Politicising Agency through Affect

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The key concern of this practice-led PhD is that lived reality and visual culture exist in a personal and political relation, one which politicises a viewer's search for alternatives through the image. This suggests that cultural productions are an ideal context for addressing matters of social change; it also reverses the classic critiques of spectatorship within Fine Art, which emphasise critical awareness, the transmission and possession of knowledge and also activity, or participation, in the promotion of political agency in spectators. In this thesis I have used my own moving image and live performance art practice as the basis for reframing these perspectives on spectatorship. The context for this research was, in part, the enduring influence of classic critical positions in fine art practice, such as Debordian analyses of the image and Lacanian readings of the viewer. Yet, the ubiquity of viewing today, and dominance of the image, seemed to call for a new analysis of the viewer's experience, from the viewer's perspective. For instance, I provide a reading of a spectator's relationship to the protagonist they view in an image using Attachment Theory, linking attachment to agency in order to challenge the common identification of separation between the viewer and image. I undertook this research as a viewer of culture and maker of artworks, but also as an artist who makes artworks from a viewer's perspective, in order to critically rethinking our relationship to the images that we view. My own artworks respond self-consciously to viewers' potential expectations of images, and the protagonists in them. For this reason I choreograph human interactions, which are always implicitly directed at the viewer, in a way that might prompt them to recall their own desire to find agency through images.

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Additional Items:

DVD 1 (rear sleeve)

Comprising one moving image work and documentation of a live event:

Group Photo, Digital Video, 9'00", 2014

Members of the Cast, Live Performance, 16'45", 2014

DVD 2: (rear sleeve)

Comprising four moving image works and documentation of one performance:

Sky High Quality and in Great Shape, Video, 18'27", 2011
Values, Efficiency and Commitment, Video, 1'43", 2011 (Commissioned, LUX, London)
Stacy's Risk, Video, 18'00", 2013
Presentation Skills, Video, 1'00", 2013
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Politicising Agency through Affect

Art Practice Introduction

On entering the Group Photo exhibition, the viewer could see one screen on the far gallery wall to her right - this was the part of the work in which the actors' poses most recalled those of a group photograph. She could see another screen slightly to her right on the facing wall, in which the actors performed a series of choreographed interactions. Then, she could see another to her left along the wall; in this part the actors moved and interacted differently, more freely. The monitors themselves were flat screens, 42" and black rimmed. The gallery furniture was reduced to a minimum with the invigilator's desk located next to the door.

Group Photo is a soundless moving image work that, in the first part, shows five people standing in a line being scanned in four tracking shots: head and shoulders, chest and torso, hips to knees, and knees to feet. These images are blue, cool in tone. The actors are depicted in moving image; although they stand still, facing front, as if waiting for a photograph to be taken against a plain background. The actors' expressions range from neutral to light smiles, but one actor breaks this pattern by looking longingly into the camera as it passes in front of him. Other small disruptions are visible as the rest of the body is scanned: hands rubbed abstractly, a stain on a trouser leg. Then the head and shoulders of four couples are framed individually in static shots. These images are orange, warm in tone. The standard pose is a broad smile as each actor looks into the camera; smiles are held for the duration of the shot. Yet smiles fade as each actor's difficulty in maintaining the prescribed pose becomes visible. Beyond this, further disruptions occur: an older woman looks suggestively into the camera, a

young woman shows (while smiling) that she has food between her teeth and a young man's broad smile becomes increasingly strained.

The second part of the work begins with moving images rendered in a deeper blue tone. The camera scans from the left, stopping at the first person's arm that it finds - a woman's. As the camera focuses on her forearm, she responds by rolling up her sleeve and showing her bare arm to the camera, turning it so that different sides can be seen. Then a woman moves to gently support her outstretched arm with two hands. In the second sequence, which is also depicted in equally blue-toned images, the camera scans to focus on a man's chest. Under its gaze, he moves forward from the group, holding out his arms sideward: displaying his clothed chest for the camera and turning as he does so. Two adjacent members of the group move to place their hands on the each side of his body, with their arms extending away from him, presenting his torso to camera. In the third sequence, in warm images that are also deeper in tone, the camera focuses on the shoulders of two men before it scans down to their hands hanging loosely by their sides. With the camera holding its focus, the two men slowly move to hold each other's hand. Then, one of the men releases his grip and takes the other man's hand, spreading out all its fingers, displaying his palm to the camera. In the final section a man and woman's head and chest are framed in the same deeper orange tones. The woman stands facing the camera with a serious expression; the man, his body angled, smiles broadly and looks into the camera. The actors relax their poses and expressions - the man turns to face the camera then both slowly move to face each other. They look into each others' eyes with affection. Then the woman moves to touch the sides of the man's face with her finger tips, angling his head away from the camera, and hers towards it.

The final part of the work begins in blue-toned images that are lighter in tone. The head and shoulders of a female actor are shown as she stands still, facing the camera with a light smile. Gradually she relaxes her pose, rolling her shoulders, stretching her neck, and exploring her teeth with her tongue. Then the camera shows the torso of a man standing, left side angled

towards the camera. His hand is on the shoulder of a man sitting next to him; he is adjacent to a woman. The man relaxes his pose by rolling his shoulders, wriggling, turning to the front and letting his hands hang by his sides, while the others maintain their poses. After this an older woman is shown sitting, as the camera focuses on her arms which are crossed casually over her knees. She relaxes her pose, splays her legs, slumps in her chair, rearranges her top, and folds her arms. Next, in warm-toned images, the group appear to be having a conversation. Yet the camera only ever shows two people at a time and there is still no sound. They appear to be debating a subject, while gesticulating and expressing themselves. As each person speaks, the group listen, shifting their gaze to the next speaker. In the following sequence, in blue-toned images, two women are holding hands; yet the camera only shows a close-up of their hands. As others in the group add their hands to the women's, the camera narrows its focus, then the image cuts. After this, a man has put his arm around a woman's shoulders. The camera focuses on his hand as it rests on her shoulder, onto which more hands are added - then the camera cuts. In a head to hips shot, a woman stands while another hugs her from behind. As a third woman comes to hug her from the front, a man puts his arms around this woman, and the first. Then, as another man puts his arms around the first and second women; the camera cuts. Finally, in warm-toned images, the group move, play, interact together – the camera once more only focusing on couples. The group are shown pulling each other up from the floor, seeming to decide what to do in front of the camera, dancing, rocking, making human bridges, laughing, play fighting, being affectionate - then the camera cuts.

My moving image and live performance artworks link disparities in social position to the gap between lived reality and the visual media we consume. In these works, actors are people one might encounter daily, yet what they say and do is drawn from different sources across life, public discourse and visual culture. As actors adopt different points of view within one work, viewers' assumptions about the representation of a person are challenged, as actors seem to both embody and disrupt the social position they occupy.

Common experiences of work or labour are often performed by actors whose roles shift between those possible in visual culture and those likely in lived existence, albeit so that the edges of each position are not always clearly visible. In my 2011 moving image work, Sky High Quality and In Great Shape a casually dressed group of people of mixed ages and backgrounds are shown in a fixed frame shot. Their acting out of scenes in an empty corporate meeting space recalls a business role-playing session. Yet, the scenes form a hyperbolic reading of the decline of the social group through history, in which a viewer's relationship to who they view was an explicit theme. Actors' positions changed significantly, particularly in terms of their power or place in a hierarchy. Flashed images of shapes, architectural sites and natural forms recalling advertising and the fast-paced edits of television - further disrupted any initial reading of the situation by a viewer. Together, this combination of actions and effects sought to challenge the fixing of images, and stereotypes in art and culture, in order to connect the limited representation of people in images, to the limitations of available social positions in life. The motive force of the deterministic narrative often portrays a person who might be easily underestimated performing the disparity between a person's dreams of a different life in or beyond capitalism, and the contemporary lived realities that contextualise them. The effect of this approach is often humorous in a way that recalls the absurd: this is always a faintly black kind of humour, one based in pathos and the tragic.

While my work is most concerned with reality, both how it manifests itself between people, and in what we experience, it is only through my work's relationship to culture and social position that it's meaning is fully realised. Yet this appearance of familiarity, the feeling of recognition is used as a basis for its disruption, as allusions to visual culture and abstract

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¹ The centrality of the notion of 'reality' for my work is strongly influenced by materialist thinking; the need to recognise what it is that we see, know and experience concretely. I am interested in Object-oriented philosophy which, undermining the significant influence of Kant's 'correlationism' on fine art practices, encourage us to recognise what faces us as 'real'. Relatedly, the capacity for people to recognise what is 'common', in response to what is 'seen' and known to exist, where each can agree that it exists, is emphasised.

gestures beyond life and culture serve to destabilise what might have already been 'known'.2 Albeit that this cultural knowledge is approached via notions of hierarchy too: I will often recall forms of culture that are dated, unfashionable or apparently lack cultural merit while situating them within a context of fine art making. Allusions to cinematic romance, 'B' movies, comic books, the internet, popular music, music videos are conflated with the concerns of cinematic distanciation and conventions of fine art production. The presence of incompatibilities between cultural languages and approaches suggest the existence of class within cultural forms - of distinctions which are uncomfortable but are nonetheless made. The position of cultural forms in time is important too, where what is outmoded is used to enable comparison with what is deemed most current. In this way the present may be better explored through its relationship to notions of the past and future. The ultimate intention is that particular cultural choices or associations can be linked to aspects of lived experience in ways that may provoke feelings about inequality and agency, as they relate to other people, and the image. I intend that my moving image and live performance works recall fixed roles, familiar contexts for action and interaction from life in capitalism. This recognisable and potentially underwhelming context is combined with roles and relationships drawn from culture, with a view to disrupting the expectations of both. I do this by employing a form of collage to produce valenced roles, dialogue or visual effects. This involves combining disparate sources, codes, ways of behaving, recognisable and abstract gestures and movements, which all possess - or deliberately lack - associations with images and social forms common to capitalist life. These various sources are centrally used to 'compile' actors' roles, to produce a fragmentation that is internal to what they do, rather than manifesting as visual imagery cut together (although I have worked this way too). These 'roles' are produced in a way that seem to exist between a continuum and a hierarchy. They, at any one point, occupy a place in a changing 'state' (which I imagine to be explored 'horizontally') and reference a shift in social

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² The work I make assumes knowledge in its viewers, and bases what it depicts on what may be familiar to them. I am concerned with reproducing what people will recognise, from life and culture, yet in such a way that it can be viewed differently.

position (which I imagine to be explored 'vertically'). These trajectories of an actor's role are central to the work that I make by both suggesting and manifesting new, shifting social and subject positions, also states of being. The possibility of what a person can be or become is key here in a way that is always underscored by the extremes of experience that do exist in capitalism. Yet there is also a planned impossibility about the extents of an actor's role, which may span what is most desirable, banal and abject about life. For instance, a man's desperate use of self-promotional statements to maintain his assumed lover's interest, is the focus of my 2011 moving image work *Values, Efficiency and Commitment*. At its most extreme, this strategy parodies desirable social positions by making those who would occupy them confront what is least ideal in life.

So my work approaches themes which allude to the occupation of one reality, and desire to realise another. In this way, ambition, and differently, 'becoming' run through the work that I make, arising in different ways in different works.³ There is something propositional here, as believable people take on positions of greater power or visibility in life and cultural productions. Relatedly, change is a central theme, in ways which manifest structurally in the work, as much as literally within an actor's role. Here, the potential limitations of a person's position, as defined by the way a person is 'framed', are often set against such freedom as that role permits. Yet the nature of this change is too fast and dramatic to be assumed 'natural', making the notion visible as much as viewable. The realities of work reoccur as a theme, often in relation to idealised notions of romance. Where, in contemporary life, romance may often

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³ 'Becoming' is closely linked to affect, where affect is based in the encounter between bodies and is said to be 'born in in-between-ness and resides as accumulative beside-ness', to mark fluctuations in 'bodily capacity', and of 'force-relations', and is 'at once intimate and impersonal'. Where 'affect is integral to a body's perpetual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is)', it represents an encoding of change within the fluxes of bodily affect that are mediated by encounter. So, as 'becoming' is often defined, in political terms, as a potentially 'radical' force, ambition may be its opposite. Where 'ambition' is, a 'drive to succeed or progress' also a 'strong desire or aspiration', this can be conceived as occurring 'within' the existing capitalist system. If becoming, at a bodily level, or at the level of political subjectivity, effectively opposes ambition, this could define a problem that confronts the working person: to achieve within capitalist culture, or to work to change or overcome it? This is a central concern around which my work revolves. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, Ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) p. 2-3. 'ambition': *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*, ed. by Della Thompson, 9th edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

be pitched as the one thing that mollifies the reality of lived existence, the hyperbolic dream of this is frequently satirised in my work, when it is combined with more disconcerting aspects of life.

Mechanisms of control are made explicit in the work, such as the misapplication of disparate 'sources', in *Stacy's Risk*, or a surfeit of images, in *Sky High Quality and In Great Shape*. What is personal about control is both openly acknowledged and made potentially suspect. The control that I as maker, and also the actors, have over the work is self-consciously visible. Here, possible mistakes, or overbearing choices, serve to disrupt what might be thought admirable about the role of the artist by undercutting hopes of her competence or honesty. In this way, my role as a director, artist, and producer is placed in doubt and my position as an employer of actors is made questionable yet self-consciously visible, thereby unsettling the representations produced. Through this, a kind of awkwardness, a feeling of sickness or destabilisation is created between the viewers' identification with the work, what is represented, and its choreography. This 'nausea' is the result of a disruption of what we think we know about our reality, and also of what we expect from an artwork, or a cultural production.

The narrative results of these moving image and live performative artworks often serve to compress action in time, as structure becomes applied in an overzealous way. The endings allude to, or reverse, popular narrative conclusions across fiction, film and history — such as rebalancing inequality, achieving fantasies of vengeance and realising personal, social or structural change. The desire for popular narratives to produce ideal outcomes tends to be heightened in these works, through an excessive or obvious overarching series of events, or through the way they are resolved too quickly or obviously. The potential of a person to develop through a narrative is deliberately thwarted, or made explicit in my work, the outcome usually being an impasse, or tragedy. Yet this approach is designed to emphasise a person's potential to change - and the limitations the actor faces in portraying that change.

The relationship of a performer to her role is treated self-consciously. Roles are written in ways that are particular to the performer used, and now increasingly, the audience addressed. I try to stretch an actor's position, to take them beyond a common role, or themselves, to enable a form of becoming in the role, as an alternate 'them'. Also, in new works I have yet to show, the viewer becomes implicated in the performance when the casting responds to the general demographic of the gallery space. Such a direct relationship is raised between the viewer and the participant where they may have things in common – social class, gender, age, etc. This serves to avoid the potential for performers across culture and media - to occupy an ideal position, to be a role model in a potentially better situation than the viewer. It also supports a form of subject-to-subject identification by avoiding the potential for performers to be seen as objects, or 'entertainers'. Yet at the same time the formal distance maintained between the audience and the viewer, either through distancing methods in moving image, the maintenance of a 'fourth wall' or prevention of dialogue between the performer and audience in performances, also serves to affirm a separation.⁴ This separation is between the viewer, a working performer (either depicted in the image or present in the flesh) and my role as maker. There is no doubt that this performer is doing something different to the viewer; they may be like the viewer, but are not that viewer. They are also doing something demonstrably choreographed.

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⁴ Marina Vishmidt has said, 'when we look at performance as a mode or practice in contemporary art we see it is more complicated than' the 'affirmative logic of performance' suggests, 'since the presence of the subject is in a way mediating the absence of an object, and this is in fact the dialectic of contemporary labour as well.' For Vishmidt, 'performance engenders a blurring and confusion between subject and object'. Vishmidt has also spoken of Tino Sehgal's, and Theaster Gates's performance work where, 'Either you, as a viewer, agree to the social contract of the work—which involves focusing on the immediate, direct experience of orchestrated sociality in Seghal's case, or a processual and temporal theatre of community in Gates—or you try to understand the conditions of possibility of these performances, including working conditions, the performers' agency, power relations in this ensemble of social mimesis, and so forth. Each perspective cancels out the other, rendering any critical approach off limits, or even redundant, because the distance demanded by critique breaks the social contract of frictionless exchange on which this work is predicated (just like in the service industries that it emulates).' Vishmidt adds, 'The work places itself beyond critique, by its participants or its viewers, because it does not base its criteria on anything but the language and parameters of "autonomous art," while at the same time using only social relations—such as the economy and layers of institutional mediation in Gates's case—as its "material" and territory of action.' I am interested in the valences of closeness and distance which surround Vishmidt's arguments here - and performance as a whole: namely those of identification and distance, affirmation and negation - arguments that will be central to this text. Marina Vishmidt, 'What is Speculation as a Mode of Production', Lecture, Weld, Stockholm, 17 October 2013; Marina Vishmidt, 'Mimesis of the Hardened and Alienated: Social Practice as Business Model' e-flux journal #43, March 2013, 1-11 (p. 9).

I am interested in the relationship of the viewer to the work, in how they address people in it as subjects, objects, or something in between. To address this I make a deliberate choice to maintain the viewer, at a time when 'participation' in fine art performance, and moving image installations has become mainstream. Where installation art sought to expand the artwork into a space, and arguments were made for the 'disruption' of singular readings of artworks or culture, the role of the viewer - heavily criticised within left politics - has been side-lined. Yet, at a time when different forms of 'immersion' in art are commonplace, it seems important to address in more detail the politics of viewing in art and culture. The popularity of participatory and inclusive works, as shown at the recent *Documenta 13* exhibition, seems tied to Dorothea Von Hantelmann's framing of the lineage of the artwork in line with the changing mode of economic production. Where participation may correlate with the shift to an 'experience' economy the political implications of an art practice that resists such a transformation, or seeks an uneasy relationship between capitalist product and artwork seem clear.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'embodied perception' supported the expanded 'perceptual' effects of works of art that occupied space, using it in a way that eschewed the 'visual' emphasis of objects or two-dimensional works. For Merleau-Ponty, as perception occurs via the body, vision of a thing is 'inseparable from a person perceiving it'. This expanded notion of perception had a significant impact on the progress of recent art history, for instance by focusing on the 'immersive' qualities of artworks. The Post-Structuralist reading of art and cultural works sought to disrupt singular 'texts' and the gaze of the viewer by providing critical responses to depictions of life that encode or affirm existing inequalities, discrimination and prejudices. The singular author was disrupted, and re-imagined as a multiple, shifting, non-white, non-male, non-Western figure. Such thinking supported a critical form of reading cultural productions that underpinned a call for people to act politically. Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 50.

⁶ Where it has been common for moving image to be presented as immersive multi-screen installations, more recently, based on the philosophical developments of Object-oriented philosophy and the work of Quentin Meillasoux, Graham Harman and others, there has been a return to the object, and to the use of moving image to address objecthood. Where, contrary to Kant's 'correlationism', which links what exists to perception, Object-oriented philosophers have sought to emphasise the existence of the material world, beyond human perception, based on scientific and mathematical views of its history.

⁷ For Hantelmann, as 'the exhibition is a priori bound up with the production paradigm of contemporary market societies, to survive as a modern ritual it must constantly change and readjust its relation to the object in line with current socioeconomic conditions.' This invites a correlation between the 'experience economy', 'affective labour', Vishmidt's 'service industry' and experience-orientated artworks, as well as underpinning the remaining presence of the object as thing, person, or product, within art. It also raises the 'mimetic' function of art, whereby it comes to emulate the appearance and operations of the economy at the time (i.e. the relationship between Conceptual Art and bureaucracy), or adopts dominant aesthetics, i.e. the digital. Dorothea von Hantelmann, *Notes on the Exhibition: 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts, No.088, Documenta 13* (Kassel, Germany: documenta und Museum Fredericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, 2012) p. 6.

⁸ While participatory artworks may, more broadly, have accords with the 'experience economy', John Roberts has said, concerning recent politicised practices that, 'this moment of social participatory activity, is being driven by a counter-political logic in which artistic thought-experiments, models of dissensus, microtopian and utopian imaginings in artistic form, offer moments of what I would call *anti-capitalist socialisation*.' John Roberts, *The Political Economisation of Art*, Leeds University February 29th 2012.

Yet, as the centrality of viewing to the capitalist economy remains, amidst the dominance of mobile platforms, personal computing and web-based content, it is the relationship between viewer and image which most interests me. ⁹ It is a relationship that I maintain and consider as a primary focus of my own work, one that could be contextualised and, in ways, best highlighted by a wider context of participation and immersion in art. The intention is that this work may sit uncomfortably among other works and have an unsettled relationship to its viewers, other images, cultural productions and the realities of lived existence. Based in what we can already see and know, this work recalls what is familiar, and then seeks to explore what we would prefer our reality to be, through our relationship to and expectations of images. Here, what is most familiar may be made most arresting, or what is most 'cold' might result in most feeling. The ambition of this work is to provoke particular affects associated with viewers' desire to pursue alternatives through their relationship to other people in images; this leads me to the specific concerns of this thesis.

I have used my three screen moving image work *Group Photo*, 2014 to illustrate and accompany the arguments that I make here. Aspects of the work are described or analysed in inserts placed in advance of each section of the thesis. At the end of the text, the work is discussed in relation to the main conclusions of the thesis. *Group Photo* was commissioned by Amy Charlesworth, curator of the University of Bradford's *Gallery II*. It was funded by the Arts Council and its installation devised especially for the space. The three screens were positioned on three different walls in what is a long, white-painted gallery space. I produced the work to have three distinct parts: the first referring most directly to the group photograph, the second involving choreographed movements, and the third freer interaction by the group. Despite the order I imagined them occupying, it was intentional that the viewer could experience them in any order, as much as simultaneously – depending on where they stood in the space. For

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⁹ What might be called the 'nominal interactivity' afforded viewers by mobile platforms is of interest here. The touch screen on a mobile phone or tablet enables us to 'swipe' to change the image or page rapidly – yet our using is still rooted in viewing. This seems to provide a limited form of agency, one that the work that I make disallows.

clarity only, I will refer to each part of the work in the text according to its 'order' in the sequence. The exhibition ran for a month.

Thesis Introduction

The key concern of this PhD project is that lived reality and visual culture exist in a personal and political relation, one that politicises a viewer's search for alternatives through the image. This means that cultural productions become an ideal context for addressing matters of social change. Psychological and neurological findings show that the impact of visual culture on a person may be deep and hence highly personal. They also show culture supports the management of emotion and thought. As we are able to feel like a person whose action we watch, it is possible to view cultural choices as a desire to occupy another reality to our own, through a social experience. This contextualises our experience of the real directly in relation to our desire to be someone or somewhere else in culture. Hence, the essence of our relationship to imagery is a desire for change.

In my work I fuse idealised cultural signifiers reflecting our desire to escape lived reality, with the realities that one may wish to escape from. This refers tautologically to our desire for change within an escapist medium. I disrupt direct identification with a protagonist, and problematise emotional effects. I do though, in the movement of bodies, always recall affective positions and seek to inspire affect and emotion via indirect means. By combining roles assumed possible in life, with ones deemed more ideal - in a way that supports changes within the parameters of each - I refer to ambition and becoming. In effect, actors hegemonize the roles of others in culture or life with more power or influence. Yet the limitations of these changes make the notion visible, rather than the experience satisfying.

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¹⁰ When I speak of the image in this thesis my emphasis is on the ubiquity of the image in public life, in advertising, on television, on the internet, in cinema – in visual culture. Yet, as the critics of 'the spectacle' did, I would emphasise the status of the image in art as correlating with, rather than differentiating from, the wider form of visual culture.

¹¹ 'Hegemonize' derives from 'hegemony'. While Antonio Gramsci's usage of hegemony, also, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's interpretations of his approach, are particularly relevant to this thesis, the early definition of 'hegemony' used in Russian Social Democracy is also important. Perry Anderson describes the development of the notion of hegemony as the need for the working class to lead a political, rather than merely economic struggle, for a 'bourgeois revolution' against Tsarism, particularly given the bourgeois class' weakness in Russia. Here, 'hegemonize' refers to the process, in Russian Social Democracy, by which a member of a subordinate class adopts tasks attributed to a person from the bourgeois class, in a moment of social change. Anderson shows how Gramsci's

I make artwork in response to viewers' likely expectations of an image or cultural production; the process is self-conscious in ways that variously aim to meet, reject or surpass such expectations. Broadly my tendency is to want to disappoint the viewer, to underwhelm. The images I produce, for instance, are rarely visually sumptuous — I have always sought to intentionally reject a viewer's admiration. Having recently started producing work in high definition moving image I have been interested to disrupt viewers' expectations of that medium, of the degree of attraction to an image or detail one might expect to see in it. An example of this is my 2013 moving image work *Presentation Skills* in which a plainly dressed man occupied a grassed space adjacent to a side street; his stances and gaze disconcerting. In these ways my work represents a desired disruption of the expectations of a medium, as much as an image; it is a response to art and culture from the perspective of an imaginary viewer who occupies a day-to-day reality in a condition of inequality.

