On Benjamin's Theory of Film

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Gisèle Freund, Walter Benjamin in the Bibliothèque Nationale

(1939)

A highly condensed note in *The Arcades Project*, dating probably from the late 1920s, offers what is possibly the broadest and boldest statement on film that we have today from Walter Benjamin. The note has its place in the context of methodological formulations concerning the temporality of historical interpretation and what is conceived of, in this serendipitous study of nineteenth-century Paris, as historical dream and historical awakening. One awakens from "that dream we name the past" only by descending back through remembrance into the convolute of the dream itself; one wakes simultaneously *from* and *to* a dream past in order to waken a present day. So historical awakening is prepared in dreaming of the past. It is nothing short of a "Copernican revolution in historical perception" that Benjamin announces here, in Convolute K of the *Arcades*: a momentous theoretical turn toward a dialectical method of historical remembrance pivoting on "the higher concreteness of now-being."[1] Such perception is dialectical because it is turned toward past and present at the same time; it is their virtual convergence as monad and mutual tension in an experience of recognition. In this precipitous constellatory temporality, in which time at once shrinks and expands, the moment of remembrance is thus "preformed" in its object.

Benjamin distinguishes this encapsulated historical force field of now-being, this oscillating now of recognizability, from what we like to call the present in the construction of chronological time, "since [now-being] is a being punctuated and intermittent." You begin to see here the connection to film form in this species of montage thinking, this dialectical theory of historical understanding, or, to put it a

little differently, this monadological conception of truth. Benjamin goes on to expound the so-to-speak chemical interaction of present and past in his historical-materialist philosophy of time—the present as a critical and creative distillation of the past—in words that bear on the stated intention of *The Promise of Cinema*, namely, to reconstruct a specific set of historical debates on the subject of film:

> And this dialectical penetration and actualization of former contexts puts the truth of the present action to the test. Or rather, it serves to ignite the explosive materials that are latent in what has been…. To approach, in this way, what has been [*So an das Gewesene herangehen*] means to treat it not historiographically, as heretofore, but politically, in political categories. [K2,3]

By fostering a new awakening of the many-sided discourse on the medium of film in Weimar Germany, *The Promise of Cinema* has enabled a broad comprehension of the theoretical-political sources of Benjamin's foray into film theory, something anyone interested in Benjamin must be grateful for. (Among the selections having a significant relation to Benjamin's fragmentary theory, I would mention in particular those by Balázs, Kracauer, Lukács, Hofmannsthal, Ruttmann, Moholy-Nagy, Haas, and Richter.)

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Penned in the lilliputian handwriting typical of his mature production, Benjamin's forgotten note on film is found in Convolute K of the *Arcades*, which he titled "Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, Anthropological Nihilism, Jung." The language of the note has a phenomenological ring, as is not infrequently the case with Benjamin in the Twenties; it proposes a kind of filmic deconstruction of the embedded intentions—the perceptual or intuitional forms and rhythms—at work in the body of modern machines, intentions fundamental to the problematic of modern art. The manuscript is illegible at the very beginning, so it is not clear whether Benjamin wrote, in his lilliputian handwriting, *Auswicklung* or *Auswirkung*::

> Film: unfolding [resultant ?] of all forms of perception, tempos and rhythms, which lie preformed in today's machines, such that all problems of contemporary art find their definitive formulation only in connection with film. [K3,3][2]

This sort of grand statement about the paradigmatic function of film is also found at the end of the "Work of Art" essay of 1936, where Benjamin characterizes the film medium, whose structural discontinuity in continuity he has emphasized, as the training ground or training device (*Übungsinstrument*) for dealing with the new tasks of apperception that face the human sensorium ("the human apparatus of perception") in an era of advanced technology. The political-educational

function of cinema is exemplified first and foremost in the cultivation of that disciplined and dynamic multilateral attentiveness he designates, with a nod to Dada, "reception in distraction," a productively dispersed form of perception, a coordinated distraction (*Zerstreuung*), such as emerges in the process of learning to read motion pictures, to negotiate the nonstop metamorphosis of image and discern its sequencing. This continuous interruption of view—technical precedents for which *The Arcades Project* traces in nineteenth-century modes of exhibition and spectatorship—constitutes the shock effect of film, which, "like all shock effects, seeks to induce heightened attention" (Baudelairean principle). For the ability to receive and decisively process impressions while being drawn in different directions—multitasking as a canon of perception—has become a condition of modern metropolitan life and its proliferating traffic; moreover, this sort of multilevel assimilation of fast-changing environments, often involving the navigation of ambiguities, is said to be "increasingly noticeable in all areas of art."[3]

