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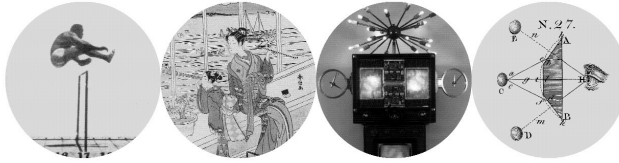
Television (an Address)

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Abstract

Television (an address) is a text that stems from an art project initiated in 2002. The project is based on an operation that relies on the live transmission of the image of television. The streamed image is accompanied by a commentary given by an invited guest to different audiences in theatres and galleries around the world. This paradoxical transmission of a transmission seeks to create a disjunction that positions the image in a place where it can speak about itself. The text is intended to highlight a general platform of thought surrounding the status of the image in contemporary culture. The general argument is linked to the notion of the 'death' of cinema in the hands of television, as the latter relinquished its ethical/aesthetical function, positioning itself instead in the realm of a purely social function. The writing is a non-academic approximation on the part of an artist and writer. It draws on notions worked by Giorgio Agamben around the Messianic dimension of cinema and also Deleuze's diagnosis of a society of control.

Keywords

cinema • Messianic • reality TV • supplement • surveillance • television • year zero

Man is the animal who goes to the cinema.   (Giorgio Agamben, 1998a)

We follow a narrative borrowed from Jean-Luc Godard, Serge Daney and Gilles Deleuze. A plot that recounts the two deaths of cinema: the first one at the hands of fascism and the second at the hands of television. A history of death and resurrection; this might well be what Saint Paul's mysterious phrase was already referring to: 'the image will only come in the time of resurrection' (Godard, 1989). Giorgio Agamben interprets Godard's *Histoire(s)*

du Cinéma and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* as Messianic works, in the sense that they push the image to its very limit, to its apocalypse (its *sadomasochistic* moment, of catastrophe and *jouissance*, in the words of Serge Daney). The image attains the dimension of a 'communication of a communicability' (Agamben, 2000a: 59); the subtle, yet definite movement where a positive possibility in spectacle can be used against it; the instant of its 'revelation', which can only coincide with its end. Even though this 'end' cannot be understood chronologically and every moment in history, every image, has a secret doorway to it.

This article presents *cinema* and *television* as two paradigms, separate from their chronology, separate from the film and the monitor, exceeding the darkened movie theatre and the blue light in the living room; exceeding the 20th century. Cinema is, essentially, a silent possibility for thought, an 'adventure of perception' (Deleuze, 1998), a '*de-creation* of the real' (Agamben, 1995). Television stands for our contemporary reality of un-thought and amnesia. The first one produces and sets forth a world, the other *programmes* and transmits a void; the first one invokes *politics* by its unspeakable gesture, the other is pure social control that conjures up the technical eye of our time.

Punctuation of War

1945. It would almost be impossible to speak without the war, the historic phrase would be too long. It is necessary to say 'after the war' or 'before the war'. When Rossellini operates on the clean slate that the bombs have left, he already understands the new phrase that we will be writing in our days. We are, as a world culture, exactly in the despairing last scene of *Germany – Year Zero*; you would have to be blind to miss it – the television cameras are always positioned on the rubble, picturing the bomb that just went off (and we still resort to the mystery of the gaze of a child as the only perspective that can save us from the chaos of exploded fulcrums). But unlike Rossellini who presented the despair of that boy amidst the ruins of his culture with an ethical/aesthetical intent (Bazin, 1967: 37, had said, 'to preserve its mystery'), the media presents us with a tumult of *unintentional*, accomplished facts in the face of which we are powerless: 'the media dictatorship likes appalled but impotent citizens' (Agamben, 1998b).

In the introduction to a compilation of his *War Trilogy* scripts, Rossellini (1985) says that, as a filmmaker, he had wanted to 'observe, to contemplate reality morally' (p. xvi) … so he proposed a world after the destruction. 'Proposed' is the key word here. He did not set out to transmit what was happening, rather he understood himself as one who would set forth an image for a culture that was in need of it. Speaking in the terms that Deleuze invokes, this proposal is precisely what we may call a *supplement*, something that is beyond the illusion of a technical one-to-one relationship of the world and the image. It is interesting to emphasize the concept of a morality that is employed as an adverb for the act of observing. It is a morality that is precisely devoted to foregrounding the position of the camera in the world, the

