jusqu’à la rue de Rivoli,

jusqu'à la place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, les éternelles files de roues et de bêtes attelées se perdaient dans le pêle-mêle des marchandises qu'on chargeait. (I, 630)

Now he had but one thought, one idea, and that was to get away from the market as fast as he could. He would put off his research until later, when the area had emptied out. The three streets that intersected here, rue Montmartre, rue Montorgueil, and rue de Turbigo, worried him. They were blocked by all kinds of vehicles, and the sidewalks were clogged with vegetables. Florent continued until rue Pierre-Lescot, but there he ran into the watercress and potato markets, and it seemed to him there was no way past them. It looked better to take rue Rambuteau. But once he reached boulevard Sébastopol he ran into such a barricade of carriages, wagons, and carts that he turned off to rue Saint-Denis. But there he was back with the vegetables. Retailers had just set up their stands--thick planks propped up on tall baskets--and the flood of cabbages, carrots, and turnips started again. Les Halles overflowed. He tried to escape the flood, but it ran after him. He tried rue de la Cossonnerie, rue Berger, the square des Innocents, rue de la Ferronnerie, rue des Halles. He was trapped, disheartened, afraid that he was unable to hop off his carousel of vegetables, which would end up prancing around him, thin vines wrapping around his legs. The eternal trail of carts and horses stretched all the way to rue de Rivoli and place de l'Hôtel de Ville. (31-2)

Zola's carto-vegetal description indicates a state of being far more fundamental than that of merely being momentarily lost in a novel setting (the kind of space in which, sooner or later, one finds one's bearings). Florent's relation to the spatio-temporal configuration of the milieu is instead such that it is constituted by a structural denial of orientation.

Zola reminds his reader frequently in the opening chapter of the novel that Florent is no longer at home in the Paris he once knew: "Sa tête lui paraissait toute vide, et il ne s'expliquait pas nettement où il se trouvait." Jameson suggests that "Florent is the ideal of the Russian Formalist reader: for him everything is estranged, partly because he has never seen this unique quartier of Paris before" (56). Florent reflects on his whereabouts and asks for street names, but the acquisition of such knowledge appears to do little to put

him at ease. This is in part because his relation to this space is coded in terms of his past (the dead woman whose wounds appear to him as two bloody eyes). Like his acquaintances whom he fears (since, he reckons, they could be spies), space itself has become suspect. Jameson adds that Florent's world has become estranged "for the obvious reason that it did not then exist" and that this "would seem to render the evocation of the *ostranenie*, or making strange of habitual objects, less relevant" (56). One should add to this observation, however, that estrangement here has a specific phenomenality, distinct from that of being dislodged from the habitual:

Il tourna la tête, fâché d'ignorer où il était, inquiet par cette vision colossale et fragile; et, comme il levait les yeux, il aperçut le cadran lumineux de Saint-Eustache, avec la masse grise de l'église. Cela l'étonna profondément. Il était à la pointe Saint-Eustache. (I, 609)

Florent turned away, enraged that he could not grasp where he was, disturbed by this fragile but gigantic specter, and as he looked up he glimpsed the luminous clock dial of the massive gray Church of Saint Eustache. He was suddenly jolted by the realization that he was near Saint Eustache—he was at pointe Saint-Eustache! (10)

This space is uncanny to Florent precisely because he feels simultaneously deeply rooted in it and entirely lost. Haussman's Paris—*Les Halles* qua modernity—has been superimposed on a field of remembrance and recollections that are in a special sense originary for Florent. It is as if, having fallen asleep on the barricades of an older, more revolutionary Paris, Florent has awakened amongst modernity. Yet, this is only one of the means by which Zola compresses and generally distorts time and space. Zola links the corpse of the past with the present through Florent, not only by way of memory, but in *le ventre* itself: Florent has been hungry, we are told, since the day of his arrest and suffers

greatly throughout his ambulations with Claude. His is a consciousness determined by hunger (“il ne sentait en lui que son estomac”). This is the body—and, more precisely, the stomach—as temporal duration.

To read Zola’s description in terms of crisis is to regard crisis not as merely an absence of a solution to a more or less readily understood query (Where am I?), but instead to see crisis as the layering of incommensurate modes of intelligibility over perceptions that have been dislodged from orderability as such. Crisis in Zola thus functions according to the definition I develop in chapter 1: that which fractures the problem such that it can no longer be formulated as problem. In Zola, one may occupy a familiar space, yet, because the sense-making structures by which that space is normally accessed have been disrupted, space with which one is familiar becomes illegible and opaque. Ackbar Abbas has argued for reading Marc Augé’s sense of non-place in similar terms,²⁴ since, for the former, the non-place is “a result of excess and overcomplexity, of a limit having been exceeded. Beyond a certain point, there is a blurring and scrambling of signs and an overlapping of spatial and temporal grids, all of which make urban signs and images difficult to read” (772). Florent straddles different “spatial and temporal grids,” yet, as I have been suggesting, this is not merely a personal configuration limited to his subjective position. It is by way of Florent’s bewildering and ostensibly individual

²⁴ Abbas reports: “Like the city, Augé’s non-place must be understood not literally, but as paradox: a non-place is far from being nonexistent. Rather, it is a result of excess and overcomplexity, of a limit having been exceeded. Beyond a certain point, there is a blurring and scrambling of signs and an overlapping of spatial and temporal grids, all of which make urban signs and images difficult to read. The overcomplex space of non-places means, among other things, that even the *anomalous* detail may no longer be recognizable as such because it coexists with a swarm of other such details.” (author’s emphasis, 772)

experience that Zola makes visible a rift between old and new that has an objective role in mediating the reality of a modern Paris. Further, while Florent is indeed the kind of reader for whom all is estranged, his is in no way a purely aesthetic experience (a mode of perception assigned to Claude Lantier), but rather one that is so thoroughly embodied (he reads Paris through his unbearable hunger), that it causes him—as Zola reports—to be frequently overwhelmed by sensation. Florent is a particularly sensitive reader of the milieu precisely because his perceptive and affective capacities verge on their limits. He becomes in Zola’s hands a particularly ironic riposte to Kant’s claim in *The Critique of Judgement* that proper access to the sublime requires enculturation, since Florent’s sensitivity to the sublime is precisely a product of his exclusion from culture proper (his “education” is that of starvation and imprisonment).²⁵

In his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin records the remarks of Maxime du Camp, who observes the sense in which the spatial logic of medieval Paris was rapidly becoming obsolete.²⁶ This obsolescence gives rise to the layering of a new organization of space over the old. Les Halles, as milieu, concretize processes of modernization and demonstrate a basic reconfiguration of the coordinates of space and time. Zola’s language

²⁵ Kant writes that “[i]t is a fact that what is called sublime by us, having been prepared through culture, comes across as merely repellent to a person who is uncultured and lacking in the development of moral ideas” (124). Of course, unlike the Sublime of Kant’s third critique, Florent’s encounters provide no great expansion of intelligibility.

²⁶ He observes, “Paris, as we find it in the period following the revolution of 1848, was about to become uninhabitable. Its population had become greatly enlarged and unsettled by the incessant activity of the railroad (whose rails extended further each day and linked up with those of neighboring countries), and now this population was suffocating in the narrow, tangled, putrid alleyways in which it was forcibly confined” (cited in Benjamin, 122).

conflates the spatial, temporal, and bodily dimensions of the milieu; his diction is at once mathematical and metaphorical, spatial and temporal:

Elles [Les Halles] entassaient leurs masses géométriques; et, quand toutes les clartés intérieures furent éteintes, qu'elles baignèrent dans le jour levant, carrées, uniformes, elles apparurent comme une machine moderne, hors de toute mesure, quelque machine à vapeur, quelque chaudière destinée à la digestion d'un peuple, gigantesque ventre de métal, boulonné, rivé, fait de bois, de verre et de fonte, d'une élégance et d'une puissance de moteur mécanique, fonctionnant là, avec la chaleur du chauffage, l'étourdissement, le branle furieux des roues. (I, 626)

[Les Halles] rose in a geometrical mass, and once all the lights had been extinguished and the matching square building were bathed in dawn light, they seemed like some kind of oversize modern machine, a kind of steam engine with a cauldron to serve all mankind, a huge riveted and bolted metal belly built of wood, glass, and iron with the power and grace of a machine with glowing furnaces and dizzily spinning wheels. (28)

The exiled Florent, not privy to the process by which Paris has been transformed, observes the belly of Paris from the perspective of his dream-like bewilderment; the objects of his perception emerge indistinctly from a shadowy, hypnagogic state. As I argue above, the link between the ostensible perceiver and perceived urban space remains loose, and, as if the former were a mere pretext for the latter, Zola's tendency (where it concerns the milieu) is to leave the perceiving individual behind so as to pursue the bigger prize of the environment. In this particular account, the milieu takes on a precise, if contradictory set of terms: While it is rigidly precise, powerful, and mechanical, it is also biological, intoxicated, and raging. As such, it perfectly actualizes Zola's ambivalent sense of modernity. It is little wonder that Zola is fond of the Provençal outsider who arrives (often by night) to the new city or village, since those not habituated to the undulations of modernity serve as better conduits to register its disorienting effects (Zola

himself is of course from Aix-en-Provence like his friend, Paul Cezanne, who is fictionalized in the figure of Claude Lantier).

Much of Zola's innovation is thus in the way his description lends to space a phenomenological depth. Zola's images frequently involve literal depth, whether in the context of the mines or the foundations of the department store. Zola uses literal depth to thematize the phenomenological layering of incompatible spatio-temporal grids. What is most significant about the world for naturalism is not that it can be articulated realistically by an unrelenting accumulation of facts, but rather that this process of accumulation indexes a more profound depth, an immanent reality. The real/unreal dichotomy is in no way equivalent to that of the actual and the virtual—the virtual (like the figurative) is no less real for lacking actuality. Of course, the mode by which each can be made accessible is different in kind. Zola's mode of describing what naturalism was to become famous for, the aggregation of often gritty details, remains within the sphere of the actual. My interest throughout, however, has been in the description of the virtuality of milieux, when Zola's language becomes most figurative.

The Role of the “As If” in Zola's Phenomenology

La Curée (1871) consolidates much of what has been said in the preceding analyses. No other novel in the Rougon-Macquart cycle takes up as succinctly Karl Marx's identification of the process of abstraction thrust upon social organization after the coup d'état of Louis-Napoléon. *La Curée*'s descriptions of the transformations of real estate, morality, sexuality, gender, and the city more generally are unique in that they

work to configure the milieu by way of the spatial. Life, and in particular, its spatial regimentation, has been reduced to a corrupted capitalist logic. In his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx famously charts the trajectory of the revolution of 1789 to the commencement of the Second Empire. For Marx, modern bourgeois civil society emerges as a result of the successive revolutionary movements of this roughly 60-year period. Modern society, in contrast to the medieval society of pre-revolutionary France, becomes one in which its members relate not to their immediate environment in the process of meaningful self-creation, but instead become functions of the abstractions of the state, which, for Marx, increasingly mobilized toward securing control at spatial and infrastructural levels.²⁷ Zola's interest lies in the correlation of the degrading character of social life and abstracted space as the instrument of this decline.

Hausmann's transformation a decade after the publishing of the *Brumaire* would come to symbolize modernization in its attempt to bring uniformity to the disorganized Parisian city. This unification departicularized the city through the coordinated process of speculation and expropriation. Benjamin understood this configuration to be a "repressive measure" in the sense that Hausmann's wide boulevards made military deployment faster and the revolutionaries' barricades difficult to construct. Such systematic departicularization is in effect what Benjamin indicates in his assertion that Hausmann

²⁷ Marx writes, "Every common interest was immediately severed from the society, countered by a higher, general interest, snatched from the activities of society's members themselves and made an object of government activity – from a bridge, a schoolhouse, and the communal property of a village community, to the railroads, the national wealth, and the national University of France. Finally the parliamentary republic, in its struggle against the revolution, found itself compelled to strengthen the means and the centralization of governmental power with repressive measures." (607)

“estranges the Parisians from their city” (12). Such estrangement is in turn necessary for what Marx calls the “civil unity of the nation,” which is coextensive with the “breaking [of] all separate local, territorial, urban, and provincial powers” (122).

On the one hand, *La Curée* makes the world strange by reversing and inverting normativity in an empathically conservative register. The contours of its characters become functions of a depraved and declining world in which normative gender roles are simplistically inverted:²⁸ Renée and Maxime frequently swap normative social practices and affectations (as when Renee goads Maxime to continue smoking his cigar: “Garde ton cigare...Puis, nous nous débauchons, ce soir.... Je suis un homme, moi”).²⁹ Indeed, when the serialization of *La Curée* was stopped for apparently moral and political reasons, Zola’s defense, while on the whole a familiar plea that description is not approbation, emphasized the tactic of inverting and disrupting established norms to demonstrate social decay.³⁰ Phenomenologically, on the other hand, Zola’s interest is in

²⁸ Priscilla Ferguson astutely observes that “Zola would have recognized his own imaginative context, including the vision of *La Curée*, in Marx’s contention that, with the advent of modern industry, ‘all bounds of morals and nature, of age and sex, of day and night, were broken down.’” (151).

²⁹ Zola frequently emphasizes such inversions: “Renée était l’homme, la volonté passionnée et agissante. Maxime subissait. Cet être neutre, blond et joli, frappé dès l’enfance dans sa virilité, devenait, aux bras curieux de la jeune femme, une grande fille, avec ses membres épilés, ses maigreurs gracieuses d’éphèbe romain” (“Renée was the man, the ardent, active partner. Maxime remained submissive. Smooth-limbed, slim, and graceful as a Roman stripling, fair-haired and pretty, stricken in his virility since childhood, this epicene creature became a girl in Renée’s arms”; I, 485; Nelson 158).

³⁰ As Brian Nelson reports in his introduction to his recent translation of the novel: “In a letter dated 6 November 1871 to Louis Ulbach, editor of *La Cloche*, Zola wrote: ‘*The Kill* is an unwholesome plant that sprouted out of the dungheap of the Empire, an incest that grew on the compost pile of millions. My aim, in this new Phaedra, was to show the terrible social breakdown that occurs when all moral standards are lost and family ties no longer exist. My Renée is the ‘Parisienne’ driven crazy and into crime by luxury and a life of excess; my Maxime is the product of an effete society, a man-woman, passive flesh that accepts the vilest deeds; my Aristide is the speculator born out of the upheavals of Paris, the brazen self-made man who plays the stock market using whatever comes to hand—women, children, honour, bricks, conscience. I

the estrangement of space and the breakdown of natural perception as an organizing logic of literary description.³¹ Zola's interest lies in depicting new spatial logics as they both emerge from and precipitate crisis. *La Curée* radicalizes Marx's thesis in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* that the phenomenological effect of capitalism is such that objects exist for us only insofar as they operate according to the logic of possession, exchange, and consumption.³² This radicalization consists in the manner in which the perception of space itself—not only objects qua commodities—becomes a function of rapacious capitalist consumption.

Aristide Saccard, in contrast to the previous protagonists thus far examined, epitomizes a mastery wrought by financial speculation, and, as such, his is a mode of perception that greedily transforms Paris in accordance with the dictates of maximum profitability. Saccard's intoxicated vision of a gilded Paris from the top of the Buttes Montmartre alchemically transforms the city. Once more, Zola deploys the metaphor of the window to call attention to the spectacle and perceptive mediation of the Screen:

Ce jour-là, ils dînèrent au sommet des buttes, dans un restaurant dont les fenêtres s'ouvraient sur Paris, sur cet océan de maisons aux toits bleuâtres, pareils à des flots pressés emplissant l'immense horizon. Leur table était placée devant une des fenêtres. Ce spectacle des toits de Paris égaya Saccard. Au dessert, il fit apporter une bouteille de bourgogne. Il souriait à l'espace, il était d'une galanterie inusitée.

have tried, with these three social monstrosities, to give some idea of the dreadful quagmire into which France was sinking'" (xi).

³¹ This latter term should be understood in its philosophical and chiefly phenomenological sense I develop in chapter 1—for example, as the everyday and practically oriented way subjects relate to the world described by Henri Bergson and similarly by Edmund Husserl in his notion of a “natural attitude” (Husserl 5).

³² As Marx writes in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, “Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.,—in short, when it is used by us” (94).

Et ses regards, amoureux, redescendaient toujours sur cette mer vivante et pullulante, d'où sortait la voix profonde des joues. On était à l'automne; la ville, sous le grand ciel pâle, s'alanguissait, d'un gris doux et tendre, piqué çà et là de verdure sombres, qui ressemblaient à de larges feuilles de nénuphars nageant sur un lac; le soleil se couchait dans un nuage rouge, et, tandis que les fonds s'emplissaient d'une brume légère, une poussière d'or, une rosée d'or tombait sur la rive droite de la ville, du côté de la Madeleine et des Tuileries. C'était comme le coin enchanté d'une cité des *Mille et une Nuits*, aux arbres d'émeraude, aux toits de saphir, aux girouettes de rubis. Il vint un moment où le rayon qui glissait entre deux nuages fut si resplendissant, que les maisons semblèrent flamber et se fondre comme un lingot d'or dans un creuset. (I, 387-388)

On this particular day they dined at the top of the hill, in a restaurant whose windows looked out over Paris, over the sea of houses with blue roofs, like surging billows that filled the horizon. Their table was placed at one of the windows. The sight of the roofs of Paris filled Saccard with joy. At dessert he ordered a bottle of burgundy. He smiled into space, he was unusually pleasant. His eyes constantly returned, lovingly, to the living, seething ocean from which issued the deep voice of the crowd. It was autumn; beneath the pale sky the city lay listless in a soft and tender grey, pierced here and there by dark patches of foliage that resembled the broad leaves of water-lilies floating on a lake; the sun was setting behind a red cloud and, while the background was filled with a light haze, a shower of gold dust, of golden dew, fell on the right bank of the river, near the Madeleine and the Tuileries. It was like an enchanted corner in a city of the "Arabian Nights," with emerald trees, sapphire roofs, and ruby weathercocks. At one moment a ray of sunlight gliding from between two clouds was so resplendent that the houses seemed to catch fire and melt like an ingot of gold in a crucible. (67-8)

This spectacle metaphorizes the process by which the city, real estate, and more generally speaking, space, become monetized. Golden autumn light suggests not only the gold of coins, but the fire of the forge that converts solids into liquid. Saccard's is thus a mode of perception determined by the logic of universal equivalence and the money commodity (i.e., gold) that Marx discusses in *Capital* (1867) (277). Space transforms according to Marx's dictum in the *Communist Manifesto* (1948) (made famous today by Marshall Berman's eponymous text) that "All that is solid melts into air." Saccard exclaims

enthusiastically to his wife, Angèle, “cette fois, tout va brûler! Vois-tu?... On dirait que le quartier bout dans l'alambic de quelque chimiste” (“You’d think the whole neighbourhood was bubbling away in a chemist’s retort”; I, 388; 68) He continues: “Oui, oui, j'ai bien dit, plus d'un quartier va fondre, et il restera de l'or aux doigts des gens qui chaufferont et remueront la cuve. Ce grand innocent de Paris!” (“Yes, yes, that’s what I said, whole neighbourhoods will be melted down, and gold will stick to the fingers of those who heat and stir the mortar. Poor innocent Paris!”; I, 388; 68). The neighborhoods of Paris, subjected to the heat of capitalistic ideality, is everywhere reduced to the destructive universality of abstract exchangeability.