Especially striking in the *Arcades* note, where the aesthetics of film is taken as epitomizing the diverse problems, and hence tasks, of contemporary art,[4] is the emphasis on the operative rhythms to be unfolded in today's *machines*. Already in the late Twenties this would have presupposed the experiments in "absolute film" by Léger, Richter, Ruttmann, Eggeling, et al. (compare, in particular, Ruttmann's comments on tempo, velocity, and rhythm in *Promise of Cinema*, 451). But it would be a mistake to think that Benjamin, the admirer of Adolphe Menjou and Katharine Hepburn,[5] is indirectly advocating the production of "abstract" or cubist cinema, with its "non-representational" musical and choreographic geometries, or that he is seeking in some way to subvert mimetic or naturalistic conventions.
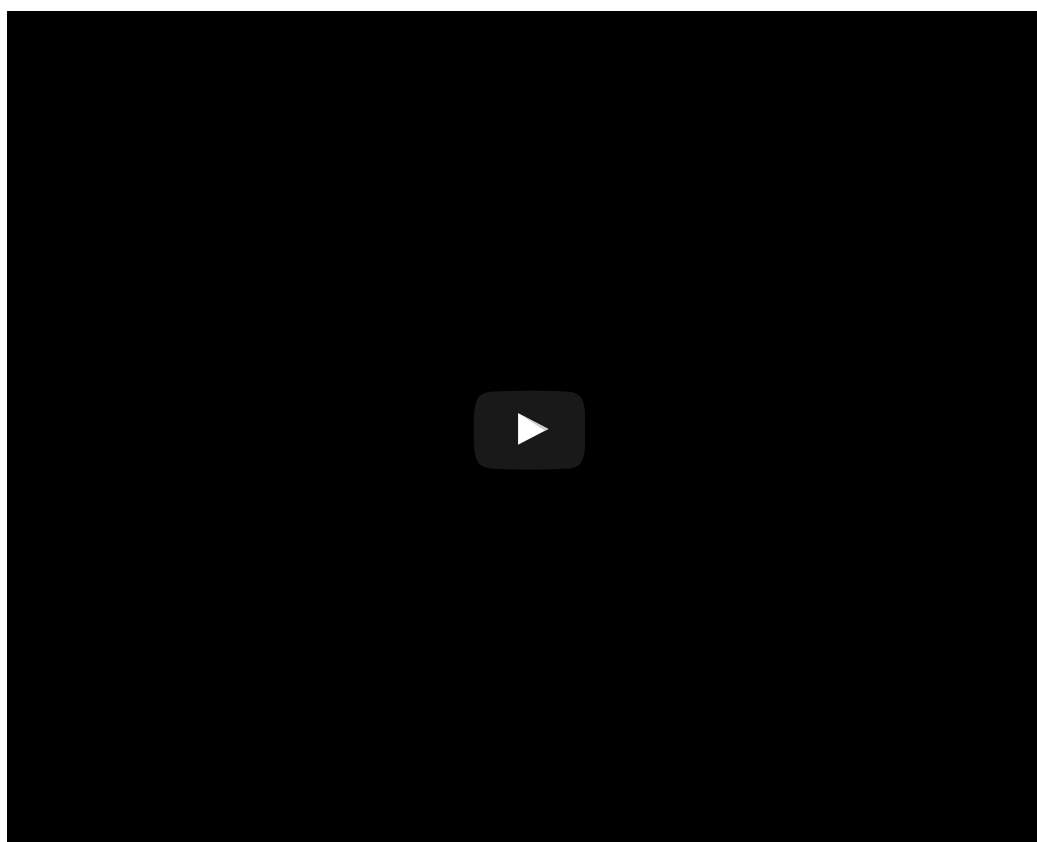
Stage Coach (Gregory La Cava, 1937) with Katherine Hepburn and Adolphe Menjou

In fact, Benjamin's attitude toward the cinematic avant-garde in that period was very close to Kracauer's (see the latter's "Abstract Film" of 1928 in *Promise of Cinema*, 465-467). In Convolute K of the *Arcades Project*, having warned of the sometimes subtle dangers of sentimentality, the calculated "comfort of the heart" that qualifies art for consumption, he writes that anyone recognizing the capacity of popular film to *transform* the mass-consumerist tendencies of "that strange and perhaps formerly unknown material which is kitsch" into educational-political tendencies will be "inclined to disallow the pretensions of abstract film, as important as its experiments may be" (K3a,1). Implicit at this point is the difficult question of a properly filmic plot design.[6]

So what is at stake in the *Arcades* note, it would seem, with its pre-Deleuzian adumbration of a new spatiotemporal image-thinking and image-writing in film, is the cinematic discovery and articulation of hitherto hidden possibilities of experience, "tempos and rhythms," in play in the collective machinery, or let us say technology, the manifold apparatus, of contemporary society—an ostensible reconciliation of formalist and mimetic imperatives in a kind of historically informed avant-garde realism. The latter would have to be understood in a broad sense that comprehends both Chaplin and Mickey Mouse, both the documentary and the oneiric tendencies of film. The idea of rhythm, as an element mediating between form and content, is evidently crucial here.[7]

Thus Benjamin's focus on Chaplin's distinctive way of moving (*Gestus*), the ensemble of gestures by which he "dissects the expressive movements of human beings into a series of minute innervations." As in Brecht's aura-negating dramaturgy, the method of montage, which Benjamin compares to the functioning of the assembly line in the process of production, has been literally and viscerally incorporated into the mimesis of character in Chaplin's Little Tramp, who thus becomes a living emblem of the principle of compartmentalized assemblage: "Each single movement he makes is composed of a succession of staccato bits of movement. Whether it is his walk, the way he handles his cane, or the way he raises his hat—always the same jerky sequence of tiny movements applies the law of cinematic image sequence [that is, discontinuous images in a continuous sequence] to human motorial function."[8] This pointed "jerky" rhythm—elsewhere likened to the action of a "fairground marionette" and of a kitchen kettle[9]—is especially vividly on display in the "break walking" performed whenever the innervated protagonist gets free of the conveyor belt at the beginning of *Modern Times*.

