



Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction

Jean-Michel Durafour

► To cite this version:

Jean-Michel Durafour. Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction. Graham Jones and Ashley Woodward (ed.), Acinemas. Lyotard's Philosophy of Film, Edinburgh Press University, 2017. hal-01690225

HAL Id: hal-01690225

<https://amu.hal.science/hal-01690225>

Submitted on 10 Apr 2018

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Cinema Lyotard: An Introduction

Jean-Michel Durafour

Let us dispel a persistent injustice. For reasons I will come back to later, it has taken several decades for the name of Jean-François Lyotard to be able to appear, without a feeling of arbitrary unfairness or of audacious anomaly, alongside those of Gilles Deleuze, André Bazin or Serge Daney in a dossier dedicated to French cinema theory (as much as Lyotard detested this word ‘theory’, which reeks of monotheism and accounting...).¹ Looking a little more closely at the facts, which are all equally as stubborn as the theoreticians, we find it hard to understand how such an ostracism – there is no other word for it – has been able to impose itself in the discourse on cinema, despite the fact (we will see this later also) that numerous theoreticians, sometimes those very ones who keep obstinately quiet about it, have openly stolen Lyotard’s whole box of methodological and operative tools (the figural), with more or less good fortune. (That is said in passing.)

Certainly, one will not find in Lyotard anything comparable to the enterprise later conducted by Deleuze with his two *Cinema* volumes; and unlike his friend, the author of *Discourse, Figure* has not inspired a whole critical disciplinary trend, nor given, *coram populi*, a new face to cinema studies. But like Deleuze, Lyotard has in his own right extended a metamorphic gesture that could be traced back to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and in particular to his celebrated 1945 conference on ‘The Film and the New Psychology’. It was there that Merleau-Ponty posed the fundamentals, common to cinema and the philosophy of perception, of what he called ‘a certain way of being, a certain view of the world which belongs to a generation’ (1964: 59), and thereby established a programme for more than sixty years of philosophy and reflection on cinema. Merleau-Ponty himself only offered a catch-phrase or slogan for this programme – and his predecessors had never done any more on this virgin territory – since he never supported his proposition about the *cinematic* (perceptive) *process* with even the slightest, most idiosyncratic analysis of *filmic* (aesthetic) *facts*.

ON THE COMMON SAYING: IT MAY BE TRUE IN THEORY,
BUT IT DOESN'T APPLY IN PRACTICE . . .

One can reasonably affirm that the Lyotardian gesture signals itself first, and perhaps foremost, by two specificities, as follows. At least for the second, our philosopher is the only one (among thinkers of calibre) of his generation.

1. *The inscription of a reflection on cinema in a broad and general aesthetic project which, far from obscuring it, gives cinema a central and select value.* When in 1973 Lyotard wrote his first important text on cinema, ‘Acinema’, this aesthetic had just been put in place in *Discourse, Figure* (1971), notably around an operator destined to become famous: the ‘figural’. It is not my intention here to analyse in detail a work as dense and complex as *Discourse, Figure*. But we can grasp several points. The *figural* is distinguished from the *figurative* (even if the *figurative* is the *figural* ‘cooled down’). While the *figurative* designates ‘a property that applies to the plastic object’s relation to what it *represents*’ (DF 205), the *figural* names that which in the *presentation* of the plastic event is always singular and disruptive. The *figural* escapes from predictability (otherwise it would be pre-figured), from recognisability, identifiability and referentiality; it escapes from codification, from forms, and from isotopic and pre-established structures. In the *figural*, the event is welcomed *for itself*, in its *sensible symptomatic* expression. It thereby differs from the regimes of signification and designation, as well as from the *mimesis* of the *figurative* tradition, in which the plastic event is taken as no more than an (abstract, separate) sign which is *referred to an other* (thing, model). The *figural* is the vacant space left by *desire*, that is to say by sense, in the visible, and in the sensible in general. Harrowing, turbulent, it is that which makes difference; that is to say, that by which the donation of the sensible, in its constitutive difference, is possible – while words crush all intensities on the homogeneous spatiality of language and the generality of concepts.² Words are incapable of safekeeping the sensible event we task them with representing: ‘one can say that the tree is green, but saying so does not put color in the sentence’ (DF 50).