As Zola illustrates, the French will to universality, realized in this instance by the modernizing vision of Haussmannization, readily conforms to the departicularizing force of capitalistic exchange. Zola also appears to recognize a second feature of the money commodity identified by Marx; in addition to being an empty universal, money is also ideal: As Marx writes, “Since the expression of the value of commodities in gold is a merely ideal act, we may use for this purpose imaginary or ideal money” (*Capital: Volume I* 189-90). In other words, no “real” money or commodity need be present in exchange, since an “imaginary” representation suffices to maintain exchangeability. Marx’s point is in part that, in grasping the money-form of commodities, it does not suffice to remain at the level of the actual, since universal value is understood only at the level of “a purely ideal or mental form” (190). Zola’s reference to *One Thousand and One Nights* magnifies the imaginary character of universal exchangeability: To find a suitable image for the capitalistic phantasm vivified by this Paris, simultaneously

bejeweled and molten, Zola makes recourse to a vague but nonetheless orientalized tableau. It is not some city in particular, but a fantastic, idealized any-city-whatever that anchors the comparison: “C'était comme le coin enchanté d'une cité des *Mille et une Nuits*” (“It was like an enchanted corner in a city of *One Thousand and One Nights*.”; I, 388) Decades later, Zola returns to this image in the novel's sequel, the aptly titled *L'Argent* (1891), making three references in total to *One Thousand and One Nights* in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Such occurrences in this later novel emerge amidst a pronounced orientalist, neo-Napoleonic discourse to which Zola remains mostly ambivalent,³³ but, remarkably, they also illuminate the same constellation of Saccard, capital, and the fantastic that emerges in *La Curée*. In one instance, Saccard imagines the sound of falling coins to be “comme dans un conte des *Mille et une Nuits*” (V, 83); in another, the immense treasure of the tales is delivered over to the greed of Paris: “C'étaient les cavernes mystérieuses des *Mille et une Nuits* qui s'ouvrirent, les incalculables trésors des califes qu'on livrait à la convoitise de Paris” (V, 233). Jan Hokenson reads the restaurant scene in terms of Saccard's subjectively projecting a vision onto a preexisting real: “Instinctual brutes and ethical decadents project onto reality their own deformations (thus in orientalist terms, the greedy Saccard sees Paris from the heights of Montmartre as a city from the *Thousand and One Nights* with emerald trees and sapphire roofs” (86). Such deformations, however, are not a one-way street; it is not enough to say that a character projects “a vision” onto reality, since, in Zola, a character's most inward expressions of

³³ Cf. Jennifer Yee's discussion of this point in *The Colonial Comedy: Imperialism in the French Realist Novel* (125).

self always also register an aspect of the milieu (i.e., there is no “reality” prior to its being deformed by the screen).

If *La Curée* offers a phenomenology of a society in crisis—and indeed Zola’s express aim is to “give some idea of the dreadful quagmire into which France was sinking” (xi)—then this liquefied, molten form is but one of the upheavals expressed in spatial terms.

Regarde là-bas, du côté des Halles, on a coupé Paris en quatre... [...] Les tronçons agoniseront dans le plâtre.... Tiens, suis un peu ma main. Du boulevard du Temple à la barrière du Trône, une entaille; puis, de ce côté, une autre entaille, de la Madeleine à la plaine Monceau; et une troisième entaille dans ce sens, une autre dans celui-ci, une entaille là, une entaille plus loin, des entailles partout. Paris haché à coups de sabre, les veines ouvertes, nourrissant cent mille terrassiers et maçons, traversé par d'admirables voies stratégiques qui mettront les forts au cœur des vieux quartiers. La nuit venait. Sa main sèche et nerveuse coupait toujours dans le vide. Angèle avait un léger frisson, devant ce couteau vivant, ces doigts de fer qui hachaient sans pitié l'amas sans bornes des toits sombres. Depuis un instant, les brumes de l'horizon roulaient doucement des hauteurs, et elle s'imaginait entendre, sous les ténèbres qui s'amassaient dans les creux, de lointains craquements, comme si la main de son mari eût réellement fait les entailles dont il parlait, crevant Paris d'un bout à l'autre, brisant les poutres, écrasant les moellons, laissant derrière elle de longues et affreuses blessures de murs croulants. La petitesse de cette main, s'acharnant sur une proie géante, finissait par inquiéter; et, tandis qu'elle déchirait sans effort les entrailles de l'énorme ville, on eût dit qu'elle prenait un étrange reflet d'acier, dans le crépuscule bleuâtre. (I, 389)

Look over there, near the Halles, they’ve cut Paris into four pieces. [...] The rest will disappear in clouds of plaster. Look, just follow my hand. From the Boulevard du Temple to the Barrière du Trône, that’s one cut; then on this side another, from the Madeleine to the Plaine Monceau; and a third cut this way, another that way, a cut there, one further on, cuts everywhere, Paris slashed with sabre cuts, its veins opened, providing a living for a hundred thousand navvies and bricklayers, traversed by splendid military roads which will bring the forts into the heart of the old neighbourhoods.’ Night was falling. His dry, feverish hand kept cutting through the air. Angèle shivered slightly as she watched this living knife, those iron fingers mercilessly slicing up the boundless mass of dark

roofs. For a moment the haze of the horizon had been descending slowly from the heights, and she fancied she could hear, beneath the gloom gathering in the hollows, distant cracking sounds, as if her husband's hand had really made the cuts he spoke of, splitting up Paris from one end to the other, severing beams, crushing masonry, leaving behind it the long, hideous wounds of crumbling walls. The smallness of this hand, pitilessly attacking a gigantic prey, became quite disturbing; and as it effortlessly tore apart the entrails of the great city, it seemed to take on a steely glint in the blue twilight. (68-9)

Saccard's sabre-like hands reduce the city to *la curée* (or, the "kill"; that "part of an animal fed to the hounds that have run it to ground" at the end of a hunt [Nelson x]).

Zola's description again blends the cartological with the biological, laying out the plans for the new arteries that will reterritorialize Paris, which now operates simultaneously as map and corpse. Angèle laughs, believing her husband to be joking when the latter speaks of seeing twenty-piece francs raining on Paris ("Oh! vois, dit Saccard, avec un rire d'enfant, il pleut des pièces de vingt francs dans Paris!") (I, 389). Here, however, Angèle recognizes that this display is no mere pretending. Zola treats this scene with the utmost seriousness, even if there is something of Don Quixote in Saccard, who flails his arm wildly at the city around him from atop a hill as if it were a sword.

Zola produces an image of the milieu as virtual, which has the structure of counterfactuality (but is no less real for that reason, since it nonetheless conditions perception). Angèle imagines she can hear "lointains craquements [...] comme si la main de son mari eût réellement fait les entailles dont il parlait." In this scene and throughout Zola's works, the "comme si" (or "as if") structures distorted images of reality as they pass through the milieu. Zola's interest in such images is methodological. They function in much the same way the "as if" operates in Immanuel Kant's description of "regulative

principles” in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).³⁴ Zola provides an image with which to think reality at the limit of realistic detail, that is, beyond the horizon of empirical grasping. To arrive at a description of the milieu, Zola discovers a mechanism to crack the hardened shell of natural perception (or, as Kant puts it, to “extend [...] the empirical unity of our experience”) (552). By way of poetic imagination, Zola posits a reality outside the limits of possible experience and secures the coordinates within which his naturalism undertakes its experiments. In Kant, as Michael Friedman explains, “the idea of a highest intelligence or wise Author of the world, for example, still function[s] legitimately to guide empirical enquiry into the objects that can be given in experience,” even if such ideas are not themselves subject to experience (73). Though Kant and Zola differ radically in their aims and projects, each recognizes the expansive capacity of the “as if” to guide the understanding of what is. Such is the function of the figurative in Zola, namely, to describe the operations and effects of a milieu on its inhabitants.

An analogous function is operative in another of Zola’s favored expressions, the “on eût dit que.” Saccard’s hand takes on the character of steel: “on eût dit qu'elle prenait un étrange reflet d'acier” (I, 389). In this particular example, both the Nelson and Vizetelly translations follow the standard practice of translating *on eût dit que* as *it*

³⁴ Michael Friedman succinctly summarizes Kant’s position: “All experience must conform to the concepts and principles of the understanding, which, accordingly, are necessarily realized or instantiated in experience: experience necessarily contains substances, causal connections, and so on. The faculty of reason, by contrast, is merely regulative in relation to experience. Although reason too plays an indispensable role in experience, the concepts proper to it—the so called ideas of reason, such as the idea of God, or the idea of the world as a complete totality—cannot be realized or instantiated in experience at all. Nevertheless, ideas of reason—the idea of a highest intelligence or wise Author of the world, for example—still function legitimately to guide empirical enquiry into the objects that can be given in experience” (73).

seemed (Nelson 69; Vizetelly 80). Zola's use of this expression demands careful attention, since, across the *Rougon-Macquart* novels, it is closely associated with the virtual, which is to say, with a departure from detailed accounts of the way things factually are. As I have argued, description of the milieu remains by definition intersubjective and is for this reason best activated by way of the third person. The French third-person indefinite pronoun *on* is thus the ideal naturalist pronoun. In principle, the English *it seemed* or *it looked like* is open to any-observer-whatever, since precisely for whom this seeming occurred is left unspecified. The general tendency, of course, is that an implied or recently mentioned observer indirectly takes the action of the verb. *It seemed*, in other words, partakes in none of the ambiguity that is possible in the French. While *on eût dit que* (or, alternatively, *on aurait dit*³⁵) remains subject to the same implicature (and therefore similarly determinate), it is nonetheless, at the literal level, open to a more generalized subject. Seeming in Zola is a matter of, to use a stilted translation, what "one would have said," where the determination of this "one" is conspicuously left open. By stressing this indeterminate mode of conditionality, Zola generalizes the "as if" and lends to his factually impossible description (Saccard's becoming-sabre) an intersubjective character: it belongs to the milieu.

³⁵ In his reading of a passage from *La Débâcle*, Jameson refers parenthetically to Zola's use of *on aurait dit* as part of "the awkward reminiscences of Balzac who ever invited us, with his rhetorical questions, to compare his scenes with this or that great painting of the past, as much theatrically to stage a tableau as to elicit our admiration" (66). Such staging is no doubt operative in Zola, but this alone does not exhaustively account for Zola's unique deployment of the indefinite pronoun as a naturalistic literary device.

Passages of the kind offered above are scattered across *Les Rougon-Macquart*. In the most general terms, what is at stake in each of them concerns the production of images by way of a specific milieu. *Seeming* invites phenomenological inquiry, since, in Zola, it functions according to particular perceptual configurations or conditions of possible experience (i.e., those determined by heredity and environment). The division between action and observation, so central to Lukács and Deleuze alike, centers upon a foundational divergence in the understanding of perception and experience. The divergence, as I argue in the following chapter, becomes increasingly significant in modernist thought, where philosophical and literary works will test thought's capacity to produce images that exceed the regimentation of action and natural perception. This is not a theory of a break between two regimes of intelligibility as they emerge in literary fields, but instead a reading of vibrations between tendencies of representation, namely, those of narration and description.³⁶

Much more can be said with respect to the naturalist Screen. If this chapter has focused on the central apparatuses of the milieux—the coal mine, the department store, the marketplace, and the city itself—it has omitted discussion of particular bodies and

³⁶ It is not that the paradigm of action collapses in Zola, but instead that it encounters a limit that instantiates a fundamental change at the level of form. One can attempt an analogy with film, which, according to Deleuze, does not generate a clean break or end of the action-image; however, something central to the medium has been irrevocably altered: “Certainly, people continue to make SAS and ASA films [i.e., dialectically organized action-image films]: the greatest commercial successes always take that route, but the soul of the cinema no longer does. The soul of the cinema demands increasing thought, even if thought begins by undoing the system of actions, perceptions and affections on which the cinema had fed up to that point” (*Cinema I* 206).

objects, which, subjected to Zola's "idiosyncratic surrealism," mutate and transform.³⁷

While my aim has been to investigate the role of the voyant in its relation to that which it encounters, it has also been to disclose the role of crisis in Zola. The crisis, diagnosed first by Lukács and later by Deleuze, concerns the inadequacy of narration (the action-image) and its subsequent breakdown. In Zola, the collapse is uneven and incomplete, but, through the ruins of action, his descriptions occasionally generate surreal spectacle.

³⁷ Objects and bodies are always susceptible to extreme transformation. In *Nana* (1880), for example, Zola describes a chair that grows surrealistically: "On eût dit que la chaise longue de Sabine, ce siège unique de soie rouge, dont la mollesse autrefois étonnait, s'était multipliée, élargie, jusqu'à emplir l'hôtel entier d'une voluptueuse paresse, d'une jouissance aiguë, qui brûlait avec la violence des feux tardifs" 'It seemed that Sabine's chaise longue, this solitary chair of red silk, whose softness had formerly been so pronounced, was multiplied and enlarged, filling the entire house with voluptuous idleness and intense pleasure, which was burning with the violence of smouldering fires' (II, 1419-20; My trans.). In *L'Argent* (1890), Saccard's body, Zola's narrator reports, actually expands: "Un instant, Saccard, avant de quitter la salle, se haussa, comme pour mieux embrasser la foule autour de lui, d'un coup d'œil. Il était réellement grandi, soulevé d'un tel triomphe, que toute sa petite personne se gonflait, s'allongeait, devenait énorme." ("For a moment, before leaving the hall, Saccard stretched up as though to better take in the crowd around him in one glance. He was really bigger, so uplifted by his triumph that the whole of his little figure swelled and grew longer, became enormous"; V, 311; 348).

Chapter 3

The Embodied Screen:

The Phenomenality of Joyce's 'Proteus' Episode

This chapter argues that the “Proteus” episode of Joyce’s *Ulysses* figures its principal character, Stephen Dedalus, in a crisis caused by the failure of the epistemological commitments that constitute his identity. Broadly, these commitments are characterized by a Western philosophical tradition that privileges disembodied abstraction over and against embodied modes of phenomenality. I draw an analogy between Stephen’s crisis and that of a more generalized European crisis of knowledge. I further suggest that Joyce’s critique of disembodied modes of intelligibility run parallel to the major assertions of philosopher Henri Bergson. Throughout, reference to Bergson substantiates my central argument, namely, that Joyce enacts a rebuttal to the hegemony of the action-image and its disembodied pretensions to mastery in favor of an embodied mode of phenomenality, what I refer to as the Joycean screen. Joyce, I will argue, responds to the European “crisis of spirit” by emphasizing the role of the body as medium—a screen—for the production of reality

Joyce, Bergson, and the European Crisis of Thought

Henri Bergson’s (1859-1941) influence on modernist intellectual and cultural life is well documented. Bergson was a modernist thinker in the broad sense that his work engaged with the period around the turn of the 19th century as a decisive shift in human history. In his interest in the nature of subjective, human experience, Bergson resisted the increasingly mechanistic worldviews encouraged as much by everyday thinking as by

positivism and philosophical naturalism. Naturalistic thinking (the steadfast belief that empirical observation and natural laws are all that is necessary to describe reality), across Western philosophical and artistic modernism, was held by thinkers like Bergson as a superficial elevation of commonsensical understandings of the world. What was absent, for many modernists, was a holistic explanation of reality that could avoid the pitfalls of scientism. This absence was accompanied by a sense of the world that, fragmented by disparate regimes of knowledge production and capitalist specialization, lacked a world picture organized around a uniquely human sensibility.

The intellectual situation of Europe in the early 20th century was frequently described in terms of a clamor to find meaning in the world. Its failure to do so was not for a want of explanatory models, but rather an overabundance of chaotic attempts.³⁸ This crisis in modernity was succinctly described by Paul Valéry in his essay *La Crise de l'esprit* (1919):

Et dans le même désordre mental, à l'appel de la même angoisse, l'Europe cultivée a subi la reviviscence rapide de ses innombrables pensées : dogmes, philosophies, idéaux hétérogènes; les trois cents manières d'expliquer le Monde, les mille et une nuances du christianisme, les deux douzaines de positivismes : tout le spectre de la lumière intellectuelle a étalé ses couleurs incompatibles, éclairant d'une étrange lueur contradictoire l'agonie de l'âme européenne. (I, 989-990)

And in the same mental disorder, at the summons of the same anguish, cultivated Europe suffered the rapid revitalisation of its innumerable thoughts: Dogmas, philosophies, heterogeneous ideals; the three hundred means of explaining the World, the one thousand and one nuances of Christianity, the two dozen

³⁸ As Eva Geulen remarks, "There is perhaps no discourse of crisis in the early twentieth century that does not invoke the specter of plurality of styles" (47)

positivisms: The entire spectrum of intellectual light displayed its incompatible colors, illuminating in a strange and contradictory glimmer the agony of the European soul. (My trans.)

Writing in 1919, Valéry imagined Europe, still reeling from the First World War, suspended over an abyss situated between “l’ordre et le désordre.” The crisis of “l’esprit,” for Valéry, articulates in part what will come to be regarded—particularly in the writings of thinkers like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer—as the destructive teleology of Enlightenment mastery. For Valéry, like many theorists of the first half of the twentieth century, rigorous control over the natural and social worlds, heralded as progress, would pave the way for war and destruction and constituted what the former regarded as a limit to modernity’s progressive aspirations (I, 985). Valéry succinctly articulates the epistemological contours of this crisis of spirit, or mind, and his diagnosis sets the stage for my argument. This chapter intervenes by positing the Joyce-Bergson constellation as a particular attempt to react to the crisis, to offer a riposte to ossified teleologies that extol the ostensible virtues of precision and mastery insofar as they harbor a duplicitous, alienating potentiality that is deeply antithetical to life.