Benjamin emphasizes the universal social import of this deeply and specifically materialized mimetic: "With his art, Chaplin confirms the old insight that only an imaginative world that is firmly grounded in a society, a nation, and a place will succeed in evoking the…highly differentiated resonance that exists between nations" ("Chaplin in Retrospect," *Promise of Cinema*, 400).

The few surviving notations of Benjamin's on Disney's Mickey Mouse—who, we might say, shares with Chaplin the idiom of the circus—similarly highlight, in this endlessly challenged set of animal bourgeoisie, the creatively and often grotesquely and ominously distorted reflection of human experience in the modern world.
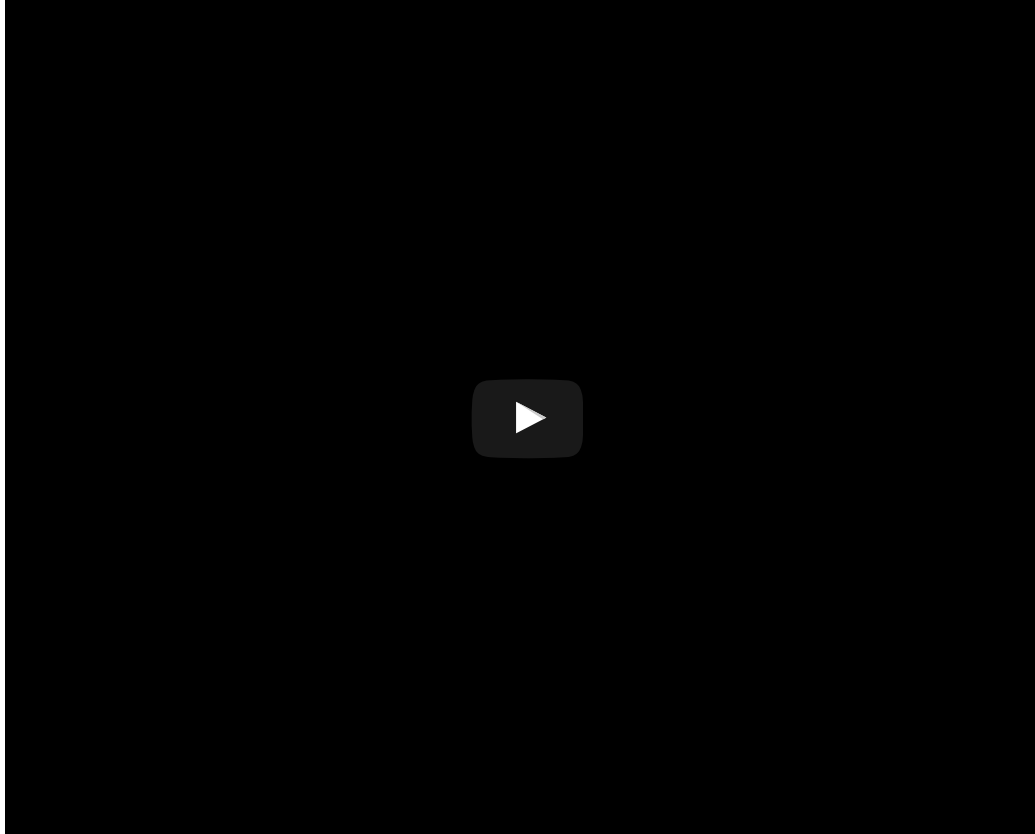
These cartoons hold up a funhouse mirror, as it were, to an objectified and technologized humanity, a humanity displaced in one degree or another from the sphere of tradition and exposed to new worlds of velocity and sudden change, dissonance and dis-traction, new domains of experience characterized by the intensive, if not brutal, "interpenetration of reality with equipment."[10] In *The Arcades Project* (W8a,5), the figure of Mickey Mouse is adduced in connection with the destabilizing and emancipatory dynamic of the "cracking open of natural teleology," which proceeds "in accordance with the plan of humor." In the case of the Disney characters, with all the attendant didacticism, technologization entails "the moral mobilization of nature," something bespeaking the intimate merger of nature and humanity, of objects and agents, in a malleable and protean—indeed, explosive and implosive—improvisatory image space, one that recalls the extravagant satirical vistas of Fourier and Grandville in the nineteenth century (as documented in convolutes W and G, respectively, in the *Arcades*).

