Does Lyotard have a significant place in the philosophy of film? He has written intriguing short pieces on film, but they are but a small sample among many more important essays on other subjects. The cinema pieces show neither particularly acute interpretations of film, nor great conceptual invention. None of his books are on film and none of them have a sustained discussion of cinema. Yet, he is one of the foremost writers on art and aesthetics of the twentieth century, renewing important concepts such as the postmodern and the sublime, while coining new ones like the figural and the differend. Influential writers on film, such as D N Rodowick, Jean-Michel Durafour and Jacques Rancière have written at length on Lyotard in relation to film, demonstrating critically the value of his philosophical and political ideas. To take their works further, this volume brings together Lyotard's writings on film, and critical assessments by film and art theorists and philosophers. Their studies allow us to ask and begin to answer the sceptical question: why Lyotard and film?

Lyotard is not alone in having skimmed over cinema. Despite its newfound passion for film, philosophy has not always been in love with moving images. It is quite a recent relationship. Philosophy of film requires an interest in the moving image, something that Lyotard broaches in his early essay 'Acinema'. Traditionally, philosophy has shown greater interest in the image that does not move: the image that represents something else, that tells truths and sometimes misreports, rather than the image that flickers fleetingly only to disappear in favour of the next. Many twentieth-century philosophers (Wittgenstein in particular[1]) have been interested in cinema as form of life and as entertainment, using it as an imaginative exercise, more easily associated with a dreamlike experience or practical experiment than pure philosophical effort. In 1936, Sartre published a book devoted to the systematic, historical, and philosophical study of images and thought,[2] but, regrettably, he "takes into account every type of image except the cinematic image."[3] In the early part of the twentieth century, although there was undoubtedly a curiosity about this new art form, there was also a general philosophical

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[1] Read and Goodenough (ed.), *Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Szabados and Stojanova (ed.), *Wittgenstein at the Movies: Cinematic Investigations* (Lexington Books, 2011).

[2] Sartre, *The Imagination: A Psychological Critique,* trans. Williford and Rudrauf (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[3] Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

devaluation of film, matched by a lack of a consistent philosophical study of the moving image. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, Cavell and Deleuze undertook the systematic study of the philosophical significance of films. Importantly, they would not confine themselves to producing a mere philosophy of art - in the sense that a movie would be used to illustrate a certain philosophical idea or a certain argument, say ethical or political. Instead, they allowed film to have a strong effect on philosophical praxis.

The classic works of these film philosophers, most notably Cavell's *The World Viewed* and Deleuze' *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*, have no parallel in recent philosophical film studies, film theory, or aesthetics. But what about Lyotard's writing? What could be considered Lyotard's major philosophical work on cinema? It is strange to give importance to the relationship between Lyotard and moving images when, in his writings on the arts, his comments about cinema (or about audio-visual images in general) are scarce compared to his deep and influential studies of other arts (painting and theatre foremost among them). In the case of cinema, however, the echoes of his thoughts greatly surpass the number of comments directly addressing cinematic art (as well as sporadic references to films). Nonetheless, his name is absent from the majority of anthologies and introductory books published on film and philosophy. When mentioned he is reduced to brief references.[4] To fill this gap, it is important to understand the nature of this echo, of how Lyotard's philosophy and aesthetics resonate with cinema without spending much time discussing film directly.

In answer to questions about Lyotard's influence, the translation here of two of his essays on the moving image (including his last conference on cinema[5]) are key to a better understanding of how his ideas on modern philosophy of art might inspire an aesthetics of film. From these works, concepts such as 'acinema', 'figural', and 'sublime' come to have a resilient impact on recent continental film philosophers and aesthetic theories. In this vein, we would argue that the 'figural', far more than 'acinema', is the stronger concept to have drifted from the other arts into his philosophical analysis of the cinema (see, for example, Brenez's figural analysis of the

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[4] Two important exceptions: Rodowick, *Reading the Figural: Or, Philosophy after the New Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). Trahair, "Jean-François Lyotard" in Colman (ed.), *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers* (Durham/Montreal: Acumen/McGill-Queens University Press, 2009).