Valéry’s articulation of the crisis usefully brings into focus the kind of worldview to which Bergson and Joyce respond. Though Valéry remains one example among many, his diagnosis succinctly articulates a more general sense, a European *zeitgeist*, concerning a split between inner life and external mastery constituting a *crise de l’esprit*. That is, the Joycean response, far from seeking to purify experience of its inherent inconsistency on its way to mastery (and potential annihilation), is instead founded on forms of

fragmentation that constitute and are fundamental to experience. In my view, what is left for Joyce after such fragmentation is the embodied encounter, and it is through the “Proteus” episode in *Ulysses* that Joyce most emphatically makes this plain.

For Bergson and Joyce, I will show, consciousness always finds itself *in medias res*, thrown into a drama of possible modes of interpreting itself and its world. That is, the drama of competing accounts of reality is itself a basic feature of experience as such. It is in this sense that they are ideal subjects for the study of crisis as a literary phenomenon. While Bergson *qua* philosopher is prompted to develop a rigorous account of the difference between the subjective flux of experience and its regimentation by the demands of practical activity, Joyce offers a mode of description in which those differences between forms of experience are always already confused and conflicting. Further, while *Ulysses* stages warring modes of intelligibility within the crisis of modernity, it ultimately provides a life-affirming vision of the world. An interminably affirmative thinker, Joyce’s disordering ends in saying “yes to life,”³⁹ in a creative relation to the future.

The “Proteus” Episode

Stephen Dedalus's famous proclamation of freedom in *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* in which he announces his departure from the “nets” of “nationality, language, [and] religion” continues to be deployed as an analytic with which critics frame this character's development in *Ulysses*. Whether or not one reads Joyce's treatment of

³⁹ Jacques Derrida refers to “l’oui-dire de Joyce” or yes-saying, playing on *l’oui-dire* (hearsay).

Stephen as an ironic figure—what Robert Scholes described as the choice between “a posturing esthete rather than an actual or even potential artist” (484)—does not, of course, render vacuous Stephen's experience and struggle with the various “nets” of his historical and cultural moment. Indeed, it remains profitable to regard Stephen as a character through which Joyce explores and catalogues many of the warring forces that come to constitute the Joycean experience of modernity-in-crisis. If Stephen is a vehicle for expressing these forces, it is because his ambivalence exemplifies the state of being “in between” paradigms that compete for his subjective self-understanding. It is through Stephen—and, in particular, his body—that Joyce meditates on the screen-in-crisis and constructs images of thought and of consciousness that emerge on the basis of the body’s phenomenological centrality. If the screen is in this context the body’s capacity to mediate phenomena and generate thought, however, it is also the text itself, which, by way of Joycean stream-of-consciousness, instantiates a structure of rationality that is incessantly interrupted by figures of the body. In this sense, Stephen's “soliloquy” that unfolds as he walks along Sandymount Strand in the “Proteus” episode of *Ulysses* might be read, not just as elaboration on the tripartite inventory of nation, language, and religion, but also as a phenomenological reflection. One can readily point out the extent to which Stephen's identificatory conflicts in this chapter take on protean variability as his mind vacillates between dichotomies. Just as Joyce juxtaposes at one moment Stephen's agnosticism (“You behold in me, Stephen said with grim displeasure, a horrible example of free thought” [1.625-6]) with thoughts of betraying his Catholicism/mother

(“The aunt thinks you killed your mother” [3.200]), one finds throughout the first three chapters Stephen's groping mind trying the extremes of his conflicted identity.

Of course, any attempt to rigorously articulate every facet of Stephen's selfhood through the limited prism of nation, language, and religion would not only be reductive, but it would be missing a fundamental point of the chapter, namely, that rigid characterizations of human existence fail to grasp the very experience they seek to describe. Indeed, in what follows, I will argue that precisely this question concerning the nature of human experience as mediated by the screen is at issue for Joyce in “Proteus.” Though scholarship has historically favored the Proust-Bergson relation (for obvious reasons), it is nonetheless productive to read Stephen's phenomenological crises in tandem with Bergson, since, in doing so, one puts Joyce in conversation with 20th-century philosophical thinking on the subjects of knowledge and metaphysics. The Aristotelian-rationalist model of knowledge production that Stephen emblemizes runs into crisis in Joyce's modernity, which favors not the immobility of rationalist abstraction, but the fluidity of experiential coping with the world.

Any inventory of Stephen's besieged subjectivity would need to account for his confrontation with a metaphysical tradition that remains at the heart of his intellectual heritage as a Jesuit-trained Aristotelian and Thomist. That the Stephen of the “Proteus” episode immediately takes up a rationalist epistemological position would come as a surprise to few. In the “Ithaca” episode, Stephen's philosophical commitments are rendered explicitly: “He affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational

reagent between a micro and macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void” (17.1013-6). It would be a mistake, however, to read Stephen's relationship with rationalism as unproblematic. Indeed, Joyce's staging of Stephen appears—for reasons that are to follow—to be designed to deliberately underscore the unsuitability of rationalism for modern experience, even if this epiphany (like so many others) is only tenuously emerging for Stephen. With the “Proteus” episode, then, Joyce conspicuously addresses the unraveling edifices of rationalist epistemology, using Stephen's fitful gropings on the beach to stage a reflection on becoming itself.

That Joyce had Homer's tale of Proteus in mind is significant for reasons that go well beyond the commonality of Stephen and Menelaus' ocean-side locales. *The Odyssey* stages Telemachus's encounter with Menelaus as part of the former's continued search for his father's whereabouts. The Linati schema⁴⁰ indicates under “Correspondences” “Kevin Egan—Menelaus”; the tempting inference that Stephen corresponds to Telemachus may therefore be well grounded. It may nonetheless be productive to imagine Stephen himself in the role of Menelaus. Like Telemachus, Menelaus is thrust into action on the basis of an epistemological crisis. But while Telemachus seeks the knowledge of his elders, Menelaus will receive divine knowledge from the sea. Menelaus' predicament on the island Pharos, like Stephen's on Sandymount Strand, emerges from a desire to overcome stasis: Although this stasis is literal for Menelaus (he is stranded on Pharos without wind), it becomes figurative for Stephen. Indeed, Stephen is seemingly stuck “in

⁴⁰ The outline of *Ulysses* Joyce drafted for his friend Carlo Linati in 1920 to explain the structure of the novel.

between” as his thought oscillates in a manner typical of Joycean consciousness, denying the tidy and syllogistic movement “from known to unknown” (17.1013). In Homer, arresting the untidy movement of thought—and indeed reality itself—is the condition of the divine knowledge that procures freedom. The daughter of Proteus, the goddess Idothea, informs Menelaus that he must apprehend her father and arrest his ceaseless transformation:

He will turn himself into every kind of creature that goes upon the earth, and will become also both fire and water; but you must hold him fast and grip him tighter and tighter, till he begins to talk to you and comes back to what he was when you saw him go to sleep; then you may slacken your hold and let him go; and you can ask him which of the gods it is that is angry with you, and what you must do to reach your home over the seas. (Butler 277)

Menelaus' acquisition of knowledge comes only after he cunningly suspends the becoming of the “old man of the sea.” The sea takes on the significance of the whole of being whose value for mortals is only made manifest in its suspension. The Menelaus episode implies a bifurcated conception of reality, one in which a dynamic flux of becoming subtends the human demands of action and knowledge. Thus, one finds here an ancient Greek articulation of the action-image. That is, to know is to suspend: Knowledge in Homer is secured by stabilizing that which is characterized by change. Plato's Forms, to use a well-known example, are both truer and more real than the world of experience precisely because they are atemporal, static paradigms. Proteus' association with the sea aptly emphasizes fluidity, change, and becoming. Menelaus only acquires divine

knowledge after he holds fast to Proteus. This conflation of human mastery with an aversion to becoming remains a characteristic feature of the action-image and is further explored in chapter 4.

If knowledge is the cessation of movement, the stilled apprehension of becoming, then it is everywhere deferred in Joyce. Stephen—and by extension the human subject in general—is not a heroic conqueror of the Protean becoming of consciousness and reality, but is instead constituted by a tentative groping at the fundamental dynamism of being. Joyce's revision of the episode retains the generative valences of the sea and becoming in relation to knowledge and consciousness, but rejects the position of mastery that Menelaus ultimately achieves. If Menelaus acquires divine (self-)knowledge to overcome his stranded epistemological position, Stephen, in an analogous position, is made to experience reality as a constant grappling. Joyce's reconstruction of the episode figures the crisis of the screen by denying the rationalist pretensions of mastery in favor of an untamable virtuality accessible only by way of embodied encounters.

Joyce and the “Time Cult”

Such a characterization of Joyce's project in *Ulysses* as a critique of a rationalist model of subjectivity is hardly new. Joyce scholar Jules Law underwrites what “Eagleton, Lloyd, and others have analyzed as *Ulysses*'s destruction or decentering of the Kantian subject—that paragon of autonomous, self-consistent, self-present consciousness” (166). Law continues, adding that such a “deconstruction of consciousness [...] goes on all the time in *Ulysses*.” This critique of the Kantian (a pejorative descriptor for Law) or

rationalist subject is particularly relevant in understanding Stephen's walk on Sandymount. And, more broadly, it is central to the intellectual currents that were very much in the air in Joyce's day.

The most persistently anti-rationalist account of subjectivity around the turn of the 19th century emerges in Bergson's major works, *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (1886), *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889), and *L'Évolution créatrice* (1907). Bergson's popularity as a thinker in the decade after the turn of the century was enormous. He gave lectures to large audiences at the Collège de France—lectures that included the likes of T.S. Eliot and William James. Word spread throughout Europe of what was seen by many as a revolutionary philosophy. Marcel Proust—whose cousin, Louise Neuberger, Bergson married in 1891—described *À Recherche du temps perdu* as a “Bergsonian” novel (Ansell-Pearson and Mullarkey viii). In 1911, Bergson gave lectures at Birmingham and Oxford which resounded throughout the anglophone world; newspapers began to speak of “[t]he new French philosophy” and of “The Bergson cult” (Ansell-Pearson and Mullarkey, ix). His role as a leading intellectual in the early 20th century was secured with the Einstein debates and his 1928 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Bergson's theory of what he calls the “le mécanisme cinématographique de la pensée” (“the cinematic mechanism of thought”; 183) is of particular relevance to the “Proteus” episode. Gilles Deleuze later glosses this idea as “l’illusion cinématographique” (“the cinematographic illusion” 10), a useful, if not entirely faithful

interpretation.⁴¹ On Bergson's account, the cinematographic illusion is in its broadest terms the error of reducing the flux of reality to a static approximation: “Elle consiste à croire qu'on pourra penser l'instable par l'intermédiaire du stable, le mouvant par l'immobile” (“It consists supposing that we can think the unstable by means of the stable, the moving by means of the immobile”; 162; Mitchell 288). Bergson suggests that Western knowledge production since Greek thought has mistakenly understood objective reality as the world as it appears through the frame of practical interests. On the contrary, he argues, reality, or what he calls “duration” (“*la durée*”) is a becoming whole, unfragmented and prior to any pragmatic differentiation.

For Bergson, everyday or “natural” perception simply is the arrestation of the undifferentiated totality of becoming insofar as it “se détachent de la durée les moments qui nous intéressent” (“pluck[s] out of duration those moments that interest us”; 162; Mitchell 288). This process is, in other words, that by which the virtual becomes actual by means of immobility. The percipient’s ordinary, interested means of knowing arranges the arrested slices of becoming and thereby produces an artificial sense of mobility. Bergson's metaphor of the cinématographe is thus apt; the “movement” produced by the frames of a film projected rapidly in succession on a movie screen is of the same kind that we experience in our ordinary way of relating to duration. That is, the movement

⁴¹ In *Cinéma 1: L'Image-mouvement*, Deleuze asserts that “En 1907, dans *L'Évolution créatrice*, Bergson baptise la mauvaise formule : c'est l'illusion cinématographique” (“In 1907, in *Creative Evolution*, Bergson coins the unfortunate formula: the cinematographic illusion”; 10). Although Bergson never uses this exact term in *L'Évolution créatrice*, he does indeed think of “le mécanisme cinématographique de la pensée” as illusory. I will follow Deleuze’s coinage, however, because of its ubiquity in scholarship.

conditioned by the “système sensori-moteur” (“sensory-motor system”; 80) is an abstract regimentation of duration analogous to the film apparatus. It is in this way that we arrive at our everyday sense of time; frozen fragments of reality are rendered in succession and held together by an abstract form of time. As a further elucidation, Bergson explains that the “instantanés” or “snapshots” taken by human apprehension fail to grasp *la durée* because they merely string together images like a reel of film: “l’immobilité, même indéfiniment juxtaposée à elle-même, nous ne ferons jamais du mouvement” (“immobility set beside immobility, even endlessly, we could never make movement”; 179; Mitchell 305). This cinematographic production of reality, according to Bergson, thinks temporality by way of a spatialization, and thus time gets wrongly thought in terms of spatial metaphors (for example, in the movement described by the ticks of a clock).

A central problem for Bergson is that, insofar as one naturalizes the cinematographic illusion, one dogmatically clings to an artificial mode of relating to the world that is regimented solely by interested, end-oriented activity. Herein lies Bergson’s philosophical intervention, his critique of a mode of perception that is not only commonsensical but also what scientism erroneously takes to be the primary means of objectively describing reality. Contrary to the presumption of science, Bergson argues that it is aesthetics that comes closest to ushering an experience of duration, that is, of reality irrespective of practical regimentation. In *Essai sur les données immédiates de la*

conscience, his revised doctoral thesis, he advances the view that art may provide the means to temporarily break the restrictions of natural perception; Bergson writes,

Que si maintenant quelque romancier hardi, déchirant la toile habilement tissée de notre moi conventionnel, nous montre sous cette logique apparente une absurdité fondamentale, sous cette juxtaposition d'états simples une pénétration infinie de mille impressions diverses qui ont déjà cessé d'être au moment où on les nomme, nous le louons de nous avoir mieux connus que nous ne nous connaissions nous-mêmes. (61)

Now, if some bold novelist, tearing aside the cleverly woven curtain of our conventional ego, shows us under this appearance of logic a fundamental absurdity, under this juxtaposition of simple states and infinite permeation of a thousand different impressions which have already ceased to exist the instant they are named, we commend him for having known us better than we knew ourselves. (Pogson 133)

Commentators often point to Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, exemplified by the famous madeleine episode, as the embodiment of the Bergsonian effort to overcome natural perception, but it is undoubtedly the case that Joycean stream of consciousness is similarly informed by this disposition. What is shared by each of these thinkers is the thought that human consciousness cannot be understood in the same terms that one uses to understand the world in an everyday, practical sense.

Two Bergsonian positions deserve emphasis in the context of Stephen's philosophical stroll on the beach. The first concerns a central theme of the "Proteus" episode, namely, the body, or what Bergson calls throughout *Matière et mémoire* a

“centre d’action” (“center of action”). For Bergson, the body is a privileged image amongst an aggregate of images endlessly acting on one another. As he writes:

Plus généralement, dans cette continuité de devenir qui est la réalité même, le moment présent est constitué par la coupe quasi instantanée que notre perception pratique dans la masse en voie d’écoulement, et cette coupe est précisément ce que nous appelons le monde matériel : notre corps en occupe le centre ; il est, de ce monde matériel, ce que nous sentons directement s’écouler ; en son état actuel consiste l’actualité de notre présent. (83)

More generally, in that continuity of becoming which is reality itself, the present moment is constituted by the quasi-instantaneous section affected by our perception in the flowing mass; and this section is precisely that which we call the material world. Our body occupies its center; it is, in this material world, that part of which we directly feel the flux; in its actual state the actuality of our present lies. (Paul and Palmer 178)

Bombarded by the flow of becoming, bodies are the center of the world construed in terms of “notre perception pratique” (“our practical perception”). What one finds in Joyce conforms to this first of Bergson’s positions to which I draw attention, namely, that our bodies are constantly assailed from without by forces for which we have no ready-made meaning (or, as Bergson would have it, for which we have no use). The inherent tension here between the actual (the present as it is produced by practical perception) and the virtual (the flow of becoming) rests at the heart of the “Proteus” episode.

The second position emphasizes the other component of Bergson’s dualism, that of “la mémoire pure” (“pure memory”). If the agential character of the body emerges on the basis of practical perception and action, then pure memory constitutes the whole of becoming that remains, strictly speaking, powerless and without use (“Le souvenir” Bergson writes, is “impuissant tant qu’il demeure inutile”) (“Memory is powerless insofar

as it remains useless”; 84). For Bergson, reality as it is in itself (that is, prior to the violence done to it by natural perception) has, by definition, no power, since power emerges only on the basis of actions instantiated by an agent. The boundary between the actual and this virtual aspect of human existence, I will argue, becomes precisely the liminal space traversed by Stephen on Sandymount Strand. His crisis is that of the breakdown of his epistemological commitments—what I call a disembodied screen—and the subsequent proximity to the protean virtuality that, from a Bergsonian perspective, subtends all experience. It is by means of the depiction of this proximity that Joyce affirms what Bergson describes as the desire to dream: “Pour évoquer le passé sous forme d'image, il faut pouvoir s'abstraire de l'action présente, il faut savoir attacher du prix à l'inutile, il faut vouloir rêver” (“To call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream”; 49; Paul and Palmer 64).