(http://www.thepromiseofcinema.com/inc benjamins-theory-of-film/grandville-des-animaux-1842-hand-col-print-drilling-mouse-2-54016-p/)

(http://www.thepromiseofcinema.com/inc benjamins-theory-of-film/grandville-des-animaux-1842-hand-col-print-knitting-mouse-2-53683-p/)

Mickey Mouse, Traffic Trouble (1931)

"Mickey Mouse…disrupts the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in humankind"—so Benjamin writes in a fragment of 1931, "Mickey Mouse" (*Promise of Cinema*, 403). In section XVI of the "Work of Art" essay, where the concept of the optical unconscious is developed, Mickey is associated, still more anarchically, with aspects of modern experience lying outside "the *normal* spectrum of sense impressions," that is, with the realm of psychoses, hallucinations, and dreams. Like the typical figures in fairy tales, Mickey Mouse is a "figure of collective dream;" and just as the former body forth the deep-rooted energies of a pre-industrial world, so, through Mickey and his ultimately reassuring encounters—his jitterbugging—with chaos, the mechanisms of repression implicit in modern civilization are given uncanny festive articulation—though without the fairy tale's "atmosphere"—in a busy graphic dimension of pure surface (to adopt Lukács's phrase [*Promise of Cinema*, 378-379; compare 605 (Bernhard Diebold) on "animated dance"]).

Benjamin's idea of an optical unconscious has, of course, generated much comment and speculation. Initially introduced in the 1931 essay "Little History of Photography,"[11] it is interwoven, in the literary montage of the Artwork essay, with a passage extracted from the 1927 newspaper article, "Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz," one of his first published statements on film (it is included in *Promise of Cinema*, together with the Schmitz article). At issue in all three texts is the photographic disclosure of "a vast and unsuspected field of action [*Spielraum*]," to quote from the Artwork essay. He goes on there to adapt the passage from the polemical "Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz":

Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung ruins [*weitverstreuten Trümmern*]. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended…. Clearly, it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. "Other" above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious [*ein unbewußt durchwirkter [Raum]*—that is, the sort of space that a body "works through" reflexively, without conscious thought].[12]

In the reply to Schmitz, which lays stress, more generally, on the vaunted emergence of "a new realm of consciousness" with the advent of film, Benjamin frames this project of shattering the prison house of routine commodified existence with a notion omitted (presumably, so as to avoid mixing metaphors) in all versions of the "Work of Art" essay, namely, the notion of the distinctively "prismatic work" of cinema: "To put it in a nutshell, film is the prism in which the spaces of the immediate environment—the spaces in which people live, pursue their vocations, and enjoy their leisure—are laid open before their eyes in a…meaningful and passionate way." There follows an earlier and less trenchant version of the passage on calm adventures taken among widely scattered remnants of the opened-up—blasted/refracted—prison world, and then he adds: "The vicinity of a house, of a room, can include dozens of the most unexpected stations."[13]

There are striking anticipations of this conception in Balázs's chapter on "The Close-Up" in his *Visible Man* of 1924 (which evokes the camera's unconcealment of the secret life of things in "those hidden little corners" of daily existence), as well as in Hofmannsthal's 1921 piece, "The Substitute for Dreams," and Kracauer's 1924 review, "A Film" (*Promise of Cinema*, nos. 176, 178, and 222; see also 252). The explosive prismatic illumination of inconspicuous stations within the confines of an ordinary milieu (and, it must be added, in the topography of a face) is primarily, Benjamin argues, a function of sudden change of location or perspective,[14] as effected by camera movement, adjustments in focus and lighting, and editing processes, that is, by film rhythm. Just think of the sequences in *M* where Peter Lorre is hiding in a warehouse, and of the way this dull and ordinary collective space, as the police enter the scene, suddenly becomes a *Spielraum* full of unexpected situations.

Here is a kind of film poetry, to use Lubitsch's happy term (*Promise of Cinema*, 209), arising purely out of the resources of cinematic naturalism. And—this is all-important to Benjamin—it is filmic poetry capable of an educative political impact, one that, in its immediacy and widespread appeal (compare no. 164 [Balázs] and no. 229 [Karl Freund] in *Promise of Cinema* concerning "popularity"), would exceed anything to be found in the contemporary theater. (I leave open the question whether such prismatic poetry might work to *restore* a non-meretricious and, as it were, profane aura to film.)

For Benjamin, the collective subject of these milieux films was the variegated class of workers, and the political value of the film medium lay in large part in its redemption of the "humanity" thought to be everywhere relinquished in "offices and factories." Too well-known to need quoting are the passages in the Artwork essay (sections X-XII of the 1936 version) on the film actor's ultimate victory over the apparatus by means of the resources of the apparatus itself, that is, the actor's piecemeal exploitation of his or her own self-alienation before the camera and recording equipment for the purpose of producing an "equipment-free" image of human experience as such. At issue in the paradoxical production of this critical promise of cinema is what Benjamin calls a test performance (*Testleistung*), a formulation I would like to set beside the passage from the *Arcades* (K2,3) I quoted at the outset, the passage concerned with the historical materialist testing (*Probe*) of the researcher's own present day. If technology characteristically poses a test of some kind for the human subject, then the film director and crew, through their technological penetration and artistic "overcoming" of collective milieux, and through the "meaningful and passionate" illumination of human situations that results from this process, can be said to put the truth of the technological test itself, whether implicitly or explicitly, to the test.