position of the work in history, the position of history in the story, the position of the moving image in and of history. To 'observe reality morally' is to include oneself in the problem rather than ignore the ground where one stands. Rossellini is not standing on ground three, or two, or one, he is facing, thinking, filming Berlin, ground zero … this *is* an ethical (moral) observation, it is a proposal for thinking a nation after a radical dismemberment of everything that it stood on. In the end it is an offer, a construction, an act of love (a *pro*mise, and a *pro*jection). If we are to think about the difference of the documentary camera of neo-realism and that of the western media, we can find the clue to their difference. The media tacitly asserts, at every step, that it is only *presenting* the news that has taken place, that the camera is there to report: 'it is the consensus par excellence, it is the technical, immediately social, offering no possible disjunction with the social, it is the social–technical in its pure state' (Deleuze, 1998: 18). To 'observe reality morally' is the work of cinema, to observe a moral reality (in the sense that one *observes* the rule) is the dimension of the media. Deleuze, following Daney's intuitions, punctuates this thought by emphasizing that television is the stage where the world makes its own cinema, all on its own. It is a kind of paradoxical keeper of a vacuum: a device for the endless deferral of thought. 'Cinema accompanied the world, but television pushes us out and places us in a waiting list' (Godard, 1998). It installs an unquestionable truth that implies that things are *just like that*; as if there were no decision involved, no idea behind, no tracking shot, no zoom, no cutting, no studio, no unidirectional microphone, no voiceover, no camera operator, no idea. In ignoring its own history/histories, the image of television acts as if the syntax of the moving image didn't have a development, as if its own common sense had always already presupposed itself, as if the history of *montage* had not been a craft that *came to be* progressively … from A to B to C and back to A; as if everything were external to television, to us, as if it weren't, as if we weren't included in the ethical problem of the image that it constantly transmits. This is what Daney points out when he says that the paradigm of *programming* replaces the paradigm of production: a mechanism by which nothing is offered and all is *on offer*. Deforming Bazin's famous phrase on cinema, we can say that television substitutes for the world a world that is in accordance with a false image of desire, which is no longer our desire, which can't even be called *desire* any more and which is there merely to sell us merchandise that was previously negotiated behind our backs. Taking into account that transmission hides itself in the appearance, how are we to reveal the obvious, that which is there as a constant *dis-appearance*? Maybe by offering that which offers nothing; by transmitting a transmission, by entering television in the realm of a *projection*.

1948. An 'oniric leap' to another city at another time. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1977) uses that expression – 'oniric leap' – in his script *San Paolo*, to describe his unexpected replacement of the German SS by the American police. *San Paolo* is the never realized script of a transposition of Saint Paul's life to a World War II context, where the apostle becomes a part of the *resistance* after being a Vichy officer (at the end he is killed in the Memphis motel where Martin Luther King was assassinated). 1947 is the year zero of the CIA,

which took the relay baton after the war, like someone who occupies a house because all its inhabitants are dead. There is a photograph of Bogotá where a poster of *Open City (Roma Ciudad Abierta*) is visible amidst the ruins of the city, destroyed by a despairing mob after the assassination of their leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. 1948 is the year zero for Colombia. In recent years the CIA has been sued over and over to release the documents from an event that took place now 56 years ago. But they keep using the *Glomar* response: 'we do not affirm or deny the existence of such documents.' The reason is National Security: 'the state of exception in which we live' (Agamben, 1998b). A *Glomar* image corresponds to our age: an image that doesn't affirm or deny anything other than it being in force without significance: the image of television.

1945.

> Syberberg has pushed some remarks by Walter Benjamin very far: we have to judge Hitler as a filmmaker … You point out yourself that 'the great political *mise-en-scène*, the state propaganda turned *tableaux vivants*, the first mass imprisonments' took charge of the cinemato-graphic dream, in conditions where the horror was penetrating it all, where behind the image there was nothing else to be found but the camps, and where the body had no bond other than its afflictions. (Deleuze, 1998: 10)

Faced by this break between man and the world, Rossellini presents a *fiction* in the setting of the devastation of a *real* war. No *mise-en-scène*, since the *scene* is already there and there is no way around it. '*Germany – Year Zero* was didactic, because I was making an effort – I am quite sure of this – to understand events that had involved me personally, and that had over-whelmed me' (Rossellini, 1985: xvi).