As my practice is a direct dialogue with the viewer, one undertaken from the perspective of a politicised perspective on culture, I have sought, in this thesis to use the terms of the work I produce to reverse, as well as extend, some of the classic theories of spectatorship commonly known as 'the politics of spectatorship'. 12 As these theories focus on how the work of art or theatre can be positioned in order to inspire political agency in its viewers or participants, I have used the ways in which my work accords with and departs from the cultural productions advocated by the classic critics of spectatorship as the basis for a reviewing of these important theories. The central argument here, advocated by Bertholt Brecht and Guy Debord, criticises the passivity of the viewer, and calls for her activation – either by 'distanced' and critical forms of presentation and viewing, collage-based practices in film that resist 'the spectacle', or

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different usage of 'hegemony' follows that of the Fourth World Congress of the Third International in 1922, signifying 'the domination of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat'. Gramsci then extended it to signify 'a differential analysis of the structures of bourgeois power in the West' in which he emphasises the separation between 'politics and economics'. Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review*, 100 (1976), 5-78, (pp. 15, 17-18, 20), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 57-58. ¹² References to 'the politics of spectatorship' in this text relate to a body of discourse that presents classic critiques of spectatorship. It is my intention, in this thesis, to re-address, extend and to an extent challenge the classic positions associated with 'the politics of spectatorship', by relating them to other perspectives.

through playful collaborative activity. In contemporary making, 'distanciation-based' practices are particularly present in cinema, (for instance in the films of Michael Haneke and Ulrich Seidel), but they also continue in theatre and contemporary forms of performance art, artists' moving image and painting. ¹³ Collage in film has a significant lineage within politicised forms of art and filmmaking. While today being as likely to occupy the mainstream of commercial success, it has also become an important medium in enabling artists to respond to the expanded nature of contemporary culture. ¹⁴ Participatory art is also popularised within public galleries and exhibitions, where the emphasis on inclusion in funding strategies has in part facilitated its development. ¹⁵ Each of these important areas of contemporary fine art and cultural practice is based on the classic theories on spectatorship, theories that are rooted in the critique of the viewer.

Looking at my work in terms of the key debates on spectatorship, rather than critiquing the viewer and visual culture in capitalism, I would treat the viewer's relationship to the image, and the people they view in it, as politicised. If the image is an alternative to life - and a banal life the ideal context for the functioning of the image - it seems a tautology to demand that the

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¹³ 'Brechtian distanciation' or 'distancing effects' are more contemporary terms for Brecht's 'alienation effect', that I will go on to discuss here. In contemporary and 20th century cinema distancing effects have manifested in the work of notable makers such as Robert Bresson, Jean-Luc Godard and more recently Michael Haneke and Ulrich Seidel. Haneke's approach to this has been described as involving, 'all the didactic framings that willfully withhold information that we, as spectators, are expected to expect,' also the many 'devices' in a film that remind viewers they are watching a film. Distanciation influences theatre-producers such as Augusto Boal, Peter Brook and Peter Weiss, albeit it exists today as one approach amongst other modes of production. The influence of Brecht can also be seen in the work of contemporary performance artists, such as the 'provisional theatre' of lan White, and Jerome Bel. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Performative Self-Contradictions: Michael Haneke's Mind Games', in *A Companion to Michael Haneke*, ed. by Roy Grundmann (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), p. 61-62.

¹⁴ Collage and appropriation - having a longer and broader lineage than the work of Debord - nonetheless were framed by him in strong, politicised terms that have influenced its use and currency, particularly in film. Yet Nicolas Bourriaud's perspective, in his text *Postproduction* is symbolic of the softening of Debord's political aims in the contemporary moment whereby collage means using, 'all existing modes of representation and formal structures', and 'seizing all the codes of the culture, all the forms of everyday life, the works of global patrimony, and making them function,' the overall aim being to 'make them one's own, to inhabit them.' This occupation of culture could be said to underscore the dominance of collage-based practices in the commercial art world today where control within culture is emphasised more than a desire to challenge or change it. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2000; repr. 2002), p. 12.

¹⁵ Participatory artworks are based on social interaction, on the 'activation' of 'audiences' by creating contexts for their participation. Having expanded significantly since the 1990's, participatory artworks, like collage, have a much longer lineage stretching back to Dada interventions of the 1920's. The political emphasis on participation has been strong, with Guy Debord's thinking and his promotion of 'participatory events' serving to link the involvement of audiences to political agency. However, the arguments of Vishmidt (see note 4) raise a criticism of the contemporary uses of participation, for instance in the popular and commercially successful work of Tino Sehgal. Also, the alignment of participatory rationales with the funding strategies of arts bodies, and their emphasis on 'inclusion' risk institutionalising what was assumed to have political potential.

viewer look at her reality as opposed to visual culture (the classic critiques of spectatorship focus on making the conditions of a viewer or participant's reality in capitalism visible). It would rather be exactly this that viewers do not want to do. Seen beyond the mystification of the worker in capitalism, a notion which underpins these theories, this may be a simple choice, of the viewer choosing visual culture over life. Relatedly, contrary to the principle theories of spectatorship, I treat viewers as watching visual culture because they see and feel the reality of their lived situations in capitalism, rather than because they do not. This means that viewers' choice of images is inherently connected to their lived situation. By response, in my own work I allude to both visual culture and lived experience, an approach which is intended to recall the relationship between the real and its representation.

As I approach the role of viewer as inherently politicised, the relational nature of viewing - its implied sociality – are a key focus for me. Here, viewing always recalls our relationship to another person. The position we take towards those we view is heightened in my work, and the range of possibilities here explored: from high affect, to the coldest form of objectification. Also important is the position of power we may feel over someone we watch, for instance when viewing pornography or someone 'failing'. The ways in which we might classify a person in life are recalled, but also specifically disrupted. Here class, race, gender, social position, role and age are both recorded and reframed so that what is most stereotypical and constraining about the ways human life is depicted in images can be challenged. Ultimately, the relationship we have to a person in an image becomes a way of recalling the ways we interact with others in life. So I select actors, and cast them in roles, specifically with a view to problematizing the

¹⁶ 'Mystification' is a term used by Karl Marx to signify the ways in which the actualities of the capitalist system are concealed by the nature of its processes. He claimed, 'since all sections of capital appear equally as sources of the excess value (profit), the capital relation [which for Marx is a social relation] is mystified.' Yet, Marx having discussed the mystifying relation between 'Capital-profit...land-ground-rent, labour-wages' goes further, 'it is also quite natural, on the other hand, that the actual agents of production themselves feel completely at home in these estranged and irrational forms of capital-interest, land-rent, labour-wages, for these are precisely the configurations of appearance in which they move, and 'with which they are daily involved.' Karl Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1981; repr.1991), III, p. 136 & p. 969.

¹⁷ As I will go on to discuss, this contradicts the common arguments supporting workers' mystification in capitalism, and shifts the emphasis of my thinking away from the classic Marxist arguments that underpin the politics of spectatorship, and towards other readings of, or alternatives to, those arguments.

viewer's relationship to them in life, or the image. For instance, in *Stacy's Risk*, 2013, I cast a female actor one might immediately associate with being a young mother, as a cultural commentator. The possibility that viewers might underestimate her was deliberately contrasted with the complex and interwoven analytical dialogue she spoke in the work. Her casual appearance also became a refusal of the cultural tropes which link conventionally beautiful women with visibility in an image. In this work I deliberately disrupt our expectations of casting within media, as much as within artworks. It is always my intention that the actors I work with create a certain impression, and that impression becomes in part, the context for the operations of the work. Such a social treatment of viewing is based on the depiction of other people in imagery and how viewers relate to them. This sets out the terms of a reciprocal relationship between viewer and image, one that asks what the viewer seeks from the image, and what effects the image has on them.

While the way I theorise the viewer's position in capitalism differs from that of Brecht and Debord, the practical approaches taken in my work reflect those they advocated. Firstly, I often use distanced methods of staging: Brechtian distanciation is an approach designed to disrupt viewers' potential to become immersed in what they view and refer them to the reality of their existence. Contemporary forms of cinematic distanciation used by Michael Haneke and Ulrich Seidel are of particular relevance to my own work. Their powerful treatment of what is most disconcerting about lived reality in capitalist countries is underscored by the distanced frames they use and the lack of warmth to their images. Haneke also locates his films within a critique of the impact of the media on human life, and there is often a visible screen in his shots that off-sets the human relations in the image. Yet the distanciation-based approaches that I use, rather than an attempt to render what is 'real' visible, are employed to disrupt what is familiar in both human life and cultural production. The intention then is to

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¹⁸ For Brecht, 'realistic means: discovering the causal complexes of society/unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power/writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught up/emphasising the element of development/making possible the concrete and making possible abstraction from it.' Bertholt Brecht, 'Against Georg Lukás', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. ed. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1977; repr. 1980), p. 70.

render representation questionable to a viewer; in this, I am always referring to the artificiality of the work's construction. This means that the cultural allusions employed in my work are used both to disrupt the work itself, and the aesthetic categories it occupies. So, while Brecht sought to inspire a critical attitude and thought in his viewers, my intention is to highlight the fundamental difference between the viewer's reality, and that of the person they commonly view in the image. I base a self-reflexive form of art making on this, one that refers to the agency we seek through images. So it is my aim to use our already politicised relationship to images to provoke affects and emotions which underscore the desire for change we explore via images, namely by knowingly recalling and rejecting such allusions. I have also sought to make artwork that has the potential to destabilise the perception of the artist, that what they do is inherently well meant.

The works I make sometimes appear instructional in a Brechtian sense, yet my use of instruction has tended to parody. While the information I have used has often been informative, it is always necessarily limited and I reject the position of 'teaching' my audience anything. I prefer to satirise the possibility of such didacticism and the power it confers. For instance, when my actors appear to instruct, they do so by way of hegemonizing the position of the educator, taking her position of power, and perhaps presenting content that disrupts this. Brecht sought to present people that his audience could identify with, and this is certainly an approach that I take. I aim to cast actors which viewers might think are 'like' them, as critics, decision-makers, and the subject of images; often people who occupy positions of power. Yet, as the people in my work do not possess reliably instructional or informative roles, what potential they may have to 'persuade' possible agents is broadly rejected. I have used a notably Brechtian approach, where an actor delivers material by speaking directly to the audience - thereby breaking the 'fourth wall'. Yet today, this method of staging also reflects other modes of addressing viewers directly, such as in news reading, or internet videos. So I use this approach less to disrupt the 'separation' between culture and audience, than to

address more literally the sociality between the viewer and those they view. Brecht sought to entertain his audiences, and sought audiences who wanted to be entertained; his works reflect popular forms. Brecht's theatre also often incorporated different 'points of view' and montage – a combination he linked to 'a firm grasp of reality'. My works similarly reflect popular cultural forms, and point of view is addressed both self-consciously, from the perspective of camerawork, and is something that is frequently changed within a character's role. For instance, performers' activities are usually formed by a variety of disparate sources from culture and life, an approach having accords with both Brecht and Debord's cultural productions.

Like Debord's, my works are often rooted in the collage of different information. While I have used visibly collaged items of staged and visual material, my work is more focused on an inclusion of collaged elements into narrative works. This means that the edges of what is and isn't collaged are blurred. For instance, a gesture, taken from a particular context becomes, when displaced within a work, either directly or vaguely familiar to a viewer, depending on her relationship to the material. I have sought to enable my actors to perform a kind of agency with the material that they deliver, by enacting connections between different types of information and gestures that seem both productive and disruptive of the positions they

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¹⁹ Brecht aligned 'popular art' and 'realism' in a desire to speak the language of the masses who suffer. He sought cultural production that was 'comprehensible and profitable' to people, so that they may 'receive a faithful image of life.' For Brecht, 'popular means: intelligible to the broad masses, adopting and enriching their forms of expression/assuming their standpoint, confirming and correcting it/representing the most progressive section of the people so that it can assume leadership, and therefore intelligible to other sections of the people as well/relating to traditions and developing them/communicating to that portion of the people which strives for leadership the achievements of the section that at present rules the nation.' I do seek to make work that is identifiable to a broad public. While I would doubt my ability to 'assume' another's standpoint I do choreograph particular 'perspectives' in my work, for instance views of the world that may disrupt the perspective of a viewer of artwork. Brecht, *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 80-81.

²⁰ Brecht, *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 70. In Brecht's theatre, 'interior monologue, montage, or mixture of genres within a single work were all permissible and fruitful, so long as they were disciplined by a watchful truthfulness to social reality.' As regards my own work, the position taken by the camera operator, editor or director shifts, often disconcertingly, in relation to the protagonist, while the protagonist's perspective shifts frequently too. Rather than seeking to make reality visible, I do this in order to make the production of artworks and culture visible, and self-conscious. Rodney Livingstone and others, 'Presentation II' in *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 63.

²¹ My use of 'point of view' originally derived from an interest in the use of 'point of view' in metafictional novels (i.e. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), particularly such novels' treatment of narrative as a political entity. 'Metafiction' involves 'the assimilation of critical perspective within fictional narrative, a self-consciousness of the artificiality of its constructions and a fixation with the relationship between language and the world.' The 'point of view' that is central to the 'grammar' of television and film is also of interest. Mark Currie (ed.), *Metafiction* (Essex, UK: Longman, 1995), p. 2.

occupy. The works I make approximate playful means of reconfiguring social relations, in ways that are akin to Debord's 'participatory' thinking. They may either appear to undertake a kind of informal testing of roles, a playing out of partial aspects of experience, or to be improvised. For instance, in Sky High Quality and In Great Shape the 'scenes' were delivered to actors in such a way that roles and scenarios were known, but the dialogue was improvised. However, as my work is generally highly choreographed, any appearance of play or participation is generally underscored by the knowledge of the artificiality of its construction. Although there is certainly a propositional aspect to my work that suggests people's potential to 'become' something other than who they are. I treat the idealised and fantastic structures of culture, which I regard as a key means of people exploring alternatives to life, as potentially the place to do this. This suggests both a formally advocated and potentially hyperbolic proposition. Debord's focus on a banal reality in capitalism, as set against the 'spectacle' in images, has accords with the approach I take to my own moving image and performance works. The works fuse familiar aspects from human life and visual culture to create productive connections between such areas of disparity. These connections are performed by actors who enact agency by treating the politicised relationship between life and culture directly. I am concerned with the problems of culture that both Brecht and Debord focus on, yet the aims and intentions of the work I make differ in important ways, and can often be better explained by their relationship to other theories of spectatorship. So it is the ways in which my work and thinking both accord with and depart from Brecht's and Debord's which mark the starting point for this thesis.

So, rather than emphasising distanciation, participation or collage solely, I draw on these and other familiar approaches in cultural production and art making, to highlight the importance of cultural production to matters of agency. It is my aim to address the critical space between viewers' lives and the images they consume. In this, my aim is to turn familiar cultural modes to a more suggestive use as regards political futures. The most deterministic and structurally

'closed' forms of culture (such as Hollywood cinema) are of particular interest to me. This is partly because they are so familiar, and to an extent occupy a historical position, also because they possess a didacticism that, in their popularity, suggests the constraints that viewers may seek via the visual. Political futures are imagined as residing in the social, yet also, as alternatives that are imagined to be sought through culture. The work I make effectively thematizes a relationship to culture that is based on a desire for change, one based in a lived inequality in capitalism and explored through images. Here, culture is a route that literally replaces and substitutes change. I want to use visual media to provoke affects and emotions particular to the disparity between reality and representation, to recall our relationship to other people through images and what it is that we seek from images. This involves looking to visual media as a key means of viewers managing affects in capitalist life. So I approach this thesis from the perspective of the viewer in capitalism, from identification with her position. In this, I aim to rethink political approaches to spectatorship in a way that specifically frames the context of my own art making, to provide an alternative perspective on spectatorship and politics - one having potential implications for political futures.

My PhD project begins by exploring Brecht's and Debord's critiques of the viewer based on their concerns for human agency and change within a particularly capitalist reality. Then I explore Brecht's advocacy of cultural productions enabling 'critical' viewing, and Debord's structural disruption of the continuity of film and pursuit of participation in would-be viewers to the realisation of political agency. I follow this by outlining the accords between Laura Mulvey and Griselda Pollock's later formulations regarding spectatorship and Brecht's and Debord's prior work. I conclude that, if looking at these theories of the viewer from the viewer's perspective within capitalism today, that there is room for further analysis. Then, I look to the work of Jacques Rancière who has recently sought to criticise the theories of spectatorship derived from Brecht's and Debord's thinking. He seeks to liberate the spectator from any limitations that may be placed on them culturally or politically. I compare Rancière's

perspective to that of Simon Watney; Watney's position offers a critique of the classic theories of spectatorship, based on a different historicisation of their origins than Rancière's. He also draws conclusions which suggest how perspectives on viewing might be broadened. Where both Rancière and Watney undermine the capacity of visual culture to 'affect' viewers in a unified way, Claire Bishop's discussion of the disparity between physical existence and the screens we view appears to open up an alternative perspective on viewing. I explore how her ideas, which draw on Debord's and Rancière's work, specifically address the contemporary situation of viewing visual media. After setting out the context for political 'antagonism' rooted in our relationship with visual media, I connect Bishop's perspective to that of Antonio Gramsci who framed culture as a key site of struggle for the working class in capitalism. This notion, and other aspects of his analysis, provides the basis for an exploration of the work of Chantal Mouffe whose reading of Gramsci's work is rooted in Lacanian psychoanalysis and Post-Structuralist thinking. Her perspective opens up the possibility for a treatment of viewers' diversity within a political framing of their viewing; she also suggests the relevance of contemporary psychoanalytic and psychological research to a deeper exploration of the viewer's relationship to the image. Finally, where Mouffe advocates political 'antagonism', Hannah Arendt's work on 'agonism' is used as a basis for exploring accords between the viewer's experience of viewing culture and fundamental aspects of political experience. I conclude by suggesting that the politicised potential of the relationship between viewer and image in capitalism is one that has particular significance for moving image and live performance artworks that retain the viewer as part of a politically focused cultural practice.

In my second section I explore psychological and neurological research which suggests that visual culture provides tools for ameliorating life by such means as 'filling conscious awareness', and also experiencing direct empathy with a protagonist that enables a viewer to 'feel like' them. I tie the uses of culture to 'manage' life in capitalism, to Debord's thinking, in order to suggest that this power of the image is based on and underscored by inequality. Here

inequalities between the lived situation of viewers and the position of those they view in images are tied to economic inequalities. Further, where Debord figured the 'social relation' central to capitalism as emblematic of a relationship between the viewer and image accumulated as capital, I take Debord's formulation of a 'social relationship' with images literally. I base this on the direct relationship between viewer and viewed protagonist, a relationship rooted in affects, emotions and identifications between people. I go on to link this 'social' treatment of the viewer and viewed person to the centrality of affect to the production of 'the self'. Here affects based in attachments are reframed in relation to viewers' experiences of others in images, in contrast to positions on spectatorship that focus more so on desire and the fetish. Here, secure and insecure 'states' of the self are explored in terms of how they relate to different experiences of using culture. Then, reconnecting this to the work of Claire Bishop, I frame the viewer's relationship to the protagonist in images as based on a continuum marked by two extremes. One is based in a desired, affective, hegemonic shift into the role of another who is in a notably better position than the viewer, the other, a desired emotional withdrawal from a person in a lesser position than us. These extremes are rooted in the uses of intimacy, on the one hand, and emotional distance on the other. They represent two points at opposing ends of a continuum of political relating that enable viewers to experience agency through specific relationships to others in images. This is affirmed by evidence that images are used more by people who are 'insecure', suggesting a close correlation between psychological states linked to 'attachment' and our use of images. I conclude by setting out how it is this continuum of feeling and relating to protagonists, based importantly in the viewer's own lived position, that is fundamental to the work I produce, one that is also suggestive of different ways of formulating the agency of groups. Where agency may be politicised by uses of affect that are based in inequality, then the psychological and social roots of these approaches suggest a desired context for agency rooted in the equal treatment of others. This has accords with the critiques of education and spectatorship by Rancière and advocacy of equal relations between unequal people in a political context by

Arendt. It suggests there are different, more relational means of approaching agency in social life. Yet this conclusion also specifically frames ways in which we relate to others via images as a context for agency, and it highlights cultural productions' potential to provoke the affects associated with our uses of images to seek alternatives. In this, culture is treated as a site where agencies happen. This is why my own work thematizes the search for agency through images, internalises and to an extent dramatises our relationship to political alternatives through it. It is also why I advocate the politicised potential of the moving image and live performance that specifically retains the viewer.



Chapter One: Agency and the Image

Re-addressing the Critiques of Spectatorship: The Viewer

Group Photo was commissioned for a University gallery. The theme of the work was selected in part for its relevance to that setting: the academic group photograph and promotional group image being two different, yet familiar, representations of groups here. But these 'types' of images, while common in wider culture, are uncommon in the gallery. Although in any gallery the portrait would be a familiar presence, I did not want the images to look like portraits found in galleries, or images found in life. Instead, I deliberately applied inappropriate techniques to these images, in the intention that they would fail to fit either context. For instance, the colouring of the images - blue and orange tones - is 'displaced' from the cinema into the gallery. This was an intentionally disruptive, self-conscious effect. Similarly the framing of peoples' bodies was constrained throughout: the 'group' were never shown in their entirety in the work. The intention was, rather than emphasising the people it depicted as subjects to be looked at, I would present them in a way that emphasised their already being viewed, by the maker, camera person, as well as the viewer. While Group Photo alludes to the photograph, the actors were recorded in live action. This meant that actors' maintenance of still poses became a form of test, in which they were bound to show movement. Consequently, these shots became about change - between a desired pose and its loss. All of the devices in the work: the decision that the group would never be wholly visible, the colouring of the images, the disparate camera methods applied to different sections, the two 'types' of roles the actors performed, were used to disrupt the viewer's capacity to immerse herself in the work. This meant that the viewer's position was treated selfconsciously as an integral part of the operations of this work; the work seemed to address the viewer and her expectations. It also suggested that a usually direct relationship between viewer and viewed person exists.

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Brecht saw passivity as residing in the 'cathartic' effect of the theatre, where the viewer would follow the 'inevitable fate' of the hero.²² He affiliated passivity with the production of a 'subjective attitude' in viewers, wherein they would 'become completely entangled with what was going on'. 23 Brecht based his definition of catharsis on the Aristotelian view of tragic theatre. This frames catharsis as supporting a 'purification and purgation of emotions' through theatre or art. It is particularly affiliated with the purging of 'fear or pity'. 24 For Brecht, such a cathartic emotional release through the experience of a cultural production provided an end in itself, one which satisfied the viewer's desire to be transported somewhere else. So he sought to avoid the 'passive empathy' of the spectator, preferring a more active response. ²⁵ He said. 'empathy alone may stimulate a wish to imitate the hero, but it can hardly create the capacity.'26 Brecht saw the viewer's emotional involvement with the play as destructive of her capacity to be activated politically. Yet, his desire to eschew emotional catharsis of any kind in his work can be qualified by his assertion that 'actually, emotions are only clarified in it, steering clear of subconscious origins and carrying nobody away'. 27 In this, Brecht's model of theatre seeks the production of emotion within a specific context, and avoidance of a powerful emotional identification with another's experience.

Brecht's focus on 'catharsis', its potential to cleanse and remove impurities from a person's emotions, seems dated. Yet the benefit of such a release of emotions associated with a cause is well known in psychoanalysis and related practices.²⁸ While this indicates a restorative

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²² Brecht, *On Theatre* (London: Methuen, 2001; 1964), p. 78.

²³ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 78.

²⁴ Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, described 'catharsis' as a 'cleansing' and defined tragedy as 'through pity and fear effecting the *katharsis* of such emotions' (vi.2). Aristotle 'argues that music has several functions: education, or 'catharsis', or entertainment, i.e. relaxation and a pause from stress (*Politics* viii.7.3).' Wiles, David. 'Aristotle's Poetics and ancient dramatic theory', *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 92-107. *Cambridge Companions Online*. Web http://o-dx.doi.org.wam.leeds.ac.uk/10.1017/CCOL9780521834568.006 [accessed 24 May 2014]. p. 99

²⁵ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 57.

²⁶ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 247.

²⁷ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 88.