Yet, it must be said that Joyce’s Bergsonism was no less controversial than Bergson himself. Wyndham Lewis famously advanced a critique of much of the late Modernist movement in his *Time and Western Man* (1927), a text in which he accuses figures such as Joyce, Proust, Pound, and Stein of being acolytes of what he refers to as the “time-cult” of Bergsonism. Lewis's project, in effect, is to undermine the artistic and

cultural value of the works produced by these artists on the grounds that they are enthralled by a philosophical outlook that remains antithetical to Western values. As he writes,

What I am concerned with here, first of all, is not whether the great *time-philosophy* that overshadows all contemporary thought is viable as a system of abstract truth, but if in its application it helps or destroys our human arts. With that is involved, of course, the very fundamental question of whether we should set out to transcend our human condition. (Emphasis in original, 102)

The view that Lewis offers concerning works he regards as compromised by “time-philosophy” is predictably that works like *Ulysses* fall short of the humanistic mission of art. It is probable that Lewis has Joyce in mind when he writes of the “bergsonian relativist,” whose works are merely the “glorification of the life-of-the-moment, with no reference beyond itself and no absolute or universal value” (23). In contrast, Lewis believes the role of artistic production to be the achievement of “absolute” and “universal” positions which help us transcend the mere immediacy of lived experience. In this respect, he partakes of a specific genealogy of literary critics—one embodied in figures such as Matthew Arnold and, more recently, Harold Bloom—that emphasizes the eternal or canonical truths of literature. Lewis's critique of Joyce, however, is at odds with assessments like those of T.S. Eliot, who ascribed to Joyce precisely those characteristics of universality that Lewis finds lacking. In his essay, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” (1923), Eliot argues that Joyce's “mythic method” lends to the chaos of the modern world a systematicity and significance that it otherwise lacks. By applying the classical forms of Homer's *Odyssey* to the formlessness of modern existence, Eliot avers,

Joyce provides a means of understanding modern life as a trajectory of Western high culture. As Eliot writes, Joyce provides “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (167). There are two obvious problems with Eliot's attempt to rescue Joyce from the abyss of modern relativism. First, it is not at all clear that Joyce understands modern life in terms of the high and low division of culture. It is unlikely that Joyce understood his Homeric superimposition as an application of form on the chaotic content of modern life, given that Joyce so clearly understands modern life to already have its own mediating forms. In her essay “Taste and Consumption in *Ulysses*,” Kimberly J. Devlin argues that “Joyce creates, through the subjectivity of Bloom, an advertisemental point of view [...] a distinctly modern perspective that tends to see objects, phenomena, and people in terms of their aura” (16). Far from an anarchic perspective symptomatic of the ubiquity of low cultural, Bloom's subjectivity is textually mediated by the context of significance that is the world of advertisements. Joyce does not appear to subscribe to, in other words, the simplistic binarisms of high and low, order and chaos, form and formlessness. The second, more immediate mischaracterization, is Eliot's presumption that the cultural work of *Ulysses* lies in its bringing order to reality. The idea that cultural production—or indeed our subjective grasp of the phenomenal world in general—is primarily a question of rendering things distinctly and giving them form is a position to which Joyce expresses a high degree of ambivalence. Precisely what the novel as a whole takes up, particularly with Stephen in the “Proteus” episode, is this privileging of immobile form over and against the more protean aspects of human

experience. Eliot, like Lewis, succumbs to a platonist impulse to disparagingly position lived reality beneath atemporal universality. Quite the contrary, Joyce's interest is in movement, dynamism, and becoming.

Between Vision and Mastery: The Walk on Sandymount Strand

Throughout the episode, Stephen reflects on his own modes of perception, often making recourse to figures in philosophy who deemphasize the role of the body and materiality in favor of epistemologies predicated on the purely mental and the unmediated. At one point during the walk, he blends the axioms of the Irish idealist philosopher George Berkeley with references to the book of Exodus, "The good bishop of Cloyne⁴² took the veil of the temple out of his shovel hat: veil of space with coloured emblems hatched on its field. Hold hard. Coloured on a flat: yes, that's right. Flat I see, then think distance, near, far, flat I see, east, back. Ah, see now!" (3.417-19).⁴³ This veil refers to the veil in Exodus that "acts as a multicolored screen between the outer 'holy place' and 'the most holy' (behind the veil)" (Gifford and Seidman 63). According to Gifford and Seidman, Stephen's reasoning is that this biblical screen later becomes a central component in Berkeley's theory of vision. In other words, taking the "veil of the

⁴² In their annotations, Gifford and Seidman note, "In his *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (Dublin, 1709), Berkeley argued that 'the proper objects of sight are not without the mind; nor the images of anything without the mind,' and that since what we actually see we see as 'flat,' distance is not something that is *seen* but something that is *thought*" (62-3). The critical point here is that the physical world is epistemologically secondary for Berkeley. In "Proteus," Joyce repeatedly challenges this and other disembodied accounts of thought.

⁴³ The tradition that follows from Aristotle and Plato has to account for the way the unextended or "flat" sensation that is received on the lens of the eye obtains extension or spatiality. The problem, put more simply, pertains to how matter is converted into mind.

temple out of his shovel hat,” Berkeley appropriates this biblical screen to articulate his account of a perceptual screen:

Berkeley argued that “Vision is the Language of the Author of Nature” [...] in other words, the visible world is like a screen with signs on it, a screen that God presents to be *read* and *thought* rather than *seen*. Thus, the signs on the screen could be regarded as something taken out of one’s head (or hat). (Author’s emphasis 63)

At the outset, then, Joyce defines the intellectual tradition in which Stephen is steeped in terms of a conspicuously disembodied understanding of perception. Gifford and Seidman’s reference to a screen usefully emphasizes its role in terms of the way it mediates phenomena (and is thus compatible with my use of the term). Joyce’s critique of this disembodied screen in “Proteus” contrasts this and similar descriptions of our perceptual apparatuses with an embodied phenomenology.

Indeed, Stephen departs from his habitual mode of relating to the world by conducting a kind of phenomenological experiment, that of closing his eyes as he walks along Sandymount Strand. The episode opens with a reflection of visual perception: “Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes” (3.1-2). The “ineluctable modality of the visible” alludes to the Aristotelian bias for sight over the other senses. This reference establishes the episode’s organizing reflection on the nature of perceptual mediation. What is at stake is an interrogation of the screen and its principal modes of mediation insofar as it is not, like the other modes of perception, mediated by a bodily organ. According to the Aristotelian paradigm, that is, the eyes do not partake of becoming in the way that the other sense organs do: “The ear participates

in (and thus can modify) the substance of what it hears, but the eye does not” (Gifford and Seidman 44). The “ineluctability” of sight is therefore a means of describing its immediacy (in the sense of being unmediated) to the degree that it eschews the body. To lay claim to such direct access to the world ostensibly grants the subject an absolute form of mastery. Yet, Stephen also sees himself in the position of a reader: “Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot” (3.2-3). The ambivalence of these first lines, which position him concomitantly in the role of knower *and* as an interpreter of signs, demonstrates a crisis of mastery and exegesis that develops throughout the chapter (and indeed *Ulysses* as a whole). But if Stephen understands himself as reader, it is as a reader “of all things,” and thus despite his minimal allowances for the subjective and mediated character of knowledge, there remains in his thinking a pretension to immediacy that prompts his thought to return to tenants of rationalist and idealist philosophy. Given his Aristotelian training, this proclivity toward knowledge by means of the visual is not surprising. The opening lines of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* insist first that “all men” desire knowledge and that the means of acquiring knowledge are the eyes. The first paragraph of *The Metaphysics* stresses the special status of sight in its relation to thought:

All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves: and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things. (1)

Aristotle provides yet another iteration of the screen in the modality of the action-image. Sight bears a privileged relation both with respect to action and to discernment, and Aristotle regards the breaking up of the flux of experience into concrete and knowable objects the “natural” purview of human subjects. With its proliferation of knowable distinctions and differences, the Aristotelian model stands in stark contrast to the Bergsonian-Joycean model, which views the desire for classification and mastery as derivative or secondary. With this contrast, Joyce figures a crisis of the self-contained, self-assured pretensions of epistemological mastery that are central to the action-image by positioning them against an understanding of subjectivity that affirms consciousness’ defining relation to virtuality and alterity.

From the start of “Proteus,” Joyce stages the break with Stephen’s disembodied Aristotelianism by emphasizing the mediating role of the body’s sensory organs. Stephen’s philosophical commitments attenuate momentarily during his stroll on the beach. Eyes closed, listening to the sound of his steps on the pebbles and shells, he thinks to himself, “Exactly: and that is the ineluctable modality of the audible.” Yet, this rejoinder to Aristotle is not as simple as opposing one sense to another—an opposition suggested by his quip, “I am getting on nicely in the dark.” Instead, Stephen tentatively grasps an alternative modality of the screen, one in which representations of the world without are neither singular nor discrete, but multitudinous, fluid, and protean. In his brief but significant walk in the dark, he demonstrates the Aristotelian point that sound and touch, unlike sight, partake and involve themselves in the experience of the material

world. These are senses that grasp the world by its extension and voluminousness—its matter—rather than in terms of formal abstractions constituting discrete objects.

Joyce sets Stephen and the litany of philosophical problems he raises against the background of a non-rationalist network of sensations and allusions. In this sense, the fluidity that emerges both in Stephen's thoughts and in the descriptions of his immediate environment stands in deliberate contrast to the rationalist precepts with which he wrestles. The prominence of the episode's initial meditation on the visual as such thus functions as a preamble to the episode as a whole. After having initially presented the relation of the visual to knowledge, Joyce will frequently make use of the other sensations as alternatives to the privileged medium. Thus, the injunction to “shut your eyes and see” in the first paragraph announces that what follows will not exclusively concern the standard modality of knowledge by which the fluidity of the world is arrested in isolated fragments (3.9). To shut your eyes and see would be to shut one's eyes in order to know, and thus Joyce confronts the Aristotelianism and epistemological assumptions of everyday language concerning sight, namely, the semantic equivalence of the verb “to see” and the verb “to know.”

Again, what is at stake in this discussion of sensory organs—to put it in the terms I establish in chapter 1—is the character of the mediating role of the screen. Joyce renders Stephen's crisis in terms of a crisis of the action-image as an Aristotelian screen, which is to say, a mode of phenomenal mediation that privileges unmediated epistemological mastery over and against the becomings of the body and the material world.

Joyce's implicit critique of the rationalist-Aristotelean iteration of the action-image seeks to underscore its pretensions to unmediated mastery. Immunizing the subject from alterity, Western thought has consolidated the father, vision, reason, spirit, God, and cosmos in the terms of sight and the visual. In *Timaeus*, Plato describes the capacity for vision as a fire that resides in the human head and leaves through the lens of the eye to meet the external object on the horizon (62). This fire, for Plato, is also the very stuff of the cosmos, a rational system around whose center celestial bodies circulate. The fiery soul of the human interior is thus like the center around which the external world revolves (65). The essential point here is that this archetypally Western understanding of the relation between thought, perception, and the external world functions on the basis of a grounding homology; interior and exterior are but different modalities of the same, leaving no room for alterity. Recall from chapter 1 that the action-image presupposes a fundamental correlation between these two poles: The dialectical movement of the action-image is such that interior and exterior express the same whole even as when stand in an ostensibly antagonistic relation to one another.

In the "Nestor" episode, Stephen first reflects on Aristotle's views on mind and its relation to the material world: "Thought is the thought of thought. Tranquil brightness. The soul is in a matter all that this: the soul is the form of forms. Tranquility sudden, vast, cadescend: form of forms" (2.74-76). The reference to Aristotle's "form of forms" pertains to the interpretation of *nous* (mind or soul) as the highest and most general mode of mediation: "As the hand is the instrument of instruments, so the mind [...] is the form of forms" (qtd. in Gifford and Seidman 32). The form-giving capacity of *nous* conditions

the experience of any particular form. When in “Proteus” this Aristotelean formulation returns, however, it has been conspicuously modified, having now become “form of *my* form” (emphasis added, 3.414). During his walk along the beach, Stephen stops to jot a note on a piece of paper: “Turning his back to the sun he bent over far to a table of rock and scribbled words [...] His shadow lay over the rocks as he bent, ending” (3.408-9). Joyce stresses the point that the shadow ends, emphasizing the finitude that characterizes form insofar as it is available to experience (i.e., since the infinite is by definition without form and thus not susceptible to experience). Stephen continues to reflect on the inseparability of form from the finite: “I throw this ended shadow from me, manshape ineluctable, call it back. Endless, would it be mine, form of my form? (3.412-14). He ponders the extent to which form would be intelligible in the mode of the infinite or “endless.” This query challenges the previous characterization in the Nestor episode (the “vast, cadescent” form of forms), and suggests that Stephen is moving into greater proximity to the Joycean articulation of the screen, one that positions experience and thought in an inextricable relation to particular bodies, especially one’s own.

In this context, of course, “form of my form” refers to the shadow cast by Stephen’s body. That Stephen’s stream-of-consciousness should entail this particular reference to Aristotle, then, is ironic in two respects: First, because Stephen particularizes what, in its original formulation, epitomizes generality itself. And second, because Joyce playfully reframes a metaphysical assertion in terms of a concrete image that underscores the relationship between a body and its shadow, that is, its form. Again, Joyce demonstrates that form is always concomitant with particular bodies. Indeed, here and

throughout the episode, Joyce instigates Stephen's reflections on abstract philosophical concepts by way of an encounter with a body in the material world. Joyce thus figures the body (both in the sense of the human body and physical bodies more generally) as the screen, since it is through the medium of bodies that thought emerges. Indeed, bodies occasion thought insofar as they constitute the phenomenological events that instantiate and impel the Joycean stream-of-consciousness.

The Mat(t)er of the Body

Cheryl Herr convincingly reads Stephen's rationalism in terms of its patriarchal heritage. She argues that scholarship regarding this chapter has been dominated by "male-identified allusions" and that Stephen himself is beholden to "a pantheon of [male] epistemological authorities" that include the likes of Aristotle and Aquinas (31). On these grounds, Herr regards Stephen's relation to rationalism as straightforwardly one of admiration and "fond[ness]" (31). For Herr, Stephen merely "goes through the motions of testing and rethinking some fundamental tenets of Western rational philosophy" (32). In contrast to Herr, I have suggested that Stephen's ambivalence to his rationalist heritage can be read as lurching and fitful gestures toward the experiential and fluid reality that surrounds him. His testing and rethinking emerges in his thoughts in the mode of a blasphemous rather than strict adherent, as indicated by the frequent reiterations and rehearsals that alter the very tradition they cite. However, Herr stresses the important insight that Stephen's prevailing modality of knowing his world only occurs in terms of a concomitant marginalization of women as objects of sexual obsession and as non-knowers. Even if, as I have suggested, the distinct line between propositional thought and

experiential knowing that Herr draws becomes difficult to steadfastly maintain at all points in the episode, it is nonetheless the case that this line itself is gendered.

The patriarchal nature of Stephen's epistemology remains deeply embedded in Western phallogocentrism. Freud, for example, has remarked that the historical shift in Western societies from matriarchies to patriarchies inaugurated a concomitant shift from societies based on matter and sensation to rationality and deduction. His argument relies on the hackneyed claim that the parentage of a mother can be sensibly experienced in the act of birth, while the father's claim to parentage must be verified by reason; as he writes in *Moses and Monotheism*: “This turning from the mother to the father, however, signifies above all a victory of spirituality over the senses, that is to say a step forward in culture, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise based on a deduction and a premiss [sic]” (184). While it is not surprising that Freud follows the philosophical tradition in understanding all sensation, vision or otherwise, as partaking of the material world, the explicit gendering of this relation is striking. Moreover, though Freud does not make the same allowances for sight that Aristotle does, both articulate views that take the phenomenologically mediating role of the body as a hindrance to pure reason.

Though the gaze appears three times in “Proteus” (two of which are directed at the navel), its status remains ambiguous, at once privileged as the organ of reason and deeply connected to matter and bodies. Stephen directs the male gaze at the women of his memory and imagination and thus recapitulates the privileging of vision over the body, particularly the female body. However, in this context, the mastery usually afforded by

vision becomes threatened by materiality and undermined by the recurrence of the body (particularly that of the mother). Indeed, Stephen's more general aversion to the body and matter (*mater*/mother) may be reflected in the traces of the body he leaves behind on the beach: his urine and his snot. The oft-cited English translation of the Linati schema indicates that the body as such remains absent in the first section of the book: Stephen-Telemachus "does not yet bear a body." However, as Enrico Terrinoni persuasively argues, Joyce's point was to put accent on the significance of the body in this episode:

[...] "*Telemaco non soffre ancora il corpo*," which according to a translation given in Ellmann's *Ulysses on the Liffey* means: "Telemachus does not yet bear a body." [...] While there is no doubt that Ellmann's literal translation interprets correctly the surface meaning of Joyce's statement, the ambiguous and half-metaphorical sense of the Italian verb *soffrire* in this occurrence has to be reconsidered. Although the verb, which can indeed be translated as "to suffer," may mean in certain cases also "to bear," suffice it to say that in this context it signifies more likely "to feel [something] intensely." A more reliable translation of Joyce's explanation would be: "Telemachus does not yet *feel* the body," meaning that he does not yet *feel the legacy* of the body. This implies also that he is not aware of the body's secret meaning. (173)

As Terrinoni suggests, Joyce figures Stephen, not as bodiless, but as slowly moving into proximity of "the body's secret meaning." If Stephen finally expels bodily matter, both metaphysically and literally, these acts of defiance do not keep him safe from the body insinuating itself on his experience. The body of the bloated corpse of the dog that lie on the beach recalls Stephen's associating death with teleological explanations of history: "Dogskull, dogsniff, eyes on the ground, moves to one great goal. Ah, poor dogsbody! Here lies poor dogsbody's body" (3.350-53). Notably, "dogsbody's body" recalls Stephen's having been called "dogsbody" by Mulligan previously. Following the

associative logic of these lines, one ironically moves from the abject, to Leibnizian providentialism, to an identification with the dead, animal body. Still, this passage is significant in this context for at least two more reasons. First, it indicates the power of the external world over the internal world of thought. Far from Cartesian rationalist stereotypes in complete control of our thoughts, we are, Joyce suggests, subjects of our haphazard bumping into the objects of the world. A Joycean encounter is then not unlike Proustian experience: The external world forces us to think and to remember involuntarily. Indeed, that thought is governed not sovereignly by a self-willed subject, but by the force of association is nowhere better manifested than in Joyce's use of stream-of-consciousness. Secondly, Stephen's repeated *Candide*-like critique of teleological history demands close attention. Stephen's embodied relation to the corpse suggest a visceral rather than cerebral rejection of the idea that history is unfolding toward perfection. Stephen cannot overcome the fact that history remains an embodied matter, a question of corpses and decay. Indeed he is forced, like the protagonist of Charles Baudelaire's "Une charogne," to reconcile the immediate and adventitious encounter of the carcass with the passage of time and lives. These two points position Stephen as experientially opposed to the very metaphysical tradition to which he remains intellectually committed. Although he is incapable of experiencing the dead body of history, of Ireland, and of his mother in positive terms, he is nonetheless made, by way of embodied encounters, to confront the reality of these forces.

This last point deals with the manner in which Joyce metaphorizes the contrast between mind and body in the episode. The image of Stephen walking along the beach

suggests his precarious position between thought and body, father and mother, the visual and the audible. The Mother sea or the “moon's handmaiden” increasingly encroaches on him. He imagines drowning and fears being engulfed. The protean fluidity of the sea everywhere threatens his physical being as the facade of his rationalism slowly (but never completely) erodes. If the schemas indicate *prima materia* as the episode's “sense,” it is to affirm the chaos that subtends the experience of reality rather than to reinforce an Aristotelian tendency. As a highly condensed episode composed almost entirely of Stephen's stream of consciousness, “Proteus” rejects rationalism even at the level of its style. The ever-shifting “seachange” of one's consciousness stands in opposition to the Aristotelian discernment with which I began. That we do not traverse the experience of our world in terms of discernible and discrete objects or images appears itself to be a lesson that Stephen learns as an embodied, phenomenal fact. The “Proteus” episode can be read as exemplary of Stephen's commitment to a disembodied rationalist/Aristotelian screen, but it should also be noted that this commitment is in service of Joyce's implicit call for an alternative epistemology, one that would be a move out of patriarchal modes of knowing.