It is consequently, *stricto sensu*, impossible *to say* the *figural* (and still less to define it). And in fact Lyotard tells us that *Discourse, Figure* is a ‘bad’ book, a failed book, because it misses the singularity of its subject. But it also poses an ideal of the book on art that Lyotard sought all his life to write, or not to write; in any case a book which would be badly written, badly constructed, even badly thought (since the concept is not in its proper place in images). Such a book would be the opposite of the argumentative essay approved by the philosophical tradition, a book more *to be seen than to be read*. Needless to say, therein lies the major difficulty for all verbal (written, spoken) aesthetics subject to the non-verbal and non-dianoetic thought of works of art. And Lyotard did not cease, under one form or another, to encounter this difficulty. The whole problem is

announced right away in *Discourse, Figure*: how can we express that which, in art and in particular in visual art (painting, literature), escapes the readable and the sayable ('[r]eading is understanding, not seeing' (DF 211))?

How can we express that which takes place behind language – since at the same time one cannot situate oneself in complete exteriority to articulated language? One sees because one speaks (did the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges not ask himself in which language he would die?) since at the same time one cannot but resort to concepts in order to account for the otherness of aesthetic experience. Is not philosophy still needed in order to express what escapes philosophy? How can we express the symptom which dazzles, uncodable, uncharacterisable, on this side of language and figures, with words that the image leaves us with, and which replay in the present something of the prepredicative and originary experience of the world, of the time before the distinction between subject and object, before knowledge and reflection?³ But if it is true that, on the one hand, sense is 'muddled, inaudible, as if nonexistent', 'until the military front of the words – so to speak – has contacted it' (WPh 75), the fact remains that, on the other hand, speech 'is already inarticulately present to what is not yet said' (WPh 82), just as the word, the *muttum*, always keeps a vestige – the sounds impish, treacherous – of the *muttus* which structures it; that there is a 'colloquy prior to all articulated dialogue' (WPh 93). Elsewhere: 'One needn't be immersed in language [*langage*] in order to be able to speak. . . . What speaks is something that must remain outside of language as system and must continue to remain there even when it speaks' (DF 8). How then to keep fidelity to the fact that 'one does not paint in order to speak, but in order to keep silent' (Lyotard 2015: 38)?

2. *The extension of the theoretical gesture in a certain practice of film. But this practice also precedes the theoretical gesture, and gives weight to it, in a creative process.* Lyotard did in fact make several films on celluloid or video, from an essentially experimental perspective. From the end of the 1960s, within a collective composed equally with Dominique Avron, Claudine Eizykman and Guy Fihman, he participated in the creation of the video *L'Autre scène*, a six-minute short film on the analogy between the work of the dream and the work of film, intended as the extension of a seminar on Freud. A first, silent version dates from 1969, but the film in its definitive form, with sound, was not completed until 1972. Two years later, Lyotard made on his own an experimental three-minute short film on 16mm, *Mao Gillette* (1974). The 1970s drew to a close with *Tribune sans tribun* (1978), an appropriation by Lyotard of a report for French television, for the programme *Tribune Libre*. He chose to turn it into an experimental video whose title indicates its subject: the absence of legitimation of the speakers on the televised stage, who speak of anything and everything. Thus ended a decade of experimentation with images, certainly on one level modest, but which, for

a philosopher, is an event sufficiently rare for it to be appreciated for its proper value. A last film, from 1982, *À blanc*, breaks with the experimental gesture in that it presents itself first and foremost as an exegetical essay in images, on someone else's aesthetic expression (which is why I excluded it from my survey in the little book that I scribbled on the question of cinema in Lyotard (Durafour 2009)): it's a brief video dedicated to a series of canvases by the painter René Guiffrey.

Lyotard's entry into cinema theory is hence made by a double path: the aesthetic of the figural, and the practice of experimental cinema. The latter appears to put the former to work in a filmic figural aesthetic: that is to say, a *pulsional* aesthetic, subject to desire, to difference, through which the cinema would escape from industry (capital, revenue, the same, *mimesis*), and clearly would be an art. We will come back to this shortly. First, however, we can conclude this second point by noting that the Lyotardian concept of acinema directly inspired for several years the work of Guy Fihman and Claudine Eizykman (*V.W. Vitesses Women, Ultrarouge-Infraviolet*). Moreover, the experimental filmic moment played an essential role for Lyotard in the passage from the aesthetic paradigm of modern art (Cézanne, Klee) – which for the most part, even if not uniquely, characterises *Discourse, Figure*, and which is primarily a legacy of the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty – to the great dialogues with contemporaries (Jacques Monory, Valerio Adami, Sam Francis, Karel Appel) which began thereafter.