So it is both formal integrity or texture and human actuality or "physiognomy" (Balázs's term as well[15]) that Benjamin describes and calls for in the art of film. The bombardment of Odessa in *Battleship Potemkin* and the pogrom against factory workers in *Mother* are cited, in the reply to Schmitz, as exemplary sequences: both convey the suffering of the urban masses as though engraved in "running script" (a formula recalling Balázs's point, made a year earlier, about the "allegorical power" of Eisenstein's imagery [*Promise of Cinema*, 507]).
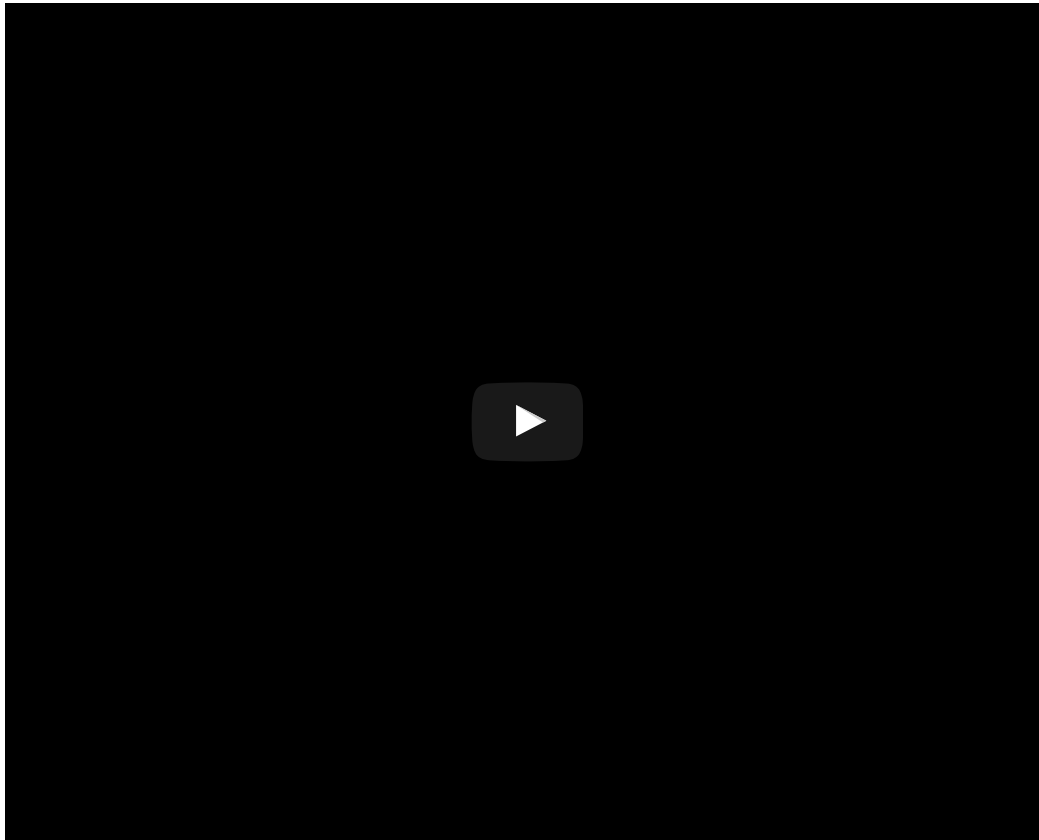

Such fluid "inscription" would have everything to do with cinematic rhythm understood as the sublimation of geometry and pathos. We can think of rhythm in general as involving its own dialectic of before and after, insofar as a rhythmic trajectory, like the trajectory of a melody or of a fairy tale, is not simply linear and developmental but also recursive and anticipatory, embodying at virtually every point in different ways both a recollection of its beginning and a prefiguration of its end, and thus articulating—it may be, in the form of disaggregation—a spatiotemporal plasticity.[16]

In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin refers to the world of flânerie, that is, the practice of urban strolling that—like the practice of collecting—functions as a model for the project as a whole, in terms of just such a spatiotemporal dynamic: an "interpenetrating and superposed transparency" (S2,1). And we are invited to consider this stratified and elastic[17] trans-parence, this strangely encompassing *Durchdringungs- und Überdeckungstransparenz*, as a medium of presentation and experience: in short, an elaborately interwoven *textual* world. Here is the point of departure for a shock-heightened prismatic attentiveness. Drawn as he is by the virtually tactile resonance of the past in discrete objects of the urban environment (in the name of a restaurant, in a particular shop front or stretch of