Berlin was to have been the site of one of Hitler's greatest *mise-en-scènes*. 'The old trade of the director (*metteur-en-scène*), you had said, will never again be innocent' (Deleuze, 1998: 11). And now Berlin was an experimen-tal scratch film, randomly punctured by bombs, in the same way that acid eats the celluloid in the militant East Coast school of material explorations on Kodak film stock. Berlin's destiny was to have been a Universal Studio of classic perfection. Hitler famously said, 'just give me ten years and you will not recognize your cities'; now it was *material*, not a stage, not a whole, but a splinter, not an asserted site but 'any place whatsoever', available to be documented, undressed from its history, raw as stock. The *theatre of war* has the amazing capacity of turning any *site* into a *region*. In the topography of the contemporary city, what was to have grounded the eye in the monumen-tal montage of the Third Reich that never was, is not Hitler's planned *Führer's Palace* (which was to be larger than the chancellery) but rather the towering Soviet television antennae.

Change of scene. Paris, a deep focus city, a perfect narrative of shots and counter shots, clean flashbacks and pantheons, correct exposures, a prewar grammar of big avenues and monuments.

1944. Paris was one step away from being Berlin. On 22 August Hitler gave the order to destroy it, and someone disobeyed. I have heard a first-hand account of German soldiers going around Paris with mines hidden in executive-style suitcases, placing them in every monument, bridge and museum. Suitcases that probably weren't too different from those of the executives of Halliburton lobbying before the War on Iraq for a Baghdad *year zero* where they could rebuild an oil industry in the likeness of the American economy. If we are to believe Robert Fisk (2003), who brought up the comparison in his article 'Year Zero', someone did indeed try this: 'Why? Who sent the looters? Who sent the arsonists? Were they paid? Who wants to destroy the identity of this country?'

1945. Back to the beginning of the phrase, in which we still find ourselves. In *Open City* a new dimension of the future of the image is presented in the most direct way, like a vision. Bergman, the Nazi SS officer, shows the grid over the map of the city and explains how Rome, like other European cities, is now divided into zones 'which allows us to comb through large masses of people scientifically, using the minimum effort'. He has to interrupt his thought to command that they shut up a screaming professor being tortured in the next room, and goes on to tell his interlocutor how 'every afternoon I take a long walk through the streets of Rome, but without stepping out of my office'. Then he reveals the enigma by showing the street photographs of which he receives copies every night: a succession of images, of couples and people walking in the streets from where he can gather the faces of his suspects. 'I'm extremely fond of this type of photograph.'

The image has landed in the age of control.

> The encyclopaedia of the world and the pedagogy of perception collapsed and were replaced by a professional formation of the eye, a world of the controllers and the controlled who communicate inside the technical, nothing but the technical ... The technical–social eye through which the spectator himself is invited to see, engendering a perfection, fulfilled and immediate, instantly controllable and controlled. (Deleuze, 1998: 19)

2004. Landing in America.

You read 'land of the free' too many times as you walk into an airport in America.

CAPSS II is about to be implemented in all the airports of America. The second version of the Computer Assisted Passenger Screening System has made its silent appearance. It is much scarier than Patriot Act II but it is passing in front of everyone's eyes practically undetected. If you travel to Colombia several times a year you are suspect. But the story won't be told like that. Travelling to Colombia several times a year to see your mother is called a 'suspicious travel pattern', in the world of data. How can you refute that? 'CAPSS II will pull information from disparate sources, your credit and financial information, public records information (like property taxes, or

whether you vote), criminal records and intelligence information (ever been to a political demonstration?). All of this information would be fed into a database which would then perform a risk assessment on you' (Pierce, 2004). The Kafkian experience is completed and perfected via the National Security exception, the same procedure that doesn't affirm or deny anything:

> Because you will never be able to see the information that was used to construct the profile or risk assessment, if you're placed on a blacklist or 'no fly' list, there is effectively no way that I know of to get off such a list. (Pierce, 2004)

If you want to understand what an image as a 'surface without depth' (Deleuze, 1998: 11) may be, you can consider that the most sophisticated surveillance system in the world has come to a new level where the image that this new *vision machine* produces is built, amongst other things, with the numbers of an individual's credit card. If you are *in the picture* as a consumer then you can be addressed, if not, then you are anonymous, you can't be imaged, you are suspect, you don't fly; it is not about being in front of the camera, it is about offering the coordinates by which you can be mapped as an image. The conjunction of military equipment and the digital world (or the production of the one by the other and vice versa) has come to its logical conclusion: an image is a product of data. Humans are no longer involved in the making of images (the world makes *its* images). The *extreme makeover* that we have undergone (to invoke one of the most notable reality TV shows of the moment) is not merely cosmetic; it is hidden in the fact that our image is now built from digits, nothing that human fingers can touch. Numbers are straight, why (y) is a crooked letter, I heard the other day on the radio.