1973

Everything on the theoretical plane begins then with the initial text 'Acinema'. It first appeared in 1973 in the special issue of *Revue d'esthétique* edited by Dominique Noguez, 'Cinéma: Théorie, Lectures', and was subsequently collected, the same year, in *Des Dispositifs pulsionnels*. In this text, Lyotard appears to apply the principles of figural aesthetics developed in *Discourse, Figure* to cinema.

Experimental cinema is a cinema of irreverence and 'irreference', as Dominique Noguez (1979: 42) said; it refuses the conventions and the analogical imprint indexed on dominant *mainstream* cinema. It is a cinema of apparition more than of appearances; appearing, in effect, to comply with all the characteristics of the figural: a cinema which refuses *mimesis*, representation, narration (which the recognition of figures implies: what do they go on to become?). Lyotard calls it *acinema*: being the negation (a-) of the majoritarian (industrial, commercial) cinema, that is to say of the cinema norm, where the movement (*kinéma*) and the image are neutralised in a middle range acceptable to the largest number of viewers. Acinema is experimental cinema. But not all experimental cinema is acinema. Or, more precisely, Lyotard restricted the concept and excluded all cinema which still, *despite everything*, rests on the narrative and the figuration

(surrealist cinema, for example) – that is to say all cinema in which the indexical analogism still plays the role of a *signifying* centre. Acinema is cinema which accepts ‘what is fortuitous, dirty, confused, unsteady, unclear, poorly framed, overexposed’ (Ac 33): intensities, timbres, nuances, colours, drips, bursts, breaks, scratches, cuts, openings. In a word, the *energetic*: the tenuous, the unstable and shifting, which always escapes the deterministic and reductive constructions of the well-formed.

In this text Lyotard proposes, on either side of the ‘normal’ movements of *mainstream* cinema, a distinction between a cinema of extreme mobility, or ‘lyric abstraction’ (Ac 40) (for example, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling), and a cinema of extreme immobilisation, or ‘tableau vivant’ (Ac 40) (he doesn’t give any examples, but such a gesture characterises, among others, a filmmaker like Andy Warhol. . .). In my book *Jean-François Lyotard: questions au cinéma. Ce que le cinéma se figure*, I spoke of ‘*exo-cinema*’ and ‘*endo-cinema*’ (Durafour 2009: 35–8). Exo-cinema corresponds to the cinema of agitation and makes representational figuration *explode* by attacking it from the exterior: it’s the cinema of the *avant-gardes* (notice the original military sense of the expression). Endo-cinema corresponds to the cinema of immobility and makes the figuration *implode* by drilling it from its interior: it’s the cinema called *underground*, literally ‘of the sub-soil’ (even if historically, we know, the term responded to other imperatives).

Lyotard paid dearly for his fondness for experimental cinema, which did no more at the time than develop the underground movement theoretically,⁴ and which had to remain in purgatory for a long time. (And incidentally, when he became interested in a completely different cinema later, people didn’t really take it into account.) Pascal Bonitzer – characteristic of the attitude that we recalled in opening, and in his typically virulent style – has not hesitated to qualify acinema purely and simply as ‘puke’ (1976: 70). Various commentators continued to be frequently discomfited by it. Thus Dominique Chateau, in *Cinéma et philosophie*, after having recalled, almost as an excuse, that ‘[Lyotard’s] contribution to the philosophy of cinema is, if not contradictory, at least relatively disparate’ (2003: 126), situates the essence of this contribution (incidentally he is not the only one to do so) in the figural (the word first encountered in a working note of the late Merleau-Ponty). Yet without doubt we owe the recourse to the terminology of the figural in the filmic regime less to Lyotard himself than to those who are – more or less directly – influenced by him. In *Discourse, Figure*, cinema is mentioned only in a footnote concerning Méliès (yet it is to this foundational text that most of the figural analyses of cinema refer). And in ‘Acinema’, there is not the slightest mention of the word ‘figural’, even though it was readily available (and was still brand new). . . All this is, to say the least, curious, and opens up some complex questions that it is not possible to deal with here (among which the principal one is surely this: is cinema a plastic art?).