paving stones), the flâneur, with untoward "felt knowledge" (M1,5), senses the city's history everywhere superimposed on its present day in a kind of fluid, "running" palimpsest, a sustained and even kaleidoscopic dissolve. It is through this interpenetrating rhythm of reading as a form of anticipatory remembrance, what Benjamin, the translator of Proust,[18] regards as "dimensional seeing" or layered now-being, that the commonplace aspect of the commonplace is penetrated and dispelled. Film flânerie—say, the last seven minutes of *L'Eclisse* or the whole of *L'Atalante*—would be no less a rhythm of disclosure, however enigmatic or phantasmagorical.
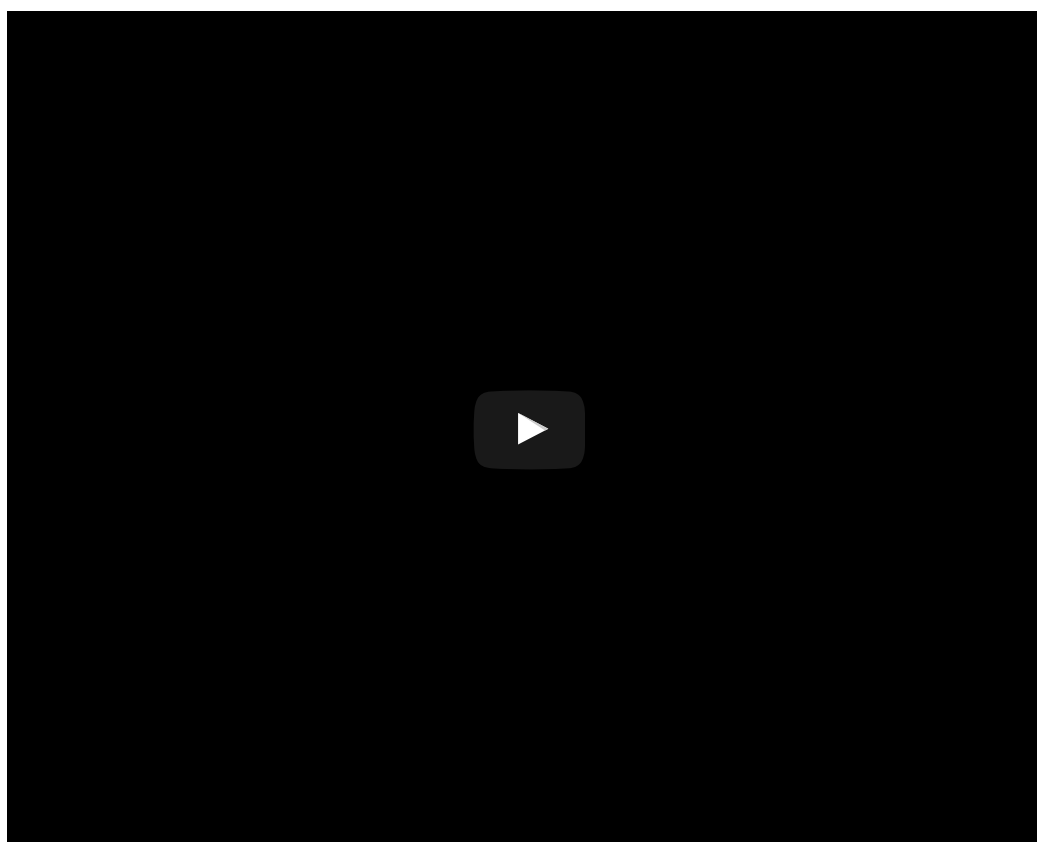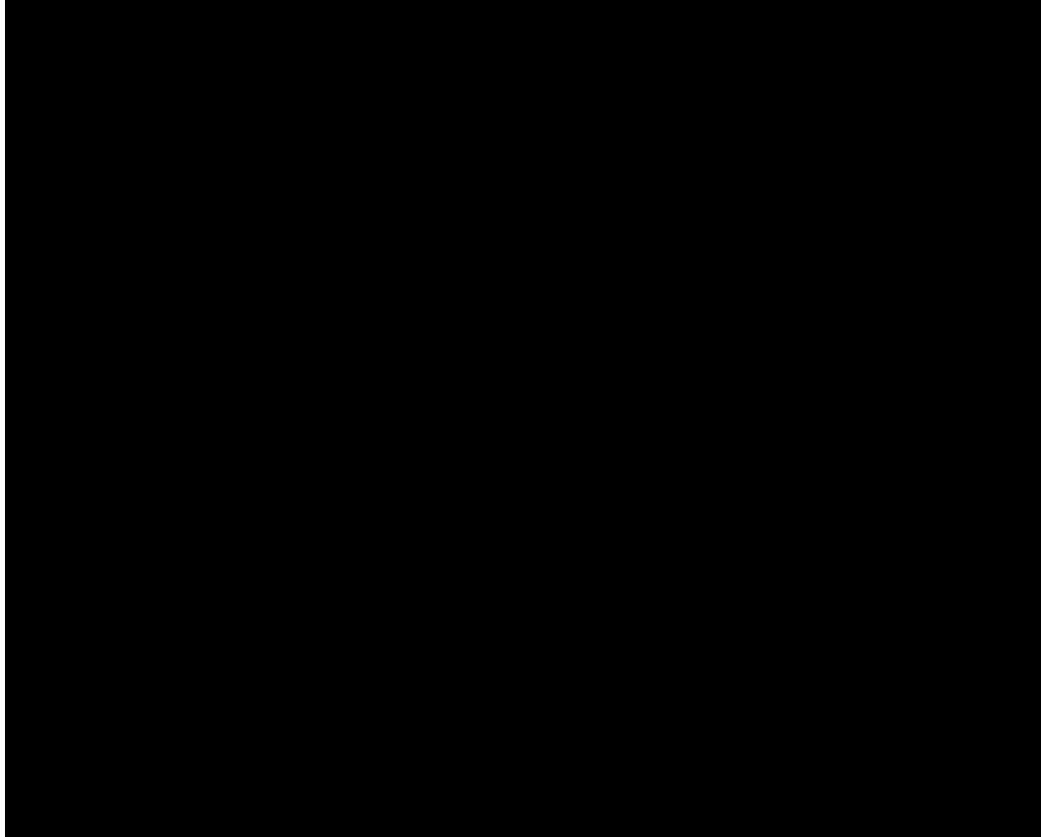
Jean Vigo, *L'Atalante*, 1934