²⁸ Catharsis was the precursor of psychoanalysis performed by Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, a process based on 'purging, setting free of a strangulated affect'. Later, Freud's psychoanalysis focused on repression, with therapy no longer seeking to release an affect, but to 'uncover repressions and replace them by acts of judgement.' Yet, as Laplanche and Pontalis say, 'Nevertheless, catharsis remains one of the dimensions of any analytic psychotherapy...although this will vary according to the psychopathological structures in question – many

function, Brecht saw 'catharsis' as the opposite of agency. Rather, it was an effect he affiliated with emotive drama and the 'strong centralisation of the story'. 29 He described the 'passion of utterance' and 'clash of forces' in bourgeois theatre, and related it to Aristotle's original reference to tragedy. 30 Yet Brecht sought a spectator who wants 'fun', rather than such deep engagement, although the fun he characterised is based on his view of 'instructional' theatre as being pleasurable. 31 He was also scathing of those who want 'the cockles of their hearts warmed,' who he described as 'scum'. 32 In such statements he sets a clear separation between, on the one hand, those who might want simply to be entertained, and on the other, those who seek deep or positive emotional engagement from theatre, whom he derides.³³ This separation between an audience's desire for 'fun', and their search for a positive or deep emotional experience, seems to make distinctions between viewers which are prescribed.³⁴ These distinctions can be contextualised by Brecht's view of bourgeois theatre as a 'moral institution' representing bourgeois concerns as if they were static and as if the present reality was unalterable - while ostensibly focusing on entertainment alone. However, given the expansion of visual media today, engaging in a range of different affects and effects, and also the persistence of capitalist culture amidst a relative absence of social unrest, the roots and

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treatments present us with intense revivals of certain memories accompanied by a more or less tempestuous emotional discharge.' Sigmund Freud, *An Autobiographical Study* (1925) in Ivan Smith ed. Freud Complete Works (2010), p. 4104 & p. 4227. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1973; repr. 1988), p. 61.

²⁹ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 70.

³⁰ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 70.

³¹ Brecht's theatre occupied a lineage of worker's groups that introduced political literature using theatrical forms and was also a key example of Agitprop theatre that sought to inspire political revolution. The Volksbühne or 'theatre of the people' in Berlin, a theatre designed for and funded by workers, was a strong connection to Brecht; his 'epic theatre' was heavily influenced by the theatre of Erwin Piscator, its director from 1924. The historical and political context of Brecht's Berlin - post-World War I, Weimar Republic Germany - framed the culturally inventive, and politically unstable times prefiguring Nazi Germany. This situates Brecht's hopes for political agitation within a social context conducive to his aims.

³² Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 14.

³³ But this suggests a contradiction between the emphasis on 'entertainment' in bourgeois theatre, which for Brecht is moral and focused on maintaining the consensus, while those who seek entertainment, or 'fun' for him are welcome. Hence Brecht separates entertainment into two, or more, kinds, one achieved through instructional means, another via bourgeois theatre, another focused on 'fun' more broadly.

³⁴ Brecht's positioning of 'fun' against 'catharsis' accords with what Oliver James has described as Donald Winnicott's emphasis on how 'an adult may infuse their work or leisure time with playfulness simply in order to make it fun, not just for catharsis.' He positions this against the notion that the production of art is often connected to the artist's need for some kind of catharsis, which could be linked to the viewer's use of culture for 'catharsis'. The aim of play, for James, is that 'it has no self-aggrandizing goal, nor is it an attempt to control the outside world.' Yet, by positioning 'fun' with educative theatrical productions, Brecht sought to link fun - that is an activity without goals - to very specific goals, namely social change. This suggests a contradiction in Brecht, or at least a relative impossibility at the heart of his theatre. Oliver James, *Affluenza* (London: Vermillion, 2007), p. 423.

context of the role of feeling in cultural productions, as to agency, seems open to wider exploration.

Debord, writing in 1967 described 'the spectacle', that is 'news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment' as 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images', as 'capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image'. This reflects Karl Marx's view of the capital relation as a social relation. Debord is suggesting that 'the spectacle', the image form, is both representative of capital, but also intervenes in the social, mediating human relationships rather than enabling direct relationships. Ultimately, Debord suggests that any relationship with images is a relationship with capital, one which necessarily takes a 'fantastic form'. It is useful to recall the definition of 'spectacle' itself, which is, 'a public show' and 'anything attracting public attention'. This definition highlights the role of attention as it relates to the visual, which is central to Walter Benjamin's use of the term in *The Arcades Project*. Debord links 'the spectacle' to the worker's alienation in capitalism by describing its pacifying effect on viewers:

The spectator's alienation from and submission to the contemplated object (which is the outcome of his unthinking activity) works like this: the more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The spectacle's externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual's own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere. 40

³⁵ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York, Zone Books, 1995; 1967), p. 12-13. p. 24.

p. 12-13, p. 24.

36 'The commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.' Marx, Capital, p. 165.

³⁷ Marx, *Capital*, p. 165.

³⁸ 'spectacle' *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*, ed. by Della Thompson, 9th edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

³⁹ Walter Benjamin used the term 'spectacle' frequently, both in his own statements and in quotations he included by others, in *The Arcades Project*. Based on the arcades of 19th century Paris, he sought to explore the preoccupations of his age, principally commodification. Benjamin's uses of 'spectacle' vary widely in this text, often referring to 'sights' of people or bodies, yet also architecture, objects and cinema. They are frequently marked out by their relative banality, as much as by their capacity to attract visual attention. While Benjamin criticises the 'rubber neck' as an 'impersonal being…absorbed by the external world', he also notes the 'flâneur' as drawn to 'spectacles'; where the flâneur maintains his individuality, the 'rubber neck' is 'the crowd.' Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2002), p. 429 & p. 537.

⁴⁰ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 23.

Debord describes a loss of agency for the viewer in the face of 'the spectacle', whereby they are distanced from, as well as in thrall to, the 'contemplated object'. Contemplation is for him rooted in 'unthinking' activity, which situates the person's gestures as something to be projected onto them, from the image. For Debord, the capitalist context of what is viewed is central to his critique of the spectator. Yet, he rejects the validity of a spectator outright, for instance by describing them as a 'generally contemptible individual'.⁴¹

It seems clear that, like Brecht, Debord had little sympathy with the spectator of the mediated spectacle. Yet unlike Brecht, Debord, rather than basing his critique on emotional effects, rejected both the spectacle and its viewers. He regarded the spectator as 'unthinking' (paralleling Brecht's desire for thinking in his audience) and seems to posit the viewer as generally helpless beyond her ability to be controlled by the visual culture viewed. Debord roots this control over the viewer in her recognition of needs in the image. In this he suggests the viewer requires the image form, but frames her need as a control over the viewer, rather than one contextualised by her lived experience in capitalism. In asserting that life decreased exponentially to the consumption of the spectacle, he defines viewers' relationship to images as being based in a complete loss of agency. The effect of the spectacle on the viewer was posed as a key reason for viewers' alienation from themselves and each other.

Both Brecht's and Debord's perspectives on the passivity of the viewer frame viewers' relationships to cultural productions within a critique of alienation in capitalism, as set out by Marx.⁴² Marx in his *Early Writings* described the formerly direct relationship of a worker to the

⁴¹ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p.138.

⁴² For Marx, 'The object that labour produces, its product, stands opposed to it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour embodied and made material in the object, it is the *objectification* of labour [...] this realisation of labour appears as a loss of reality for the worker, objectification as a *loss of and bondage to the object*, and appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*.' In this, Marx sets out the worker's alienation in relation to the products of her labour, yet he extends this by asserting that the worker 'estranges' (for Marx a stronger term than 'alienates') 'himself from himself'. This happens as the work is 'external' to the worker, 'does not belong to his essential being' leading him to 'deny' rather than 'confirm' himself. While Marx's essentialism has been difficult to accord with his later writings by many commentators, his affirmation of the importance of a person's 'self' here, also her interests, is something I will go on to discuss further. Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1975; repr. 1992) p. 324, 326.

land and to what he produced, as being alienated by the removal of the produced object within capitalism for sale on the open market. Here, workers become estranged from themselves, from other people, the production process, and are ultimately dominated by capital. Debord extends such domination to the effect of the spectacle on viewers. He does this by describing their 'false consciousness' in capitalism (a term Marx didn't use), and 'mystification'. The notion of 'the spectacle' as a mystifying field can be seen in Debord's reading of the spectacle as the existence of 'reality on the one hand and image on the other'. For him, imagery, rather than representing our reality, 'serves as a total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system'. In other words, the spectacle is always functioning to support the most dominant version of 'reality', and its function is to provide fantasy which is explored and directed within that culture, rather than in a self or collectively determined way. In this, cultural productions support the mystification of workers who are unable to see their reality clearly.

Brecht, while neither emphasising workers' 'mystification' in his own writings, nor referring to their 'false consciousness' directly, located his theatre in response to a capitalism that, facilitated by the bourgeois culture he saw supporting it, appeared to people as universal and unchanging. This directly reflected the writings of Marx which aligned the operations of capital

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⁴³ For Marx, the term 'estrangement' defined a more marked separation between people than 'alienation'. On domination: 'So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the worker produces the fewer can he possess and the more he falls under the domination of his product, capital.' Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 324.

⁴⁴ 'false consciousness' is a term first used by Frederic Engels in a private letter where, for him, 'ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives.' Yet, when Benjamin refers to the 'origin of false consciousness', by quoting Marx and Engels as stating that, 'Division of labour becomes truly such only from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears...From this moment onward, consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real."' This suggests that while the term was not used by Marx, its definition was framed by his thinking. 'False consciousness' was also employed in the later work of Georg Lukás, *History and Class Consciousness* (1920) and Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). On mystification, see note 16. Frederic Engels, 'Engels to Franz Mehring', from *Marx and Engels Correspondence*, 1968

http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_07_14.htm [accessed: 25 May 2014] (para. 4 of 11). Marx und Engels über Feuerbach: Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Marx und Engels," in Marx-Engels Archiv, ed. D. Rjazanov, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main, 1928), p. 248 in Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2002), p. 651-2.

⁴⁵ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 13.

with their concealment of the 'social relation' that underpinned them. Brecht stated that in theatre 'what is "natural" must have the force of what is startling. This is the only way to expose the laws of cause and effect.'⁴⁷ In this way he positioned his use of distanciation within the desired production of a 'natural' reality that is visible, that jumps out at the viewer. So Brecht's distanciation is contextualised by capitalism's concealment of its origins and reality; which people working in capitalism cannot see. By response, in seeking to highlight 'cause and effect', Brecht's aim was to show the historical nature of development, to reveal, through his theatre, the conditions of working life in capitalism.

Importantly for this discussion, despite the roots of Brecht's and Debord's critiques of the viewer in Marx's analysis of the negative effects of capitalism on the worker, neither Brecht nor Debord seem sympathetic with the viewer of culture in capitalism. This suggests both criticised viewers for their lack of awareness or critical attitude. But it also suggests that viewers' 'false consciousness', 'mystification', or acceptance of the present reality could be broken - by thinking rather than focusing on the demands of their position in capitalism. In other words, despite the suggestion of the overwhelming impact of 'mystification' and 'false consciousness' for Debord, and the need for political theatre to 'make visible' the historical conditions producing capitalist relations for Brecht, based on their criticisms, both thinkers seem to suggest that the viewer has the capacity to break it quite easily. This is interesting in light of what they advocate as solutions to the situation of the viewer in capitalism, which I will now go on to discuss.

⁴⁷ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 71.

Re-addressing the Critiques of Spectatorship: Agency

In the first part of Group Photo the group occupy static poses that allude to two types of photograph: the formal group photograph that records achievement and participation, and the promotional group photograph linked to the advertisement of a service or product. In the work these 'types' of photograph are depicted as scanned tracking shots of static bodies and isolated framings of 'couples'. Although the way actors are depicted appears to have an indirect association with the types of photographs that their actions suggest, actors' assent to this suggests otherwise. Nonetheless this 'assent' is disturbed when some actors perform expressions, gestures and 'mistakes' that disrupt the continuity of the work and what might be expected of the group photograph. These might be small rebellions, actions that show actors' desire to spoil the image-making being imposed on them. In this way, the camerawork that interrogates bodies and frames 'couples' becomes the axis around which the actors' agency is revealed. Yet this agency tends to feel choreographed, codified, limited. Responding to what might be called the 'desires' of the camera in the most 'static' section, the group literally move to meet its expectations in the next; they enact romance and respond to the call to be scrutinised in ways that both recall, and unsettle familiar interactions from life and culture. Importantly, the actors tend to reject the final moment that might round off a scene, instead performing an abstract gesture, a sign that the continuity of their acts is not a given. It seems that the formal extremes of the camerawork have enabled actors to become free of the conventions of the group photograph. In the last part of the work they initially consent to and then progressively reject the terms of the image-making set out. The collaborative forms of agency and play that the actors show here could be a direct reaction to the constraints of the image that remain, also to their original stillness. As agency becomes tied to the operations of the image, the work asks what it is that we expect from images and whether this can be disrupted by what is unfamiliar here.

In contrast to the passivity they both saw in the viewer, Brecht and Debord sought to produce agency, Brecht in his viewers, Debord by promoting collaborative action. In each case, the 'activity' of the spectator was sought, and viewing in and of itself, was denounced as lacking any politicised potential. In this way, Brecht sought to 'teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed towards changing the world'. 48 He wanted his audience to be able to relate directly to the actors on the stage, to identify with a hero who might be themselves. He said:

The view is that the spectator ought to be able to feel himself into the stage character's skin in such a way that he would like to imitate him in real life. 49

He sought to 'stimulate consciousness' this way, rather than to 'stimulate' blind imitation. He wanted to produce a 'critical attitude' in the spectator, for them to think and to know what it is that they see. 50 To achieve this he employed the 'Alienation-Effect'. This approach sought to make what is familiar strange by rendering it more visible. The following describes it well:

The achievement of the A-effect constitutes something utterly ordinary, recurrent; it is just a widely-practised way of drawing one's own or someone else's attention to a thing, and it can be seen in education as also in business conferences of one sort or another. The A-effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected.⁵¹

This act, of making an object strange or unusual in order that it can be seen, shows Brecht's desire to make people aware of their surroundings, the social conditions they occupy. 52 By alienating the object, or practice, the viewer's attention - in a condition of alienation in capitalism – is broken, and her surroundings are made visible, her ability to understand them

⁴⁹ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 247.

⁴⁸ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 78.

⁵¹ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 142.

⁵² Brecht's use of the 'alienation effect' was intended to produce a 'true realism'. For Brecht, 'true realism has to do more than just make reality recognisable in the theatre. One has to be able to see through it too. One has to be able to see the laws that decide how the processes of life develop.' Bertholt Brecht, The Messingkauf Dialogues, 2nd edn. (Indiana USA: Bloomsbury Methuen, 1965), p. 27.

clarified. For Brecht, making the familiar strange produced critical vision in the audience. Here, the relationship between whether something can be seen or known is related directly to the potential to support one's own search for agency. Brecht's emphasis on the link between knowing and seeing is central to his work. It is a relationship he compared to the inability of the person, who is emotionally involved with what they view, to perceive her own reality critically - in a way that would support the collective search for political agency.

Differently, Debord advocated collaborative action as the ideal alternative to viewers' engagement with the 'spectacular' form of contemporary imagery. Such action included the public and hence removed the audience altogether. In 1957 he defined 'participatory events using experimental behaviour to break the spectacular bind of capitalism'. Debord advocated new, playful modes of interaction which would serve as an alternative to the events in a person's life which are 'in their immense majority, so undifferentiated and so dull that they perfectly present the impression of similitude'. He sought to construct situations; 'collective environments' where groups of individuals could gather together and 'multiply poetic objects and subjects', creating games between them. He advocated the 'extreme dispersion of acts through these activities, positioning this against their 'concentration' in tragedy. Debord asserted a 'non-continuous conception of life,' and sought to challenge the fixing of emotions in art by 'always gaining ground on change, on always going further in play and in the multiplication of moving periods,' in the situations produced. This shows a desire to expand social roles overall, not only for would-be 'viewers'. So, like Brecht, Debord's focus on the nature of activity moved beyond a simple avoidance of 'spectatorship'.

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⁵³ Debord, 'Towards a Situationist International', 1957, in Claire Bishop, *Participation* (London: MIT Press and Whitechapel, 2006), p. 96.

⁵⁴ Debord, 'Towards a Situationist International', p. 98.

⁵⁵ Debord, 'Towards a Situationist International', p. 98; p. 99.

⁵⁶ Debord, 'Towards a Situationist International', p. 99.

⁵⁷ Debord, 'Towards a Situationist International', p. 99; p. 100.

Yet through Debord's (and the Situationist International's) notion of *détournement* – that is influential to the now prevalent process of 'appropriation' in fine art – he also advocated a critical use of cinema. This revealed a desire for what is least productive about the cinematic spectacle to be surpassed. Thomas Y. Levin has described how for the Situationist International:

To the extent that cinema is synonymous with spectacle—a spatialization of time, a staging of separation, a fostering of passivity, alienation, and so on—it is simply unacceptable and must be eliminated.⁵⁸

Referring to Debord's statement that, 'The cinema could have been historical examination, theory, essay, memories,' he went on to say that:

This leaves open the possibility of an alternative sort of cinematic activity incompatible with the economy of spectacle, a nonspectacular, antispectacular, or other-than-spectacular cinema. Such a realm of possibility is the precondition of what one might call situationist cinema. ⁵⁹

This desire to avoid the realm of the spectacle recalls Debord's trenchant critique of the image form in *The Society of the Spectacle*, yet it situates a possible response within the realm of images. However, Debord's notion that the artwork should disrupt or reject its context in art, or culture, and to occupy an anti-art position, clearly suggests that this practice should be situated beyond the realm of the spectacle. ⁶⁰ This recalls his advocacy of experimental 'situations', which are clearly posed in the real. Both positions suggest the power of the spectacle over the viewer, and either the critical use of images, or the benefits of human participation, as routes to achieving the viewer's agency.

⁵⁸ Thomas Y. Levin, 'Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord' in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonagh (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002), p. 325

Debord, *In girum,* in *Oeuvres cinématographiques,* 207–208; cf. the second epigraph that opens this essay, in, Thomas Y. Levin 'Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord'; Thomas Y. Levin, p. 328. Thomas Y. Levin, p. 328.

Debord's advocacy of 'experimental situations' as a route to agency seems to occupy a propositional role which enables groups of people to collectively perform alternative forms of social life through play. This places any reading of 'participation' in performance as a route to agency, in and of itself, as something which – for Debord – seems insufficient as an interpretation of his work or aims. In order to overcome the position of viewer, Debord located the 'pacifying' effect of 'the spectacle' as the context that framed participatory 'activity' as necessary. Yet, by advocating collage-based practices in film, he suggests that the viewer can be accessed by a change in the structural form of what it is that they watch. If détournement of different aspects of culture can be used to disrupt the homogeneity of the field of the spectacle then this indicates another route beyond the spectacle.

Taken together, the influence of both Brecht's and Debord's critiques of spectatorship has been vast and prompted many critical cinematic, theatrical and fine art responses. As set out here, both linked their critique of the spectacle to a critique of the viewer. Yet, this meant that their arguments risked avoiding a wider exploration of the actual situation of the viewer in capitalism. While this is in essence the point of these key theories - that they eschew the common position of the spectator in the production of political agency – the limitations they placed on the viewer seem to leave room for other perspectives. Both sought viewers or participants with particular attitudes, or who want to act rather than look, in ways that suggest their exasperation with the viewer. Yet this also shows both Brecht's and Debord's powerful desire for social change, within a situation which they saw as fundamentally compromised. For both, the effects and contexts of capitalism were so limiting for the person that any engagement with its culture was fatal to a viewer's capacity to think, and act. This is affirmed

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⁶¹ Perhaps most appropriately for Debord, the exasperation that he displayed towards the viewer may be contextualised by the divorce between theory and practice in Marxism. The urgent need to 'create' political change could, in part, frame his criticisms of the viewer.

by the later texts of Griselda Pollock and Laura Mulvey who, from the perspective of feminism, continue the Debordian and Brechtian projects. $^{\rm 62}$

⁶² Griselda Pollock, 'Screening the Seventies', in *Vision and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1988; repr. 2006). Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: MacMillan, 1989; repr. 1991).



Feminism Extending the Critiques

It was my intention that Group Photo present men and women who viewers may feel able to identify with as equals. The five people depicted in the work are of different ages, racial and cultural backgrounds. The actors are dressed in their own casual clothes; women were asked to wear no, or if preferred, light make up. The way the actors are presented serves to reject the aesthetic of photographs of achievement (uniforms, sports strips, formal attire) and of promotional images (brightly coloured, new, aspirational clothing, each person arranged next to the others in a way that is lively and contrasting). So although these people appear to resist the formal codes of the images they occupy, they may, as a result, seem to be more 'like' the viewer. We might encounter such people daily: they do not represent an ideal of beauty. The ideal suggested in this work, aside from its many constraints and more unsettling aspects (which nonetheless are applied to people equally), is found in this group. It is a group of equals, who are all different. They are each equally able to 'become' someone else in the work, to shift their role from being in a 'fixed' image, to a moving, collaborative activity. They are all equally able to shake off their stereotypes. It is important that these allusions to equality exist in the work, even though the treatment of actors' bodies may suggest otherwise. In this way, equality becomes 'visible' against the power of the camera operator and maker. It is important that a sustained image of equality is present in the work – with the compromised conditions of capitalist life that challenge it characterising the mechanisms of control that frame these people.

Griselda Pollock, in her 1988 text 'Screening the Seventies', highlighted the relevance of Brechtian distanciation for feminist art practices at the time. Yet Pollock also reinforces the Debordian view of 'the spectacle', by describing the 'illusory fictional worlds offered in art, fiction and film', and asks that the 'social reality' of women's oppression not be 'swept away in

the gloss and glitter of the spectacle'. 63 Her viewer being 'swept away' mirrors the language of Brecht, and she suggests that the 'dominant pacification of populations takes place through the passive consumption of meanings naturalised through realist representations'. ⁶⁴ The implied control of the viewer by the image is also reinforced in Pollock's text, and her description of viewers 'consuming' images, accords with Debord's analogy for the image as an accumulation of capital. Agency is, for Pollock, as for Brecht and Debord, figured in relation to making visible the conditions which form the viewer's reality. She highlights the 'political purpose' of feminist practices 'with the intention to expose critical areas' in patriarchal systems producing subject positions. ⁶⁵ Pollock defines the 'point' of 'dis-identificatory practices' as being to 'liberate the viewer from being captured by illusions of art which encourage passive identification with fictional worlds,' thereby rendering them an 'active participant in the production of meanings'. 66 Her framing of the viewer's position in relation to imagery, and agency, interestingly conflates Debordian and Brechtian approaches. Yet Pollock's language mirrors that of 'the spectacle' when she re-emphasises its control over the viewer: its meanings must be 'exposed', and the viewer must be 'liberated' from its power, as she has been 'captured' by it. Writing twenty years after Debord, and fifty years after Brecht first wrote about alienation effects in Chinese theatre, Pollock's text shows the continuing importance of Brecht's and Debord's framing of the viewer and mediated culture, as regards agency, to feminist practices.⁶⁷

Laura Mulvey, in her influential feminist text 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), situated her analysis of the framing of women in Hollywood cinema within the terms of Debord's framing of 'the spectacle' in capitalism. Her descriptions of the relationship of the viewer to the cinema accord with his, when she refers to 'the fascination of film' as reflecting existing 'patterns of fascination' which have 'moulded' the individual subject, and the

⁶³ Pollock, p. 217; p. 267.

⁶⁴ Pollock, p. 246.

⁶⁵ Pollock, p. 222.

⁶⁶ Pollock, p. 223.

⁶⁷ Brecht, *On Theatre*, p. 91.

'interpretation of sexual difference' which 'controls images'. ⁶⁸ She goes on to describe mainstream films that:

portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy. ⁶⁹

Here Mulvey highlights the power of film over the viewer, in the 'fascination' it provides, and suggests its role in 'moulding' the subject. With images 'controlled' from within, she describes their portrayal of a 'sealed', 'separate' world, which supports the potential for 'voyeuristic fantasy'. Mulvey's terms, while they may not consciously reflect those of Debord, seem to directly affirm his framing of 'the spectacle' by paralleling the alienating separation of life in capitalism. Mulvey too speaks of alienation, but rather refers to the alienation of the subject at the point of the Mirror Stage, and its effect on identification based on 'ego ideal' positions. Yet, Mulvey affirms the context of alienation in capitalism in her recurrent use of metaphors based in distance and separation; her framing of 'woman as spectacle'. Read in Debord's terms, capital could be accumulated as the image of woman, where woman as object and 'fetish' (this parallel's Marx's definition of the fetishistic status of the product in capitalism) is the ideal occupant of the capitalist image; for Mulvey the 'perfect product'. Mulvey frames

⁶⁸ Mulvey, p. 14.