This last point, which accounts for the ambiguous status of *underground* cinema, which is lodged *in figurative representation*, then makes possible another reading: a more accurate reading of this text which is usually poorly understood, and certainly very poorly liked (but perhaps because poorly understood?) – but also liked, when it is, for the wrong reasons.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE FIGURATIVE

Lyotard always displayed a great suspicion of the critical gesture, which consists in wanting to take hold of an exteriority, but which only perpetuates *in another sense* what it rejects. To this posture he always preferred clandestine infiltration, undercover work.⁵ I recalled this earlier here, apropos of language. One can say the same for representation: *it is impossible to position oneself in complete exteriority to it*.⁶ With language, we must situate ourselves *in language outside of language*, in the eye of the cyclone (the pivotal zone where everything is very calm), as it exists as a ‘well of discourse’ (DF 7). We affirm that there exists in the same way a *wellspring of figuration* in which the figure is secreted from representation; that is to say, from what is always already figurative. And years later, Lyotard will end up somewhere else by detaching himself from the figural. In *What to Paint?* (1988), he did not hesitate to write that *Discourse, Figure* is ‘a book which makes a screen to the anamnesis of the visible’ (WP 96).⁷

For Lyotard produced more than one text on cinema (even if we silently pass over the multiple examples taken from cinema in the framework of his philosophical writings). While these writings are ‘disparate’ (Chateau’s word is appropriate), this does not however permit the conclusion that they lack coherence or unity, or that they remain minor or imperfect thoughts. Lyotard simply never felt the necessity or the desire to collect them or to develop them into a book. There is no need to ask why: it is a fact. We just have to live with it.

What are these texts? It is not my project to make a catalogue or some kind of taxonomy. If I leave aside – in addition to ‘Acinema’, which I have just spoken about – pages here or there where mention is made of such and such a film, such as interviews mentioning the films presented during the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* at Beaubourg in 1985 (which require a proper perspective), we can propose as the most important the following texts, generally put in the garbage of cinema theory:

1. An article in English, ‘The Unconscious as Mise-en-Scène’ (1977), which appeared in the collection edited by Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello from the University of Wisconsin Press, *Performance in Postmodern Culture*. It presents, in the entire final section, an analysis of Michael Snow’s *La Région central*, starting from the work of the unconscious.

2. ‘Deux métamorphoses du séduisant au cinéma’ [Two Metamorphoses of the Seductive in Cinema] (1980), a contribution to the book edited by Maurice Olender and Jacques Sojcher, *La Séduction*, which appeared from the publisher Aubier-Montaigne. Here the principal focus is Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and just at the end, very rapidly, some films of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg (*Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland*, *Winifred Wagner und die Geschichte des Hauses Wahnfried von 1914–1975*).
3. Finally, the posthumous publication of the manuscript of a conference paper delivered in Munich in 1995, ‘Idée d’un film souverain’ [The Idea of a Sovereign Film], included by Dolorès Lyotard in *Misère de la philosophie* in 2000. The subject of this crucial paper is filmic invention in the so-called ‘modern’ cinema (in Yasujirō Ozu, Orson Welles, etc.).

If the first of these texts still inscribes itself in the continuity of the acinematographic libidinal theses, it is not at all the same with the other two. These two texts do not break purely and simply with acinema, but oblige us to reconsider its nature. Starting by coming back to the seminal article of 1973 and proposing a slightly different reading, we are clearly enabled, in my opinion, to grasp an important stake of this text which has so far escaped us. We can understand what it was about Lyotard’s writings that made the cinema theorists uncomfortable: their refusal to constitute a system (system is closure, capitalisation, hoarding, theorisation), to offer a fully delivered, established global theory; their ‘drift’ (a Lyotardian word), that one could take for disorder, or see as superficiality. The necessity which is ours, to which they oblige us, is that of needing to *present and represent* them in order to ‘squeeze the juice out of them’, so to speak. But in this lies what in Lyotard’s eyes always counted the most (and this was also the basis of his interest in experimental cinema): a fondness for differences, a fidelity to singularities, a passion for dissensus.