And perhaps the elusive nonverbal language of film rhythm, which Eisenstein always viewed as essentially tied to plot development, can likewise be conceived as the medium of a potential interarticulation of figural becoming and philosophical being in the mode of a higher concreteness, something like the verbal mode of image-thinking in Benjaminian composition. May we assume that it is, at least in part, the possibility of this politically constructive transformation of classical antitheses, with the production of "new synthetic realities" (O°,3), that would make of motion pictures a pattern for the other arts?

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Howard Eiland recently retired from teaching literature at MIT. He is co-author, with Michael W. Jennings, of *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (2014) and co-editor of volumes 2-4 of the Benjamin *Selected Writings*, all published by Harvard University Press. He has also contributed to the translation of Benjamin texts, such as *The Arcades Project*, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, *On Hashish*, and *Early Writings* 1910-1917. His articles on literature, philosophy, film, and jazz have appeared in journals such as *boundary 2*, *Telos*, *Philosophy and Literature*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Chicago Review*. He is currently at work, with Michael W. Jennings, on a new translation of Benjamin's *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*.

Previously published translations of Benjamin's writings have been occasionally modified in this article to bring them closer to the original German.

[1] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 388-389, 391-192 (Convolute K1,1-3 and K2,3). Hereafter cited by convolute number. Benjamin's phrase in K2,3 is "die höhere Konkretion des Jetztseins (Wachseins!)."

[2] "Der Film: Auswicklung <Auswirkung ?> aller Anschauungsformen, Tempi und Rhythmen, die in den heutigen Maschinen präformiert liegen, dergestalt daß alle Probleme der heutigen Kunst ihre endgültige Formulierung nur im Zusammenhange des Films finden." Compare, in *The Arcades Project*, K3a,2: "One can characterize the problem of the form of the new art straight on: When and how will the worlds of form [*Formenwelten*] which, without our assistance, have arisen, for example, in mechanics, in film, in machine construction, in the new physics, and which have subjugated us, make it clear for us what manner of nature they contain [*das was an ihnen Natur ist*]?… Of course, this brings to light only one moment in the dialectical essence of technology…. [For] there lives in technology another impulse: to bring about objectives strange to nature, along with means that are alien and inimical to nature—measures that emancipate themselves from nature and master it." And also Q1a,8: "The fact that film today articulates all problems of modern form-giving [*Gestaltung*]—understood as questions of its own technical existence—and does so in the most stringent, most concrete, most critical fashion, is important for the following comparison of panoramas with this medium…."

[3] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (second version), trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 120, 132n33. See also Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction," in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 3-13.

[4] This claim has been made in other quarters, of course: "The cinema would seem to be the highest stage of embodiment for the potentialities and aspirations of each of the arts./ Moreover, the cinema is that genuine and ultimate synthesis of all artistic manifestations that fell to pieces after the peak of Greek culture, [that synthesis] which Diderot sought vainly in opera, Wagner in music-drama, Scriabin in his color-concerti, and so on and on." Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, 1949), p. 181.

[5] In a letter of October 16, 1927, to Alfred Cohn, Benjamin mentions seeing "some good films with Adolphe Menjou" in Paris; they were *A Social Celebrity* (1926; directed by Malcolm St. Clair, and also starring Louise Brooks) and *Blonde or Brunette* (1927; directed by Richard Rosson). See Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 3, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), p. 293, 295n. Gershom Scholem visited his friend Benjamin in Paris in August-September of that year, 1927, and remembers: "Several times we went to the movies, because Benjamin especially admired the actor Adolphe Menjou and automatically went to every film he appeared in." Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1981), p. 133. In a letter of July 20, 1938, to Gretel Adorno, Benjamin writes from Brecht's place of exile in Svendborg, Denmark: "I recently saw—for the first time!—Katharine Hepburn. She is superb." Gretel Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Correspondence 1930-1940*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2008), p. 230. The film in question may have been *Holiday* (release date: June 15, 1938) or *Bringing Up Baby* (release date: February 18, 1938).

[6] This question is briefly raised in Benjamin's "Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz" (see *Promise of Cinema*, p. 358), which I discuss in the text below.

[7] The idea of rhythm is important elsewhere in Benjamin. See, for example, "Theological-Political Fragment" (ca. 1920-1921) on "the rhythm of messianic nature," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 306. And see below in this article on the figure of the flâneur.