[5] Lyotard, "The Idea of a Sovereign Film," XXXX

dialectics between seeing and saying). The idea of the figural, taken from *Discourse, Figure* should be seen as ancestor to the idea of acinema. The event of a figural interruption to discourse is the model for acinema's rupture with the conventions of film. This argument is about conceptual influence. But what about influence over the full scene of film theory? And is this influence mutual? More precisely, in light of the contributions collected here, how should we delineate and define Jean-François Lyotard's place in aesthetics and philosophy of art, and more specifically in philosophy of film? Where should film be placed in his thought? Is it central, or marginal?

The first work by Lyotard addressing moving images appears in the 1970s, a decade dominated by film theories based on Lacanian psychoanalysis, structuralism, semiotics, and Marxist film theory. More than reading films within these theoretical paradigms, philosophy of film is concerned with general questions of scepticism, of knowing and doubting the world through cinema. It is concerned with the philosophical interest of film as thinking. It seeks to define the role and nature of cinema in relation to other forms of art, most often around its ontological and temporal paradoxes. Rather than revealing the truth hidden beneath each image, read from within the paradigm of psychoanalytic film theory, today's cinematic analyses prefer to follow a network of many different 'circles' within a post-continental-post-analytic philosophical approach. Following the path of Lyotard's own philosophical interests, film theory has entered into post-Kantian philosophical debate, not only as regards artistic and aesthetic experience, but also in terms of ethical and socio-political pragmatism, as a self-transformative experience that engages the viewer in a perceptual, intellectual, and philosophical activity. This explains in part why Lyotard's work is rich in references for reflection on film. He has given a conceptual and sense-based vocabulary to this post-Kantian moment; notably in shifting the sublime, the event, the ethical, and ideas of political hiatus and interruption centre stage. It is not the organised flow of movement and its conditions that matter, but rather the breaks in flow and resistances to ordered conditions. This is exactly what Lyotard saw in avant-garde cinema.

Recently, philosophers of film such as Badiou, Rancière, and Agamben have renewed the ethical and political engagement of contemporary film studies. Although film is not discussed in his 1974 *Libidinal Economy*, we find a sketch for a libidinal economy of cinema in "Acinema", in which Lyotard presents a distinction between

cinema (mainstream films) and acinema (experimental and avant-garde films). We would also argue that *Libidinal Economy* is itself in many of its most emblematic moments unusually cinematic for a work of philosophy; notably, in its initial lingering on the unwrapping of a body, in the various dramatic scenes of discombobulation by labyrinth, and perhaps also in its picturing of sexual exchange, money and desire chiming surprisingly with post-crisis Hollywood high finance films. By considering the division between cinema and acinema as time-based, he divides the latter into two distinct "dispositifs" that he borrows from his philosophy of art, especially from the aesthetic divide between representation and anti-representation, between narrative and figural anti-discourse. Lyotard distinguishes the "tableau vivant" (extreme immobility) and "abstraction" (extreme mobility) as the two opposite ways of analysing acinema.[6] This aesthetics of film, concerned with the gesture of the work, differentiates cinema from acinema by taking into account the temporal economy of images and sound, as well as sensuous and affective qualities of films, rather than an intellectualized system of moving images, or an analysis of the images' representational content, or a study of the processes of film-making. The turn towards affect and stasis against narrative turns out to have been one of the longest running themes of his philosophy. He teaches us to be aware, but also wary, of the apparatus hidden behind the naturalness of narrative. Lyotard enjoins us to fight against the results – the lessons – of resolutions in plot and drama so essential to the propaganda of everyday normality and consensus.

Running in parallel to Lyotard's own philosophical and political development, the aesthetics of film dates back to the peak of Marxist theory and the proliferation of debates between narrative and non-narrative experimental films. Narrative films were considered pre-eminently political, in the sense that the filmmaking process had to deal with representation and critique of economics and politics on grand and personal scales over periods of social conflict and contradiction. In order to undo the hegemony of the plotline and lesson, of the flow of film, Lyotard argues that all moving elements in a film (both audio and visual) are submitted to a consideration of selection and elimination, without which the final cinematographic object would be an assemblage of perfect and clear images along with imperfect and unclear ones. According to the practice of film-making, surrounding mess should be effaced in favour of the purity, the