‘Two Metamorphoses of the Seductive in Cinema’ and ‘The Idea of a Sovereign Film’ do not then fully satisfy the model of acinema. Let us move forward from this observation. It is difficult, in effect, to see *Apocalypse Now* or *The Magnificent Ambersons* as experimental films. That being so, they include some *acinematographic moments* (the helicopter attack with all its smoke and pyrotechnics in the first, for example). This is what Lyotard calls, in the second of these texts, ‘*filmic facts [faits]*’ (ISF 68; my emphasis). In this regard, if one reads a little quickly, one could see a *conservative* weakening of the orthodox acinematographic position, particularly in ‘The Idea of a Sovereign Film’. This text was undertaken after the publication of the two volumes of *Cinema* by Deleuze, from whom Lyotard acknowledges, in the note sent to the journal *Liberation* on the occasion of his death, having appropriated several ideas (MP 193). Had

Deleuze not presented a philosophy of the event and of singularity able to think *all cinema*, including when it is figurative and narrative (which it is never either straightforwardly; if such were the case, as Eugène Green (2003: 35) said, there would be no difference between a cinematic film and a tourist film⁸), and even if the figurative and narrative axis is not the one retained by the author of *The Movement-Image*.⁹ In this conference paper, Lyotard in fact displaces the acinematographic marker taken as filmic *totality* towards the ‘filmic fact’, which alone guarantees the *sovereignty* of film. What does this mean? It means that sovereignty excludes totality.¹⁰

Do we witness a frightful rupture?

1. One can first of all say that the ‘filmic fact’ *makes a difference, visually or auditorily*, in relation to a globally maintained ‘narrative-representative form’ (ISF 64, 68). In this sense, it maintains fidelity to the difference of the event because such a difference can only be perceived on a homo-audio-visual ground from which it is detached (Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, called it the ‘phenomenal field’). When there is only difference, when difference is all there is, when difference makes a *totality*, it cancels itself as difference. When everything is different, nothing is different. It is therefore appropriate to keep the figurative ground, at least in this capacity. But there’s more. In addition, the filmic fact is a ‘faded’ reality; it consists in ‘moments [which correspond to] outcrops of the visual or the vocal in the surface of the visible and the audible’ (ISF 69).

2. Next, this gesture permits us at once to widen the scope to Deleuzian proportions,¹¹ to make a case for the application of the acinematographic criterion, without abandoning it, to a cinema *more expanded* and less restrictive than acinema strictly speaking. To be given henceforth by examples of acinematographic moments, of ‘filmic facts’, of ‘intense instants, temporal spasms, which are only transcendent because they *emanate from immanence*, that is to say from a realist experience and existence – one says in filmography: neo-realist’ (ISF 62; my emphasis). Moreover, was acinema really as restrictive as it appeared to be? One will remember what we recalled earlier: that despite superficial appearances, the profound originality of the acinematographic thesis of ‘Acinema’ *bore principally on the figurative and representative image* (which begins to explain the absence of the explicit terminology of the figural...). This was precisely the *underground* cinema: attacking representation *from the interior of representation* (the under-ground), and not with any putative and deceptive exteriority, like the eye of the cyclone (one will recall the image from *Discourse, Figure*) where it is neutralised at its centre. Thus, in ‘Acinema’, it is clearly *underground* cinema which Lyotard prefers, for reasons, one could say, of a ‘general philosophical’ nature (total exteriority is an illusion). Now what does he say of this cinema? This: ‘the paradox of

immobilisation is seen to be clearly distributed along the *representational axis*' (Ac 40; my emphasis). This is the only sentence in the article where Lyotard addresses himself directly to his reader, which would suffice to underline its importance, or at least its difference. Moreover, in placing the accent on the representation of the perceptive reality in the image, such a formula appears to be a counter-current to the figural perspective. Without doubt that's why this exclusively disruptive perspective will never really have existed (as will be said differently in later texts).

FILMIC MATTER (PRESENT POTENTIAL)

In the philosophical and aesthetic canon, matter, in contrast to form (which informs), has generally been taken to be purely passive. The source is above all Platonic – the *Timaeus* (50c) describes matter as 'the stuff from which everything is moulded', the principal 'wax' (*ekmēgeîon*), 'modified and moulded by the things that enter it, with the result that it *appears* different at different times' (Plato 2008: 42). Matter is only the '*that in which*' of the thing, whose form is the '*that for which*'. It is, before all information, unlimited, therefore imperfect, tending towards non-being, since it is form which has definition and completion (form is closed).