⁶⁹ Mulvey, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Lacan posits that the 'I' of the child is formed in correspondence with the mirror image or parent. For him, 'the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an "orthopaedic" form of its totality - and to the finally donned armour of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure.' In this respect the 'alienating identity' is reflected in the formation of the ego, which corresponds with the external image, figured in an imagined 'whole.' For Mulvey, 'The mirror phase occurs at a time when the child's physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity, with the result that his recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body. Recognition is thus overlaid with misrecognition: the image recognised is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject, which, re-introjected as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others. This mirror-moment predates language for the child.' Where identification is imagined as occurring within a mimetic relation, 'whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides,' to be 'like' that person, the notion of the ego-ideal positions inequality within identifications. If the 'self' is misrecognised as more 'perfect' than it is experienced, then the person's identifications with others based on the ego-ideal, involve a symbolic improvement in her own position. This is relevant to later discussions here. Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in Ecrits, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970; repr. 2006), p. 78; Mulvey, p. 17; Laplanche, J., Pontalis, J.B., p. 188.

^{&#}x27; Mulvey, p. 20.

Mulvey, p. 22. 'The commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of

the male viewer (and actor) as 'active' in looking, and the woman as 'passive' in being looked at. ⁷³ Yet, as Brecht and Debord regarded the position of viewer as broadly passive, this shows the potential of Mulvey's framing of sexual difference in the viewer's relationship to cinema, to disrupt notions of what is 'active' or 'passive' in viewing (albeit that she frames this as a criticism). Mulvey repeatedly welcomes practices that 'challenge' mainstream narrative film in her text, inviting their destruction of the 'satisfaction, pleasure, and privilege of the "invisible guest"'. ⁷⁴ Here she reaffirms the dominance of the image over the viewer and – like Debord – suggests the need to negate its power, pleasures and effects, which are so harmful to the progress of gender politics.

Both Pollock's and Mulvey's texts confirm the broad continuance of Brecht's and Debord's perspectives on the spectator as regards agency. Yet, while Debord and Brecht sought to set the terms of viewing, or avoid the viewing role, both Pollock and Mulvey indicate ways that the position of viewers can be reconsidered; principally they suggest critical reformulations regarding the position of women. While I will draw on particular aspects of Mulvey's and Pollock's texts in my next section, it is clear that amidst the contemporary expansion of visual culture across different platforms, the position of viewer cannot be avoided. It rather seems ripe to be addressed directly, within a politicised context, in a way that enables a reframing of the majority of culture that still maintains the viewer.

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this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.' Karl Marx, *Capital*, p. 873-904, p. 165.

Mulvey's 'passive – active' binary follows John Berger's conclusion that 'men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.' Berger framed his well known analysis of painting using woman as the figure on this basis, extending it to the representation of women in advertising. John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 45-47.

⁷⁴ Mulvey, p. 25-26.

⁷⁵ While 'sexual difference' is addressed in my work, within a desired framing of equality, it is not its primary focus and is not the focus of this text. My treatment of Mulvey and Pollock here reflects this.

The Spectator Emancipated

In Group Photo actors are presented to viewers, and actors present themselves to viewers, in specific stylised ways. The modes of presentation and activities of the actors alone constitute the work. Group Photo deliberately avoids trying to tell or directly communicate anything to the audience. Instead, what is conveyed is done so through: the gestures of the actors, how they interact together, the way the camera treats them, and also how the work is edited and treated in post-production. Images have been produced in the expectation that viewers would like to address the people depicted in them directly. Yet the viewer may expect to see a reality unlike her own in these images. The likely difference of these moving images, to the experience of the person viewing them in capitalism, is to a fair extent rejected. Much of what is depicted feels like it could originate from our shared reality. So, what alternative the image could provide, is rather suggested through different combinations of gestures and interactions that oscillate around familiar tropes from visual culture, art and cinema. The image, so often highly rendered and visually seductive today (in art, and across culture) is made both banal, unsettling and highly rendered; this might be the dark side of high definition moving image. Principally the work rejects the association of high definition with positive depictions of life or culture, instead focusing on its potentially unnerving capacity to scrutinise. For this reason, these may be images we do not want to view. There is an ambivalence about them that is purposeful, which addresses what it is that we seek from images, and self-consciously suggests that we look to images for alternative, rather than merely different, realities.

Jacques Rancière has recently provided a significant revision to the historically important critiques of spectatorship. He, by contrast with Debord and Brecht, positions potential agency in the act of viewing, and situates the act of looking as fundamental to social life. Rancière suggests that we cannot always be 'agents'. Instead he frames looking in terms of 'associating

and dissociating', for him the route to a potential 'emancipation of the spectator'. Here, 'association and dissociation' define the fundamental separation at the heart of cultural production: 'the aesthetic cut which separates outcomes from intentions'. Rancière hopes to reframe the 'collective' power of the audience, which is 'the power to translate in their own way what they are looking at'. He contextualises this by criticising the attempt to produce an activist energy from the viewer's knowledge, one which would instigate social change. He qualifies this by saying:

There is no straightforward road from the fact of looking at a spectacle to the fact of understanding the state of the world; no direct road from intellectual awareness to political action.⁸⁰

In this, Rancière offers a direct critique of the positions of Brecht and Debord towards viewers. He also breaks the hopes of makers of politically interested works whose intention it is to directly instigate activity towards social change in their audience through an emphasis on the relationship between looking and knowing alone. He altogether loosens the pressure placed on the maker to produce certain effects in the viewer, and frames any desire to do so as rooted in the ascription of a 'lack of capacity' to the viewer, and 'capacity' to the actor. He suggests that fundamental limits are placed on the status of the viewer by the positions of Brecht and Debord.

Rancière locates his critique of these approaches in relation to their roots in theories of the 'mystification' of the person, and hence viewer, in capitalism. Relating 'artistic critique' to Martha Rosler's photomontages he describes the root of their intention as:

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⁷⁶ Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator' *Artforum*, March 2007, p. 279.

⁷⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London: Verso, 2009) p. 82.

⁷⁸ Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', p. 279.

⁷⁹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 47.

⁸⁰ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 75.

⁸¹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 47-8.

Always a question of showing the spectator what she does not know how to see, and making her feel ashamed of what she does not want to see. 82

Here he describes a focus on comparing heterogeneous elements, rather than addressing the difficult homogeneity between consumption and protest, for instance. 83 For him, as there is no link between 'knowing' or 'seeing' the spectacle and being able to effect change, approaches intended to reveal reality can be undermined. He offers a scathing critique of this approach, positioning its roots in fears, aired in the mid-nineteenth century, of the concern that the introduction of visual displays and images in public places produced a situation where 'too many stimuli have been unleashed on all sides'. 84 He also contrasts the 'paternalistic concern' about the potential harm done to workers by these 'stimuli', which allowed the 'multiplication of unprecedented encounters' and the 'awakening of original capacities in popular bodies'.85 Rancière posits a form of emancipation at this moment of the expansion of culture, where the 'old distribution of what could be seen thought and done' is reframed. 86 He suggests it was a paternalistic concern about the negative 'effects' culture may have on people that underscores both the aims of social critique in art, and Debord's and Brecht's framing of the viewer based on 'incapacity'. In making this claim, Rancière suggests that the intentions of 'social critique' are linked to critiques of the viewer, in a way that risks generalising their roots. 87 He frames this by saying that:

⁸² Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, p. 29-30.

⁸³ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 27-8.

⁸⁴ Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, p. 46.

⁸⁵ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 47.

⁸⁶ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 47.

⁸⁷ This contradicts Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's different historicisation of 'social critique'. They delineate two forms of critique: 'artistic critique' and 'social critique.' Aligning 'artistic critique' with criticisms of capitalism as '(a) a source of disenchantment and inauthenticity of objects, persons, emotions'; '(b) as a source of oppression, inasmuch as it is opposed to the freedom, autonomy and creativity of the human beings who are subject to...the market' and 'forms of subordination involved in the condition of wage labour.' They define 'social critique' ('inspired by socialists and, later, by Marxists') as concerned with '(c) capitalism as a source of poverty among workers and of inequalities on an unprecedented scale;' and '(d) capitalism as a source of opportunism and egoism' that 'proves destructive of social bonds and collective solidarity.' Chiapello and Boltanski, in The New Spirit of Capitalism define 'artistic critique' as based on 'a contrast between attachment and detachment' – an analogy having some accords with Rancière's association and dissociation. They relate this to bourgeois 'attachments' to products, and the rational detachment needed to continue acquiring them, alongside the intellectuals and artists 'free of all attachments'. Rancière openly criticises their approach in his text, linking it to the 'melancholic' discourse of the left, and undermining the claim they make to a link between creativity and the concerns of May 1968, saying the binary of 'artistic' and 'social' critiques are not 'based on any analysis of historical forms of protest'. For Rancière, 'social emancipation was simultaneously an aesthetic emancipation, a break with the ways of feeling, seeing and saying that characterized working-class identity in the old hierarchical order.' Chantal Mouffe, whose

In effect, the procedures of social critique have as their goal treating the incapable: those who do not know how to see, who do not understand the meaning of what they see, who do not know how to transform acquired knowledge into activist energy.⁸⁸

Rancière suggests that the new visual culture supported capacities which were disruptive to the social order by providing information, forms of freedom and different ways of viewers constituting themselves in life. For him the aims of social critique stem from the fear of this disruption. Rancière's view of what would be the realm of 'the spectacle' for Debord as a shift from one sensible world to another seems to underscore this.⁸⁹ He suggests that culture is marked out more so by difference, one which may or may not have a potentially 'disruptive' effect for a viewer.90

Rancière's position accords with, and departs from, another 'classic' perspective on spectatorship 'Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror', a 1988 critique of the strategies of 'making strange' in photography by Simon Watney. In this text Watney historicises these approaches to photography in the 1920's and 1930's, in relation to earlier Romantic notions of a 'flawed perceptual capacity' and 'equating knowledge with seeing'. 91 He also connects these practices to Marx's concept of 'false consciousness' (incorrectly as Marx didn't use the phrase), and claims that for Marx (writing in The German Ideology):

Capitalism is seen to create conditions which cloud or mystify our awareness of ourselves and our relations to the world in such a way that we cannot correctly perceive our objective conditions of inequality and exploitation, which are misunderstood as if they were 'natural' and therefore immutable.92

work I will discuss here, supports Boltanski and Chiapello's position, from a hegemonic perspective (see note, 127). Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, The New Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005; repr. 2007), pp. 37-38; Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, pp. 34-35.

⁸⁸ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 47.

⁸⁹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 47.

⁹⁰ Rancière's frequent use of the term 'different' or alignment of the image with 'difference' could be said to have accords with the Post-Structuralist influenced Marxism of Gilles Deleuze and its 'valorisation of 'difference' over negation.' Yet Rancière's position is not so clear, both being aligned with, and a critique of Marxism; his thinking is neither directly aligned with Post-Structuralism. Nonetheless Rancière's language recalls the terms of Post-

Structuralism. Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, (London: Verso, 1998), p. 79.

91 Simon Watney, 'The Shattered Mirror' in *Thinking Photography*, ed. by Victor Burgin (London: MacMillan, 1982),

p. 155-156.

92 Watney, p. 157; Watney also describes Marx's 'problem' of 'how to picture consciousness as an "ensemble of "" and how to relate this picture to the rest of material. social relations" rather than as a historically given "essence", and how to relate this picture to the rest of material life.' He describes the concept of 'false consciousness' as an 'early solution' to solving this problem of linking a

Watney's argument appears to add support to Rancière's view of the Marxist framing of 'mystification', as fundamental to 'making strange' and thereby 'distanciation'. While Watney acknowledged that Marx's position enabled a 'radically new emphasis on the ways in which culture legitimates particular forms of society,' for him, the Romantic 'socially abstracted notion of perception' remained. 93 Yet Rancière's discussion of spectatorship, in light of midnineteenth century fears of the impact of multiple visual 'stimuli' on people, appears, in contrast to Watney's, de-historicised from the lineage of the development of art practices that relate to 'making strange'. Albeit that Rancière's intention seems to be to highlight the accords between 'conservative' concerns about the effect of visual media on the viewer and those of the left. Conversely Watney historicises 'distanciation' and 'making strange' in the context of the activities of the Russian Futurists in pre-revolutionary Russia - setting out the impact of figures like Sergei Tretyakov and Victor Shklovsky's framing of ostranenie or 'making strange' on Bertholt Brecht. In contrast to Rancière, Watney seems to praise the political ambitions of the techniques affiliated with 'making strange', especially by the Russian Futurists and in the Surrealist movement, yet he bemoans their effect on photography. He accords with Rancière in criticising the 'inflexibility' of the Marxist framing of 'making strange' in Tretyakov, which he saw as equal to that of the 'bourgeois dogmatism which "ostranenie" had set out to question'. 94 Generally too, he criticises the roots of 'making strange' in a Romantic 'hostility to the customary, to all fixed forms of habit and taste', its overemphasis on the significance of 'seeing'. 95 In an argument which accords with Rancière's analysis, Watney claims that 'the thinking self which needs such ideas and habits remained largely untheorised,' and that 'making strange' was a 'bourgeois abstraction of thought' which failed to address the multiple

'consciousness' conceived socially to material life in capitalism. Yet, this suggests that the notion of mystification was used to limit the socially constituted 'consciousness' Marx imagined, by suggesting that it was possible for capitalism to determine, through its operations, the mystification of workers. In my second section I will turn to the 'social production' of the self, in contemporary terms, to address this question further. Simon Watney, 'The Shattered Mirror' p. 156.

⁹³ Watney, p. 157.

⁹⁴ Watney, p. 163.

⁹⁵ Watney, p. 173.

class, race, gender positions within a revolutionary politics. 96 Rancière's rejection of the ability of cultural works to produce particular effects in viewers is affirmed by Watney's claims that 'the familiar' is not determinable across all viewers, that it is 'neither uniform or heterogeneous,' and is based in social experience. 97 Watney sought recognition of the 'objective historical conditions' which contextualise any 'surprise' in response to 'making strange' saying rather that meaning is an 'infinite dialectic' between images, subjects and institutions.98

Rancière's critique of Debord's and Brecht's attempts to produce agency in the viewer provides a significant re-reading of the classic critiques of spectatorship. He reframes the way that viewers and artworks may be perceived, and his argument is suggestive of the potential for liberation and critique which resides with the viewer. By positioning an agency in viewing, he is going against the classic critiques of spectatorship and extending viewing to the centrality of the visual to both life and politics. He also posits a viewer with the power to translate material as they wish, and entirely loosens the relationship between the intentions of the artist, and the effects of the work they make, based on the separation which runs through cultural production. He suggests it is impossible to produce particular effects in a viewer, rather emphasising her capacity to respond as she wishes. By removing the mystified worker, Rancière claims that the worker and person in capitalism is able to see her reality, that there is an open relational field in which interpretation can be formed. By disrupting the tenets of social critique, he suggests the same disservice is done to the viewer. Also, by positing the realm of images as an alternative reality, he removes the dramatic separation between images and viewers, and undermines the domination of viewers by images emphasised by Debord. In

⁹⁶ Watney, p. 173; p. 176. Watney raises a principle concern of the Post-Structuralist movement; the diversification of subject positions based on different cultural and social concerns. He suggests that this acknowledgement of different perspectives can significantly disrupt the more singular hopes for 'making strange' to 'affect' its viewers equally. This is suggestive for a perspective on spectatorship that specifically addresses this diversity. It also suggests that visible diversity in the protagonists of a cultural work may serve to disrupt the effects of distanciation. ⁹⁷ Watney, 'The Shattered Mirror' p. 174.

⁹⁸ Watney, 'The Shattered Mirror' p. 175.

this Rancière seems to frame a relationship between viewer and image as one potentially rooted in equality.

However, there are limitations to Rancière's critique. While he advocates certain creative practices which construct the work as 'the very tension between the apart and the together', he does seem to allow a general broadening of the frame of the politicised artwork, almost to the point where all creative production might be so. ⁹⁹ This seems to generalise specific contexts for making work which may address particular areas of social life in a politicised way. Relatedly, Rancière's argument seems to ignore the capitalist character of the 'alternative' visual field in a way which softens the potential of his analysis. While I find Rancière's argument that the viewer is able to see her reality in capitalism, important, it seems too vague to generalise the whole realm of visual production in capitalism as an 'alternative'. But the drastic contrast between his view and the classic critiques of spectatorship, provokes a shift away from perspectives emphasising a one-way impact of images on people, enabling a focus on the human relationships suggested by our interaction with images.

While Rancière lacks detail at the level of the relationship between people and images, this seems intended to leave a freer relational space for the viewer to operate in. Yet, in his unwillingness to determine the effects of cultural products, he seems to deny the capacity of culture to affect people's lives. This suggests both that culture does not have the potential to 'socialise' people, and that the same applies to artworks. This has interesting accords with Watney's critique which also seems to suggest the impossibility of art addressing what is

⁹⁹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 78; Rancière has written a number of influential texts, such as *The Politics of Aesthetics* in which he seeks to productively reframe the history of fine art making, by affirming what is inherently political about aesthetics. He founds his notion of the political in art on 'the distribution of the sensible' which is framed by the order of 'the police', a law that separates 'those who take part from those who are excluded' a separation that underscores the aesthetic division between what is 'visible and invisible'. Here, 'artistic practices are "ways of doing and making" that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationship they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.' Rancière's way of connecting 'inequality' or 'those who take part from those who are excluded' with aesthetics is of particular interest to this thesis. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004; repr. 2007) p. 13.

'familiar' about people's habits – or having an effect on a viewer. Yet, the effects culture can have on viewers are well known. 100

¹⁰⁰ Culture is acknowledged as having a significant impact on viewers, with its 'socialising' properties affirmed by thinkers affiliated with Post-Structuralist and its related Postmodernist currents. The notion that representations, or cultural productions, produce our shared reality, rather than exist merely as a response to it, is dominant. While this emphasis has been significant for art and cultural analysis, Rancière suggests that the viewer has more agency in viewing, perhaps while viewers are 'affected' by what they view, they also seek the image for certain 'effects'. This is something I will go on to discuss here.



Affect, Incommensurability and the Image

Group Photo represents people using methods and approaches that aren't necessarily ethical. In fact, they suggest a lack of ethics on the part of the camera operator or maker. The scenes using an 'interrogating' camera – even though I imagined them as an extreme extension of 'formal' modes of viewing - parallel the human capacity to 'scrutinise' others, either via the image, or in life. While the actors appear to rebel against the terms of their representation, and the agenda of the camera operator, the viewer is left to pick out the errors, problems and issues that they find with the image. Even though highly rendered video has the capacity to 'show' us things we are unable to see with the naked eye, it is not supposed to be used this way. By contrast the 'ideal' of romantic love is referred to in other images. Yet as the camera continually frames 'couples', what may be romantic becomes increasingly unsettling and arbitrary. Treated together, images alluding to achievement (which have been extended to become interrogative) are aligned with images alluding to aspiration (which have been extended to become romantic). The image is depicted selfconsciously as something that is neither inherently ethical, nor something that viewers possess an inherently ethical relationship to. Rather, viewers are imagined to be quite demanding of the image, seeking something specific from it. This means that the effect of the image on the viewer comes before its ethics, framing a viewer who is indiscriminate in her use of images. Equally, the expectation that the artwork represents the world view of the artist is challenged, as the viewer becomes uncertain that this artist would want to be thought to see the world this way. Group Photo addresses the ethical dimension of our relationship to protagonists in images by eschewing the ethics of the gallery. The artwork is treated as a self-conscious entity, produced in a way that speaks about, as much as embodies, the terms of our relationship to an artwork, image or item of culture in a contemporary capitalist reality.

Having suggested both the potential of, and some possible caveats to, Jacques Rancière's approach towards spectatorship, I will discuss the perspective of Claire Bishop whose position both accords with, and departs from Rancière's. Bishop has recently produced *Artificial Hells* an ambitious text on the politics of participatory performance in the contemporary sphere. She has supported Rancière's 'reinvention of the notion of "aesthetic"', his emphasis on the 'affective' properties of art and his notion of art 'as an autonomous realm of experience.' ¹⁰¹ She has also tended to make a strong case for artworks which problematise the relationship between the viewers of, and participants in, a performance. For instance, she closes her book with this statement about participatory art:

it has the capacity to communicate on two levels – to participants and to spectators – the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse, and to elicit perverse, disturbing and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew. ¹⁰²

This statement indicates Bishop's desire to explore the range of possible relationships between a spectator and what they view. These may be pleasurable, paralleling Brecht's audience who wanted 'fun' or their 'hearts warmed', as much as they may be 'perverse' or 'disturbing'. This suggests that a broader context for 'engaging a viewer' exists, one based on a range of possible relationships to other people and situations. This breadth seems to accord with the freedom

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¹⁰¹ For Bishop, 'One of Rancière's key contributions to contemporary debates around art and politics is therefore to reinvent the term 'aesthetic' so that it denotes a specific mode of experience, including the very linguistic and theoretical domain in which thought about art takes place. In this logic, all claims to be 'anti- aesthetic' or reject art still function within the aesthetic regime.' Bishop continues, 'Rancière has therefore informed my thinking in two ways: firstly, in his attention to the affective capabilities of art that avoids the pitfalls of a didactic critical position in favour of rupture and ambiguity. Good art, implies Rancière, must negotiate the tension that (on the one hand) pushes art towards 'life' and that (on the other) separates aesthetic sensoriality from other forms of sensible experience. This friction ideally produces the formation of elements 'capable of speaking twice: from their readability and from their unreadability'. Secondly, I have adopted Rancière's idea of art as an autonomous realm of experience in which there is no privileged medium. The meaning of artistic forms shifts in relation to the uses also made of these forms by society at large, and as such they have no intrinsic or fixed political affiliation.' Bishop's description of Rancière's attention to the 'affective capabilities of art' seems to have accords with Simon O'Sullivan's recent claims for an 'aesthetics of affect' where art history 'which attends only to art's signifying character' would disappear, while 'art's asignifying functions' and 'affective and intensive qualities' would be emphasised. Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (London: Verso, 2012) p. 29-30. Bishop cites Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics, p. 63. and Rancière, Malaise dans l'esthétique, (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2004), p. 67, Bishop's translation. Simon O'Sullivan, 'The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art beyond Representation' in Jorella Andrews and Simon O'Sullivan, Visual Cultures as Object and Affects (London and Berlin: Goldsmiths and Sternberg Press, 2013), p. 20-21.

¹⁰² Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* (London: Verso, 2012) p. 284.

afforded the viewer by Rancière, one also set within the cultures of relating and viewing common to capitalism.

Laura Mulvey's recent reassessment of her earlier arguments in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, in an interview with Roberta Sassatelli, frames a contemporary context for spectator positions that accords with this picture of a broadened field of viewing relationships. When Sassatelli notes that Mulvey's earlier text was criticised for 'having embraced the heterosexual matrix and not having seriously considered the widely diverse modalities of spectatorship,' Mulvey, in the interview continues:

There are also multiple audiences and spectator positions, multiple ways in which different kinds of social groups are distanced or entranced by the images on the screen. ¹⁰³

Mulvey's statement emphasises the variable status of the viewer, the different ways in which they can 'become' viewer and in which they might use the image. In this she significantly expands viewers' potential to experience agencies through images. She also suggests a broader capacity to analyse viewers, and viewing, in ways that can be applied to culture retrospectively, as well as to a contemporary moment dominated by the digital.

This potential, to address the viewer and viewing in a particularly contemporary context, is addressed by Bishop in a 2012 *Artforum article* 'The Digital Divide'. In it she seems to strike a balance between, on the one hand, Debord's treatment of 'the spectacle' as a separate reality and, on the other, Rancière's perspective on the emancipatory potential of the viewer. In the article, in which she discussed the return of film-based practices to the gallery, and debated what this meant in the digital age, she made comments particular to moving image practice:

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¹⁰³ Roberta Sassatelli, 'Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture', *Theory, Culture & Society* 28:123 (2011) 123-143 (pp. 124, 129).

While many artists *use* digital technology, how many really confront the question of what it means to think, see, and filter affect through the digital?¹⁰⁴

Here, Bishop seems to open up a debate which could frame a contemporary politics of spectatorship. She suggests that most artists using the digital do not address the implications of our interaction with those media in their work. Where Brecht sought a viewer to think, here Bishop is saying the viewer 'thinks' (and 'sees') through the digital. Further she asks what it means to 'filter affect through the digital'. In this she sidesteps Brecht's critique of catharsis and rather speaks of affect as the notion of a person in a process of constant becoming, of feeling, in a vastly preconscious way. Affect as a force for change becomes, in Bishop's statement, one filtered through the digital. ¹⁰⁵ Yet Bishop lists a select few artworks which she feels address the implications of this, and goes on to say of these artworks:

Each suggests the endlessly disposable, rapidly mutable ephemera of the virtual age and its impact on our consumption of relationships, images, and communication; each articulates something of the troubling oscillation between intimacy and distance that characterizes our new technological regime, and proposes an incommensurability between our doggedly physiological lives and the screens to which we are glued. ¹⁰⁶

In this, Bishop indicates how the surfeit of image-based forms, applications and programmes which exist today, impact on contemporary human relations and modes of communication.