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[6] Lyotard, "Acinema," trans. Livingston. In Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *The Lyotard Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 169-180 [this needs to cross reference to the version in the volume]

noiselessness, of clean image flow. Lyotard is concerned with the manner and reasons behind the question of which moving elements are selected and which ones eliminated. More radically, he asks why such a choice should take place at all. As ever in his philosophical work, where the underlying motive is always political and ethical, the driving concern is to reveal the political and to render it ethical. By proposing the concept of acinema, he is struggling against a political economy of production-consumption (the law of value that rules the 'which' and the 'why' of the productive process). His claim is for a paradoxical *jouissance* of sterile moments, which he compares to the evanescence of pyrotechnic displays. It is important that the image should go up in smoke after capturing our senses, rather than flow into a reassuring result, tamed, and remaining to be exchanged in markets of ideas and values. Against Žižek's Hegelianism, Lyotard has always resisted investment in a combination of interpretation, resolution and judgement. Like the later sublime event, the image of acinema, is the last ethical call to resist capitalist exchange and surplus value and to re-intensify the arts without subjecting them to another metanarrative of salvation and redemptive truth over time. The interesting question is not whether this ethical turn is possible, since there is plenty of evidence from avant-garde film that it is. The deep question is whether film is any different, any worse or better, than the other arts at this ethical work of resistance.

Again, consistent with Lyotard's wider philosophical interests and the development of his thought around *The Differend*, perhaps part of the answer can be drawn from a study of time where, following Deleuze (and Guattari), as Lyotard often does when he works on film, cinema takes on the role of the art of temporality *par excellence*. In a temporal economic reading of the process of economic exchange and consumption in cinema, we might say that in the sterile moments of acinema there is neither a 'before' (production) nor an 'after' (consumption). Instead, there is only 'the presenting present,'[7] the 'not yet' or 'no longer' present. The flow of film is halted in a present that renounces its past and foregoes its future. This is the paradoxical value of sterility for Lyotard. It is the moment that expresses the inexpressible, that presents the unpresentable, and that creates a sense for timelessness. If mainstream narrative and representational cinema aim at ordering time and movements, within an economic

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[7] Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Bennington and Bowlby (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991)

perspective of the film industry and production (the minimum resources for the highest effects, leaving no waste behind), in acinema we find the power of those films that synthesize both spatial and temporal ordering in the present as abyss, rather than over time as formative narrative and medium of exchange. Acinema therefore responds to the need to create sounds and images just for the sake of '*il y a*' or 'it is', for the sake of an event outside of time and of sensations for themselves rather than for judgement and exchange. In acinema, sterile movements are not eliminated or avoided. They therefore escape the dominance of *mise-en-scène* techniques that outline narrative linearity. Drawing from his longstanding interest in hyperrealism in painting, in Jacques Monory for example, Lyotard cites the example of the hyper-realistic helicopter scene in Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which breaks with realism and with "seduction."[8] The *tableaux vivants* of the scene interfere with our conditioning towards the real and hence interrupt two flows of realism: the flow of the film as realist representation and the flow of the real as smooth and well-ordered unfolding over time. We become caught in the tableaux, unable to move on and unable to resolve them as real and manageable – exchangeable – events.

However, hyperreal *tableaux vivants* are still representative and figurative forms of art. We are familiar with them in classical paintings by Caravaggio and contemporary video art by Bill Viola. They stand in opposition to abstract cinematic forms, closer to abstract expressionism and non-objective art, which could be considered as truly figural acinema, not representing a reality and not being recognizable as one: beyond even the hyperreal. Later, therefore, Lyotard will critically rethink acinema and its libidinal economy, as well as its psychoanalytical and ideological analysis anchored in the stark conflicts of the seventies. He does this by developing his approach to experimental films and with the apparently contradictory introduction of, following Bazin, some of the most representative of post-Second World War neo-realist filmmakers (De Sica, Rossellini, and Antonioni). It is only an apparent contradiction, because the move back to realism is designed to take us within the tableau, within the image, to take it apart rather than inflate it. Where hyperrealism creates an interruption effect by suspending our trust in the real through full-frame intensification, the realist image has stronger

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[8] Lyotard, "Two metamorphoses of the Seductive in Cinema", XXXX

resources for breaking our conditioning to the flow of the real and to the consistency of the image through frame breakdown.