Any shift away from patriarchal epistemologies would, for Stephen, remain a terrifying and arduous process. Joyce consolidates in Stephen's preoccupations the motifs of the mother, the sea, and fluidity more generally. These forces coalesce around the general permeability of the body that continues to haunt Stephen. That is, to return to Freud's patriarchal logic, “the mother” remains the site of the body in all its messiness, decay, and fluidity, while the father emerges as the disembodied ghost (“Hamlet, I am thy

father's spirit" [9.170]) and "legal fiction" who need not be present in an embodied manner to assert his importance. Besieged by the becoming world, Stephen imagines the sea as the rejected fluid of the mother:

Across the threadbare cuffedge he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the well-fed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting. (110)

The association of the sea with the mother-body is not entirely antithetical to the sense of the sea and fluidity more generally as signifier of the protean flux of experience. Indeed, Joyce offers both connotations concurrently in Stephen as he wrestles with his personal history and intellectual heritage. It is nonetheless significant that the body and embodied sensation (in distinction with the disembodied vision of Aristotle), remains so frightening to Stephen. Stephen's fear registers the affective dimension of the crisis of the screen, a fear that Joyce figures as a rupture between mind and body.

Stephen invests his mother with not only the significance of the body, but more specifically the dead body. As ghoul and vampire, she is pure, "dispirited" body: The mother as undead emphasizes her status as "matter/*mater*," that is, as constituted by the lifeless stuff of the material world, rather than by the paternal breath of the *logos*. But this emphasis on the body also provokes in Stephen a heightened awareness and fear of the permeability of his own body, which has become, at least tentatively, the screen by which he accesses himself among other images (to recall the Bergsonian formulation of the body, cited above, as merely one image amongst others). For Stephen, the ghoul is a

“[c]hewer of corpses,” one who consumes and gnaws the body. Stephen's associative thinking tends in this manner to link the sea to the mother and the mother to death and touch. In one chain of associations, he imagines in neutral terms the ubiquity of the sea “[a]cross the sands of all the world,” and, personifying its movements, thinks, “[s]he trudges, schlepps, trains, drags, trascines her load. A tide westering, moondrawn, in her wake” (3.391-3). Stephen's personification, however, already serves as a form of embodiment that brings him closer to thoughts of the undead mother. The sea as “handmaid of the moon” leads him to the tide, moon cycles, and to the suggestion of menstruation: “In sleep the wet sign calls her hour, bids her rise.” Here again, Stephen cannot seem to think the feminine body without thinking his mother's body and thus his own vulnerability. The thought of sleeping sea as a sleeping handmaid sets him on a trajectory that traverses mother, death, undead, and touch: “Bridebed, childbed, bed of death, ghostcandled. *Omnis caro ad te veniet*. He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss” (3.395-8). Indeed, the embodied mother/monster comes to take on the significance of touch in its most radical symbolic resonance as a divine touch. Stephen's phantasmic encounter with his mother in the “Circe” episode further elaborates this last point:

The Mother/(*her face drawing near and nearer, sending out an ashen breath*)
Beware! (*she raises her blackened withered right arm slowly towards Stephen's*
breast with outstretched finger) Beware God's hand!/(*a green crab with*
malignant red eyes sticks deep its grinning claws in Stephen's heart.)

(15.4216-21)

The image of the “green crab” reiterates the mother's association with the sea, but, more importantly, Stephen's fantasy raises touch and specifically the touch of the mother to the level of cosmic, divine force. The “withered right arm,” raised to Stephen's chest, collapses into “God's hand” and finally “grinning claws” in a chain of images that culminates in the quintessence of bodily permeability.

While this fear of being intruded upon by the external world no doubt metaphorizes an on-going sense of guilt Stephen feels about his mother's death, it also figures anew the tension in Stephen's rationalism. Indeed, Stephen's Thomistic rationalism, far from offering a permeable sense of self, thinks the human subject in terms of a clear articulation between internal and external worlds. The frequent merging of inside and outside that figure in the many iterations of intrusion from the external on the internal that Stephen imagines are in violation of this subjective/objective divide. That such a violation takes the form of touch should hardly be surprising, given the Aristotelian bias against touch as a less rational and more embodied form of sensation. Still, Stephen's relation to touch, like his relation to virtually everything else that governs his experience of the world, remains ambivalent. In fact, it is tempting to read Stephen as desirous of a non-threatening form of touch that would collapse the internal/external divide in a productive manner. Such a collapse, Joyce seems to suggest, can be found in love, although it is uncertain that Stephen is aware of this possibility. Stephen fantasizes about a girl whom he, struggling to recall, remembers as the “virgin at Hodges Figgis' window on Monday looking in for one of the alphabet books” (3.26-27). In this fantasy one finds what is perhaps Stephen's most positive tactile moment: “Touch me. Soft eyes.

Soft soft soft hand. I am lonely here. O, touch me soon, now. What is that word known to all men? I am quiet here alone. Sad too. Touch, touch me” (3.433-6). Joyce suggests here that the non-threatening touch Stephen desires would be, whether he is fully aware of this or not, the touch of love, “that word known to all men.” Joycean love, however, is not an abstract or Platonic love that leaves the self intact, but rather a Dionysian blurring, or indeed a protean metamorphosis, of subjective boundaries.

Joyce’s critique of the disembodied screen is at times quite subtle, as when he emphasizes the privileged mode of perception, sight, only to immediately return to the body: “his *gaze* brooded on his broadtoed boot, a buck’s castoffs” (emphasis added, 3.446). Again, Stephen’s thoughts are instigated by a physical body. The sight of his boots causes him to reflect on the fact that his boots were handed-down to him by Buck Mulligan—“buck’s castoffs”—and begins to contemplate other bodies: “He counted the creases of rucked leather wherein another’s foot had nested warm. The foot that beat the ground in tripudium, foot I dislove” (3.446-49). Inevitably, Stephen’s thoughts of his own body lead outward; in Joyce, bodies are connected by a virtual network of associations. Stephen’s rumination on feet continues, and “dislove” appears to evoke its opposite: “But you were delighted when Esther Osvalt’s shoe went on you: girl I knew in Paris. *Tiens, quel petit pied!*” (3.449). Here an accidental touch of the foot leads to thoughts of love. Indeed, the next sentence recalls Oscar Wilde’s relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas: “Staunch friend, a brother souls: Wilde’s love that dare not speak its name” (3.450-1). From Wilde and his association with homosexual love, Stephen’s thoughts turn to yet another body: “His arm: Cranly’s arm” (3.451). In this particular context, the reference to

Cranly—a friend of Stephen’s from his university days who figures largely in *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*—suggests that Stephen’s feelings toward Cranly are at least partly amorous. Far from the abstract modes of subjectivity espoused by the philosophers that Stephen contemplates, the subject in Joyce remains inextricable from embodied sexuality. Indeed, Joyce structures this passage—which begins with Stephen’s gazing at his boots and ends with the arm of an old friend—around bodies and body parts. Throughout this episode, moreover, Stephen’s thoughts emerge only on the basis of his contact with bodies.

Matter and Memory

In “Proteus,” the triad of perception, memory, and the body form a constellation that dissolves agential subjectivity. What *Ulysses* and *Matière et mémoire* have most in common is the affirmation of the oceanic excessiveness of life as undifferentiated becoming. Bergson’s negative formulation that the screen of human perception is fundamentally subtractive rests on the thesis that human experience is conditioned by a constitutive limit, one that generates what is experienced by excluding and ignoring the protean richness of reality. Joyce’s work, then, submits the selective, action-oriented function of consciousness to a crisis such that action ceases to regiment the production of reality. Bergson’s musing that a novelist might be capable of “tearing aside the cleverly woven curtain of our conventional ego” aptly describes the Joycean procedure of stream-of-consciousness, which rejects the idolatry of the actual. Stephen personifies the contradiction that reality emerges on the basis of its constitutive suppression (or, in Hegelian terms, its determinate negation). Indeed, the “Proteus” episode tracks the ways

in which Stephen is bombarded by an unmanageable excessiveness of memory and matter itself. Stephen is not an autonomous, dialectically driven Subject, but he is subjected to the perpetual infiltration of the useless—thoughts and perceptions that have no bearing on the immediate sensory-motor management of the world, but are nonetheless prompted by occurrent sensations and images.

The centrality of the body is at the heart of the crisis of the screen. In my view, Bergson's contribution to the present analysis rests largely in his thorough description of the hegemony of the action-image. One finds in Bergson a view of human consciousness that is embedded in the sensory-motor potential of the body. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson offers the following formulation: "*J'appelle matière l'ensemble des images, et perception de la matière ces mêmes images rapportées à l'action possible d'une certaine image déterminée, mon corps*" ("*I call matter the aggregate of images, and perception of matter these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body*"; 13; Author's emphasis, 22 Paul and Palmer). Matter, the universe itself, is the aggregate of all "images," the perception of which comes about only on the basis of the "eventual action" of a body. Action, actual or potential, conditions perception; the world is the world only insofar as it can be acted upon. Put negatively, perception is a process whose function is to filter out that which is irrelevant to the actions of the perceiving body. Such is the screen as conditioned by the action-image. Joycean stream-of-consciousness, by contrast, seeks to eliminate the prominence of action. Images are linked not to eventual actions, but to a virtual network of allusion, memory, and association. Joyce's

stream-of-consciousness, then, seeks to capture not a mimeticism of the brain, but an alternative brain, decoupled from the demands of action.

Images—in the broadest sense of the term—from Stephen’s past surface to the level of his conscious examination. These images commingle with the present field of images and are folded into others. This basic feature of stream-of-consciousness, by which an image at hand evokes a past remembrance, remains deeply Bergsonian in each of Joyce’s characters. One could find dozens of examples of what Bergson calls “recollection” on a given page. In “Proteus,” Joyce’s narrator describes a part of Stephen’s walk: “He turned northeast and crossed the firmer sand towards the Pigeonhouse” (3.159-60). The Pigeonhouse evidently prompts Stephen to recall lines from Léo Taxil’s *La vie de Jésus* (1884):⁴⁴

—Qui vous a mis dans cette fichue position?

—C’est le pigeon, Joseph. (3.161-62)

That the site of the pigeonhouse conjures “le pigeon” suggests a mnemonic operation that is more complex than what might at first be apparent: The pigeonhouse is not simply an object that reminds or prompts recognition, such that the image of one object calls to mind a like object; instead, its image activates a whole field of associations operative in Stephen’s recollections, the duration of which is represented by way of his walk. That is, the pigeonhouse reasserts the prominence of themes of childbirth, paternity, origin,

⁴⁴ See Gifford and Seidman (52).

metamorphosis—in short—an entire context of thoughts and associations vibrating against one another. Joyce provides a set of metonymies that overdetermine the whole to which they refer.

In other words, Stephen's thoughts animate what Bergson calls the "état virtuel" of "le souvenir pur" ("virtual state of pure memory"; 141; Paul and Palmer 319). Bergson distinguishes two types of memory: bodily memory and pure (or true) memory. For Bergson, the forms of memory work in concert to produce images that help the subject act and react to the present. Bergson departs markedly from the commonsense conception of memory as a kind of storeroom of arranged and delineated memories ready, in varying degrees, for retrieval. Instead, pure memory is a whole of becoming (the virtual) that only becomes actualized on the basis of the sensory-motor demands of the present:

La mémoire du corps, constituée par l'ensemble des systèmes sensorimoteurs que l'habitude a organisés, est donc une mémoire quasi instantanée à laquelle la véritable mémoire du passé sert de base. Comme elles ne constituent pas deux choses séparées, comme la première n'est, disions-nous, que la pointe mobile insérée par la seconde dans le plan mouvant de l'expérience, il est naturel que ces deux fonctions se prêtent un mutuel appui. [...] la mémoire du passé présente aux mécanismes sensori-moteurs tous les souvenirs capables de les guider dans leur tâche. [...] Mais d'autre part les appareils sensori-moteurs fournissent aux souvenirs impuissants, c'est-à-dire inconscients, le moyen de prendre un corps, de se matérialiser, enfin de devenir présents. Il faut en effet, pour qu'un souvenir reparaisse à la conscience, qu'il descende des hauteurs de la mémoire pure jusqu'au point précis où s'accomplit l'action. (*Matière et mémoire* 91)

The bodily memory, made up of the sum of the sensori-motor systems organized by habit, is then a quasi-instantaneous memory to which the true memory of the past serves as base. Since they are not two separate things, since the first is only, as we have said, the pointed end, ever moving, inserted by the second in the shifting plane of experience, it is natural that the two functions should lend each other a mutual support. [...] the memory of the past offers to the sensori-motor mechanisms all the recollections capable of guiding them in their task [...] But, on the other hand, the sensori-motor apparatus furnish to ineffective, that is

unconscious, memories, the means of taking on a body, of materializing themselves, in short of becoming present. For, that a recollection should reappear in consciousness, it is necessary that it should descend from the heights of pure memory down to the precise point where action is taking place. (Paul and Palmer 197)

Bergson provides a picture of memory as effectively subordinated to action, and he goes on to suggest that it is action that brings life to the powerless recollection pure memory (*Matière et mémoire* 91; Paul and Palmer 197). On the other hand, he suggests that the ubiquitous regimentation of action degrades the loftier purity of true memory. Indeed, Bergson's model, as I have been arguing, is such that everyday consciousness remains yoked to the demands of the actual. Joyce, like so many modernist artists, seeks to decouple pure memory from the actual and thereby to animate the virtual without reducing it to the demands of action.

Much of Bergson's critique responds to the Aristotelian heritage in Western thought that extols and privileges perception in relation to thought. The commonplace in science and philosophy alike, Bergson claims, is that "la perception a un intérêt tout spéculatif ; elle est connaissance pure" ("perception has a wholly speculative interest; it is pure knowledge"; 17; Paul and Palmer 18). His philosophy rejects this assumption, showing instead that consciousness activates perception on the basis of present or potential action; perception concerns acts, not the acquisition of knowledge. Joyce, and modernist literature generally, takes this critique further. In Joyce, it is rare that perception remains yoked to the demands of the actual, as one is far more often in the

protean waters of the virtual. What remains in Joyce are not acts, but bodies, bodies that generate incessantly changing relations to the virtual.

To be sure, Stephen's awareness of alternative ways of being-in-the-world remains nascent. Joyce stages Stephen's crisis liminally, between two screens; his abstract rationalism and love of discernment tentatively gives way to an embodied relation to becoming. Bloom, in contrast to Stephen, operates more comfortably in the realm of experiential knowing. Joyce sets Stephen in deliberate contrast to Bloom with regard to the body (for Bloom is in many ways of the body) and, more important in this context, he contrasts their relations to water. In the "Ithaca" episode, Joyce develops Bloom's affinity for water in a manner that suggests that Bloom may in fact be more in tune with the Joycean-Bergsonian flux of reality: "What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier, returning to the range, admire?/Its universality: its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level" (17.183-6). What Bloom admires about the water is precisely its protean nature, that is, "the variability of states at sea" (17.189-90). Bloom does not (like Lewis and Eliot) take universality to be at odds with mobility and change: Flux is not a synonym for nihilism, but is indeed the state of the background against which meaning as such is made. Like "neverchanging everchanging water," consciousness, particularly Joycean consciousness, acquires its permanence by ceaselessly washing over the figures that occupy and reoccupy it, like so many pebbles eroding over eons under the force of the tide's continuous ebb and flow (17.234). Stephen, on the other hand, sees in water a terrifying return to the mother/womb, or "Oomb, allwombing tomb" (3.402). For him, water

connotes drowning and death: “A drowning man. His human eyes scream to me out of horror of his death. I... With him together down ... I could not save her. Waters: bitter death: lost” (3.328-30). Indeed, if Bloom is a “waterlover,” Stephen is a “hydrophobe, hating contact by immersion or total submersion” (17.237-8). Of course, Stephen's fear of water is not merely the literal anxiety about being immersed. The central source of his fear, the fear that constitutes one of the main threads of the “Proteus” episode, is that of the untameable flux of reality that he, following in the footsteps of his rationalist predecessors, unsuccessfully tries to master. As the “Ithaca” episode relates, he remains “distrusting of aquacities of thought and language” (17.240). However, “Proteus” challenges Stephen's epistemological commitments, rendering them naive by situating them within the protean fluidity of thought captured so powerfully by Joycean stream of consciousness.

What is noteworthy here is less that Joyce participates in a larger modernist critique of particular epistemological assumptions, than the way he dramatizes this critique in “Proteus.” Stephen’s fitful rejection of his metaphysical training stages in miniature the crisis of European thought, situated between an epistemology predicated on mastery and rationality, on the one hand, and an aesthetics of experience that affirms life and becoming, on the other. For the intellectual milieu of modernist art, Bergson provides a means of seeing human pretenses to technical mastery over all aspects of human existence as inescapably derivative. Claims concerning the inevitable progress ushered forth by humanity’s progressive utilitarianism were not only historically dubious (in light of the growing catastrophes of the early 20th century), but also philosophically

unwarranted. If Bergson is among the first to articulate the hegemony of the sensory-motor regimentation of human experience, artists and thinkers like Joyce begin to pursue a virtuality that defies the action-image.

Chapter 4

Kieślowski's Cinema of Exhaustion and the Crisis of Action

The first of Gilles Deleuze's cinema texts, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (1986), appeared several years before Krzysztof Kieślowski garnered widespread acclaim among European audiences with the release of *The Decalogue* (*Dekalog*, 1988). Beyond brief remarks on Krzysztof Zanussi, Deleuze's discussion of Polish cinema never reaches the sustained attention that he grants other national cinemas. Nonetheless, reading Deleuze and Kieślowski together produces a rich theoretical undertaking precisely because neither is easily assimilated by the other. This chapter substantiates the claim for regarding Kieślowski's work as a response to the Deleuzian "crisis of the action-image." Such an undertaking requires clarifying various instantiations of what Deleuze calls "the exhausted" or *l'épuisé*. While variations of the term are scattered throughout the two volumes on cinema, the word remains inconspicuous relative to oft-cited neologisms of other texts. As such, *l'épuisé* (or *l'épuisement*) has enjoyed little attention in film scholarship specifically (though Tom Conley helpfully provides a discussion of the term—primarily in reference to Beckett—in, "The Film Event: From Interval to Interstice" [2000]). The role of exhaustion and exhausted life bears a significant relation to the mobile army of terms that constitute Deleuze's film-philosophical lexicon. Developing these terms elucidates the specific sense in which Kieślowski's oeuvre partakes in the post-war transition to "modern cinema." Such an undertaking accounts not only for the operation of

"exhaustion" in Deleuze's film-philosophy, but also for the tired faces and worn-out characters that populate Kieślowski's films.