> When surveillance becomes omnipresent and ever-more insistent demands are made for an impossible degree of absolute security, the perspective on reality turns upside-down, making every place a scene of crime and every person a virtual victim or delinquent so that anonymity becomes an offence against public security. (Frohne, 2002: 269)

State surveillance and reality TV are the two sides of the same coin. Think of the pleasure that the Nazi SS officer, Bergman, in *Open City* gets from those photographs that take people by surprise. As a culture today we seem to have internalized his fondness, after having pushed away every adventure of perception in the name of the professional eye. As Ursula Frohne (2002) puts it, the menace of 'you are being watched' has turned into the metaphysical comfort of 'you are not alone' so that the vacuum deepens to the point where the other day I saw an image of a reality TV show where the participants were examining each others' ears and mouths with specialized medical equipment, desperately searching the last orifice of the image. This kind of auscultation of the void has also led to the frantic search for all the TV shows that were cancelled, what you *weren't supposed to see*. As Serge Daney had

said, 'nothing happens to humans anymore, things only happen to the image' (Deleuze, 1998: 20). The anxiety of the disconnection is always increasing, reality TV always finds that the virgin subject it desperately seeks has already been produced by television; that not one of his/her gestures are *pre-televisual*, even if he/she comes from the deepest palisade of the Garden State. At the end television always gets the distressing shriek of feedback, even when it places its subjects in the middle of the African wilderness.

From Here

Onto a sequence of stills of the concentration camps, taken from a television network – Godard (1998) once wrote his notes: 'Was it really indispensable for a national network to print its copyright logo on these poor images of the night?' (p. 160). The last still from the sequence is a *close-up* of the number assigned to a prisoner … nothing needs to be added.

There is an easy definition here for the technical eye of television: the *technical* eye is the eye that doesn't see that logo. It is also the eye that can't see the cut to commercials. Godard had also suggested a way to address this: in an article published in *Le Monde* he suggested that the M6 network place six commercial breaks in the broadcast of *Breathless* instead of the one they were shyly asking him to authorize. He suggested that a commercial break, selling insect repellent or laundry detergent, be inserted between the last image of Jean Seberg and the word 'end'.

No act of resistance, Agamben (1995) says, is possible without an act of *de-creation* of the facts; otherwise the facts are too strong. How to resist the embedded reporter of our days? If ever there was a possible straightforward resistance to the suppression of facts during the darkest years of the Stalinist Gulag, there is no possible resistance to the pixillated image that this reporter brings to us from *the desert*. In the first case the meaningful image is unavailable, in the second the image is totally available and absolutely meaningless (think of the nature of the images that the current US administration has been able to 'spin', as they themselves like to call it). Behind them, there is another image. If we postpone our task of resurfacing in this vertigo we are fucked. 'Beware of the dream of the other' – Deleuze (1998) tells his students – 'because if you are caught in the dream of the other you are fucked' (p. 138). Television is the dream of the other in which we are caught. If cinema became an organ of our body, television stands for atrophy.

What is the Messianic dimension of works like *Histoire(s) du cinéma* or *The Society of the Spectacle*? The fact that they both show us that by stopping on the image itself after *running it over*, we can subtract it from the spell of the narrative power and expose it as an image, image of nothing, going nowhere. Images of images brought to light again from the history/histories of cinema, from the spectacle of the 20th century (Fox). Images having acquired the capacity of 'showing themselves as images' (Agamben, 1995). 'The true Messianic dimension is to throw again the image to its non-image which, as Benjamin says is the refuge of all images' (Agamben, 1998b)

Television (an Address)

Streaming is a new medium by which a moving image can be transmitted. What takes place when the streaming camera focuses not on the world but – learning the lesson from Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* – it casts the image of television itself? It doesn't matter what commentary is produced, the operation is already taking place when a presence is felt in front of the screen … if only someone's breath … live. A *live* transmission of *live-ness*, a breathless image in a paradoxical back and forth. As in a Lutheran revolt, the hierarchy of the image is symbolically overturned when the reception of *one* is highlighted over that of the unified, anonymous millions. The image that is already a thousand times folded is folded again; the un-addressable image is addressed, *given an address*.