Nevertheless we can say right away that such an opposition – to which materialism only takes the opposite stance, which means it fails to put it in question – is problematic. Henri Focillon, in *The Life of Forms in Art* (1934), had already attracted attention to this apparently extravagant proposition: matter determines form, *matter is the form (the determination) of form*. And he proposed to speak of *matters* rather than of matter, in order to designate the plural and complex 'formal vocation' (Focillon 1989: 97) of matter: grains, waves, notches. Such matters – marble, metal, wood, graphite, charcoal, voice, etc. – are not anodyne for an artistic project, nor are they equivalent to each other; they differ according to their flexibility or the effects aimed at. '[A] charcoal drawing copied in wash . . . at once assumes totally unexpected properties; it becomes, indeed, a new work' (1989: 100). In the same way, the tool in its materiality, and not in the gesture which manipulates it (which is form, the design of the artist), contributes to making the final form of the work: 'Certain plates reek of the tool and conserve a metallic aspect [from it]' (1989: 114). Moreover the term 'form', in an expression such as 'matter imposes its form on the form', need not be heard univocally in both occurrences: the 'form' of the matter is not the 'form' of the form. The formative power of the matter has its proper principles, which must not be confused with those of form.

Lyotard will go a lot further than Focillon (who in the end remains rather conventional, especially from the point of view of 'well written' language) by inscribing himself ardently in this opening. From the Greeks – as we know – matter

is opposed to *logos*. We cannot *say* matter, even with the scholastic (originally Aristotelean) title of the *materia prima*, pure potentiality, of perceptive experience, because it gives us nothing to grasp. Lyotard responds: no discourse, which is always putting-in-form, putting-in-signs, can *signify* matter. Matter can only be *expressed*.

Lyotard thinks matter in a first period through the figural, and the privilege of the visual over the visible and the readable: *the event of the image*. (This period culminates in *Discourse, Figure*, still in some regards very much a conventional book in its format and organisation.) That being so, the pulsional energy of desire makes established figures burst like a saxifrage plant; it breaks the decorum of the monotone, of the predictable, of that which is set in stone. There is a transgression of codes and writing by the irruption of the primary processes (intensities, desires) in the secondary processes (language, actions) by virtue of what Freud called, apropos of the formation of dream images from unconscious thoughts, the *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit* ('the taking into account of figurability'). It's this figural matter which, in reflection on cinema (Philippe Dubois, Raymond Bellour) or art in general (see the work of Georges Didi-Huberman), has dominated and still largely dominates the field of analysis.

But we have seen that the figural does not constitute the whole of the Lyotardian thought of the image, and that cinema breaks with it. And it's without doubt here that Lyotard's reflections are more fascinating for both *theoretical research* and *an actual aesthetic* of cinema. In the last decade of his philosophical activity, Lyotard spoke of '*an energetics or . . . a general dynamics*' (MT1 199; my emphasis).¹² This 'energetics' envisages matter, no longer from the figural point of view, but *from the side of figurative invention*. What is the difference between the two? In a word: the figural concerns the presentable, not the representable (that is to say it concerns the event, not the thing, the *res*). The 'general energetics' is the fact that *there is*, in the representation, the unrepresentable. What is unrepresentable is presence itself. The presence of sound is not sonorous, as the presence of blue is not blue, as the presence of a rock is not mineral. This amounts in the end to the grandeur of art, when it opens onto the originary opening of our rapport with the world: the presentation of unrepresentable matter – which fixes itself as objective (in the various social, professional, etc., uses that we make of matter, which *present* everything quite well) – is in fact always aporetic. The question of painting: how does the colour perceive itself in itself? The question of music: how does sound perceive itself in itself?

The presence of the sensible world that cannot be taught, that is anterior to any symbolism and accomplished anew in art through its initial chromatic stridency, has always persistently overtaken pale discourse and its wan digressions . . . Beyond the spirit that meditates and the eye that reads, vision is already in the process of seeing. (MT2 659)

From this then comes the exigency of a new aesthetic orientation, which Lyotard here and there calls ‘*anaesthetic*’ (in opposition to the traditional aesthetic of forms). This aesthetic is concerned not with presented forms, but with matter; and a matter not only stolen, pilfered from between forms, but a matter which it is all the more possible to welcome in its unrepresentability because it is itself unformed. Since the aesthetic subject, which here no longer recognises itself (recognition is form), is numb, groggy, precisely *anaesthetised*. One cannot see matter (one sees forms); one can only eye it up. In the sense not of objectification (this is still form: constraint), but of the French verb *mater*, understood as eyeing up furtively *as if one had not clearly seen*. As if one could not get over having seen that one had not seen.