Kieślowski's cinema of exhaustion fixates on the generalized inefficacy of volitional acts—or *impouvoir*, to use a Deleuzian formulation—in the post-war context of Stalinist Poland and its subsequent dissolution. Despite appearances to the contrary, the humanist Kieślowski and "postmodernist" Deleuze are not such strange bedfellows, as the former registers a form of exhaustion as an affective correlate to what the latter famously describes as the post-war crisis of the action-image. Yet, this chapter also seeks to vivify Kieślowski's resistance to the hegemony of exhaustion, reading his work as particular mode of Deleuzian creation, that is, as a life-affirming riposte to exhausted life under the communist regime. The unique sense of exhaustion that emerges from this interchange allows one to read Kieślowski's oeuvre with greater attention to the phenomenological import of the director's response to socio-political crises out of which his films emerge. Meanwhile, Kieślowski's films bring a specificity to Deleuze's abstract philosophical formulations that underscore the social and political stakes of the latter's thought. As such, Kieślowski does not simply exemplify ready-made Deleuzian standbys; instead, I assert, staging this encounter between the filmmaker and the philosopher forces a reconsideration of the motifs of exhaustion, tiredness, and crisis as they pertain both to Deleuze's taxonomy of cinema and to Kieślowski's cinematic responses to exhausted life in communist milieux. Moreover, like the authors examined in the previous chapters, Kieślowski's work is positioned between the actual and the virtual. Indeed, reading the long arch of the director's

career, I argue that Kieślowski's films—in particular, in their relation to an exhausted actual—register the ethical and ontological significance of the crisis of the action-image. From his documentary period to his later fictional works, Kieślowski's oeuvre moves consistently toward an affirmation of the virtual.

Deleuze's Exhaustions

At the outset, one is confronted with a proliferation of exhaustions in Deleuze. As such, before proceeding to the analysis of the cinematic expression of exhaustion as a foundational aspect of Kieślowski's rejoinder to the regime of the communist cliché, a preliminary explication of the notion's philosophical remit must first be addressed in order to avoid muddying the theoretical waters. What is it to be exhausted? Deleuze treats the term in a sustained way in two texts. The first is in the "Powers of the False" chapter in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989). A later text, "The Exhausted" (1995), which is an afterward to Samuel Beckett's *Quad et autres pièces pour la télévision* (1992), develops in an emphatically Beckettian direction that differs significantly on a number of points from the earlier sense of exhaustion. Writing on Beckett, Deleuze describes exhaustion as distinct from mere tiredness ("Exhausted [L"épuisé] is a whole lot more than tired [le fatigué]") (57; 3). To be tired is to no longer be able to realize one's projects, plans, or intentions, but to be exhausted, by contrast, is to be rid of the possible itself: "The tired has only exhausted realization, while the exhausted exhausts all of the possible. The tired can no longer realize, but the exhausted can no longer possibilite. [ne peut plus possibiliser]" (57; 3). That which undergoes exhaustion proper is not situated within a body or place, but within space as such; as Conley notes

in his aforementioned essay, the purview of exhaustion is "imaginary space, a space that would have formerly carried the guarantee of preestablished presence" (307). Such a guarantee finds its correlative form of space in the cinema books in the guise of "traditional realism [and] the space of a sensory-motor situation" (*Cinema 2*, 5). To exhaust space is to eliminate any possible relation to the sensory-motor or to "destroy all perceptive or prehensive potential" of a space (Conley, 316). This elimination consists in an erasure of concrete actualities and determinate bodies, such that exhaustion supersedes what was relevant for fatigue (which still concerned 'something,' that is, the particulars of objects, persons, and things): "You were tired by something, but exhausted by nothing [rien]" (59; 4). By dint of such exhaustion, the argument goes, one secures the conditions of creation ("the Event," as Conley has emphasized) or what Deleuze renders in the context of "The Exhausted" as a minimal assurance concerning an emergent creativity: "It is, rather, the end, the end of all possibility, that teaches us that we have made it, that we are about to make the image" ("The Exhausted").

Deleuze's language indicates that Beckettian exhaustion concerns an occurrence; it is a procedure of the work, the artist, or even the spectator, and thus exhaustion proper is best rendered in its verb form (Deleuze uses the locution "Beckett *exhausts* [*épuisse*]"; from this Conley takes his cue: "the person walking on stage or in the film becomes the one who [...] *exhausts* [*épuisse*] the possibilities of space of any-kind-whatsoever" ("The Exhausted" 21; Conley 309). In the "Powers of the False," however, the modality of exhaustion under examination is descriptive, that is,

adjectival; exhausted life (*la vie épuisée*) describes a dearth of the creative forces that constitute life (185; 142). For Deleuze, the term "life" signifies the endless differentiation of forces prior to any concrete actualization. The dilemma posed by exhausted life is that it supplies "forces which are now able to respond to others only in a single, uniform and invariable way" (*Cinema 2*, 140). The scope of "exhausted life" encompasses the generalized "nihilism" that seeks to reduce life to "cliché," that is, to life "that no longer knows how to transform itself [ne sait plus se transformer]" (183; 141). The crisis of action for Deleuze is such that life, enervated by a clichéd regime of truth, has lost its constitutive dynamism.

Much remains to be said in analyzing the nexus of these instantiations of exhaustion, but such inquiry lies beyond the scope of this chapter. I rely in what follows on this earlier conceptualization of exhaustion, not only for its greater proximity to the film and film theory, but because the theorization of exhausted life—the diminution of the capacities to act, to realize, and to transform—has a clear affinity with Kieślowski's films. In Kieślowski, one encounters a world whose powers of transformation have been exhausted, reduced to naught—what the director calls "a world without representation" (Wierzbicki, 1996). As I explore below, this is a world in which the ethical and ontological assurances of the action-image are no longer operative. Of critical significance here is that it is not enough to claim that access to intersubjective master narratives has disappeared, or that a fragmented politico-social existence can no longer be formalized in cohesive ideological frames (Lyotard). The crisis of action, moreover, is not simply Deleuze's famous pronouncement "we no longer believe in the world," but

more specifically that "[W]e hardly believe any longer that a global situation *can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it—no more than we believe that an action can force a situation to disclose itself, even partially* [emphasis added]" (*Cinema 2* 206). The screen is in crisis here precisely insofar as it is no longer driven by the dialectics of action and disclosure.

Many of Kieślowski's films are guided by the crisis of what one is to do in such a world: How is one to respond to exhausted life? In the impulse to respond to exhaustion, however, lies what is perhaps the central convergence of the philosopher and filmmaker, namely, the ultimately life-affirming dimension of their thought. One begins to respond by way of creation, for there is hope of transforming image and thought even in exhausted life; to quote Deleuze, "it is clear that becoming is always innocent, even in crime, even in the exhausted life in so far as it is still a becoming. But only the good allows itself to be exhausted by life rather than exhausting it" (1989, 142). Kieślowski, who time and again casts doubt on the pretension of mastery where it concerns innocence and guilt (though *Decalogue: Five*, [*Dekalog, pięć* 1989] takes this up most emphatically), exemplifies this Deleuzian notion of "good" in the precise sense that his films do not actively exhaust their milieux and characters (in the manner of Beckett), but instead respond to the ubiquitous conditions of exhaustion with creation (the very act of filmmaking, I argue below, becomes one such response). Deleuze writes of the "good" that it is "always putting itself at the service of what is reborn from life, what metamorphoses and creates" and that it stands opposed to "a uniform and fixed being" (1989, 142). As I show in what follows, the stakes of such opposition do

not involve a simple program of aesthetization; the creative metamorphoses of Kieślowski's films (which are so often concerned with problems of judgement and cinematic modalities of truth) are as much ethical and epistemological as they are aesthetic. The similarities with Joyce, therefore, are pronounced; however, what Kieślowski's films emphasize, what he adds to the ongoing discussion of the screen in crisis, are the decidedly ethical stakes of breaking with the idolatry of the actual.

The temptation to reduce Kieślowski's oeuvre to a unidirectional instantiation of Deleuze's thought must be avoided. Indeed, the converse relation comes closer to the truth: Kieślowski's films are instructive precisely because they lend specificity and contextualization to the otherwise abstract contours of the crisis of action and its correlative affect of exhaustion. I regard Kieślowski's films as offering historically inflected instantiations of the crisis that are conditioned by the violences and repressions that constituted Kieślowski's Poland. This, after all, is the tendency of the cinema texts themselves, which offer, not a monolithic master theory, but discrete branches of a larger taxonomy of cinema. Kieślowski's films provide a means to reflect upon the conditions of exhaustion in general by lending the term an otherwise absent concreteness. Kieślowski, for example, allows one to see the political stakes in Deleuze's assertion that exhaustion is a deficient condition of knowledge or *savoir faire* (i.e., that of knowing how to transform), since knowledge is exhausted as the result of an externally imposed socio-political order (that of the Communist state). If to be exhausted, in the general theoretical sense that Deleuze supplies, is to be always already handed over to predetermined descriptions of reality, then Kieślowski's films

both actualize the description of exhausted life in various milieux and offer—particularly in his later works—an alternative to the paradigm of action and its exhaustion. Again, Kieślowski's films respond to the crisis of the screen and the correlative exhaustion of action by affirming virtuality.

The Dilemma of Politics

As a documentary filmmaker in communist Poland, Kieślowski was acutely aware that his directorial decisions could have life-altering consequences, not only for himself, but for his subjects. His own history with political activity seems to have been a persistent source of insight. The 1968 student protests in Poland were met with violent repression, arrests, and expulsions. These demonstrations also spread to Łódź Film School. The public understanding of the demonstrations was soon appropriated by the government and narrativized as a Zionist plot. As Danusia Stok reports,

In the spring of 1968 there followed a purge of thousands of Polish Jews from the Party and from Poland. Łódź Film School lost many of its finest professors. The Party, blaming the demonstrations on Zionist conspiracies, managed quite successfully to set the media and, most importantly, the workers of large factories against the rebellious students. Many students, if not themselves arrested, suffered great disillusionment. (xv)

Kieślowski's disillusionment and sense of personal responsibility for his involvement in the protests appears to haunt him throughout his life. Decades later, he reflects on the events and their aftermath: "The more I shouted against the authorities, the more I threw those stones, the more people would get thrown out of the country... We were used. I realized I could never have anything to do with politics because politics deceived the students" (Stok 14). This explicit rejection of political engagement is well documented.

Paul Coates identifies the post-political character of *The Decalogue*, which appears in 1989 just prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, as an answer to the defining query of Polish cinema: "After politics, what next?"

However, where it concerns Kieślowski, rather than the whole of Polish cinema, one would do well to reformulate the question in an emphatically more existentialist vein (Coates himself reminds us of the director's love of Dostoyevsky and Camus).⁴⁵ Since the conditions of existence no longer permit an act (political or otherwise) that might fundamentally alter the "general situation" [*situation d'ensemble*], what remains of life, of existence? (*Cinema I*, 33). An existentialist proclivity certainly accounts for the absurd in such films as *The Office* (*Urząd*, 1966), *The Factory* (*Fabryka*, 1970), and *Refrain* (*Refren*, 1972), in which the vulgarity of bureaucratic regimentation of life is laid bare in occasionally comic fashion. Kieślowski's response to existentialism, however, mobilizes a certain modernist optimism: Precisely because life—social, political, and personal existence—remains exhausted by incessant reification, one must insist on giving it (cinematic) space. To give space to life is to create new modes of description, to loosen the hold of a ubiquitous official reality; as Kieślowski remarks: "Our descriptive tools had been used for propagandistic purposes. Outside of Poland, you don't know what it means to live in a world without representation" (Wierzbicki, 1996).

The Scar (*Blizna*, 1978) is one of several of Kieślowski's films that take up the problem of life after or beyond politics. The film is about a beleaguered chemical factory

⁴⁵ Annette Insdorf speaks of some of Kieślowski's work as representative of "existential despair" (49).

manager, Stefan (Franciszek Pieczka), who is caught in a moral bind between small-town opposition to a newly-constructed factory and rapacious industrialists. He is criticized both by local workers and by the local communist executive committee. The well-meaning protagonist cannot unproblematically align himself with any of the prevailing options. Effectively unable to act, Stefan resigns after four years, disaffected and tired. Characteristically, there are no easy solutions, since what matters is living through the problem itself: One is reminded of Kiesłowski's quip that "a dilemma is something you live with" (qtd. in Haltof, 2004, xii). *The Scar* ends with a long take of the retired factory manager, finally at peace, helping his granddaughter learn to walk. The task of achieving or failing to achieve a degree of tranquility is of course a central Kiesłowskian theme and figures prominently in films of this period—for example, *The Calm* (*Spokój*, 1980) and *Camera Buff* (*Amator*, 1979)—and can in fact be readily detected throughout Kiesłowski's work. The appearance of the granddaughter here is significant in terms of the retreat from the act; as Deleuze suggests (with reference to neorealism): "[...] the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing" (*Cinema 2*, 3). Moreover, Deleuze states that the mode of seeing (perception in general) beyond the cliché is childlike: "En ce sens, on peut dire c'est l'œil de l'enfant, oui c'est l'œil de l'enfant mais d'un drôle d'enfant" ("In this sense, one could say that it is the child's eye; yes, the child's eye, but that of a strange child"; My trans., "La voix de Deleuze").⁴⁶ In my view, it is crucial to emphasize the mediating role

⁴⁶ Deleuze's reference to children (here and elsewhere) highlights their being less burdened by the demands of pragmatically organized activity (and thus better equipped to apprehend the world by other means—in particular, by way of the virtual). While Deleuze himself does not elaborate on the "strange"

of “the child’s eye,” conceived here as a break from the actual, since it succinctly articulates a reconfigured, virtualizedration of the screen toward an expression of virtuality. Returning vicariously to the childlike, Stefan rejects the sensory-motor in favor of Kieślowskian calm. Reuniting with the granddaughter becomes an escape not only from politics to family, but a flight from the world regimented by the demands of intentional acts and their consequences (i.e. the sensory-motor schema of classical cinema). If, as Marek Haltof suggests, “the retreat from politics and escape from the political to the private [is] typical” in Kieślowski, then one must respond that the Kieślowskian “private” does not neatly correspond to the private sphere of liberal individualism (34). The turn to the private would be instead a flight from rigid determinations of subjectivity (the oppression of cliché), from being to becoming, and from reification to life. Such a turn prefigures the division of the cinema texts: Recall that for Deleuze “the problem with which Volume 1 ended” centers on “tearing a real image from clichés” (*Cinema 2*, 21). If the final shot of *The Scar* constitutes such a “real image,”⁴⁷ then it does so by mediating the image through a narrative context that

character of the child, it seems plausible to attribute this strangeness to a prolonged or exaggerated indifference to the sensory-motor and an ambivalence with respect to utility. This would be, in other words, an extended child-like state unconcerned with trying to overcome sensory-motor helplessness and detached from “development” in the mode of emulating sensory-motor activity. On the other hand, it may be unwise to read too much into the singular use of the adjective “drôle,” since this quotation is from a transcribed seminar discussion.

⁴⁷ There is, however, no guarantee that such an image will not itself succumb to exhaustion and become yet another cliché. Deleuze, well aware of this problem, writes, “[t]here is only a slim chance, so great is the capacity of nihilism to overcome it, for exhausted life to get control of the New from its birth, and for completed forms to ossify metamorphosis and to reconstitute models and copies” (*Cinema 2*, 147). It follows, perhaps, that the act of creating the life-affirming image is more important than the image itself, since what matters—at least for Deleuze—is constant becoming, the will-to-transformation. As this quotation from Deleuze suggests, however, images have consequences. As I argue in the context of *Camera Buff* (*Amator*, 1979), Kieślowski remains keenly aware of the dire social and political consequences of even the most

establishes the impasse of action (the crisis of the action-image figured as the Kieślowskian dilemma that must be lived with). Kieślowski thereby provides an image that responds to the exhausted world—a world in which, for reasons of both morality and repressive bureaucracy, one can no longer act. Exhaustion in Kieślowski thus partakes in the obliquely generative dimension of impasse and sensory-motor powerlessness privileged by Deleuze's philosophy as a whole; as Gregory Flaxman writes, "philosophy [in Deleuze] is always more intimately concerned with problems than with answers because a problem not only coordinates the invention of concepts but, in fact, presses thought to its limit, namely, its exhaustion or 'impower'" (41). Kieślowski's films, however, concern less the creation of concepts than the production of images of life that defy the limitations of the milieux within the "world without representation."

The Clichéd Actual

To tear an image from "the civilization of the cliché" would be to overcome what Bergson (and Deleuze) call natural perception, the subtractive way of relating to the world by which subjectivity becomes a function of practical interests; as Bergson writes: "the body, always turned towards action, has for its essential function to limit with a view to action [*en vue de l'action*], the life of spirit" (215; 213). For this very reason, the new image will be one that we do not know how to use (*Cinema 2*, 45). A central task of the cinema books is to describe cinema's enactment and eventual sublimation of this mode of perception, to witness the "spirit of cinema" refuse the *vue de l'action*—and the action

well-intentioned artistic affirmations of life. Here, as elsewhere, Kieślowski's films concretize—and thereby revise by way of specificity—Deleuze's observations.

shot, *la prise de vue de l'action*—as its organizing onto-epistemological category. Moreover, Deleuze's work evinces a conflation of action and cliché, such that the action-image becomes a form of clichéd-image. In *Cinema 2*, the term “cliché” registers the death of thought, which is concomitant with a subtractive falsification, since life is always qualitatively richer than what cliché presents to consciousness. In the Deleuzian framework, however, a “sensory-motor jam or break” interrupts the hegemony of the cliché, clearing the way for the production of thought, virtuality, and new cinematic images (*Cinema 2* 20). Kieślowski increasingly moves in the direction of such a break, but, as I hope to demonstrate, he does so for reasons that have a far more concrete socio-political immediacy than what one finds in Deleuze's description of the generalized ideational crisis of Western thought. In Kieślowski's rendering of the screen-in-crisis, in other words, the hegemony of the action-image becomes exhausted and gives way to a screen determined by its relation to virtuality; however, this crisis cannot be entirely separated from the historically specific social, political, and ethical problems that codetermine it.