All images are sleeping, in the expectation of the moment of their awakening. The fully realized nihilism of the spectacle of our age cannot be undone; there is no unravelling its always already present presupposition. After the prewar 'encyclopaedia of the world' and the pedagogical adventure of neo-realism and the *Nouvelle Vague* (Deleuze, 1998: 15), the *post-advertising* film has triumphed in the culture at large without the shadow of a doubt. Films inherited the cliché that television inherited from the advertising clip

Figure 1　Television (an address), by François Bucher, 2004.

(a frozen shred from the History of Cinema) and then the loop was looped, as Daney (1989) would say. This leads him to repeat that in the depth of every image there is always already an image. The sense of this diagnosis is not a longing for a return to a pre-lapsarian connection to the substantial world of early cinema, but rather a call to take the process further.

Thought is 'defined by the very capacity to de-create the real'; memory is the paradoxical power that makes 'the unfulfilled fulfilled and the fulfilled unfulfilled'. And here lies its potential for resistance; much in the same way cinema 'projects power and possibility towards where it is impossible by definition, towards the past' (Agamben, 1998b: 84). And that is its Messianic force. In his book on Saint Paul, *Le Temps qui reste*, Agamben (2000c) says that Paul doesn't oppose the old Jewish law by introducing a new universal principle to counter it. He does something else: he divides the division and creates a supplement, a remainder, annulling by this subtle operation the original division of the law. The law is considered here at its basic level, precisely as something that divides. Paul checkmates the law of his time by positing that if the law divides Jew from non-Jew he will offer another division of that division line: the Jew by birth and the Jew by spirit. He thus creates non-non Jews. He doesn't seek a substance or a new universal order to replace the old one, but rather a separation of the separation. Every juridical status is radically transformed or indefinitely suspended: after the *calling* a slave remains a slave as if not a slave, a non-circumcised man remains non-circumcised *as if not* non-circumcised.

The Christian tradition that Paul inaugurates sets forth the novel idea that the Messiah has already come and the Messianic time is here; an image that is here but cannot be seen (rather, a transformation that 'happens in not happening', something that takes place at the same time as it doesn't). In the Messianic time everyone remains exactly where they were before their *calling* but everything is different (the *nothingness* of revelation). How to invoke this dimension? Not a left seeking to overthrow the images of the right in favour of its own images, inside of the language game of *information* that makes their discourses equivalent, but a stage on which those divisions between right and left are called radically and incessantly into question. Not a progressive group of liberal thinkers that fight in the name of a dispossessed abstract viewer, for a better television (more moral, more interactive, more progressive, more concerned with social issues) but the birth of a viewer/reader that is done with the judgement of God and can face the image, project himself onto it and see it in the now. Daney (in Deleuze, 1998) had something definite to say about this: that television needed to be addressed at the level of *its perfection, not its imperfection*. The perfection of television has no supplement, no space for thought, no remainder. In transmitting the transmission (which is equivalent to dividing the division between world and image) there is a chance to create one: the image can be offered as such 'without allowing that which reveals itself to be veiled in the nothingness it reveals, but bringing language itself to language' (Agamben, 2000b: 85).

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François Bucher is an artist from Cali, Colombia; he lives and works in Berlin. Bucher's work investigates 'the image' as it circulates in contemporary culture. His reflection focuses on cinema and television, highlighting a politics of the moving image. Bucher has initiated several projects and collaborations that seek to open alternative spaces of thought, including Part Two: A Network Event on World Conflicts, and Television (an address). His essays and projects have been included in *Saving the Image: Art After Film* (edited by Tanya Leighton and Pavel Büchler); *Here and Elsewhere* (OE, Denmark); *Revista Valdez*; *Files* (MUSAC); and *Artwurl*, the online magazine of PS 122 (August 2004) amongst other publications.

From 1999–2000 Bucher attended the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in New York. In 1999 he finished his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he received the MFA fellowship prize. He is a recipient of the New York City Media Arts Grant of the Jerome Foundation, 2000. His critically acclaimed, award-winning work has been exhibited internationally in group and solo shows and festivals. It is distributed by the Video Data Bank and is included in the collections of Bard College, Princeton University, University of Essex, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Castilla y Leon (MUSAC) and the University of California at Santa Cruz. Bucher is a founding co-editor of *Revista Valdez* presented at Centre d'Édition Contemporaine, Geneva, 2003 and the Armory Show in 2004.

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