She also seems to add a more critical perspective to Rancière's 'associating and dissociating',

¹⁰⁴ Claire Bishop, 'The Digital Divide', *Artforum*, September 2012 http://artforum.com/inprint/id=31944 [accessed: 9 October 2012] (para. 2 of 15).

¹⁰⁵ Affect, a term first used by Baruch Spinoza to refer to a potentially broad range of emotions or feelings in the mind and body, has more recently, in the work of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and the work of Brian Massumi (their translator) focused on affect as being based in the body. It is described as being separate from emotions and, linked to processes of 'becoming' and hence to the political significance such bodily changes suggest. The development of positions in 'Affect Theory', since the mid-1990's, has been influential in bringing concerns regarding affect to the fore in philosophy and cultural analysis, particularly concerning its political potential. Yet Bishop suggests that, if affect is 'filtered' through the digital, affect's potential at the level of social and political becoming may be harnessed via the image or mediated by it in such a way that what it promises politically may not be realised. Indeed Patricia Clough has described a commodification of affects whereby, 'the circuit from affect to emotion is attached to a circulation of images meant to simulate desire-already-satisfied, demand-already-met, as capital extracts value from affect – around consumer confidence, political fears, etc., such that the difference between commodification and labour, production and reproduction are collapsed in the modulation of the capacity to circulate affect.' This suggests that the 'filter' of affects through the digital may be fundamental to an economic relationship between person and image. Patricia T. Clough, 'The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia and Bodies', *The Affect Theory Reader*, pp. 220-221.

the flirtations between Frances Stark and various Italian cyberlovers in her video *My Best Thing*, 2011; Thomas Hirschhorn's video of a finger idly scrolling through gruesome images of blown-apart bodies on a touch screen, occasionally pausing to enlarge, zoom in, move on (*Touching Reality*, 2012); the frenetic, garbled scripts of Ryan Trecartin's videos (such as *K-Corea INC.K [Section A]*, 2009).' Bishop, 'The Digital Divide', 2012, (para 2 of 15).

by describing the 'troubling' shift between 'intimacy and distance' which seems to underscore relationships to the digital. I will explore the implications of this later in the text. She also describes the 'incommensurability between our doggedly physiological lives and the screens to which we are glued,' a statement which seems to open up a more specific contemporary space for considering the relationship between viewer and culture. Here Bishop suggests a dramatic separation between physical and screen-based reality. This recalls Debord's framing of 'the spectacle' as a separate realm opposed to the banality of human life. Also, Bishop's use of the word 'incommensurable' suggests an inability to relate reality to the image in a direct way. It is useful to outline the definition of 'incommensurable' which is 'having no common standard of measurement; not comparable in respect of magnitude or value'. This appears to extend the estrangement common to mystification and the separating power of the spectacle by suggesting that fundamental differences separate reality and representation creating a form of impasse. It also seems a contrast to the position of Rancière, where his 'alternative' reality becomes a more separate one, for Bishop.

To consider the implications of this further, it is relevant to contextualise Bishop's use of the term 'incommensurable' by briefly discussing her earlier critiques of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* in which she sets out the value of 'antagonism' to democracy. The definition of antagonism is 'active opposition or hostility' which, particularly via Thomas Kuhn's theorisation of 'incommensurability' in scientific revolutions, seems to set the terms 'antagonism' and 'incommensurability' in relation. In that text, she drew on Ernesto Laclau

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¹⁰⁷ Bishop, 'The Digital Divide', (para 2 of 15).

¹⁰⁸ 'incommensurable' *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*, ed. by Della Thompson, 9th edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51–79. In this piece, Bishop analysed Nicolas Bourriaud's text *Relational Aesthetics*, and his claims for the artists' work he promoted as curator and critic, in affiliation with it. Yet Bishop promoted the work of other artists, namely Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra, who, for her, represented a political practice better suited to the realities of social life. While undermining the claims of relational art practices to be 'convivial', Bishop highlighted the 'antagonism' that is necessary to democracy, based on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theories in their influential text *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

¹¹⁰ 'antagonism' *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*, ed. by Della Thompson, 9th edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Thomas Kuhn defined the relationship between different scientific paradigms, in the context of scientific revolutions, as 'incommensurable', meaning that 'the normal-scientific tradition that emerges

and Chantal Mouffe's influential book Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, which provided a Post-Structuralist response to Antonio Gramsci's theories of hegemony. 111 Bishop also suggested that the artwork of Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra represented – through its exposition of the more antagonistic aspects of our present 'democracies' - 'better democracy'. 112 Her analysis of Relational Aesthetics was roundly critiqued by Liam Gillick, a prominent artist affiliated with the associated art movement. 113 Yet, while Bishop's emphasis on the value of political antagonism in artworks is less prominent in her writings today, her 2012 comment framing a fundamental incommensurability between the screens we use and our physical reality, continues to suggest the viewer's relationship with the image as a context for such an antagonism. 114

from a revolution...is...often actually incommensurable with that which has gone before.' Here, each school's 'standards or their definitions of science are not the same,' and while terms used may remain the same, 'old terms, concepts and experiments fall into new relationships with one another'; they 'see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction.' Because of these incompatibilities, changes in paradigm 'must occur all at once...or not at all.' Kuhn goes on to say, in his 'Postscript' that while persuasion of one by the other group is needed, 'two men who perceive the same situation differently but nevertheless employ the same vocabulary in its discussion must be using words differently. They speak, that is, from what I have called incommensurable viewpoints. How can they even hope to talk together much less be persuasive.' Incommensurability, then, as a state in which the two parties speak from such different positions that they are incompatible, has accords with the 'active opposition' of antagonism. Yet, while hostility is less an emphasis for incommensurability, in many ways the roots of opposition seem much deeper, the incompatibility less resolvable. So, where Bishop's thinking is linked to 'antagonism' in her earlier text, and discusses 'incommensurability' in her later text the continuity of her concerns seems visible. Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd edn. (Chicago USA: University of Chicago Press, 1962; 1970), p. 103; 148; 149; 150; 200.

¹¹¹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, (London: Verso, 1985); In this text, Laclau and Mouffe sought to make a case for a 'radical democratic politics' that was 'plural', setting this against the tendency in Marxism, as they saw it, for generalising the revolutionary subject. Basing their work on Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the Post-Structuralist concern with different subject positions, they sought to provide an analysis of prior revolutionary theory, and the moments of social change tied to them, in order to show how simplification of the revolutionary subject might be challenged. They sought to reframe Gramsci's notion of hegemony from a Post-Structuralist perspective and apply it to the creation of a new democratic political project. Important to this was their definition of an 'agonistic' political space, one for them marked out by antagonism - a space where conflicts between diverse subject positions and political interests are possible.

112 Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', October, 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51–79 (p. 77).

Gillick's critique was a response to Bishop's article in *October* magazine in which he cites 'contentious statements and wilful omissions,' and an emphasis on 'melancholy and failure in art as a comforting reinforcement of existing social models.' Gillick suggests that Bishop misunderstands and misapplies the politics of Mouffe which, for him, 'concerns the recognition of the antagonism suppressed within consensus-based models of social democracy.' Interestingly, Gillick only draws on the thinking of Mouffe in his response, and as such his comments on the political underpinnings of Bishop's text seem limited. However, Stewart Martin's 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics' accords with Claire Bishop's complaints about Gillick's avoidance of the political implications of Relational Aesthetics that she sought to criticise. Martin describes the 'profound limitations of Bourriaud's conception of art as a form of social exchange' and seeks to explain 'why it is so helplessly reversible into an aestheticisation of capitalist exchange.' He goes on to suggest that 'Relational Art' attempts to eradicate the alienation of social relations without eradicating what caused it. Liam Gillick, 'Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", October, 115, Winter 2006, pp. 95-106 (p. 98; 99; 100); Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', Third Text, 21:4, 2007, pp. 369-386 (p. 371, 385-86). Claire Bishop, 'Claire Bishop responds', October, 115, Winter 2006, pp. 95-107 (p. 107).

¹¹⁴ Bishop, in her recent text *Artificial Hells*, makes a number of references to 'antagonism', yet in no way emphasises it to the extent of its centrality to her October critique of 'Relational Aesthetics.' For instance, on

So while 'antagonism' is a less central concept for Bishop now, she remains in support of the same artists, as were featured in her paper on Relational Aesthetics. For instance, Thomas Hirschhorn is one of the artists she suggests addresses the problems of our relationship to the digital. In the 2012 article, she describes:

Thomas Hirschhorn's video of a finger idly scrolling through gruesome images of blown-apart bodies on a touch screen, occasionally pausing to enlarge, zoom in, move on (Touching Reality, 2012).115

From this description, the work appears to address the ethics of the position of the viewer in relationship to the protagonist: the languid focus of the former, the violent end of the latter. 116 Viewed in the context of the wider theories of spectatorship, Bishop seems to suggest that there is an 'incommensurability' between the screen and its viewers' physical existence. She refers to one reality - that of the viewer in her own life, home, or viewing context and to her physicality. Then she refers to another reality - which is mediated by and produced for viewing on a screen. Yet her discussion of Hirschhorn's work refers to the power of the viewer, her ability to casually watch whatever scene she might wish. This seems a significant shift from Debord's view of the spectacle's power over the viewer. Instead, Bishop and Hirschhorn seem to raise the issue of what it means for one person, occupying (in this case) a more secure reality, viewing the aftermath of another's violent death. Rather than merely highlighting the viewing role, Bishop's selection of this artwork, suggests an important relationship exists between the viewer's reality and the situation of the people they watch on a screen.

This picture of a viewer's possession of agency in relation to culture - when set against the 'incommensurability' of that culture to our physical lives – is an interesting one. As already

discussing the political incorporation of 'creativity', based on economic imperatives, she counters, 'Artists and works of art can operate in a space of antagonism or negation vis- à- vis society, a tension that the ideological discourse of creativity reduces to a unified context and instrumentalises for more efficacious profiteering.' Here, Bishop reaffirms the context of artworks that might be antagonistic to society, in a way that accords with her earlier writings. Bishop, Artificial Hells, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Bishop, 'The Digital Divide', (para 2 of 15).

¹¹⁶ This languid focus is enabled by the swipe screen in this instance, an interesting adjunct to the experience of viewing. (See note 9).

discussed, the role of the viewer is generally, in the terms of the classic critiques of spectatorship, thought passive or that the viewer must be activated through the particular critical nature of the material shown. Yet, based on this argument, viewers may use their power over culture, to turn it to relevant personal uses. If the way we experience life as human beings, and the representations of that life are incompatible, then it is possible to think of the culture we choose to view as a direct response to the lived reality of the viewer. In this way, visual culture may be more than just another sensible reality, as Rancière suggests, but provide an experience which is necessarily different. Such a necessity shows that culture may, as well as having various effects on viewers, serve particular functions for them too, ones underscored by the actual disparity between life and the image. So, rather than there being a critical relation between the 'dogged' physicality of human life and 'the screens to which we are glued,' a critical relation exists between our mental, physical and social existence and the specific ways in which human life is displayed and consumed on screens.

To develop this thinking further, I would like to return to the politics which underscored Bishop's original critique of *Relational Aesthetics*. While Bishop appears to have stepped away from the implications of Laclau and Mouffe's theories, their roots in Gramsci's theory of hegemony suggest an alternative view of the relationship of a person to culture in capitalism is possible. Gramsci's notion of hegemony afforded subordinate groups agency in society by describing their wrestle with dominant groups as to how their culture is represented. This differs from the arguments of Debord and Brecht, as to the domination of the viewer by the spectacle, and rather accords with the contemporary position of Rancière. Today, Gramsci's perspective seems appropriate to the contemporary cultural context marked out by usergenerated content. The agency to present one's own view of culture or re-work existing culture to new ends (as emphasised by Bourriaud), has become a significant response to a

diverse and expanded visual cultural sphere for many artists and cultural commentators. Such practices also continue the lineage of Debord's own *détournement* of culture. However, Gramsci's emphasis on the realm of culture as a context for hegemonic struggles directly contrasts Debord's focus on the mystification of workers and his emphasis on them realising the conditions of their existence. Rather, Gramsci, by affording the worker greater agency, suggests a fruitful context for reframing the classic arguments on the politics of spectatorship.

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¹¹⁷ Nicolas Bourriaud, in his text *Postproduction*, provided a critical context for artworks that, since the 'early nineties', have been, 'created on the basis of preexisting works.' He spoke of artists 'reprogramming' existing artworks, occupying historical forms of art, using existing images and visual material, employing vestiges of the economy to create a 'catalogue of forms' and producing artworks aligned with fashion and media practices. While Bourriaud recalls the political context of appropriation-based practices, he describes how, 'artists today practice postproduction as a neutral, zero-sum process, whereas the Situationists aimed to corrupt the value of the diverted work, i.e., to attack cultural capital itself.' Bourriaud asserts that 'these practices each affirm the importance of maintaining activity in the face of mass production....no sign must remain inert, no image must remain untouchable.' In this he suggests these practices' alignment with a generalised agency or 'activity' 'within' capitalism, rather than in opposition to it. In a closing remark, Bourriaud claims that 'works can propose scenarios and art can be a form of using the world, an endless negotiation between points of view.' His discussion of 'points of view' recalls the same in cinema (cinema being important to artists affiliated with *Postproduction*). (See notes 20-21). Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p.7; 8-10; 31, 87, 88.

Hegemony, Agonism and the Viewer

In Group Photo the common disparity between the situation of the viewer and that of the person they view in an image is, to an extent, rejected. While the types of photography suggested in the work allude to achievement and aspiration, the people in the image could be you or I. Viewers of this work may have more opportunities to 'identify' with the protagonists they find in these images as equals, as this work broadly rejects capitalist culture's ideals of beauty, fitness, youth and fashion. Yet here, the 'believable' person is imagined to be entering the 'capitalist' image from life, occupying it and disrupting or even democratising it. In Group Photo the group assent to two disparate forms of representation, while simultaneously performing minor disruptions to them. Then they playfully 'meet' the requirements of the disjunctive camerawork, finally rejecting both representational approaches, and the aesthetic of the camera, which persists. Ultimately, this group, having 'entered' the image, have come to rework it on their own terms. This is the narrative of the work. Fundamentally it is a narrative about power and the image, and of the uses of images to depict groups. Where we are familiar with seeing other kinds of people act in images, here, people more like us act in a way that is intended to both recall and disrupt the terms of our relationship to images. The group have entered into a self-conscious battle with the forms of representation that are applied to them, with the limitations that the image so often, in practice, presents. Important to this is the quality of the visual image, of the camerawork and the rendering. While we are familiar with people presenting themselves to camera, most notably today on the internet, in this work, the choreography and complexity of the actors' self-display suggest an awkward conflation of the imagined democratic, 'self-organised' ideals of the internet and the more controlling, seductive and professionalised aspects of industrial image production.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony denotes the centrality of the cultural realm to the maintenance of power by a ruling group. He emphasised two principal means of keeping power: coercion

and consent. Where coercion is linked to the exercise of 'state coercive power', he describes consent as:

The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. ¹¹⁸

For Gramsci this consent gave cultural, ideological and moral leadership a significant role in the maintenance of a given 'hegemony'. Relatedly 'common sense', for Gramsci, was a social group's 'traditional conception of the world,' one which he aligned with all men being philosophers and the passing down of modes of thought through history. ¹¹⁹ He nonetheless sought 'awareness and criticism' in such groups by, 'refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality?' ¹²⁰

However, Gramsci afforded the 'subaltern class' a greater role in the determination of culture than other Marxist thinkers.¹²¹ Here, due to the complexity of 'civil society', Gramsci advocated a 'war of position' (as opposed to a 'war of manoeuvre' in revolutionary – and military - politics).¹²² For Gramsci the role of 'intellectuals' within civil society was important to this

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¹¹⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. & trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971; repr. 1991), p. 12. Yet, there are limitations to Gramsci's formulation of 'consent'. By defining consent based on the influential social position of the dominant group, consent is more of a given than a considered choice for the subordinate class. However, Gramsci, in opposing consent to coercion, framed 'the apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively.' Consent, then, occurs within a context of an underlying threat of repression, its spontaneity most likely rooted in a context of fear. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 12
¹¹⁹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 323. Gramsci's notion of 'common sense' has interesting accords with the same in Rancière. See note 140.

¹²⁰ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 323-34

¹²¹ For Perry Anderson, Gramsci's 'most profound and original investigations were institutional analyses of the historical formation and division of intellectuals, the social nature of education, and the role of mediate ideologies in cementing blocs between classes.' Here, 'Gramsci's whole work was unremittingly centred on superstructural objects, but unlike any other theorist in Western Marxism he took the autonomy and efficacy of cultural superstructures as a *political* problem, to be explicitly theorised as such – in its relationship to the maintenance or subversion of the social order.' It was within the realm of the cultural that the subaltern class would engage in struggles for an alternative social reality. Gramsci saw the 'future of Marxist theory' lying 'with intellectuals organically produced by the industrial working class.' Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB, 1976), p. 77-78, 105.

¹²² For Gramsci, a war of position takes place in civil society, while a war of manoeuvre would involve a 'frontal assault' on the state. While civil society is the 'site' of the dominant class' hegemony, it is also the place where counter movements organise and build power socially. In this, Gramsci saw the terrain of civil society as the sphere

struggle, a role he recognised as being challenged from within the 'subaltern' class. On this basis he called for a reconstitution of the notion of the intellectual – one which negated her separation from society. This intellectual was characterised by, 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator'. He saw every man as enacting some form of 'intellectual activity' by which:

he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. 124

This has interesting accords with the recent theorisations of Rancière on the education of the lower classes also his discussions of the intellectual and cultural life of working people concerning their 'free time'. ¹²⁵ Gramsci goes on to describe this cultural terrain as one of struggle for the mass of people:

who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialised intellectuals, producing outstanding individuals and groups of greater or less importance. ¹²⁶

Gramsci clearly sets out the terms of an active struggle on the part of the subaltern class to intercede within the 'hegemonic' order. In this he affords considerable agency to the working class by setting them within a dynamic interplay of forces, and struggles – ones necessarily aimed at the sphere of culture, ideology and private allegiances. Further, what Gramsci termed their 'consent' to the cultural hegemony (albeit in a context of coercion) implies an agency

of political action. *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. by David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 124-127.

¹²³ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 10.

¹²⁴ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 9.

Rancière describes his book as follows, 'The Ignorant Schoolmaster was a meditation on the eccentric theory and strange destiny of Joseph Jacotot, a French professor who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, unsettled the academic world by asserting that an ignorant person could teach another ignorant person what he did not know himself, proclaiming the equality of intelligences, and calling for intellectual emancipation against the received wisdom concerning the instruction of the lower classes.' I am interested in how Rancière's advocacy of the production of equal relationships in learning, or with culture, would create a context for political change, a notion that seems to have accords with Gramsci's concept of 'organic intellectuals.' Rancière's text also accords with the dominant trends in contemporary teaching theory that emphasise 'student-centred learning', that is removing the role of the lecturer as an instructor, and focusing teaching on the facilitation of students' learning independently and in groups. Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', p. 271.

Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 335.

which 'mystification' and 'false consciousness' would not account for in Debord. Here, Gramsci provides an important context for the direct application of cultural and ideological practices within hegemonic struggles, by the working class.

However, limitations to Gramsci's analysis arise which challenge the broader conception of agency he might provide. His focus, when discussing the working class' 'common sense' remains tied to 'criticism' and 'awareness' in the sense that he, like Debord and Brecht, seems to assume the 'subaltern's' generalised lack of awareness of their conditions. Gramsci also makes frequent reference to rather wide disparities in capacity. For instance, his notions of 'the mass of the simple' or merely 'mass', give a clear impression of vastly stratified classes which, apt to his time of writing, are more fragmented today. Yet, despite some of the limitations of his terms, Gramsci's analysis affords the 'subaltern' class a degree of agency, a capacity to struggle within the cultural hegemonic order, that is not seen in Debord's or Brecht's Marxism. So it is important to address Gramsci's tendency to limit the framing of the working subject, by using the work of Chantal Mouffe, which reinterprets Gramsci's thinking based on Lacanian and Post-Structuralist theories. 128

In a 2009 article Chantal Mouffe sought to apply the central tenets of her earlier work (with Ernesto Laclau) to the realm of contemporary fine art practice. Arguing for another perspective on the political significance of the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism, she called for a

¹²⁷ The clear delineations of class that existed at Gramsci's time of writing are more fragmented today, based on changes in labour patterns. The change from Fordism to Post-Fordism broke the former link between large workforces and industrial production with: the weakening of unions, outsourcing of production, and (often initially desired) changes in labour patterns, being some of the key developments. Italian Autonomist theorists have emphasised the impact of 'affective' and 'immaterial' labour on the form and nature of contemporary work. Similarly, the increased 'precariousness' that workers may face today defines a contemporary moment within which familiar notions of the revolutionary potential of large workforces, and hence the homogeneity of the working class, have been undermined.

¹²⁸ Laclau and Mouffe's reading of Gramsci - and their thesis in general - is criticised from a number of quarters. The authors identify as 'Post-Marxist', hence their agenda more so deliberately questions some of the core tenets of Marxism: its classical modes of conceiving revolutionary change, notion of the centrality of class and means of figuring the relationship between economy and society. Their reframing of Gramsci's work, which is highly regarded within Marxism, is then, among many Marxists, criticised. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe undermine the notion of the economy as the determining 'base' of society, and hence the means of determining human subjectivity; their emphasis on language rather countering this. Yet their thinking was an influential response to the Post-Structuralist emphasis on diverse subject positions and hence sought to counter the limitations that a classic Marxist framing of revolutionary subjects might involve.

more complex view of the 'forces at play in the emergence of the current neoliberal hegemony.' She goes on to describe how:

This hegemony is the result of a set of political interventions in a complex field of economic, legal and ideological forces. It is a discursive construction that articulates in a very specific manner a manifold of practices, discourses and language-games of very different nature. Through a process of sedimentation the political origin of those contingent practices has been erased and they have become naturalised. 130

By framing hegemony as a 'discursive construction', Mouffe situates the maintenance of a given cultural hegemony within the realm of the social, of interactions between people, and of people's consumption of culture. In doing this she indicates the potential for diverse subject positions. Yet for Mouffe 'forms of identification' have 'crystallized into identities which are taken for granted'; this, for her is how 'common sense' has been 'established.' 131

To challenge the neoliberal hegemony Mouffe calls for 'agonistic' and 'counter-hegemonic practices' that engaging with, rather than withdraw from, existing institutions (as suggested by post-Operaist theorists like Franco Berardi Bifo). ¹³² This is in order to 'disarticulate the existing

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¹²⁹ On the transformation from Fordism to post-Fordism, Mouffe sets herself in opposition to the theories of Adorno & Horkheimer, for whom Fordism marked the development of the 'culture industry', and Italian Autonomists like Paolo Virno, who see culture marking the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and becoming the 'matrix of post-Fordism'. Contrary to Rancière, Mouffe uses the work of Boltanski and Chiapello to define the 'hegemonic' transition from 'Fordism to post-Fordism' as an example of 'hegemony through neutralisation', where 'demands which challenge an established hegemonic order are recuperated by the existing system, by satisfying them in a way that neutralises their subversive potential.' Chantal Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism' in *Open 2009*, No. 16, 'The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon', 32-40 (p. 34-37).

¹³⁰ Chantal Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 37. Mouffe's analysis, based as it is on Post-Structuralist thinking and Lacanian psychoanalysis, emphasises the political function of language in producing hegemony.

Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 38. Yet there seems to be a contradiction at the heart of Mouffe's thinking: while the diversification of subject positions is essential to a 'radical democratic politics', if identities are now 'crystallised' so that they are 'taken for granted', then the basis of that democratic politics is ossified. To unleash the political potential of the 'diversification of subject positions' it would instead be necessary to loosen any sense of identities being fixed or 'crystallised'.