As interesting as Lyotard's sparse comments on the dominant narrative cinema are, his thoughts on experimental and avant-garde filmmakers such as Eggeling, Thompson, and Baruchello, are more so. They derive from his studies of Pollock, Rothko, Francis, Richter, among other abstract painters, and point to a more radical direction for film theory and practice. These avant-garde pieces are self-referential film works that become both subject and object. They involve a performative instantiation of questions regarding the supposedly simple functions attributed to the cinematic apparatus designed to select and register reality in its spatial consistency and temporal linearity (if we follow Aristotelian narrative structure) thereby creating an artwork with minimum waste and dead moments. However, by privileging formal self-reflexivity, these self-referent and non-narrative films risk lacking any possible political content, inviting a critique of nihilism and apathy, thereby negating Lyotard's passion for the political. From a Marxist analysis of cinema's paradigmatic function, we might argue that all "acinematic" artwork is a waste of time (wasted sterile movements, wasted money, unrewarding experience, and so on). Acinema would lead to unproductive time in its lack of narrative purpose and in its failure to fit into Aristotelian and post-Hegelian narrative structures.

Lyotard's answer to this critique is that the aim of avant-garde moving images is not to record reality, but to film the unpresentable. Experimental and avant-garde films free themselves from cinema's photographic, representational, and realistic nature in order to bear witness to the voices silenced by realist flow, organisation and narrative. But, how should one derive pleasure from works of art such as Thompson's kaleidoscopic *N.Y., N.Y.* (1957) or Snow's frameless *La Région Centrale* (1971)? Lyotard's work seeks to elide such questions by slipping from pleasure to jouissance, and from the beautiful to the sublime. The completion of pleasure and purposiveness without purpose of the Kantian beautiful are to be replaced by the vibratory tension of jouissance and the contradictory co-presence of pleasure and pain, attraction and repulsion, in the incomplete sublime event. The paradoxical fruition of avant-garde films is spatial and temporal fracture. It defies the possibility of suspending the tension between objective time (narrative and intra-diegetic temporality) and subjective time

(the completed act of having seen and having heard). As a result, spectators experience timelessness – the event of no result at all.

Lyotard argues that neo-realist filmmakers "write" extreme acinematic immobility, these are Ozu's 'cases of stasis' or 'still lives' that Deleuze synthetized as the direct time-image.[9] But the "written" movement may also be saturated with audio-visual excessive speed. From slow cinema to fast editing, images can tell us "another story", independent of the official plot. The hegemony of sovereign powers can be resisted by the danger of sovereign moments. Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) is one of Deleuze's examples of the crystal-image, not only in the sense that Welles' film fits the concept, but also and more importantly, that this philosophical concept was created for Welles' films. This is where a distinction can be drawn between the two French thinkers. The crystal allows for other stories in ways that seem impossible for Lyotard's events. For Lyotard, the Welles movie involves a coexistence of narrative and chronological time, which characterizes mainstream films, with punctuations by descriptive time, thereby introducing a certain type of arrhythmia into time.

Contrary to Deleuze's long plot and *mise-en-scène* descriptions (consistent with auteur theory), Lyotard's method is erratic and unsystematic. His work with painting or with theatre is a dialogue, a shared journey, but cinema comes after a philosophical inquiry which, most of the time, is about something other than the seventh art. He never analyses a whole movie, preferring instead to choose a particular sequence of a specific film to exemplify what he has in mind; he might well have an entire *oeuvre* in purview, but it still remains an exemplification rather than a provocation to philosophy. So, finally, why is there no systematic film theory by Lyotard? Maybe it is because there ought not to be systematic theory (for anything).[10] The event resists the system, as avant-garde acinema shows us, in its paradoxical and ethical moments of suspension.

Susana Viegas and James Williams

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[9] Deleuze quotes respectively Schrader, Burch and Richie's ideas in *Cinema 2*, trans. Tomlinson and Galeta (Continuum, 2008), 15-16. Lyotard, "The Idea of a Sovereign Film," XXXX

[10] Durafour, *Jean-François Lyotard: questions au cinéma* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009).