To break from the perceptual and affective demands of exhausted life, Deleuze insists, is hardly a simple exercise: How does one break with cliché, with the sensory-motor, if it subtends intelligibility itself (“Nothing but clichés, clichés everywhere...”) (*Cinema 2* 208). Kieślowski describes, toward the end of his career, his affirmation of that which lies outside the cliché: “The world is not only bright lights, this hectic pace, the Coca-Cola with a straw, the new car...Another truth exists...a hereafter? Yes, surely. Good or bad, I don't know, but...something else” (qtd. in Insdorf, xv). Critics vary on the

extent to which such assertions should be taken as evidence of Kieślowski's religiosity.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, I regard Kieślowski's suggestion as more apposite within the intellectual trajectory of Nietzsche and Deleuze than in a specific theological context. Beneath the world of bright lights and cliché ("the Coca-cola with a straw"), lies an indeterminate alternative to the sensory-motor that exceeds the judgment of "good or bad." This concern with the cliché does indeed seem conspicuous in the later Kieślowski; the claim that his more recent, French-language films—beginning with *The Double Life of Veronique* (*La double vie de Véronique*, 1991)—make a concerted break with the action-image would likely seem uncontroversial to Deleuzian film scholars. Crucially, however, one can already discern a similar tendency in earlier films, particularly insofar as they center around undermining the subject's pretensions to certitude, the (im)possibility of acting, and the (un)decidability of a dilemma. Indeed, in Kieślowski, characters' modes of thinking and knowing (i.e. the structures of rationality that constitute the screen) had always been disoriented by crisis:

All my films from the first to the most recent ones, are about individuals who can't quite find their bearings, who don't quite know how to live, who don't really know what's right or wrong and are desperately looking. (Stok 79)

⁴⁸ Paul Coates, for example, sees Kieślowski in an atheistic light (2-3), while Joseph Kickasola stresses the "spiritual" and "transcendent" dimensions of Kieślowski's films (in the sense that these terms pertain to metaphysical questions) (xv). To be sure, Kieślowski is far from a relativist in matters of truth, though he grounds his belief in an "absolute point of reference" in generalized uncertainty; he explains, "I think that an absolute point of reference does exist. [...] The God of the Old Testament leaves us a lot of freedom and responsibility, observes how we use it and then rewards or punishes, and there's no appeal or forgiveness [as there is in the New Testament]. It's something which is lasting, absolute, evident and is not relative. And that's what a point of reference must be, especially for people like me, who are weak, who are looking for something, who don't know" (Stok 149).

Even as he retrospectively muses on his career, Kieślowski speaks with an urgency that is not easily missed. In Deleuzian terms, what he relates here is reminiscent of the abovementioned "good"—exhausted, without the givens of ready-made politico-ethical configurations, but nonetheless oriented toward an outside.

Beyond Naturalism

Strohiem and Buñuel especially, Deleuze claims in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, exemplify naturalism because their films describe "an originary world, which rumbles in the depths of all the milieux and runs along beneath them" (*Cinema 1* 125). On this account, naturalism "exhausts" milieux by stripping them of organic, encompassing structures (the "world" generated by natural perception) (*Cinema 1* 125). Kieślowski's early documentary work is undoubtedly naturalistic in the traditional sense that it deploys milieux (e.g. hospital, city, factory, funeral parlor, and so on). However, it is far less clear that Kieślowski's milieux are exhausted in the sense that Deleuze deploys in reference to Émile Zola in this first volume of the cinema texts (which resembles instead the term's use as it appears in the Beckett text). One can perhaps attribute this difference to the fact that, while Kieślowski regarded himself as a humanistic artist (or perhaps even metaphysician),⁴⁹ Zola famously understood his work as scientific.⁵⁰ For Deleuze, naturalism concentrates on "diagnos[ing] civilization," thereby disclosing the destructive passions of the originary world (the impulse-image) (*Cinema 1* 125).

⁴⁹ Insdorf notes that Kieślowski at least tolerated the label "metaphysician" (184).

⁵⁰ Cf. Émile Zola, *The Experimental Novel* (1964).

Kieślowski's interest, on the contrary, tends toward a generative description of humanity beneath the restrictions of milieux in which the life of individuals takes precedence over bureaucracy. Such description pursues life "before" its regimentation by the actual. Yet, his critique of bureaucracy serves a more fundamentally philosophical endeavor, *viz.*, creation by means of description:

At that time, I was interested in everything that could be described by the documentary film camera. There was a necessity, a need—which was very exciting for us—to describe the world. The Communist world had described how it should be and not how it really was. We—there were a lot of us—tried to describe this world and it was fascinating to describe something which hadn't been described yet. It's a feeling of bringing something to life, because it is a bit like that. If something hasn't been described, then it doesn't officially exist. So that if we start describing it, we bring it to life. (Stok 54-55)

Life is something that must be created against the hegemonic demands of exhausted life ("the Communist world") and the regimes of official truth. The creation of truth—the task of the artist⁵¹—is *a priori* political (even if it ignores the prevailing discourse concerning politics and policy) since it demands a new world. Deleuze lauds naturalism in cinema precisely because it discloses a world prior to its organization by reifying forces, since this is a step beyond the action-image: "[I]t is undoubtedly one of the naturalist cinema's great achievements to have come so close to a time-image" (*Cinema 1* 127). Yet, as has already been suggested, Kieślowskian documentary does not fit neatly into Deleuze's sense of naturalism, since the former describes life—becoming beneath the falsification of the Communist world—and the latter, on Deleuze's view, succumbs to a conception of

⁵¹ "What the artist is," Deleuze asserts, "is *creator of truth*, because truth is not to be achieved, formed, or reproduced; it has to be created" (Author's emphasis, *Cinema 2* 146).

time as degeneration, societal decay, and a regressive return of the past (e.g., through hereditary taint). Indeed, naturalism fails to produce a “direct image of time” because it “could only grasp the negative effects of time; attrition, degradation, wastage, destruction, loss, or simply oblivion” (*Cinema 1* 127).

From the City of Łódź (*Z miasta Łodzi*, 1969), Kieślowski's first professional film, implicitly partakes in this temporality of degradation through its images of the ruined post-war city. Deleuze remarks that “modern cinema has been constructed on the ruins of the action-image” (*Cinema 2* 198). Kieślowski's fascination with the exhausted, post-war city emerge from what he calls its "homogenous" dilapidation, which extends beyond the city's buildings to its inhabitants, the old and amputated. For Kieślowski, Łódź metonymizes the exhausted world:

The world around was very sad. It wasn't even black and white, just black. Maybe grey. That is linked to the place where the Film School is located, that is Łódź. The city is particularly photogenic, dirty, scratched. That's what the whole city is like, so in some sense—the whole world. People's faces look no different from the walls—tired, sad, with some kind of drama in their eyes, the drama of feeling the nonsense, the creeping feeling, which results in nothing. ("Hallucinating Elephants, DIY & Annoying Everybody: Curious Facts about Kieślowski, Poland's Most Influential Director")

While the decay of cities is certainly a theme of naturalism, entropy in Kieślowski's documentaries is not indicative of a generalizable moral decline (as it is in Zola), but rather a symptom of bureaucracy and the increasing implausibility of action.

In *From the City of Łódź*, degradation takes on a temporal dimension that stands in contrast to youth and modernization. The film depicts generational conflict as an existential one, since the milieu itself embodies the deterritorialization of the city: In one

shot, a new building, its construction still in progress, looms over old Poland. Shots of adults going about their day on the street are contrasted with children playing amongst rubble. An elderly woman retires from more than 20 years of factory work, and is congratulated by a woman who refers to herself as the youngest worker at the factory. In one of the film's crucial scenes, factory workers gather to protest the dismissal of the Łódź Mandolin Orchestra, led by Edward Ciuksza. Ciuksza, who arrived in Łódź in 1945 as the result of forced deportations, is a significant figure, since he represents the pre-war generation. The workers resent the new music, which they regard as belonging to the younger generation. After the worker gathering, shots of aging buildings accompany Ciuksza's music. A band, equipped with electric guitars and led by a female vocalist, plays the new generation's music, and the subsequent reaction shots of tired (but also quite bored) faces indicate the older generation's indifference.

The film's philosophical import derives largely from its refusal to decide on behalf of the spectator: This is neither propaganda for modernization nor facile nostalgia. The situation is too diffuse, too temporally overdetermined, to evoke an act that could instantiate change. If the image of time rendered by naturalism remained entropic, Kieślowski's mode of exhausting the milieu—the city of Łódź itself—produces an image of time in which forces of past and future are set in motion toward an ambiguous end, and it is precisely this ambiguity, this uncertainty regarding the situation, that conditions the lives depicted in the film. In one scene, a man on the street allows passersby to test their constitution against his odd contraption, a machine that shocks its user with increasing degrees of electrical voltage. The film presents the obvious curiosity and fear of the

mostly young crowd within the context of the questions raised by modernization, and demands of the viewer still further questions: Is technology a trivial curiosity, a carnivalesque attraction? And to what extent are progressivist claims of modernization analogous to the tantalizing unknowns of childhood? The film reiterates this ambiguity in its final moments, again using the metaphor of music to elicit the motifs of time and generational difference. A soloist from the Warsaw opera (another emblem of cultural modernization) sings about a mythic town over grey shots of Łódź and its dilapidated buildings. The striking disparity of image and lyrics produces an ironic disjunction and emphasizes the film's uneasiness with temporal linearity; time here is out of joint: "There's a town.../One day in the course of time/Perhaps in our live's fall/We'll live in the good gentle town/There must be one after all." Such happy teleologies, the film suggests, belie the truth of the subtending ruins. Already in this early work, Kieślowski reflects upon the ineffectuality of progressive teleologies and the acts that might engender them. Kieślowski figures an increasingly exhausted image of the actual, thus setting the stage for a transformation of the screen oriented toward virtuality.

Kieślowski's transition to fiction filmmaking culminated eight years after *From the City of Łódź* with *The Scar*. As Insdorf notes, this "second stage" of his career consists of films that were "reality-based," producing a mode of filmmaking that, while still bearing traits of the documentary style that emphasized milieux, moved increasingly toward fiction (31). Questions concerning the ethics of documenting and recording are

foundational in Kieślowski's thinking throughout his career, and such concern accounts for this fictional turn:

I began with the documentary. I abandoned it because every nonfiction filmmaker ends up realizing one day the boundaries that can't be crossed—those beyond which we risk causing harm to the people we film. That's when we feel the need to make fiction features. (Insdorf 31)

While it is no doubt the case that fiction can act as a means of protecting those that might otherwise be subject to state oppression, Kieślowski's fictional turn arose also from worries regarding film's epistemological robustness, its capacity to truthfully capture life: “Not everything can be described. That's the documentary's great problem. It catches itself as if in its own trap” (Stok 86).

The Ethics of Epistemic Uncertainty

For both epistemological and ethical reasons, the Kieślowskian meditation of truth makes recourse to fiction. One's relation to knowledge—a relation, Kieślowski's films remind us, that is increasingly mediated by technology—always has an ethical dimension. To know without mediation—an aspiration of much early documentary—is a form of pernicious mastery. For this reason, and because Kieślowski has suggested that all of his films have an autobiographical character,⁵² it is not unlikely that he aligned himself with his characters “who don't quite know how to live.” For Deleuze, to be relinquished of certainty is a generalizable feature of modern cinema: “The famous formula, ‘what is suitable for the documentary is that one knows who one is and whom

⁵² Krzysztof Wierzbicki's documentary on the director reveals the autobiographical character of Kieślowski's work: “I turn the camera on myself in all my films” (1998).

one is filming,' ceases to be valid. The Ego = Ego form of identity [...] ceases to be valid for the characters and for the film-maker, in the real as well as in the fiction" (*Cinema 2* 153). The resultant position for Kieślowski evinces an ethical affirmation: Art begins where mastery ends. His apparent retreat from politics should be understood within the context of a higher-order suspicion of those who claim to possess such mastery:

I'm frightened of all those people who show you the way, who know. Because really—and I'm deeply convinced of this, I firmly believe it—nobody really knows, with a few exceptions. Unfortunately, the actions of these people usually end in tragedy—like the Second World War or Stalinism or something. I'm convinced that Stalin and Hitler knew exactly what they were to do. They knew very well. But that's how it is. That's fanaticism. That's knowing. That's the feeling of absolutely knowing. And the next minute, it's army boots. It always ends up like that. (Stok 36)

This coupling of certitude and the catastrophes of the first half of the 20th century aligns Kieślowski with Deleuze, whose understanding of truth involves its passage through a crisis that is concomitant with the crisis of the actual and the sensory-motor dimensions of the screen. Kieślowski is one of many European thinkers who conduct some variety of what Horkheimer calls the “critique of instrumental reason.” *Blind Chance (Przypadek, 1981)* marks the start of a substitution of what Deleuze calls "organic" and "truthful" narration for narrative driven by chance and contingency (cf. *The Double Life of Veronique* and *Red*). For Kieślowski, *Blind Chance* responds to a moment when a “true description of Poland” was generally unavailable.⁵³ *Decalogue: One (Dekalog, jeden,*

⁵³ Kieślowski states, “I don't really know why there wasn't any true description of Poland in the 1970s in the other arts. There wasn't even a proper description of it in literature and literature is easier to produce than film. It's not subject to censorship to the same degree although individual writers or individual books might be” (Stok 113). He adds, however, that even cinema's capacity to describe was diminishing: “At the end of the 1970s, I realized that this [cinematic] description was limited, that we had reached these limits and that there was no point in describing this world any further” (Stok 113).

1988) reflects on techno-scientific certainty as a tragic absence of faith. *Decalogue: Five* (*Dekalog, pięć*, 1988) meditates on the inhumane character of even justly applied law—an aporia that is more fully elaborated in the later *Red*. These films are exemplary of a general tendency in Kieślowski to put dogmatic claims to truth or "absolutely knowing" into crisis. Undermining such mastery is integral to what I am calling the cinema of exhaustion: One no longer knows how to act and what to do since such knowledge is no longer established by the idolatry of the actual.

Even taken ironically, the title of the English-language release of *Amator* (1979), (i.e. *Camera Buff*) misses the richness of a more literal translation: "Amateur" emphasizes the protagonist's general lack of expertise, his non-mastery, but also the spontaneous joy of the hobby. The amateur, Filip Mosz (Jerzy Stuhr), is a prototypical Kieślowskian protagonist who does not "quite know how to live." His stumbling into filmmaking becomes just one facet of a more generalized amateurism. In a conversation with Filip, Anna Włodarczyk (Ewa Pokas) relates the detail that others refer to her as *amatorka*, adding that she has never been able to "get used to anyone or anything." The amateur is one who cannot remain still. Filip's incessant, amateurish dabbling derails his previous aspiration of reaching Kieślowskian calm. A portrait of the artist as neophyte family man, *Camera Buff* begins with the birth of Filip's daughter. Like the granddaughter of *The Scar*, the child here signifies a repose that marks the end of personal struggle, or the achievement of what Filip and his wife call "peace and quiet." One of the major narrative threads of the film involves Filip's conflict with his wife, the film's spokesperson for peace and quiet, who protests against the former's new interest in

filmmaking. Filip's wife, Irka Mosh (Malgorzata Zabkowska), has a conspicuous prescience regarding Filip's amateurism, immediately fearing that her husband has become a dabbler, no longer compatible with the calm the couple once sought. In extending the notion of the amateur (and the filmmaker) to denote one who cannot "get used to anyone or anything," Kieślowski sets up an important opposition between cinema and tranquility (or calm), insofar as filmmaking compels one outwardly toward the messy engagements of life and politics. Filip rebuffs Irka's complaints with the admission that he now believes that the importance of filmmaking outweighs the appeal of tranquility. Kieślowski stresses that he does not think the struggle to strike a balance between living and one's public existence is one that is peculiar to film, but it is nonetheless a struggle that structures this film (and indeed the director's own life) (Stok 112).

Camera Buff emphatically depicts the filmmaker's ethical dilemmas resulting from the position of non-mastery (amateurism), particularly in the repressive context of Stalinist Poland. The question of documentary film's efficacy as a truthful medium converges here with exigent moral considerations. Filip, who is in some ways Kieślowski's doppelgänger, comes to know what it means "to live in a world without representation." *Camera Buff* unfolds as a *Bildungsroman*: Filip's *éducation cinématique* begins with a modest intention to document his daughter's birth, but he quickly becomes entangled in local politics. He first encounters censorship when scolded by his boss for filming factory officials exiting a bathroom. Soon afterward, Filip remarks that the object of his camera is "everything that moves," a naive impulse that he later learns is incompatible with the world.

Later, Filip is given an assignment by a Krakow television station and decides to document a case of corruption that involves the misappropriation of funds meant for city renovations. His suspicions of corruption encourage him to film a brickyard that, on Filip's account, has not "made a brick for months." In both instances, Filip's assumptions turn out to be only partially correct. The ostensible malfeasance uncovered by Filip's first film turns out to be a matter of reallocating funds to construct a kindergarten and slaughterhouse—both projects will be stopped as a result of Filip's film. The stagnant brickyard, he learns, remains operative so that its personnel retain employment "cleaning the town." As a result of the first of the two films, others lose their jobs, one a close friend of Filip's. When he learns of these consequences, he protests to the factory director that his intention was merely to inform people of the truth. The director's response is twofold: On the one hand, he asserts the Stalinist perspective that people are in general too "immature" to know and that one must first meet certain criteria (he reports that he "had to study law, two languages, and sociology"). Conversely, the director suggests that the problem of truth in film is resolved in the selection of its object. The director drives Filip to a scenic location above a misty valley—a picturesque scene that might have been a Romantic painting: "Have a look," the director says, "It's so simple. The world can be beautiful. People live and love. You should look at that, too. Your films are so bleak." Filip nods subtly, as if in gradual realization, and suggests that only "nature" can be filmed truthfully.