¹³² 'agonistic struggle' for Mouffe is 'a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally', one that is the 'core of a vibrant democracy.' 'counter-hegemonic practices' for Mouffe engage with existing institutions to 'disarticulate the existing hegemony and establish a more democratic one thanks to a process of re-articulation of new and old elements into different configurations of power.' In a recent article, Mark Fisher and Franco Berardi Bifo set out arguments for engaging with and disengaging from the state, respectively, in order to realise social change. Fisher advocated the latter and set out his support for Chantal Mouffe's approach. Conversely, Bifo (an influential Italian Autonomist theorist advocating the construction of social formations that are autonomous from the state) referred to Mouffe's assertion that 'various modes of artivist intervention influenced by the Situationist strategy of *détournement* like The Yes Men are very effective in disrupting the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to impose, bringing to the fore its repressive character.' Yet Bifo argued that, 'this may be true, but the unveiling of the repressive character of power is not

discourses and practices through which the current hegemony is established and reproduced'. Here Mouffe asserts the need for an 'agonistic' politics rooted in antagonism, and positions herself against Hannah Arendt's conception of agonism. She posits the need for conflict between different positions within a 'radical democratic politics' and frames the struggle in terms which contrast those underpinning the classic theories of spectatorship:

It is also important not to envisage this struggle as the displacement of supposedly false consciousnesses that would reveal the true reality. 135

She describes this perspective as being at odds with the theory of hegemony 'which rejects the very idea of a "true consciousness," and asserts that identities are always the process of identification'. She suggests it is 'through insertion in a manifold of practices, discourses and language games that specific forms of individualities are constructed'. For Mouffe this necessarily calls for the 'transformation of political identities' through 'insertion in practices that will mobilize its affects towards the disarticulation of the framework in which the process of identification is taking place'. She suggests that, 'cultural and artistic practices could play an important role in the agonistic struggle because they are a privileged terrain for the

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going to bring about rebellion. On the contrary, it only reinforces the sense of impotence.' He added that, 'the majority of people hate finance capitalism but, as far as I can see, this hatred is turning to depression rather than autonomy.' Chantal Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces' in *Art & Research*, Volume 1. No. 2. Summer 2007, pp. 1-5 (p. 3); Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 38-9; Chantal Mouffe, 'Strategies of Radical Politics and Aesthetic Resistance', truthisconcrete.org, September 2012, in Franco 'Bifo' Berardi and Mark Fisher, 'Give me Shelter', *Frieze*, Issue 152, January-February 2013, www.frieze.com/issue/article/give-me-shelter/> [accessed 14 February 2013].

¹³³ Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 38.

¹³⁴ Mouffe asserts that, 'In my view the main problem with the Arendtian understanding of 'agonism', is that...it is "agonism without antagonism." She continues, 'Arendt puts great emphasis on human plurality and insists that politics deals with the community and reciprocity of human beings which are different, she never acknowledges that this plurality is the origin of antagonistic conflicts.' For Mouffe, 'Arendt...ends up envisaging the public space in a consensual way....However neither of them (Horkheimer and Arendt) is able to acknowledge the hegemonic nature of every form of consensus and the ineradicability of antagonism.' Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces', p. 4.

Spaces', p. 4.

135 Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 39. It is interesting that Mouffe supports artworks, such as those by The Yes Men which are based in the détournement of existing culture (see note 130), yet although these approaches are rooted in Debordian thinking, they are not for her applied to workers' 'false consciousness', rather to a hegemonic reality in which the origins of political states have been 'erased'.

¹³⁶ Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 39.

¹³⁷ Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 39.

 $^{^{\}rm 138}$ Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 39.

construction of new subjectivities.' For instance, in a 2007 text, Mouffe considers the 'possible forms of critical art' which could 'question the dominant hegemony'. Saying that the objective of the 'agonistic approach' is to 'unveil all that is repressed by the dominant consensus' she asserts that critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate'. Her use of dissensus, which interestingly accords with Rancière's use of the same term in his political analysis, again suggests the need for breaks in the apparently seamless state of culture.

Mouffe's approach engages with the ways in which people view or relate to culture, which for her are primarily rooted in identification. This refers what is political about viewing to its content. It also emphasises the relationship between a person and what they view, and suggests that a proxy relationship between people exists here. Such a relationship may, if viewed in combination with Gramsci's perspective on culture, be reciprocal by affording the person agency in relation to culture. Further, Mouffe's use of Post-Structuralist theories, and application of them to the notion of hegemony, has important accords with recent psychological and linguistic developments which frame culture in a way that is less 'dominating' of its viewers. Here, Mouffe emphasises the process of socialisation in capitalism via culture, in a way which situates culture within the realm of the psychological; the

¹³⁹ Mouffe, 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', p. 39. Here Mouffe parallels Pollock's and Mulvey's emphasis on the role of culture in producing subjectivities, also shows support for the Gramscian notion that culture is a significant site for the maintenance of hegemony.

¹⁴⁰ The matter of 'critical art' is an interesting one for this thesis. Rancière suggests that a politics of art must be thought beyond the separation between work that is critical, and work that is not, rather defining aesthetic practices more broadly within the political. Yet Mouffe sets 'critical art' that 'foments dissensus' by trying to make visible what has become invisible within capitalism, against other art that does not. In this she emphasises the 'hegemonic' process of concealment of this system's origins. But the narrative of 'visibility' persists in Mouffe, in a way that begs the question whether the origin of any social system is 'visible' to its occupants. It seems possible, as Rancière and Bifo have suggested, that this has been overstated, and that people can see and feel the conditions of their present reality, but they struggle to work to change it. This leaves the field open for imagining new modes of art practice that respond directly to what is most political about people's viewing of visual culture. Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces', p. 4.

¹⁴¹ Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces', p 1-5, p. 4.

¹⁴² There are direct accords between Mouffe's discussion of dissensus, her framing of 'agonism' in politics and aesthetics and Rancière's approach. For Rancière, both politics and aesthetics are forms of dissensus, where dissensus is 'the essence of politics' and 'is the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself.' Further, 'a dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions or values; it is a division inserted in 'common sense': a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we see something as given.' This allusion to common sense has interesting accords with the same in Gramsci, and Mouffe, yet Rancière's conception of the term seems to be figured more loosely within capitalism. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. by Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 38; 69

production of identities and 'selves'. Mouffe's analysis, in both emphasising individual subjectivities and political antagonism, also seems to provide a more open conception of the agent.

Yet Mouffe departs from Gramsci's formulation of hegemony in important ways. She actually seems to afford less agency to the working class, by emphasising the 'effect' of culture on people, rather than speaking of the 'struggle' that Gramsci saw occurring within culture. Mouffe also seems to avoid Gramsci's suggestion that the working class is involved in representing its own interests by calling for the production of new subjectivities. She seems to extend the 'naturalising' state of culture beyond Gramsci's more positive formulation of 'common sense'. It is also possible that Mouffe's Post-Structuralism overdetermines the impact of culture on people, rather than emphasising their agency in relation to it. Here Gramsci's framing of culture as a context for struggle may provide a more fruitful perspective, one which can emphasise the 'creative' acts of the working class, alongside any by cultural practitioners. Yet, taking Gramsci's and Mouffe's positions together, it is possible to unite a greater sense of 'agency' and struggle in the working person as regards culture, with a greater focus on the social and psychological realm, one for which the relevance of 'antagonism' may return. This has the capacity to locate the direct relationship between viewers and the people they view as central to struggles in culture.

Yet, it is possible to extend the formulations of Gramsci, and Mouffe by using the work of Hannah Arendt – namely her position on 'agonism' - which was dismissed by Mouffe. Arendt, speaking of politics in Ancient Greek society, describes a 'concept of action' that 'stresses the urge towards self-disclosure at the expense of all other factors'. She goes on to describe how this:

became the prototype of action for Greek antiquity and influenced, in the form of the so-called agonal spirit, the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states. ¹⁴³

Here, Arendt describes a historical context for agency defined by a space of interaction, one based in a person's capacity to speak and act in the presence of others. Arendt argues that in industrial societies such a 'space' of political action has been eclipsed, where 'men show themselves only in the privacy of their families or the intimacy of their friends,' 144 and, like Marx, suggests that this cultural situation is tied to the present socio-economic system. Yet it is possible to link her framing of the 'ideal' Greek agency to the way viewers engage with culture today. Arendt describes the organisation of the *polis* as enabling certain kinds of visibility for a person in the political realm where:

the organisation of the *polis*...assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men....According to this self-interpretation, the political realm rises directly out of acting together, the 'sharing of words and deeds'. Thus action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it.¹⁴⁵

Importantly, Arendt suggests that being seen, heard, and appearing before others is fundamental to the political space of the polis. She defines this as a 'space of appearance' something that, 'to be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance.' While Mouffe emphasises the more consensual aspects of Arendt's politics in her critique, it is useful to discuss Arendt's framing of

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¹⁴³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1958), p. 194.

¹⁴⁴ Arendt, p. 209-10.

¹⁴⁵ Arendt, p. 198. Arendt's mention of the 'part of the world common to us all' can be contextualised by her discussion of 'common sense.' For Arendt, 'the only character of the world by which to gauge its reality is its being common to us all, and common sense occupies such a high rank in the hierarchy of political qualities because it is the one sense that fits into reality as a whole our five strictly individual senses and the strictly particular data they perceive. It is by virtue of common sense that the other sense perceptions are known to disclose reality and are not merely felt as irritations of our nerves or resistance sensations of our bodies.' She defines a 'lack of common sense' as sign of a community's 'alienation from the world.' Arendt's 'common sense' resides in the social, where a community's alienation manifests as 'superstition and gullibility.' Arendt's framing of 'common sense' differs from Gramsci's which is more so figured in terms of capitalist hegemony, yet it has accords with Rancière's perspective. Arendt, p. 208-209.

¹⁴⁶ Arendt, p. 199.

a social and relational 'space' of politics in Greek antiquity. ¹⁴⁷ This political agency is one that happens 'between' people - people who are, for Aristotle, 'different and unequal'. ¹⁴⁸ Rather than antagonism, Arendt suggests that a particular space in which agency can be supported is needed.

By relating Arendt's thinking to Mouffe's emphasis on the role of culture in socialising people, it is possible to extend the 'effect' of culture on people, at the level of 'identification', to a more relational context, one that 'feels' social, but ultimately is not. If, as for Gramsci, culture is a site of struggle, experiences of culture may approximate some of the terms of Arendt's political 'space of appearance', by enabling a person to 'feel' seen by, or to see, others who are 'acting and performing'. This would position the present form of culture as an imbalance towards the actor and performer. Albeit that the viewer may relate to actors in a political space, represented by visual culture, and thereby 'feel' seen by the characters to whom they relate. Taking this further, the 'performance' of people on video sharing channels and social media seems to affirm Arendt's formulation of the importance of being 'seen' by others. Here the digital space of sharing and showing becomes an alternative to a physical, public 'space of appearance' as defined by Arendt. The inequality that Aristotle felt marked the political space could be used to define what is fundamentally different about the image – perhaps the 'incommensurability' that Bishop describes - and what is, again, necessarily different here for the person viewing it. Yet, rather than enabling direct, political communication between different people, with different concerns, this inequality might provide a context for the use of imagery to approximate 'feelings' of agency, as well as to 'experience' others who are in a different position to us. Just as for Arendt, one's achievement in politics may be marked by comparison with those witnessing one's speech and acts, viewers may also 'use' the disparity

¹⁴⁷ Arendt asserts the importance of the direct social experience of others in a public space to political agency. There are accords between Arendt's framing of the formation or staging of political identities and the manner in which 'selves' are formed, socially, in key contemporary therapeutic dialogues (Attachment Therapy and Family Therapy). This is also suggestive of a potential shift away from the emphasis on identification in relation to images and politics. I will explore this in my second section.

¹⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II33al6, in Arendt, p. 214-15.

between them and the people they view in the image, to produce felt impressions that manifest as proxy experiences of agency. 149

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¹⁴⁹ It is Mouffe's suggestion that Arendt's agonism lacks 'antagonism', yet the context for conflict, also the centrality of difference between people in Arendt's 'agonism', seems clear. While Arendt set out the important inequalities between 'men' in the *polis* for Aristotle, such differences or even, 'incommensurabilites' in experience and culture, would position diverse dialogues in one space, that appear to present a context for antagonism. It seems suggestive then, to consider the relevance of difference, inequality and conflict to viewers' experiences of the image.

Conclusion

Arendt's analysis holds great potential, in combination with the positions of Gramsci, Rancière, Mouffe and Bishop for a reframing of the politics of spectatorship, one that affords the viewer a different position in relation to culture that can be conceived more productively at the level of agency. The viewer may seek a form of relating, via the image, that approximates agency, be that 'antagonistic' or more so 'agonistic'. Her viewing may represent a struggle to experience a reality through the image that provides or approximates feelings of power or political agency. Rather than a one-way form of identification alone, the approximation of 'the social' in viewers' interactions with the image suggests, rather than the waning of the social, or 'alienation', an affirmation of viewers' continuing need for it, for other people. Also, while the classic critiques of spectatorship emphasise the production of critical thinking and activity in its viewers or participants, the nature of the political context of speech and action in Arendt's terms, and also the 'filtering of affects through the digital' in Bishop's, may suggest the existence of a deeper, more social relationship to images. Here viewers' viewing may accord with what they need to feel politically, as members of society. The status and usage of the image becomes, as Rancière suggests, inherently linked to desired political outcomes.

In my work, I aim to critically address the disparity which may be found between the realities of lived experience in capitalist cultures and their alternate as visual depictions in culture. While in effect these two situations do, as Bishop suggests, appear 'incommensurable' - where the visual depiction of life is set against what is banal about existence - the banal seems to provide the ideal context for the functioning of the image in capitalist culture. It suggests that the greater the apparent disparity, the larger the role and need for visual culture, particularly if it provides a more entertaining, emotive, or engaging reality, for that period of time. It might be that, consciously or subconsciously, visual culture acts as a direct corollary to what is least desirable about contemporary life. That is, we may view images as a response, or alternative

to, what we actually see, feel and experience in daily life. Rather than positing the realm of political agency firmly in the 'real' or the realisation of that real it rather suggests that the location of the precise function of such imagery for the person could be critical in terms of her own relationship to the desire, if not the will, to pursue an alternate reality. This means that the interstice of the viewer's position in her lived reality, and choice of culture is fundamental. Yet, given the various possible ways of, and reasons for engaging with, culture this cannot be treated prescriptively by producing artworks with a view to instigating human political agency in a unified way. Rather it sets the scene for a direct treatment of visual culture in the realisation of artworks that address the specific politics of the image, as they relate to the social basis of agency. Such artworks may use the relationship between what is common to the image in capitalism, and its corollary in life, to create suggestive alternatives originating between the image and existence.



Chapter Two: Affect, Inequality and the Image

Introduction

In my first section I sought to extend, and depart from, the classic arguments concerning spectatorship which have had such an impact on contemporary art practice. By loosening the strong association between such theories and the notion of a person in capitalism as 'mystified', I used the work of Rancière, Bishop, Gramsci, Mouffe and Arendt to formulate an alternate politics of spectatorship. This is based on both an acknowledgement that people can see the reality of their existence in capitalism, and are hence potentially able to change it, and that they are engaged in a 'struggle' with culture. This struggle can be positioned within a range of possible experiences that the viewer might seek from the image - as emphasised by Claire Bishop. My conclusions indicate that the relationship between affect, emotion and agency may be strong.

In this section, I develop these arguments in order to answer the thesis title of *Politicising Agency through Affect*. I begin by exploring findings in psychology and neuroscience that show how uses of visual media may enable viewers to avoid or manage their emotions, also to use experiences of others through images to do so. Then, so as to affirm the political implications of the 'social' effect of viewing others on screens, I return to Debord's position on 'the spectacle', reframing this by taking the 'social relationship' he speaks of, literally. Following this, I base an affective relationship with images that is social, on the inequality between life and image that seems productive for the viewer. I connect the centrality of affect to the viewing of other people in images, to the basis of affect in the production of 'the self'.

Returning to Bishop, her 'intimacy and distance' become two extremes of a continuum of possible means of relating to others via images. Where we may be able to hegemonically occupy a more favourable position via the image, or where we can feel empowered through

our lack of empathy for a protagonist, our feeling of gaining in social position is palpable. Viewers' use of their affective relationship to other people in the image, suggests that affect politicises agency, but also that it is the basis of our exploration of agency via the image, and may also be in life. This underscores the 'rise' of images in our culture and frames a context that my own artwork productively explores. I then return to discuss my moving image work *Group Photo,* concluding that it both self-consciously occupies and thematizes the debates I am setting out here.

Affect, Emotion and the Way Viewers Use Images

The movement of actors dominates Group Photo. From actors' tentative stillness in the work, to their highly choreographed gestures and interactions, and also their increasingly open and collaborative interactions, actors' bodies are the content that addresses viewers. The affective and emotional power of images is rooted in our capacity to relate to other people through them. In Group Photo, the actors' movements may inspire affective feelings and responses in its viewers. The significant change in the actors' 'states' in the work is fundamental to this effect, where what is felt by a viewer may differ from monitor to monitor. The potential this group might have in life is linked to the affects they may inspire in the work, as well as their capacity to transform their roles dramatically here. This work suggests that what a viewer feels in relation to moving images is tied to the ways in which an actors' position or situation changes. Change is a common aspect of narrative moving image – where actors' states, situations and positions change from start to finish. Yet, in Group Photo this trope is turned to a more suggestive use: the actors occupy fixed stereotypical poses, and then undertake actions and interactions that - while still limited - appear to show more 'agency'. After this they act more freely while, aside from the positive implications of this freer state, their actions still suggest choreography. The feelings that these actors may inspire in viewers, the emotional and affective responses to a work that may unnerve as well as prompt empathy, are all choreographed in a way that suggests that what we 'see' or 'think of' as agency is also limited. Agency is suggested as being based in affect, in a way that becomes jarring next to the work's choreography. This implies that agency must be constituted on people's own terms, terms that are liberatory, in order to function.

The notion that visual culture may provide a set of deeper functions for viewers is supported by recent research in psychology, psychoanalysis and neuroscience. Some research emphasises viewers' potential to view visual culture, read books and listen to music, in order to manage feelings and thoughts in daily life. Other research shows how empathy, bodily feelings and

affects conveyed via screen media, may be experienced by a viewer. This means that feelings experienced between people in life are akin to the effects achieved through screens, in a way that seems to frame a literally 'social' effect of the media. Given that, as Bishop suggests, images also support an ability to distance ourselves from others, this indicates that viewers may seek a range of effects via visual media, effects supported by the culture they 'choose'. On the uses of culture to manage feeling, Lisa Butler, while Researcher in Psychology at Stanford University, published a 2004 editorial piece, in which she introduced a number of recent studies on 'Dissociation in Culture'. 150 A clinical psychological definition of dissociation as a disorder describes it as 'partial or total disconnection between memories of the past, awareness of identity and of immediate sensations, and control of bodily movements, often resulting from traumatic experiences, intolerable problems, or disturbed relationships'. 151 Yet in her research, Butler described dissociation at an 'everyday' level. ¹⁵² She defines this as operating in a 'non-pathological' way, describing it as a tool we use in daily life, to manage feeling. Saying how most commentators place special emphasis on the 'defensive' role of dissociation, in 'protecting the individual from overwhelming experience' she went on to say that, 'those with the capacity to dissociate can evade awareness of aversive perceptual, emotional or behaviour inputs; past experiences (memories); present meanings, associations, and preoccupations and the burdens of volition.' Butler frames dissociation within viewers' uses of culture in contemporary life by tentatively proposing three functions of everyday dissociation. One of these, dissociation as escape, relates directly to visual culture. She describes it as 'actively sought experiences that fill up conscious awareness, thereby temporarily supplanting personal concerns or preoccupations or dissociating them to the periphery of awareness'. 154 Examples of dissociation as a means of escape are described as

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¹⁵⁰ Lisa Butler is now Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, University of Buffalo, New York; specialising in trauma, dissociative processes, and the representations of mental illness in film.

¹⁵¹ 'dissociation' *A Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. by Andrew M. Colman (Oxford University Press, 2009) Oxford Reference Online. http://www.oxfordreference.com [accessed 22 January 2011].

Lisa D. Butler, 'The Dissociations of Everyday Life', Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 5: 2 (2004), 1-11.
 Butler, p. 4.

Butler, p. 4.

154 Butler, p. 6.

listening to music, watching films or reading a book.¹⁵⁵ This situates interactions with culture within a person's management of their own thoughts and feelings.

Yet, while the 'filling of conscious awareness' involves a detachment from personal feelings and concerns, it is based in a process of loading attention with other stimuli. This may also be rooted in the uses of feeling, to displace existing feelings that are less desirable. Recent findings in neurology and cinema have particular implications for this. The discovery of 'mirror neurons' by neurologists has led researchers in cinema to delineate the emotional and bodily affective properties of film as part of 'embodied simulation.' 156 In this, film's affective properties are rooted in our capacity to feel, in our bodies, what emotions or states actors occupy, but also to mirror in the 'preactivation of motor structures' the actual state that another body is in. 157 It means that when we watch a person performing an activity, our bodies become prepared for, or actually begin the kind of motor action which would occur were we doing it ourselves. 158 This is defined as an adaptive tool for 'knowing the body states of others, which are expressions of their mental states'. 159 Ultimately, human capacities for empathy, adaptive means we have for learning about other bodies socially, become central aspects of our ability to have powerful experiences by watching human action on screens. The uses of media to fill awareness - but also to engage emotionally or affectively with a real or fictional person's reality - enable us to be distant from our own concerns, while able to feel another's situation.

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¹⁵⁵ Butler, p. 6.

¹⁵⁶ Following commentators who, prior to evidence that would support it, suggested the significance of the brain for the viewer of cinema, such as Edgar Morin, Gilles Deleuze and Steven Shaviro, the discovery of 'mirror neurons' in the brain have provided significant scientific support for such perspectives on cinema. These provide an alternative to semiotic and psychoanalytic approaches that have been dominant in film and visual cultural analysis. For instance, Shaviro states, 'there is no structuring lack, no primordial division, but a continuity between the physiological and affective responses of my own body and the appearances and disappearances, the mutations and the perdurances, of the bodies and images on the screen.' Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press 1993), p. 254-55.

¹⁵⁷ Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), p. 2. Damasio, p. 82.

¹⁵⁹ Damasio, p. 82.

These findings position our relationship to visual media within a continuum of feeling and engagement that provides a particular personal function for us. They suggest that the consumption of media enables us to manage our feelings in such a way that situates our choices of visual culture to view very much within our present lived circumstances. As many commentators have set out the context for mental stress in contemporary capitalist societies, such stress may provide the ideal context for the ascent and dominance of the image. Where the argument in favour of a person's mystification in capitalism suggests people experience capitalist life as 'natural', the evidence for mental illness in this culture indicates otherwise. It suggests that people experience stress that they may find various normalised ways to manage, such as watching visual media. This means that, a stressful condition of labour can be ameliorated by the affective and emotional provisions of the image. As people's need for the image - their usage of it - will vary and can be satisfied in different ways – it is

 $^{^{160}}$ Many commentators have defined the conditions of living in capitalist economies as providing a significant context for mental stress or 'distress'. Oliver James, in his text Affluenza aligns what he terms 'selfish capitalism' with higher levels of emotional distress in the countries where it exists. In this he creates a distinction between the most extreme forms of neoliberal economies and those in which less unequal forms of capitalism exist. He bases this on evidence that such distress is experienced across society, by those deemed 'successful' by occupying desirable jobs, or possessing financial wealth for instance, as well as those who do not. He bases his conclusions on World Health Organisation analyses of emotional distress in fifteen countries (2004) in which the highest inequality of income distribution in a country correlates with the highest rate of emotional distress, the USA having the highest. James uses the term emotional distress, rather than mental illness, as he describes its effects as 'a rational response to sick societies.' He bases this on evidence that there is little to no genetic basis for emotional distress. He affirmed this in a recent article, quoting Craig Venter, a key researcher on the human genome project as saying 'our environments are critical', as the number of genes are not significant to determine psychological differences. He went on to say that 'In developed nations, women and those on a low income are twice as likely to be depressed as men and the wealthy,' with the extent to which a society was 'individualist' adding support to this outcome. James' perspective accords with the findings of Attachment Theory, which I will go on to discuss here, which emphasise the impact of affectional bonds with carers on children's later emotional well being. Here, our experiences of family can be connected to the effects of economic circumstances on people's lives, in ways that are relevant to this thesis. While James' findings are compelling, they risk undermining the effects of capitalism on its inhabitants more broadly, that is aside from its 'selfish' or less selfish determinants. Other commentators, arguing from a more directly anti-capitalist perspective suggest the problematic nature of capitalism goes deeper, noting its inherent instability. For instance, Mark Fisher describes capitalism's 'bi-polarity...it's ceaseless boom and bust cycles...To a degree unprecedented in any other social system, capitalism both feeds on and reproduces the moods of populations.' Similarly, Franco Berardi Bifo has criticised how, 'The acceleration of network technologies, the general condition of precariousness, and the dependence on cognitive labour all induce pathological effects in the social mind, saturating attention time, compressing the sphere of emotion and sensitivity, as is shown by psychiatrists who have observed a steep increase in manic depression and suicide in the last generation of workers.' Others have based influential critiques of capitalism on analogies with its 'schizophrenic' structure or culture, such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in Anti-Oedipus and Fredric Jameson's Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, approaches that try to align capitalist culture with its 'symptoms' or with 'the schizophrenic's' revolutionary potential. Yet David Harvey has set out the risk of these critiques making light of the frightening nature of the schizophrenic experience. Oliver James, Affluenza, p. xvii-xx; 17. Oliver James, 'Why Genes are leftwing> [accessed: 20 August 2013] (para. 3 of 11). Mark Fisher, Capitalist Realism, (Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2009) p. 35. Berardi Bifo, 'Cognitarian Subjectivation', e-flux journal, 20 (November 2010) p. 1-8 (p. 1-2). David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1990, repr. 1999), p. 352.

impossible to determine a generalised means of 'affecting' all viewers. ¹⁶¹ Where people seek particular subjects, objects and outcomes through images they become, rather than dominated by culture, able to determine their own experience and feelings in relation to it. Culture may enable a person to temporarily realise her desire to become someone else or occupy a reality other than her own and, given the democratised access to culture in the West today, choose exactly who, what, or how. This means visual media frames a critical relationship between, on the one hand, the lived and felt experience of a person in capitalism, and on the other, the effects they might seek from the culture they view. It also affords viewers agency and control over their feelings and over culture. This emphasises what viewers take from their viewing, as much as, if not more than, its 'effect' on them. ¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ The importance of Post-Structuralist theories to the positions of Simon Watney and Chantal Mouffe returns here, also the concerns of Mulvey and Pollock concerning diversity and the male gaze more broadly. The perception of viewers as diverse allows cultures of viewing to be explained by individual usage. Here, different cultural needs, means of experiencing capitalism and relationships to collectivity might underscore relationships to the visual.