This matter finds a fertile ground for expression in the cinematic image. We must not let ourselves be misled by its photorealism. I have argued in my book already cited (it is impossible for me to repeat here the long demonstration) that, through a relationship with pictorial hyperrealism, which plays itself out in cinema, including in its more figurative and narrative aspects, there is an explosion of the criteriology of traditional, analogical *mimesis* (resemblance). In cinema, one has little business with an image which resembles, better than another image, the thing which it models. Rather, cinema is concerned with the fact that, for the eye habituated to old images, the thing resembles *itself* in a way never before seen (black-and-white changes nothing here: for decades, this has been the norm of the realism of the photographic image, and colour in cinema only started to increase the exoticism, the fantasy, the dream. . .). It’s not a question of saying that cinema gives us the ‘things themselves’: how would we know what they are? But the thing, as Lyotard said apropos the hyperrealism that I am drawing out here for cinema, comes half-way to meet us, and stumbles; it becomes ‘*a bit too much* before the eyes’ (MT2 485;¹³ my emphasis). It is not only abstraction which gives a skewed image of the world: ‘*showing reality*’ (MT2 471¹⁴) can do this just as much. In this ‘excess of presence’ a certain conventional image of the world *dematerialises* itself, under the cover of its minute and scrupulous renewal, and *materialises* what can only be eyed up [*être maté*]: a donation of presence-matter contravening established forms so that the classic aesthetic subject (with its coded certitudes, its mastery) feels itself threatened through and through by being touched by nullity. The form is that by which the figure *exists*, the matter that by which it *insists*. And this insistence is, at the same time, my private concern, my business, but also a demand which intimidates me intimately.

I will give, in conclusion, a very short filmic example of an analysis according to anaesthetic matter. John Cassavetes’ *Faces* (1968) is celebrated in the history of cinema for its big shots exacerbating the grain of the skin of the body; an operation intensified in various ways by the Éclair NPR, Kodak 4x16mm film, and powerful lighting by quartz lamps. One can do a figural reading of this film

by paying attention to the jump cuts, the broken speeches, the over-the-shoulder shots, the variations of focus, and so on and so forth; in short, by paying attention to the vicissitudes of the form. But the ‘general energetic or dynamic’ makes sense of it in another way: a way of *insisting*, and not of *rerouting* (the figural) with regard to images, *including those more figurative, more coded*. It’s a question of a phobic matter, which places the spectator before the anxiety of his or her proper aesthetic condition: that of perception. Better: it performs here, in these various images, an affection – what I have called above a commanded and intimidating intimacy, coming from *the unrepresentable presence of matter (the unrepresentable in representation)*. This announces: that in virtue of which we are beings of sensation is not anything. In the face of these skins visible to the pores, in the face of *these prominent holes*, with all their doors and all their windows (Leibnizian language), it’s not only the form of the skin that we see [*voyons*]; we see [*matons*] the anxiety of being penetrated ourselves because if we see, if we feel, *it’s because we are penetrated*. Matter reveals sensation to us as anxiety by connecting us to the unrepresentable condition of presentational perception. Like Klein bottles, we do not have a (full) body because we are only gaps, voids, atomic bonds. And this is because we have neither interior nor exterior (the film then asks: where are feelings, emotions, held? Between bodies? . . .). Matter is ‘the suffering of a body visually bewildered’ (PF 231); in effect, unrepresentable matter, inasmuch as Lyotard defined the artistic power of cinema in this way: ‘I think that a filmmaker, if he or she is not a commercial trader of images, carries in him or herself the idea of a sovereign film where from time to time the realist plot allows the presence of the ontological real to pass . . . to which [idea] no object, here no film, can correspond in experience . . .’ (ISF 69).