Still, *Camera Buff* does not aspire to resolve the dilemmas of documentary, but instead poses the question of whether a filmmaker's intentions can meaningfully align

with his or her art. After hearing his boss' conservative conception of filmmaking, Filip visits Stanislaw (Jerzy Nowak), his friend who is fired as the result of his documentary. Stanislaw encourages Filip to continue his work at all costs: "You must realise that this will happen again. And you must carry on. If you feel you're right, nothing else matters. You'll never know who you're helping. Who you're working against." The "eternal dilemma" of the filmmaker lies in this necessity of carrying on without the guarantee that the consequences of one's work will be equal to one's intentions. Action, conceived in terms of the filmmaker's own capacity to practice his or her art, is here in crisis. If there is a spokesperson for the crisis of truth in filmmaking it is Krzysztof Zanussi (who plays himself in the film). At a "meet the director" event after a screening of his *Camouflage* (*Barwy ochronne*, 1977), an audience member asks, "Is it enough for a director to believe he's telling the truth? Or should he try to verify it?" Zanussi's response captures the task of the modern filmmaker after the crisis of action:

He must. And there lies our eternal dilemma. Wondering if what we're saying is objectively true, or wise without being able to specify how it can be tested. Each of us hopes that his film will help someone. That it will change society. But let's face the facts. We are no longer alchemists of the soul capable of changing the world. Criteria are relative. There are no hard and fast rules. We don't know. And this uncertainty is our strength. It's what drives us to say things over and over again. Differently, more tellingly, more precisely.

These remarks bear striking resemblance to Deleuze's pronouncement that "we hardly believe any longer that a global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of

modifying it." The erosion of truth becomes the condition of what Deleuze calls "fabulation"⁵⁴ and "the powers of the false."

The role of reflexivity is reiterated in the film's ending, when Filip turns the camera on himself. The "Ego = Ego form of identity" ceases to be valid precisely in this inward gesture: The uncertain subject becomes its own object, its "truth" a creation of the camera. In the denouement, Filip holds the camera to his face and begins to tell the story of the birth of his daughter, the very event that prompted him to acquire the camera and that sets the film in motion. This ending is therefore suggestive of the Kieślowskian motifs of doublings and second chances (e.g. *Blind Chance*), since Filip's epiphanic reflexivity leads him to urgently re-tell the story of *Camera Buff*, emphasizing in this iteration the development of his new family. The inward turn therefore emerges as a last resort, a flight from the pernicious consequences of acting on the world; as Kieślowski explains:

He doesn't give up because he turns the camera towards himself at the end. He simply realizes that, as an amateur film-maker, he's found himself in a trap and that, making films with good intentions, he might prove useful to people who'll use the films with bad intentions. (Stok 112)

Reflexivity is in this respect a response to the absence of solid ground in the overlapping domains of ethics and epistemology. Exhausted, Filip is incapable of producing acts that would modify a situation or that might "alchemically change the soul" (as Krzysztof

⁵⁴ Deleuze encourages his reader to think of fabulation as process (rather than substance) with the verbs "*fictionner*," and "*fabuler*," and in the phrase "*faire de la fiction*" ("La voix de Deleuze").

Zannusi puts it in the film). The Kieslowskian epiphany issues from the knowledge that one is a *de facto* amateur, exhausted and unable to act upon the world with mastery.

Encounters in the Aftermath of the Actual

If previous films work through exhaustion and the impossibility of mastery, *Red* gestures toward the aftermaths of exhaustion. It follows Valentine Dusot (Irène Jacob), a student and model who lives in an apartment in Geneva across the street from Auguste Bruner (Jean-Pierre Lorit), a law student. Valentine's boyfriend lives in London, and the two frequently communicate by phone. The film's narrative, through a series of near encounters and parallel sequences, weaves together the lives of Valentine and Auguste, who remain completely unknown to one another until the film's final scene. Driving one night, Valentine becomes distracted by her car's radio, which has lost its signal. Her momentary lapse of attention causes her to run down a dog, Rita, whom she immediately rescues. This accident is only one of a number that will dictate the events of the narrative. After finding the address of Rita's owner, Valentine drives to the home of Joseph Kern (Jean-Louis Trintignant). In one of many instances of communicative failure, Valentine rings the bell on the gate but receives no answer. Inside the house, she finds Kern asleep beside his radio. The rest of the film develops the relationship between Kern and Valentine. As the two grow fond of one another, a parallel narrative emerges that strongly insinuates Kern as a "version" of Auguste (among other similarities, both are judges devastated by unfaithful lovers). The film unfolds not as a series of cause and effect (action and reaction) but rather through accident and happenstance. For some critics,

Kern ostensibly orchestrates the coincidences, which suggests (as Emma Wilson argues) a kind of Prospero figure (or even Kieślowski himself) (Wilson 95).

Kieślowski remarks that the "theme of *Red* is the conditional mood" (Stok 218). That is, *Red* partakes not in the indicative mood—which concerns itself with actual states of affairs—but with how things might be otherwise. Repetition and accident (both as chance and catastrophe) orient exhausted life toward an "outside," that is, a flight toward transformation that rejects paradigms construed around agential mastery. Scholarship on *Red* frequently comments on the construction of an intricate network of visual rhymes. *Red's* repetition of innumerable images and color has a primarily ontological significance, since repetitions concern the very being of the characters in question. Here the screen mediates phenomena according to visual rhetoric of connectivity and is ultimately a mode of figuring the variability of existence and the richness of potentiality. Joe Kickasola, for example, writes that

Kieślowski loves these "links," not as cute connections between scenes, but rather, as expressions of the grand drama of unrealized relationships in the world, the thousands of "might have been" stories. These small links remind us that the world is sown with seeds of potential connection, and our lives are fundamentally shaped by our chance (or is it predestined?) nurturing of those we select. (300)

Potentiality rather than actuality emerges as the relevant optic with which to bring life to the screen. Indeed, the question Kickasola raises concerning predestination in *Red* remains inseparable from the repetition of visual "links." Kieślowski explains that one of the film's most prominent images, a profile shot of Valentine that foreshadows the film's ending, functions by means of a necessary repetition: "Fate was pre-ordained: the image of her existed before the catastrophe. Maybe there is fate, an image that has to repeat

itself. It's more of a Greek than religious concept" (Insdorf 174). Repetition both prefigures and posits the conditional—what might have been and what might be—irrespective of its plausibility within a sensory-motor framework.

Clearly, neither metaphysical naturalism nor commonsense notions of causality, law, and identity are operable here.⁵⁵ One cannot, for example, resort to the usual categories of judgment to sort out the ontological relationship of Kern and Auguste. If the latter repeats the former, it is not because one is the other (the "Ego = Ego form"). To reduce these relations to adequation and identity does little in the way of explanation. Nor do pertinent temporal concepts readily make themselves available: Does the young judge simply recapitulate the prior life of the older? Does the life of the former itself constitute a form of flashback, retelling the past of the judge in the mode of the present? None of these alternatives appear particularly convincing, nor does the film seem interested in resolving such questions. Instead, it must suffice to say that the temporal relations are unreadable in terms of the tripartite structure of commonsense temporality. Kieślowskian repetition is not a repeated, identical figure that merely differs in space and time, but is instead virtual differentiation without an originary, grounding term. In the language of Deleuze, the film declines the sensory-motor regularity of the action-image, a paradigm generating only an indirect images of time, in favor of a direct relation to time, that is, a time-image that invents a new temporal triad: chance, difference, and repetition.

⁵⁵ Paul Coates' reading suggests that causal relations between the film's many repeated sounds and images are finally undecidable (58).

Wilson remarks that, "[for Kieślowski,] the privilege of narrative cinema is in its potential to visualize parallel destinies, to actualize so many virtual existences" (99). Kieślowski's repeated audio-visual figures reverberate with virtuality, eliciting relations between places, characters, and temporality that remain irreducible to the demands of natural perception. Such irreducibility for Deleuze is tantamount to a form of law-breaking: "In every respect, repetition is a transgression. It puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality" (*Difference and Repetition* 3). If the negative conditions of exhaustion involve a break with the law of the sensory-motor schema and the inaccessibility of certitude, then its generative side lies in the production of an "artistic reality." *Red*, more than any other of Kieślowski's films, affirms this creative response in the aftermath of exhaustion, and it does so in part by means of an explicit confrontation with the regulation of socio-ethical relations (law, broadly conceived) whose claim to mastery has become exhausted.

It is fitting that the transgressive gesture of putting law into question becomes central to the film's narrative and characterization. Laws are of course a favorite subject of the director who created the *Decalogue*. As Wilson notes, Kieślowski "has used a literal and metaphoric legal system as an infrastructure in his cinema" since the start of his collaboration with Krzysztof Piesiewicz, himself a lawyer (96). What makes *Red* central to Kieślowski's cinema of exhaustion is the manner in which it consolidates many themes and motifs of previous films. In particular, *Red* addresses the intersection of epistemology and ethics, that is, the aforementioned problem that acts are performed on the basis of imperfect knowledge. Indeed, it is precisely this dilemma that informs the

relationship between Kern and Valentine. Kern is a *juge à la retraite*, a retired judge but also one who has retreated, fled from the affairs of his fellows. Yet, like previous Kieślowskian figures such as Filip—or Tomek in *A Short Film about Love* (*Krótki film o miłości*, 1988)—he maintains voyeuristic contact by means of technology. Unlike his predecessors, Kern relies on audio surveillance rather than a lens to conduct his inquiry into the lives of others. For Valentine, the immorality of the judge's actions (spying on his neighbors) is as certain as it is unforgivable, but she quickly learns the Kieślowskian lesson that acting on the basis of knowledge—regardless of its apparent veracity—can have dire consequences. Kern correctly assesses Valentine's outrage as stemming from her moral certitude ("You're persuaded you're right"), and challenges her to act. When, at Kern's behest, Valentine goes to a neighbor's home to relate Kern's wrongdoing, she finds herself incapable (she estimates the damage such knowledge would generate for the family too devastating). Kern orchestrates for Valentine the dilemma that he continues to live through. When, later in the film, Kern shares with Valentine the events leading up to his retirement, it becomes clear that his dilemma is the problem of judging life: "Deciding what is true and what isn't now seems to me a lack of modesty." That the young Kern convicted his girlfriend's lover further contributes to the problem of judgement since it raises the possibility that all judgement is merely a form of revenge (cf. Nietzsche, Deleuze). The judge's retirement is a response to the crisis stemming from the fact that all judgement has an unethical dimension, since a position of "pure" judgement is impossible. To judge is to assume the immodest position of mastery.

Kern is neither what Deleuze calls the "truthful man [...] who judges life from the perspective of supposedly higher values" nor the "sick man [...] who judges life from the perspective of his sickness, his degeneration and his exhaustion" (despite assessments of his character as misanthropic)⁵⁶ (*Cinema 2* 140-41). For Deleuze, judgement operates on the basis of revenge and *ressentiment* that imposes moralistic hierarchies on life: It is precisely insofar as judgement negates life that it is nihilistic. Kern's voyeurism remains caught between, on the one hand, the impossibility of nihilism (one can no longer judge, since one is disabused of the pretense to "higher values"), and, on the other, a compulsive attraction to life. That is, like Kieślowski the documentarian, Kern is guilty of surveilling his fellows, but has conspicuously removed himself from the dangerous games of judgement and action (just as Kieślowski had abandoned explicit political activity). This compulsive attraction to life thus takes the form of affirmation without actuation.

The centrality of the accident in Kieślowski displaces volition as the primary force of being in the world. His aesthetic of the visual rhyme, an oft-cited technique, thus takes on an ontological and epistemological significance: Our knowing and very being is conditioned by accidental becomings (the virtual). *Red* not only tracks the chance moments which make up the lives of its characters but also repeats these moments. Both Kern and Auguste pass their examinations because they fortuitously drop their legal textbooks, which open to the precise passage that will secure their success. These

⁵⁶ For Coates, the film has a classically reparative narrative logic, since Valentine "thaws" Kern from his "misanthropy" (58).

repetitions and doublings beget virtual forks, conditionally testing what could have been or what might still be. Kieślowskian chance, however, avoids establishing a new system that would revert to the old system of judgement. Against the exhausted screen that is no longer conditioned solely by action, Kieślowski posits a screen reconfigured by virtuality and chance encounters. Indeed, this modality of chance is beyond the categories of good and evil; accident ensures neither positive nor negative outcomes. The ferry catastrophe that puts Valentine and Auguste into the same diegetic space (suggestive of a forthcoming relationship between the two), renders impossible a "happy ending." As Marek Haltof notes,

[...] it is not easy to bring together the idea of a "happy ending" with the immensity of the tragedy. Several hundreds of passengers are dead but the chosen ones, "our protagonists," are saved. [...] the end serves almost as a mockery of happy endings and seems to be closer to the realm of disaster genre than art cinema. (144)

Life, Kieślowski suggests, can never be a neat sequence of dialectical actions and reactions, but is instead the incessant undulation of felicitous and catastrophic encounters. This absence of the happy ending that characterizes all of Kieślowski's films offers an instructive lesson concerning virtuality as a response to exhausted life. To turn away from the exhausted actual in favor of Kieślowskian chance (*Przypadek*⁵⁷), is to endure the competing states that this word implies: happenstance, coincidence, accident, and so on. In this sense, reading Kieślowski through Deleuze (and vice-versa) becomes an instructive reminder that an artistic practice predicated on a relation to the virtual is

⁵⁷ The Polish title of *Blind Chance* (1987).

hardly a royal road to liberation from the actual. In *Red*, however, serendipity, as much as catastrophe, is liable to emerge as an interruptive and potentially generative force. That chance might give rise to unhappy endings is yet another crisis, a dilemma that one must live with. From the perspective of the Kieślowskian virtual that I have attempted to sketch, the alternative—that of judging life from a supposed superiority or mastery—remains politically and ethically indefensible. Such is the generative function of the virtual in Kieślowski's later films, which refuse exhaustive regimes in favor of life, irrespective of the generalized inaccessibility of mastery.

Quite distant from Enlightenment notions of autonomy, Kieślowski shares with Deleuze an insistence on the primacy of the heteronomous, that which comes from without as an incessant destabilizing force. Another way of stating this point would be to reiterate Deleuze's anti-Kantianism, particularly with respect to ethics. Here again the problem of laws and judgement emerges. Kant's deontology places autonomy at its center; acts of moral value in Kant emerge on the basis of laws rationally formulated and acted upon a subject without reference to external aims. For reasons adumbrated above, such an internalized law-making is tacitly (and sometimes explicitly) criticized in the Kieślowskian universe: The good intentions of a rationally deciding subject are almost always minimized in favor of a higher order concern with the contingent and capricious nature of reality and subjective relations. In contrast with Kant's autonomy, Kieślowski shares with Deleuze this insistence on the primacy of the heteronomous, that which

comes from without as an incessant destabilizing force. Deleuze characterizes the force of such alterity as that of the "encounter";⁵⁸ he writes,

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. (*Difference and Repetition* 139).

One should add exhaustion to this list of "affective tones." In Kieślowski, however, one encounters not images of philosophy but rather those of the conditional itself—chance repetitions of what might have been or might still be thought otherwise.

⁵⁸ The metaphor of "encounter" appears frequently in descriptions of dialectical movement. Jean Hyppolite often uses the term in his famous *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. As it pertains to the classical, Hegelian conception of dialectics, the metaphor of the encounter rests on an image of confrontation—a fight, the results of which yield a victor. The encounter in this sense thus neatly maps onto the dialectical sense of crisis I have been arguing against. Throughout, however, I have deployed the concept of the encounter against this dialectical heritage. Whether Florent's encounter with *Les Halles*, Stephen's many encounters in *Ulysses*, or a Kieślowskian chance encounter, I have attempted to render the nature of the encounter as a generative, creative force.

Conclusion

The operative tension in each of the preceding chapters has been that which links the persistence of the action-image to a beyond of action. Action, as I have theorized it, demarcates a world made by and for the mastery of an all-knowing, all-powerful subject. Representation regimented by the paradigm of action—which is to say, the paradigms of instrumentality, identification, orderability, commonsense, *etc.*—remain hostile to the alterity of the screen. It is no surprise, then, that thinkers have so frequently identified such regimentation as antithetical to life, becoming, and self-creation. If Bergson and Deleuze, upon whose works I have so heavily relied, are among the more prominent thinkers of the hegemony of the action-image, they are nonetheless representatives of a broader tendency in continental thought insofar as they regard the dogmatism of action as a central philosophical problem. The others I have enlisted in this critique, not least of all Nietzsche and Mallarmé, demonstrate the scope of the crisis of action and the life-affirming desire to think beyond it.

It would be too simple to claim that a film and literary critical approach to the screen in crisis issues from an affirmation of usefulness, that is, a desire to resist pragmatic (sensory-motor) paradigms of representation. Uselessness may always itself prove to be instrumental. The paradigm of the useful, however, can only be suspended if the prevailing modes of its intelligibility, its presuppositions, and its conditions are suspended (or “jammed,” to use Deleuze’s term). The crisis of action-image, as I have asserted, is ongoing, but so too the virtuality that subtends it. Today, according to Deleuze and Guattari, thought has been handed over to “commercial professional

training”; thinking becomes visible only in the light of the demands of consumer society: “The only events are exhibitions, and the only concepts are products that can be sold” (10). One hope of the preceding chapters, then, is to have registered some of the literary and cinematic challenges to idolatry of the actual and to the action-image as the hegemonic modalities of the screen.

My use of the screen serves to insist on the subjective and objective consequences of literary and cinematic forms in crisis. In Zola, a paradigm of representation, one governed by a dialectics of action and consequence, gives way to a subterranean mode of description that defies the idolatry of the actual. As a concept, the screen captures not only this spectacle as a matter of form or narrative, but the implications for the production of intelligibility generally. No doubt, particularly from the perspective of common sense, this claim risks elevating the significance of representation to unintelligible heights. Yet, from the beginning, I follow Rancière (and in certain respects, Zola) in arguing that texts produce the very world they seek to describe.

By way of the screen, I have attempted to think the fact that in constituting “forms of rationality,” as Rancière puts it, both subjective and objective worlds are remade. In breaking from natural perception, the artists I have examined redistribute the sensible, modifying what is, not just by way of the imagination— e.g., imagining the world otherwise—but through reconfiguring the screen itself.

I have often made recourse to exceptional or anomalous moments in texts, those passages or shots that defy the ostensible logic of the text. These scenes include those of Zola, who describes his characters in direct encounters with milieux. In other cases, as

with Joyce, the author openly stages a crisis. Stephen's walk on the beach pits opposing metaphysical systems—which is to say, screens in the broadest sense—against one another. One finds in “Proteus” the staging of a crisis of rationalism incurred when Stephen encounters the interminably becoming world through the screen of the body. Stephen becomes the textual “space” of a crisis; he discovers *mater*, that is, a body that extends to meet a material world that is itself a body inseparable from his own. Such are the operations of the encounter, which in Kieślowski engenders transformations of the law, both in terms of moral and legal thought and with respect to the laws of identity and causality.

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