¹⁶² This shifts the emphasis from the effect of culture on the viewer to a more reciprocal relationship. It means that, if we have 'agency' as viewers, that there is not a straight line between what we view and how we are socialised by it.

The Viewer and Viewed Protagonist: A Social Relationship

In Group Photo inequalities between the lives of viewers in capitalism and the situation of people they view in images are addressed. The reality of the viewer and the context of the image are conflated, producing visible disparities and contrasting methods that are used to disrupt what is familiar about each. The politicised relation between viewer and viewed protagonist is both suggested, and to an extent resolved in this work: the viewer is presented with protagonists who may be 'like them' who 'become' in the image. This means that the viewer's proxy 'becoming' within a different reality is undertaken by someone like them. But other 'inequalities' exist too, namely between the camera methods used, colouring of the images and their contents. These visual aesthetics are extensions of the idealised framing of convivial relationships in advertising, and the formal recording of achievement by groups in official photographs. Where the bright light of advertising frames convivial relationships, it reaches its extreme as the warmth of cinematic romance. Similarly, the cold daylight that frames the formal photographs of groups becomes the blue light of cinematic distanciation. Yet the associations I make when writing the work can also be reversed: the urge to seek an ideal relationship or situation in the image may become the corollary of the display of bodies in a context of achievement, while the scrutiny of others in images can be linked to the desire to 'become' in the limited sense of aspiration and consumption. Here, high resolution images may become a sign of 'quality' that the actors themselves, deliberately, fail to meet. Where actors show 'mistakes' in the first part of the work (the 'wrong' gesture, a stain on a trouser leg, food between an actor's teeth) they show that just when the group might be at their most presentable, they fail to be - their appearance serving as a rebellion against the high definition camera that expects perfection. In this work high definition moving image becomes the ideal medium for an exploration of inequality, as it expects quality, and it sees everything. Group Photo uses what is most unsettling about the perfection of the image to explore the political implications of a conflation of the life of the viewer in capitalism and the alternative reality viewers seek in images.

For Guy Debord, the basis of the politicised relationship between viewer and image is the general disparity between the realities of life in capitalism and the 'reality' found in the image; one so extreme that he situated 'the spectacle' of cultural production as opposed to 'the banal' and 'boring' reality in capitalism. While Debord can be said to have generalised the banal and the effects of 'the spectacle', he defined a gap between the reality of living in capitalism and the way capitalist concerns are represented to people living in that culture. This disparity is fruitful for building a picture of how the difference between life and image, in capitalism, is so important to the image's function for viewers.

The framing of 'the spectacle' in Debord's terms is at risk of fixing the disparity between a banal, uninteresting reality and a visually exciting one. This may support a more dramatic separation between life and visual culture - and description of that separation - than exists.

Yet, this problem can be addressed by using the terms of 'the spectacle' to produce a different analysis of the image. A Debordian framing of visual culture can be seen in Fredric Jameson's influential assessment of Postmodern 'Late Capitalist' culture where, 'the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror'. Jameson's framing of an unreal culture is marked out by an emphasis on 'surface' which he illustrates using a schizophrenic girl's experiences of 'illimitable vastness, brilliant light, and the gloss and smoothness of material things'. Aside from the drama of this description, it is notable that while Jameson emphasises the 'surface' of visual culture, the 'reality', or underside of culture, is characterised by events that happen to people; the visceral qualities of blood, the pain of torture. This reverses the perspective of Thomas Hirschhorn's earlier mentioned contemporary artwork which emphasised the viewer's ability to lazily consume the violent deaths of people via an image. Such a comparison between

Jameson, Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London: Verso, 1991; repr. 1999), p. 5. Marguerite Séchehaye, Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl, trans. G. Rubin-Rabson (New York: Plume, 1968), p. 19, in Jameson, p. 27. In his article 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' Jameson correlates the experience of postmodernism with that of the schizophrenic who 'is condemned to live in a perpetual present'. He also defines 'linguistic fragmentation of social life' (resulting in a 'neutral and reified media speech'), 'omnipresence of pastiche' and an emphasis on surface, as characterising a postmodern culture without depth. Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998 (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 20. Jameson, Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, p. 17-18; p. 12.

Jameson and Hirschhorn's perspectives highlights the centrality of human protagonists to the content of images; it further suggests that a direct 'social relationship' exists between viewer and protagonist, one defined by inequality.

Debord's analysis situates capital, and the inequalities it represents, as accumulated as image: he frames the 'social relationship' with images on this basis. Yet, his approach serves to occlude the inequality between the reality of the viewer in capitalism and that of the people they view. Albeit that his separation of the 'banal' from 'the spectacle' suggests what the nature of this inequality might be. Where the image form is broadly thought to represent the interests of capital, the root of the disparity between viewer and viewed person becomes the extent to which the viewer's life does not correlate with the manifestation of those interests represented in the image. This produces a disjuncture between visual representations of life in capitalism and lives actually lived in that economy. Where, for Debord, the spectacle is ultimately 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images,' this can be addressed literally. The inequality between viewer and viewed person can be treated as a 'concrete' disparity between what is experienced in life and what is seen and felt via the image. In Debord's terms, this suggests a social relationship between viewer and viewed protagonist which, in capitalism, is underscored by inequality.

Such a social relationship between viewers, and the visual culture they view, links the viewer's 'choice' of visual material to the nature of the difference that the image contains. Given the direct emotional, affective, thought, and also attentional and perceptual effects that it is possible for a viewer to experience via the image, this 'difference' can be contextualised by the

¹⁶⁵ Laura Mulvey recently claimed that 'the body in everyday life is very different from the body circulated in images...the female image, for instance, in advertising and in movies, didn't necessarily refer to actual women, the women of everyday life, but to an image that could be put into circulation as part of commodity culture.' In the terms of this argument, depictions of the body would reflect the concerns of commodity culture, underscoring the inequality between reality and image. Sassatelli, p. 132.

¹⁶⁶ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁷ Such a 'concrete disparity' is between the actual experience of the viewer in capitalism (i.e. her economic circumstances and position in labour, her social relationships and thought and felt experiences of that life, etc.) and that of the person, or people, the viewer watches in the image.

relational effects of each image, on each viewer. Where the 'social' relationship with the image is inherently unequal, something of this disparity must be productive for the viewer, in her viewing experience. For instance, the sociality between viewer and viewed protagonist enables a viewer to experience the other person's emotions and bodily states through a screen, in a moving image. Such images also support the 'displacement' and management of feelings and bodily states through the viewing of cultural material - and 'use' of protagonists to 'determine' feeling. This range of effects shows the breadth of possible means of a viewer relating to the image. Yet, it also refers us back to the lived situation of the viewer as the basis of her viewing. Here, the 'evasive' and acknowledged 'escapist' qualities of visual media may be read as providing more concrete alternatives to the observable lived, felt, reality in the present moment. 168 This indicates that the image provides something that cannot be achieved in life. It also suggests that critiques of 'escapism', if read in terms of Lisa Butler's framing of 'dissociative experience as escape,' can be contextualised by viewers' wish to, at least temporarily, experience something different to their present reality. 169 This sets out both a direct context for the viewers' desire for change within capitalism, and their exploration of agency through images.

Where images have the potential to be highly 'affective' for a viewer, an important distinction opens up: between the literal 'alternative' visualised in the image and how the viewer's affective transformation by that image can be contextualised by her lived reality in capitalism. For instance, Laura Mulvey spoke of how, in cinema, 'the character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator'; hence by identifying with

¹⁶⁸ The definition of 'escapism' is 'the tendency to seek distraction and relief from reality, esp. in the arts or through fantasy.' This has been a familiar critique levelled at the consumption of culture and media by viewers. It has accords with contemporary arguments that focus on distraction and attention as they relate to art and the wider viewing of visual culture, such as that presented by Peter Osborne: 'We go to the gallery, in part, to be distracted from the cares and worries of the world.' I suggest here that 'distraction' is too simple a term for our relationship to the visual and rather point to the discontent that 'escapism' and 'distraction' suggest. 'escapism': *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*, ed. by Della Thompson, 9th edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Peter Osborne, 'Distracted Reception: Time, Art and Technology', in *Timezones*, ed. by Jessica Morgan and Gregor Muir (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p. 68.

¹⁶⁹ Butler, 'The Dissociations of Everyday Life', p. 6

them, the spectator can experience 'control' via the protagonist viewed.¹⁷⁰ This means that viewers' use of images to 'ameliorate', 'manage' and improve the real can be treated with empathy. Such an empathy with the viewer's position allows her politicised relationship to the images she consumes to be addressed directly. This initiates a possible frame for dialogue about the 'use' and significance of images in people's lives, in directly politicised terms.

Analysis using contemporary therapeutic currents in Attachment Theory and Family Therapy has the potential to enable a more direct way of relating to the viewer and viewed protagonist in an image.¹⁷¹ It is possible to explore this speculatively here, in order to focus on what a viewer's 'need' for the image might be based on. Parallels can be drawn between the ideal mode of relating in Attachment Therapy and Family Therapy which might be summed up simply as 'being listened to and taken seriously', and the relationship between viewers and viewed protagonists in moving images.¹⁷² I apply this to the proxy 'dialogue' between viewer

¹⁷⁰ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' p. 20.

¹⁷¹ Attachment Theory is an influential psychoanalytic approach, with associated therapeutic practice, initiated by John Bowlby in the 1960's and 1970's, with important studies undertaken by Bowlby in the 1940's and 1950's. Today, Attachment Theory is broadly supported by over 3000 published empirical studies with children and families, which assert the primary impact on the child of any form of separation between, or loss of, 'attachment figures'. Family Therapy, a group therapy which includes the patient's family in her treatment, was influenced by the work of Gregory Bateson, who emphasised the importance of the reciprocal interactions between family members on the 'dialogic' generation of 'the self'. Oliver James, *Affluenza*, p. 345.

¹⁷² Jaakko Seikkula, 'Becoming Dialogical: Psychotherapy or a Way of Life' *The Australian and New Zealand Journal* of Family Therapy, 32: 3, (2011), 179-193, (p. 191). Jaakko Seikkula states that, 'Nothing more is needed than being heard and taken seriously and it is this which generates a dialogical relation.' The work of 'Open Dialogue Therapy' involves intervening early in first episodes of schizophrenia, and basing treatment on talking in groups that include clinicians, family members and concerned people close to the family. The therapy draws on Bakhtin's dialogical principles and is rooted in a Batesonian tradition of Family Therapy. Seikkula's 'Open Dialogue Therapy' has 'virtually eradicated' schizophrenia in Western Lapland, Finland, where it was initiated, so that '82% of patients who were given open-dialogue treatment had no, or mild psychotic symptoms after five years, compared to 50% in a comparison group'. Seikkula describes 'the activities that appear to be factors in healing: creation of new, shared language from multivoiced conversation, shared emotional experience, and creation of community', all supported by, 'powerful mutual emotional attunement, an experience most people would recognise as feelings of love.' For Seikkula the combination of dialogue between the members of the family and the schizophrenic patient and the high emotions that arise in the meetings is essential to the efficacy of the 'Open Dialogue' treatment. Here catharsis accords with agency where high emotions facilitate the ability of the patient to recover her capacity to act in the world. Seikkula's focus on 'being heard and taken seriously', has direct accords with Arendt's emphasis on 'being seen and being heard' as the basis for agency in the political life of the community, also with her statement that to be deprived of a 'space of appearance' is to be deprived of reality.' The therapeutic importance of the 'Open Dialogue' meeting for the early stage schizophrenia patient, seems, in seeking to resolve serious breakdowns of the self, to situate the patient within a dialogue with her own family, one in which all statements are 'taken seriously', in this her 'appearance' or visibility is affirmed. The basis of subjectivity then, as inherently dialogical and shared, is emphasised by the success of this practice. Jaakko Seikkula, 'Becoming Dialogical: Psychotherapy or a Way of Life', (p. 191). Laura Barnett, 'The play that wants to change the way we treat mental illness', The Guardian, 24 March 2014 http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/mar/24/play-mental-illness-eradication-schizophrenia- western-lapland-open-dialogue-hallucination [accessed: 25 March 2014]; Jaakko Seikkula and David Trimble,

and viewed as an intended disruption and rejection of the dominant use of Freudian and Lacanian theories in the analysis of visual culture, which tend to reproduce metaphors for separation.¹⁷³ While affirming Freud's and Lacan's emphasis on language in the production of identity, Attachment Theorists have emphasised the role of attachment - that is affectional bonds between carer and child - in the production of 'the self'.¹⁷⁴ This links language, dialogue and communication to affect. Indeed, Gregory Bateson said, in a 'metalogue' with his daughter:

we have to start all over again from the beginning and assume that language is first and foremost a system of gestures. Animals after all have only gestures and tones of voice—and words were invented later.¹⁷⁵

'Healing Elements of Therapeutic Conversation: Dialogue as an Embodiment of Love', *Family Process*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2005, pp. 461-475 (p. 462, 464-65).

Chicago Press, 1972; repr. 2000), p. 13.

¹⁷³ Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories have had a significant impact on readings of fine art and visual culture in a way that is underscored by the importance of Griselda Pollock and Laura Mulvey's positions on spectatorship within fine art. The emphasis, seen in Pollock and Mulvey, on the separation between viewer and viewed protagonist, can be aligned with the therapeutic methods of Freud and Lacan. For instance, Pollock describes how, 'In psychoanalysis the patient is not observed while dumb, but listened to. The body's symptoms are also deciphered as speech from the unconscious.' While, in Attachment and Family Therapies too, the person is 'listened to', there is an emphasis in psychoanalysis on the use of pre-existing knowledge to ascertain 'symptoms' by 'watching' the person analysed. The impression and intention within Attachment and Family Therapies is rather the generation of an equal relationship between therapist, and client (or therapist, family and client) based on a balanced dialogue in which empathy and 'care giving' is supportive of that person's experience of 'self'. Similarly, as Freudian and Lacanian therapy may avoid eye contact between patient and therapist, Attachment Therapy is based on direct eye contact; the therapist taking the position of the supportive other. Where the 'analysis' of the patient is not emphasised, the experience of the person, viewed within an equal, relational space, can be considered; this seems to have significant implications for visual culture, and the enabling or facilitation of political subjectivities. Relatedly, where the production of 'the self' is emphasised as a social process - one in which the 'self' itself may be 'autonomous' but is constituted by the 'voices' that have surrounded us in life - then the emphasis, as regards the 'transformation' of the individual, resides in the nature of the group surrounding them at any one time. This emphasises what happens 'between people' in a way that also shows why Debord's viewer's gestures 'are not her own'. This is because watching others in images has a comparable effect to the socialisation process that takes place between people in life. Rather than emphasising 'alienation' here, it rather affirms the 'social' production of the self. Griselda Pollock, 'Screening the Seventies', p. 264.

John Bowlby, based on studies with children, challenged Freud's position on childhood neuroses and the developmental stages that they must pass through for psychological development (Freud himself rarely directly observed children, and was aware of the limitations of this approach), by suggesting that they are natural responses to the risks of separation and environment threats. He based this on correlations in the responses of young children, and young animals, to separation from the mother and potential risks they would face in the dark and from loud noises. Rather than 'stages' of development, Bowlby sees this in terms of potential pathways, in which 'no variables, it is held, have more far-reaching effects on personality development than have a child's experiences within his family.' Bowlby's findings have added scientific backing to Lacan's notion of the 'mirror stage' particularly the significance of the mother or carer's engaged and caring response to the child for the formation of attachment and development of a 'lovable' sense of self. As Bowlby describes, 'among the most effective reinforcers of attachment of a 'lovable' sense of self. As Bowlby describes, 'among the most effective reinforcers of attachment behaviour is the way a baby's companions respond to his social advances.' John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Separation, Anger and Anxiety*, 3 vols (London: Random House, 1998; 1973), II, pp. 103-4; 411-419; John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Attachment*, 3 vols (London: Random House, 1997; 1969), I, pp. 280, 313-14.

What is 'affective' about the movement of bodies relates to the emphasis placed on gesture by Bateson and R. D. Laing in their work with schizophrenic patients and their families. Both recognised the important interrelationship of gestures, spoken language and facial expressions for the child's mental health. For Bateson and Laing, confusion here had the potential to disrupt the development of 'the self'; the child's 'attachment' to her carer being an important factor underscoring this outcome. Further, in Attachment Therapy, separations from important carers, with whom affectional bonds were present, had the potential to produce 'insecurity' and, at worst, 'disturbed attachment' in later life. 177

The basis of affect and language in the body becomes important for the relationship between viewers and the protagonists they view in images. Where the viewer is able to 'mirror' the body state of another person in an image - to experience changes in her mental and physical state in response to watching another person's actions, movements and gestures - affectional relationships with images gain a wider context. This is relevant to Laura Mulvey's emphasis on Lacan's 'Mirror Stage'; the viewer's search for an 'ego-ideal' in the protagonist viewed. ¹⁷⁸ As

¹⁷⁶ Researching the families of schizophrenic patients Bateson and Laing both identified the presence of contradictory patterns of communication; which Bateson termed a 'double-bind'. Significantly it is the child's attachment to the parental figures that leads them to normalise this confused mode of communication, where the 'disorganisation' in her thinking becomes a factor in the formation of her self. Originally framing the double-bind in terms of a victim and the family, Bateson came to frame the family as a group 'caught up in an ongoing system which produces conflicting definitions of the relationship and consequent subjective disasters.' While their work has been controversial, its validity has been affirmed by the success of 'Open Dialogue Therapy' in Finland (see note 170) for instance. See note 116. Bateson, 'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia', *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind* (London: Jason Aronson Inc, 1972), pp. 153-171; R. D. Laing, *Knots* (New York: Routledge, 2005; repr. 1970); Bateson, 'A note on the double bind' (1962) in Jaakko Seikkula and Mary E. Olson, 'The Open Dialogue Approach to Acute Psychosis: Its Poetics and Micropolitics', *Family Process*, 42:3, (2003), p. 405.

¹⁷⁷ In Attachment Therapy, the child who experiences separations from, or a lack of care from carers is at risk of 'insecure' or 'disturbed attachment.' Where a child is securely attached they have an internal image of a 'lovable self and responsive other', while by contrast a child whose attachment is disturbed will employ 'defensive exclusion.' This is when a child will 'disown her anger, need and anxiety and the awareness of a carer's rejection.' These painful areas become 'dissociated frozen blocks of cognition or emotion,' resulting in an 'internal working model' in which much is excluded – where 'emotional detachment and a difficulty in giving an integrated account of experience abounds.' Importantly, Attachment Theory shows that attachment 'styles' tend to continue into adult life where our relationships there, such as with potential partners, tend to follow the same patterns (i.e. avoidant, ambivalent, etc), although the patterns may differ depending on the context. Lavinia Gomez, *An Introduction to Object Relations*, (London: Free Association Books, 1997; repr. 1998), p. 161. Dorothy Heard, Brian Lake and Una McCluskey, *Attachment Therapy with Adolescents and Adults*, (London: Karnac Books, 2009), pp. 76-77.

¹⁷⁸ See note 68 on Lacan. Mulvey states that, 'Important for this article is the fact that it is an image that constitutes

the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the 'I' of subjectivity'. This is a moment when an older fascination with looking (at the mother's face, for an obvious example) collides with the initial inklings of self-awareness.' This latter point emphasises the impact of the parent, and the 'image', on the child's development of 'self'. Yet it is possible to balance this with John Berger's description of 'the reciprocal nature of vision', which he regarded as more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue.' This

the mirror stage applies to the child seeing her own image in the parent's face (not only the mirror), the loving or affectional aspect of this relation can be emphasised. This signifies how the carer's look communicates her affection for the child, in the terms of Attachment Theory. Theory. For instance, Parveen Adams describes (in respect of the artwork as 'ego-ideal' of the viewer):

This ego ideal is necessarily involved in narcissism because the ego ideal is the point from which the subject feels himself to be satisfactory and loved. ¹⁸⁰

Rather than narcissism, it is possible to emphasise the importance of feeling 'loved' for the child; of the child's search for a loving gaze from her parent. Where the artwork or image looks on the viewer from a position of love, the image itself, via its maker, or the identified with actor, may become a proxy for the kind of 'look' that we would like to receive from a parent. In cinema or television, the confident pose of an actor, and her open display of emotions, might enable the protagonist to become the ideal person with whom we would most want to interact. The actor may appear to show us the love that we seek in life, albeit that the actor actually directs this 'emotion' towards his co-star in the film. ¹⁸¹ This suggests an experience

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enables a shift to the importance of the dialogic nature of interactions with carers to the development of 'self'. Further, Laura Mulvey's discussion of sadism and masochism in viewing are described, in Attachment Therapy, as 'ego states' based in ambivalent attachment. This suggests an association between attachment and the positions of the viewer that Mulvey describes. Mulvey, p. 18; John Berger, p. 9; Ruth A. Blizard, 'Masochistic and Sadistic Ego States', Journal of Trauma and Dissociation, 2: 4 (2001), pp. 37-58.

¹⁷⁹ For Bowlby and his adherents the loving look from the parent (attachment figure) confers confidence in the child, supporting the development of her secure sense of 'self'. Where such a look is not present, or not meant, a context for insecurity is said to be provided. Relatedly, the baby's smile is said to act as a 'social releaser', that 'the function of the baby's smile is that of increasing interaction between mother and baby and maintaining them in proximity to one another,' (also see note 172). John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Attachment*, I, pp. 280.

¹⁸⁰ Parveen Adams, 'The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's Interim and the Discourse of the Analyst', in *The Emptiness of*

the Image, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 77. Mary Kelly's Interim is said to disrupt this expectation by providing, for instance, a reaction in Slavoj Zizek more akin to horror. Adams, p. 86.

¹⁸¹ This is supported by the shot-reverse-shot camera technique used in cinema and cinematic-style television series. Where George Bataille described the 'Cruelty of Art' this might rather be the 'Cruelty of the Image.' Bataille spoke of the artwork's role as always being to please, meaning that the most 'terrifying painting is there to attract visitors.' He also spoke of the 'double-bind' from which, 'the very meaning of art emerges – for art, which puts us on the path of complete destruction...offers us ravishment without death.' Here, the pleasure afforded by art enables our 'disordering the order that suffocates us'. The association between 'pleasure' and the image in Mulvey, accords with Bataille's perspective, where her focus is on sadism and Bataille's is on 'cruelty'. Yet it is possible to pose this 'pleasure' more simply, at the level of the relationship sought by viewers with others. For instance, in cinema, the attraction to the actor, the feeling of being her opposite in the film - that she is speaking to us - becomes rather than a relationship necessarily underscored by the cruelty of the viewer, one that may accord more so with Lauren Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism'. For Berlant 'all attachments are optimistic' and relatedly, 'cruel optimism is the

with images that in some way accords with 'attachment,' one which may underscore the affective 'pleasure' of relating to the image. This may be further underscored by the overuse of visual media by an 'insecure' self; with this insecurity being said to have a particular relation to capitalist life.