Translated by Ashley Woodward¹⁵

NOTES

1. This chapter was first published in *La Furia Umana*, Paper #3 (2013), pp. 121–36.
2. ‘Every word immediately becomes a concept, inasmuch as it is not intended to serve as a reminder of the unique and wholly individualized original experience to which it owes its birth, but must at the same time fit innumerable, more or less similar cases – which means, strictly speaking, never equal – in other words, a lot of unequal cases. Every concept originates through our equating what is unequal’ (Nietzsche 1976: 46).
3. The *topos* of phenomenology since Husserl. On the notion of *Lebenswelt*, see in particular Husserl 1970: 103–13.
4. See, in addition to the academic work of Noguez from the end of the 1960s (on North American underground cinema), from the other side of the Atlantic: Parker Tyler’s *Underground Film* (1969), the articles by Annette Michelson and Manny

Farber in the journal *Artforum*, Jonas Mekas's *Ciné-journal* (1971), P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film* (1974), etc.

5. Once again, permit me to refer you to my book – Durafour 2009: 69.
6. The reading of Lyotard for cinema that I propose here distinguishes itself from this complementary work by Jean-Louis Déotte. Déotte is less interested, in Lyotard, in what is thought of cinema or what can aid us *by first beginning from reflections on cinema*, than to what, in his philosophy of language (*The Differend*), can serve the purpose of an understanding of the phenomenon of montage: namely, montage as the expression of a *differend* between frames thought of as analogues of linguistic phrases, as irreducible ‘universes’ (each phrase presents a type of universe), between which it is necessary, despite everything, *to link* (one will have recognised the axiomatisation of *The Differend*). See in particular Déotte 2004.
7. I do not have the liberty, in the context of the present introductory article, to develop the arguments advanced by Lyotard in this extremely rich book. We can just note a difficulty attendant to the figural: at what time can we identify it? Because to identify is to recognise, and we can only recognise what is repeated, what reproduces itself a number of times. But is this then still the figural?
8. In Deleuze's two books, incidentally, experimental cinema occupies a restrained and marginal place (gaseous perception), while the central paradigm for thinking cinematic perception is *liquid* (equivalence of all spatial points, a-centric, immanence . . .) in opposition to ordinary human perception of the *terrestrial* type (differentiation and hierarchisation of points, centric, transcendence).
9. Deleuze repeats it in several places: ‘In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or of inventing forms, but of capturing forces. For this reason no art is figurative’ (2003: 56).
10. The argument is primarily political: totality aims at unity under a dominating ‘grand narrative’, and is therefore the enemy of singularities, feelings, events; of all others, all dissenters. In fact, where there is totality, the sovereignty of ‘little narratives’, of differences, is neutralised by homogenising and generalising reason.
11. The ‘filmic facts’ are described by Lyotard in terms which are manifestly very Deleuzian: for example, ‘vacuoles, or blocks of time, in the realist-narrative progression’ (ISF 64).
12. I develop this question of the place and role of matter in Lyotard's aesthetics in further detail in the epilogue to MT1.
13. TN: Translation modified.
14. TN: Translation modified.
15. TN: Thanks are due to Véronique Malcolm for generously taking the time to provide helpful comments on this translation.

REFERENCES

- Bonitzer, Pascal (1976), *Le Regard et la Voix*, Paris: UGE.
Chateau, Dominique (2003), *Cinéma et philosophie*, Paris: Nathan.
Deleuze, Gilles (2003), *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, London and New York: Continuum.

- Déotte, Jean-Louis (2004), *L'Époque des appareils*, Paris: Lignes-Léo Scheer.
- Durafour, Jean-Michel (2009), *Jean-François Lyotard: questions au cinéma. Ce que le cinéma se figure*, Paris: PUF.
- Focillon, Henri (1989), *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles Beecher Hogan, New York: Zone Books.
- Green, Eugène (2003), *Présences. Essais sur la Nature du cinéma*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.
- Husserl, Edmund (1970), *The Crisis of European Sciences and Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Lyotard, Jean-François (2015), ‘Freud According to Cézanne’, trans. Ashley Woodward and Jon Roffe, *Parrhesia* 23, pp. 24–40.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1964), *Sense and Nonsense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1976), ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-moral Sense’, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Kaufmann, New York: Viking.
- Noguez, Dominique (1979), *Éloge du cinéma experimental*, Paris: Centre Georges-Pompidou.
- Plato (2008), *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. R. Waterfield, Oxford: Oxford University Press.