[8] "The Formula in Which the Dialectical Structure of Film Finds Expression" (1935), trans. Edmund Jephcott, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 94. Compare, from the "First Sketches" section of *The Arcades Project*, G°,19: "Careful investigation into the relation between the optics of the myriorama and the time of the modern, of the newest. They are related, certainly, as the fundamental coordinates of this world. It is a world of strict discontinuity; what is always again new is not something old that remains, or something past that recurs, but one and the same crossed by countless intermittences [*das von zahllosen Intermittenzen gekreuzte Eine und Selbe*]. (Thus, the gambler lives in intermittence.) Intermittence means that every look in space meets with a new constellation. Intermittence the measure of time in film [*Zeitmaß des Films*];" and also H°,16: "On the rhythm of today, which determines this work. Very characteristic is the opposition, in film, between the downright jerky [*stoßweisen*] rhythm of the image sequence, which satisfies the deep-seated need of

this generation to see the 'flow' of 'development' disavowed, and the continuous musical accompaniment. To root out every trace of 'development' from the image of history and to present becoming—through the dialectical rupture between sensation and tradition—as a constellation in being: that is no less the tendency of this project."

[9] The phrase about the marionette appears in both the feuilleton piece, "Chaplin in Retrospect" (1929), reprinted in *Promise of Cinema*, 399, and in a fragment of 1928 or early 1929, "Chaplin," in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 199, where it is also said that "Chaplin greets people by taking off his bowler, and it looks like the lid rising from the kettle when the water boils over." See further the fragment of ca. 1934, "Hitler's Diminished Masculinity," apropos of *The Great Dictator*: "Chaplin has become the greatest comic because he has incorporated into himself the deepest fears of his contemporaries" (*Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 792).

[10] "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 116. "[Mickey's] life is full of miracles—miracles that not only surpass the wonders of technology but make fun of them. For the most extraordinary thing about them is that they all appear, quite without any machinery, to have been improvised out of the body of Mickey Mouse, out of his supporters and persecutors, and out of the most ordinary pieces of furniture, as well as from trees, clouds, and the sea. Nature and technology, primitiveness and comfort, have completely merged" ("Experience and Poverty" [1933], in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 735). On the Disney hyperbolizing of the modern imbrication of nature and technology, and on Mickey Mouse's hybridizing "cyborgian" embodiment of disjunctive temporalities, especially in the cartoon's early years, see Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 174-180. Regarding polyphonic and polyrhythmic processes making for "disparate temporalities" in film practice generally, see pp. 247-248. In her rich and sophisticated analysis of Benjamin's theory of film in the context of the German 1920s and 30s, Hansen refers to "the historic role of film as the most advanced technical medium of [Benjamin's] time" (p. 79; see also p. 277), but she does not mention the passages from *The Arcades Project* concerning the paradigmatic significance of the film medium.

[11] See Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 510-512.

[12] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 117. Compare Siegfried Kracauer: "In recording and exploring physical reality, film exposes to view a world never seen before, a world…which cannot be found because it is within everybody's reach. What is meant here is of course not any of those extensions of the everyday world which are being annexed by science but our ordinary physical environment itself. Strange as it may seem, although streets, faces, railway stations, etc., lie before our eyes, they have remained largely invisible…. The cinema is materialistically minded; it proceeds

from 'below' to 'above'…. Guided by film, then, we approach…ideas…on paths that wind through the thicket of things" (*Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960; rpt. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997], pp. 299, 309).

[13] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 17 (trans. Rodney Livingstone). Compare *The Arcades Project* (C1,9): "Couldn't an exciting film be made from the map of Paris? From the unfolding of its various aspects in temporal succession? From the compression of a centuries-long movement of streets, boulevards, arcades, and squares into the space [*Zeitraum*] of half an hour? And does the flâneur do anything different?"

[14] "Weniger der dauernde Wandel der Bilder als der sprunghafte Wechsel des Standorts bewältigt ein Milieu" (Benjamin, "Erwiderung an Oscar A. H. Schmitz," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977], p. 752). Compare Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 16, on a Kracauer review from 1924.

[15] See, in particular, Balázs's last book, *Theory of the Film*, trans. Edith Bone (1952; rpt. North Stratford, NH: Ayer, 1997), chapters 8 and 9; on machine physiognomy, see pp. 98-99, and on "microphysiognomy" and "the microdramatics of the close-up," pp. 65-88.

[16] "I have written and spoken many times about montage as being not so much the sequence of segments as their *simultaneity*:…the *simultaneous conjoint presence* on one canvas of elements which are, in essence, *the successive phases of a whole process*…. [T]he various elements are simultaneously seen both as separate *independent units* and as *inseparable parts of a single whole*…. [T]hat unity of *simultaneity* and *sequence* proves to be a unique means of producing an absolutely specific effect." S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, *Towards a Theory of Montage* (1937), trans. Michael Glenny (London: British Film Institute, 1991), p. 86. See also, on filmic rhythm and "montage rhythm," pp. 227-248.

[17] On elasticity, compare Herbert Jhering, "The Acoustic Film," in *The Promise of Cinema*, p. 551. Jhering anticipates the argument of Benjamin's Artwork essay with his point here that silent film "overcome[s] mechanics [by] extracting its effects from the mechanical."

[18] In his "Conversation with André Gide" (1928), Benjamin quotes Gide concerning Proust's reliance on the cinematic devices of composite imagery (*surimpression*) and dissolve (*Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 94). The phrase "dimensional seeing" (*dimensionalen Sehen*), in the text below, is cited from Rudolf Borchardt's *Epilegomena zu Dante* (1923) in *The Arcades Project* (N1,8).