The significance of an 'insecure' viewer relates to the framing, in Attachment Therapy, of two different states of 'the self': one when in dialogue with others, and another when experiencing one's own mental state, for instance when alone. 182 Therapists have noted the increased presence of negative internal dialogues in 'insecurely attached' people, especially when alone. 183 Uses of digital media and visual and aural culture have been described as enabling insecure people to manage their thoughts and feelings. 184 This links insecurity in adults and

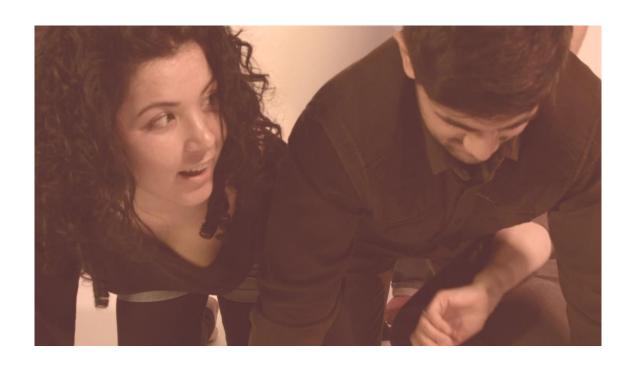
condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object in advance of its loss.' This could position optimistic attachments as a key factor in viewers' choices of images to view. The 'star system' in Mulvey remains: we feel we know the people we have watched, to have experienced intimacy with them, yet we do not know them. Where feelings of relating, or being related to, are sought, we may go to the image to 'feel like' this is happening, then turn from the image, computer, leave the cinema and find ourselves alone or in a less ideal relationship or situation. In this, the image is an inadequate alternative to life, albeit, in its popularity is capable of making up for what a person's experience in life lacks, with other feelings, sights, experiences. Here pathos, loss, inadequacy may underscore our relationship to the image. This further reinforces the relevance of attachment to the image as 'loss' has such an impact on the growing 'self', presenting a strong likelihood of insecurity. In addition, just as the child needs care and affection, she needs 'a secure base' in Bowlby's terms, that is enough space so that they can play, explore interests freely, while knowing the carer is available, visible. Such a 'secure base' could be provided by the image where, through strategic identifications we may stabilise the self. This reaffirms Bishop's closeness and distance, as regards the image, and shows its strong connection to the needs of a child for closeness, and distance (albeit within a context of empathy) and what the image may provide. This is something I will go onto discuss here further. George Bataille, 'The Cruel Practice of Art', originally published in Medecine de France (June 1949) <supervert.com/elibrary/georges_bataille/cruel-practice_of_art> [accessed: 27 June 2014]; James, Affluenza, p. 427; Berlant, p. 93-94.

¹⁸² Dorothy Heard, Brian Lake and Una McCluskey, contemporary adherents of Attachment Therapy, describe the 'internal' and 'external' environment of the person. They define the 'internal environment' as 'the self' in a state of 'subjectivity', how the person experiences her own subjectivity, and the 'external environment' is defined as a person who is 'interacting with other people and making a life through planning forthcoming events with them.' The influence of a 'secure' or 'insecure' state of the self on these 'environments' is said to be significant: for instance, 'insecure selves suffer waves of loneliness and emptiness, which is usually coped with by the use of defensive strategies. So long as the strategies work, all may seem well.' Dorothy Heard, Brian Lake and Una McCluskey, p. 45,

 $^{^{183}}$ This has accords with the Freudian 'Super-Ego', which is one of the 'agencies of the personality' acting as 'judge or censor'; which for Bowlby marks the 'rules for appraising action, thought and feeling...overlearned during childhood and adolescence' which as a result 'come to be applied automatically and outside awareness.' Laplanche, J., Pontalis, J.B. p. 387; Bowlby, Attachment and Loss: Loss, 3 vols (London: Random House, 1998; 1980), III, p. 55. ¹⁸⁴ Insecure attachment may involve avoiding 'information whose recognition evokes dread' (fear being a significant outcome of 'insecure attachment' as a result of inadequate 'caregiving') by a range of means that 'give care or comfort to the self', such as food, or drugs, but also, 'for the person to become immersed in some activity that claims attention' whereby 'attention is diverted on to a subject of absorbing interest and the distress of the dreaded event is temporarily put out of mind.' Differently, Oliver James describes young people's attachments to celebrities as 'a form of virtual relationship, of second-hand living, a fantasy relationship with a stranger.' He adds that 'people with such attachments to celebrities are also prone to emotional distress' and continues, 'adolescents with weak attachment to parents, or who are exceptionally reliant on peers for their sense of status and well being, are at greater risk of being obsessive.' Dorothy Heard, Brian Lake and Una McCluskey, pp. 66-67; James, p. 427-8.

children to the pursuit of visual media. Oliver James cites 40% of children and 50% of people as being insecure, a point he bases on the disruption of early attachment relationships in capitalism. Where visual media may be used to 'manage feeling' here, the presence of insecurities or existing attachment issues seem to prefigure a greater reliance on such media. Also, if being alone with oneself and one's thoughts is unbearable or uncomfortable, the experience of visual media can help to manage or displace these feelings. This contradicts Butler's rather reserved assessment of the uses of visual media for 'everyday dissociation', and instead situates such media as a potentially important tool in managing capitalist life. This places the various uses of visual media in a deeply personal, psychological and hence political relation to the viewer's, one rooted in social experience in capitalism.

¹⁸⁵ James, p. 345. Oliver James supports John Bowlby's findings on the importance of strong early attachment relationships to a lack of 'emotional distress' or 'insecurity' in adulthood. He has linked insecurity in children and adults to the common practice of using childcare services in capitalist countries for children under four - for James the key period in a child's life at which disruptions in attachment may be harmful. This positions the demands of labour as affecting the wellbeing of children in capitalism.



A Politicised Relation between Intimacy and Distance

In Group Photo the shift between viewers being affectively drawn to an ideal situation in an image, is combined with their capacity to affectively withdraw from another person's situation in an image. This means that the shift between warm and cool imagery – and the attendant shift in its content - is one that oscillates between two extremes: one in which we might want to 'be' the protagonist, and another in which we are happy not to be, but may be entertained by her situation. Both scenarios enable a viewer to feel power in relation to a protagonist, thus providing a context for agency, one through identification, affect and empathy, the other through the rejection of each. In this way, Group Photo stages and seeks to explore, as much as temporarily resolve, the viewer's relationship to agency via the image. While the ideally desired reality and the least desirable reality are both present, they are choreographed to produce an ending that rejects both, one that seems more ideal in social or political terms. This change reflects the cinematic mode of transforming an actor's state or situation, albeit at a speed that is beyond 'natural', which makes the changes self-conscious and visible. Group Photo is a work about the inequality between viewers and protagonists they view in images, and the agencies and alternatives we seek through those protagonists. Yet, while the unequal conditions of this relationship are reproduced and staged, a resolution is suggested by the responsive and playful interactions present in the work. These suggest that affect is fundamental to agency, and that the answer to social change may be found between the viewer and those they view in images.

The importance of affect and 'affectional bonds' to the development of 'the self', and visual media's role in supporting a more manageable experience of self, makes it possible to return to Claire Bishop's analysis. She described the 'troubling' oscillation between 'intimacy and distance' experienced by the viewer of images. Yet 'intimacy' and 'distance' reflect exactly the problems of the child in the family: she needs to feel cared for as well as to have enough

¹⁸⁶ Bishop, 'The Digital Divide', 2012, (para 2 of 15).

mental and physical space in which to play and explore her interests safely. Here, the relationship of people to the images they view develops an interesting corollary to the affective balance needed by a child whose 'self' is developing.¹⁸⁷ This defines viewers' relationships to images as enabling them to ameliorate affectional issues and insecurities that lie at the heart of the capacity of the child to become an agent.¹⁸⁸

This means that intimacy and distance frame a political relation between viewer and image. Rather than being troubling, per se, I would like to explore this as a potentially productive relation, especially for politicised cultural work. Here, valences of 'intimacy' and 'distance' become two extremes of a broad continuum of relating between viewer and viewed protagonist in an image. These extremes underpin different means of a viewer seeking agency via the image. The first extreme is an experience of culture that supports the highest degree of identification-based, emotional and affective transference — one enabling a viewer to feel most like the protagonist viewed. The second is an experience of culture that supports the least emotional engagement - but which allows a viewer to feel power or control in relation to the viewed protagonist. I will now discuss each in turn.

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¹⁸⁷ Just as Oliver James links insecurity in the young to a greater tendency to attach to stars, an emotionally neglected child may have a greater need for images. This suggests that the affective properties of the image can ameliorate what is lacking affectively in life. In this way, the capacity to engage with others and to support 'the self' can be linked to the pursuit of agency. Hence, agencies can be explored through the image: via viewers' identification with apparently 'active' figures (like celebrities). Conversely, in a context of adequate emotional support, viewers' own agencies would be nurtured in social life, enabling them to act more in accordance with their own interests. The political ramifications of this alignment of agency with the image seem clear. In a different way, Mulvey recently reversed her notable formula, whereby the woman in the cinematic image was the object of the male gaze, saying how, 'the figure of the male star...emerges as an object of the spectator's possession...Implicitly, as the female spectator is now able to manipulate and control the image, she can reverse the power relationship so central to cinema of 24 frames per second, in which the female spectator is amalgamated into the male look.' This suggests a new 'agency' in relation to images, possessed as a result of the capacity of viewers to alter or rearrange their form and content. Yet, I would also suggest that this 'possession' of the male, as object, imaginary partner, or attachment figure, by the female viewer, was perhaps always possible, and a central part of the powerful affective impact of the cinematic image for the female viewer. Sassatelli, p. 141.

¹⁸⁸ Laing, also Deleuze and Guattari have argued for the positive benefits of the loss of the ego as the route to liberation, if not political agency. Yet, Laing's work with schizophrenic patients at Kingsley Hall, in which he encouraged them to delve deeper into their psychosis was notably unsuccessful. Where the experience of the schizophrenic is traumatic in a way that tends to close down social interaction and action, a 'self' that is produced through supportive and collaborative interactions with important others affirms the enabling of a person most capable of individual and collaborative agency.

The first extreme is one defined by relationships with culture that support the highest degree of affective transference via the image. In cinema, as opposed to theatre, the structural representation of scenes, so as to emphasise a viewer's feeling of 'being in' or in relation to that scene, is notable for the intimacy it suggests. Mulvey emphasised the effect of this on a viewer by describing how 'the function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception'. ¹⁸⁹ Yet, she might also have extended this to the natural (or ideal) conditions of human relating, and thereby to feeling. In comparison to catharsis as a means of 'managing emotions associated with a cause', the actual complexity of emotional and affective transference is now known to reach far beyond this. ¹⁹⁰ Various affective and emotional interplays can take place between viewer and protagonist. In addition, cinema often seems to heighten feeling, rather than to reproduce naturalised feeling from life. This is supported by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's statement:

And undoubtedly we owe part of our pleasure in going to the movies to the promise of a protected momentary intimacy (protected because all the presumed knowing of the other is on our side) with other persons massively and defencelessly exposed. So comforting is this expectation that in order to defeat it the film-maker must somehow traumatise perception. ¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Mulvey, p. 21.

Damasio has described, 'our connection to others occurs not just by visual images, language, and logical inference but also via something deeper in our flesh: the actions with which we can portray the movements of others. We can perform four-way translations among (1) actual movement, (2) somatosensory representations of movement, (3) visual representations of movement, and (4) memory.' Further Damasio distinguishes between emotions and how they feel in our bodies and says that emotions are triggered 'by images of objects or events that are actually happening at the moment or that, having happened in the past, are now being recalled. The situation you are in makes a difference for the emotional apparatus. You may be actually inhabiting a scene of your life and responding to a musical performance or to the presence of a friend; or you may be alone and remembering a conversation that upset you the day before. Whether "live," reconstructed from memory, or created from scratch in one's imagination, the images initiate a chain of events. Signals from the processed images are made available to several regions of the brain. Some of those regions are involved in language, others in movement, others in manipulations that constitute reasoning. Activity in any of those regions leads to a variety of responses: words with which you can label a certain object; rapid evocations of other images that allow you to conclude something about an object; and so forth.' Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 83; 89.

¹⁹¹ Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of being: cinema, aesthetics, subjectivity* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 8. This statement by Bersani and Dutoit also has interesting correlations with the position of power the viewer may adopt, particularly when watching others who are 'exposed' or 'vulnerable', in internet videos, for instance. A more disturbing corollary of Bersani and Dutoit's statement would be Mulvey's 'At first glance, the cinema would seem to be remote from the undercover world of the surreptitious observation of an unknowing and unwilling victim.' Her comment suggests accords between cinema and the contemporary 'reality show'. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 17

Here, the 'intimacy' experienced by the viewer is 'protected'. That is, she is safe to manage feeling through culture, as well as experience feeling at its most powerful. ¹⁹² This safety can also be contextualised by what John Bowlby described as the 'secure base' sought by a child with her parents, where emotional safety creates a context for the child's action. ¹⁹³ This suggests that the actor's ability to convey emotions accurately enables viewers to experience other people more directly - and importantly in a way that may even feel more honest and safe than perhaps it would in life. ¹⁹⁴ In such a circumstance, it is unsurprising that the ability of a viewer to feel like an actor is so powerful and potentially transformative. Viewers are able, in essence, to literally 'become' that person by affectively approximating her bodily and emotional state. Relatedly, screens in a therapeutic setting, are said not to lessen the ways that 'affectional bonds' might be affirmed between parent and child. ¹⁹⁵ This means that our experience of others through screens is as if we were communicating with them face-to-face, feeling their feelings for us, their attachment to us. It also means that the informality of an internet video need not limit the capacity for viewers to feel like protagonists.

This capacity to feel what others feel through images has implications for the possibility of affectively occupying another's position, from the perspective of a hegemonic struggle in culture. It has particular accords with what Laclau and Mouffe describe as the meaning of hegemony within Early Russian Social Democracy:

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¹⁹² It may be that there is more opportunity to feel deeply via images, than in life, where we may feel too exposed or vulnerable to do so. This reaffirms the 'safety' sought in attachment relationships as something we may seek through our relationships with others in images.

¹⁹³ The matter of emotional 'safety' is interestingly mentioned by Roberta Sassatelli regarding 'applications in virtual reality', that, 'offer us the possibility to be masters of emotions by immersing ourselves in various forms of safe eventfulness.' This suggests the continuation, and expansion of cinematic forms of emotional immersion into very popular contemporary entertainments such as gaming. Sassatelli, p. 135.

The insecurity of relationships within capitalist cultures is well known. A recent event drew on research by Hito Steyerl, Katja Diefenbach and Hannah Black among others, that sought to 'make connections between the financial crisis, the commodification of relationships, the ideological dimension of love, psychopathologies of gender and the idea that personal is political.' I am suggesting that the experience of images may ameliorate such losses, that rather than replacing them, it determines them. Also, as attachment styles are known to provide 'patterns' of relating which tend to continue into adult relationships, it is possible that viewers' 'attachment styles' may either be reflected in, or ameliorated by, their relationship to those watched in moving images. Love Against Lovers: Capitalist Crisis of Feeling, Showroom Gallery, London, 11 May 2013.

¹⁹⁵ A study with a mother and young child caused both to be upset when the 'wrong' facial expression was displayed, at a point when both thought the video to be a live link. This has interesting implications for Skype as it suggests our communications with people we are close to, using this medium, need not be experienced as being any more emotionally distanced than they would be when experienced in person. Heard, Lake and McCluskey, p. 38

'hegemony' here designates, more than a relation, a space dominated by the tension between two very different relations: a) that of the hegemonized task and its 'natural' class agent; and b) that of the hegemonized task and the class hegemonizing it. ¹⁹⁶

Here, central to the revolutionary moment, is a 'proletarian' 'hegemonizing' a bourgeois task: adopting a person's position that is higher in the class system than her own. ¹⁹⁷ While this relates to a particular historical situation in Tsarist Russia, people's ability to change their social position in order to take on a more dominant or active role, seems important for our relationships to the image. Yet, where Laclau and Mouffe have spoken of the importance, in Russian Social Democracy, that the 'bourgeois' task remains bourgeois in character, they say that:

the democratic potential can be developed only if this bond is broken, only if the conditions disappear which permitted the emergence of a rigid separation between leaders and led within the masses. ¹⁹⁸

Through this, Laclau and Mouffe suggest that to enable the democratic potential of the working class to hegemonize tasks, the traditional relationship between the vanguard and the group it leads must be dissolved. Their inference is that only within a condition of equal and direct relations between those theorising or imagining political change, and also those who might effect that change, can such a hegemonic transformation for working persons occur.

Returning to the viewer and the image, such an equal relation between different classes suggests that viewers may engage with protagonists who are in different situations to them on direct terms; they may want to empathise with and feel like them. This suggests both the potentially great hegemonic power of identifications with protagonists but also affirms direct and equal relations as the ideal basis of agency within social life and change.¹⁹⁹ Addressing the

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¹⁹⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, p. 50.

¹⁹⁷ Laclau and Mouffe, p. 50.

Laclau and Mouffe, p. 57-8.

¹⁹⁹ Gramsci's framing of culture as a site for struggle is reaffirmed here – with viewers of culture able to experience a form of hegemonic becoming via their relationship to protagonists in images. This suggests the viewer's agency in relation to the image and correlates with the definition of hegemony that applies to Russian Social Democracy. It

position of viewers in capitalism in these terms, it is possible to see viewers' relationship with a viewed protagonist - whose position is more desirable than theirs - as based in a potential shift in role; one that parallels a desired 'hegemonizing' of a task or social position. It seems to be Hollywood cinema that most enables such a 'hegemonic shift' for a viewer; that is an affective improvement of the viewer's position in life, through the image. ²⁰⁰ In cinema emotions and bodily states tend to be accurately conveyed by actors occupying identifiable contexts – in a way that best supports identification and emotional and affective 'transference'. This means that cinema and cinematic-style television series are able to produce powerful feelings of 'being like' a protagonist, through such technical methods as shot-reverse-shot and naturalistic acting. ²⁰¹ They can support an ascendance in role within a cultural production that the viewer has selected to view, one which rather than correlating with her own experience, presents an improvement of it, within capitalism or fantasy. ²⁰² This means a viewer's hegemonizing of an actor's role suggests that a context of political change, of political dialogue and

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also positions equal relations as the basis for political agency, in a way that accords with Rancière's politics, the structures of Hannah Arendt's framing of Greek politics, and the format of Open Dialogue Therapy. Where 'the self' is threatened, equal meeting based on open communication is sought (this being the impression that cinema creates via the exposure of actors' apparent emotional honesty.) Interestingly too, Attachment Theorists significantly lessen the importance of identification for experiences of loss, in contrast to Freud. Here, attachment and the desire to recover the lost person replace yearning for them. This suggests that attachments may hold a larger role in our relationship to images, where identifications have often been emphasised. It also, within the notion of 'hegemony' situates our identifications as being with those who are not 'like us', hence again destabilising the 'similarity' that identification implies. Here our search for a broader range of objects, imaginary partners, or attachment figures through images gains a stronger context (see note 187.) Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Loss*, III, p. 24-28.

²⁰⁰ While ambition might be very much tied to a conventionally capitalist reality, as much as the more prosaic notion of 'social climbing' (a person anxious to gain higher social status), hegemony would appear to mirror such forms of social ascent, yet serving as a functional 'displacement' within a situation of social change; the relationship between the two is interesting here. It would also correlate with the 'ego-ideal' where our identifications may be based on a more 'perfect' version of us.

²⁰¹ The popularity of cinematic television series today demonstrates the continuing impact of cinematic methods on viewers. In these series, cinematic production levels are extended to multiple episodes occupying a much greater length of time than a film. American channels like HBO have popularised such material with series such as *Mad Men, True Blood* and *Breaking Bad*.

where Brecht saw 'bourgeois theatre' as showing capitalism to be universal and unchanging it is perhaps interesting to emphasise the importance of change, for both theatre and cinema. Cinema is rooted in the transformation of situations, characters and contexts. This means that not only outcomes (or fates) are realised, but the ways in which a character's life alters during the film, within a fixed and ultimately fast timeframe that 'feels' natural, are significant. Hence, while such changes generally occur within a fictional mimesis of a capitalist reality, our identifications with and attachments to protagonists in films serve to enable us to feel what their transformation is like and to map it onto our own experience. Where change is central to cinema and cinematic style television programmes, this situates changes in role, not only within a 'vertical' route of hegemonic 'ascendance' but also within the horizontal changes that produce a powerful 'feeling' of transformation and improvement in time, albeit within the existing system.

subjectivisation, is an appropriate frame for the viewer's affective transformation through the image. ²⁰³

The common disparity between the lived position of the viewer in capitalism and the position of the viewed protagonist in culture suggests that a greater need for affective transference might be found in groups under greater economic strain, or in positions of personal insecurity. In this light, such audiences may be in need of positive transference with the image or culture; transference which would enable them to feel 'better', in a way that positions 'pleasure' in viewing, within a wider situation of struggle. This also actually suggests viewers' existing discontent within their capitalist reality. The consumption of a didactically themed and framed film or play which will almost certainly end well therefore becomes understandable – and framed by the political actualities of capitalist life. Ultimately, the most deterministic of Hollywood films becomes the corollary of the viewer's ability, or need, to change from a worse to a better position in capitalism, due to the power and safety of the structural representation of narratives in the cinematic system.²⁰⁴ This also politicise the uses of catharsis whereby those most disadvantaged in capitalism may use the image as a means of 'managing emotions associated with a cause'.

So, rather than the viewer being solely a product of the control of the image over them, this 'capacity' for a viewer to transform in relation to the image suggests a form of agency. If the viewer's relationship to culture supports her ability to experience a different social position, the viewer's agency would situate them in a position of power in relation to what they choose

²⁰³ Where, for Rancière, viewers' relationships to images occupy a position of relative equality, their relationship to protagonists can be seen as one of affective 'becoming'. Yet, if for Gramsci culture is the site of struggle and Arendt sees as a political space in which 'unequal' people pursue political ends, viewers' 'use' of the ability to feel like someone in a different situation to them suggests both that viewers seek a condition of equality for political subjectivisation, also that they pursue hegemonic agencies through images.

This safety is based on the viewer's ability to determine her emotions in relation to a particular protagonist, via cinema, also to feel another's emotions and actions without her own being significantly compromised or risked. This correlates with the safety sought by the child via her familial, or 'attachment relationships', the loss of which leads to fear. Rather, secure attachment based in affection contextualises experiences of security, confidence and the pursuit of agency. This reframes the criticisms levelled at class subjects' consumption of popular entertainment by both left and right commentators.

to view, enabling them to 'determine' feeling. ²⁰⁵ Also, as contemporary visual culture is now democratised across different producers and viewing platforms, our capacity to 'determine' emotions and bodily effects via the selection of appropriate media to the 'cause' is expanded. Our agency over culture becomes an agency in the management of feeling and thought within a capitalist context likely to produce, rather than readily give occasion to address, the emotions and instabilities it provides. ²⁰⁶ This immediately politicises the powerful effects of mimetic dramatic modes. It also emphasises their historic role amidst the development of the Hollywood system, one notably tracking important economic developments in capitalism. Importantly, such dramatic forms continue to have significant influence today, for instance in the rise of cinematic television series. ²⁰⁷

The other extreme of the viewer's experience regards her search for agency through the image via her capacity for emotional distance from the people she watches, who occupy less desirable situations than her own. The viewer's ability to remove herself from another's experience, at the level of identification, emotion and affect, provides an interesting corollary to the search for a deeper affective transference by a viewer with a protagonist. It also positions such relations as a choice in the manner of Butler's framing of the uses of culture as a 'tool'. While agency is the ability to act and exercise power in one's own social reality, if opportunities or conditions for the pursuit of that agency seem too few or too difficult, the achievement of power through other means becomes relevant. Claire Bishop's work recalls

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²⁰⁵ The ability to determine feeling seems to be contextualised by the expansion of ways of accessing culture today; on mobile platforms, online, cinema, television, DVD, etc. It is notable that cinema, as well as being accessed via the cinema can be viewed on DVD, via online subscriptions, as well as illegal downloads. It becomes something that can be 'selected' and engaged with as desired, also stopped, recorded, distributed - in a way that accords with Mulvey's recent arguments regarding the agency of the viewer concerning visual culture (see note 185.)

²⁰⁶ The emphasis in capitalism on emotional distress as something to be addressed at an individual level, often using medication, personalises struggles that are familial, and social. This could be seen as pushing people to the individual consumption of entertainment, for the amelioration of those affective struggles.

²⁰⁷ The dominance of Hollywood cinema between the 1920's and 1960's tracks the development of what Ernest Mandel described as a third 'purer' stage of capitalist development, beginning post-war until the early 1970's. The impact of the affectively transformative power of cinema during this time may be connected to the role of the image in the 'amelioration' of political concerns. Where for Autonomist thinker Virno, culture is the 'matrix' of post-Fordism, perhaps visual culture is the 'matrix' of the pursuit of agency in contemporary capitalism. Following this, might peer to peer networks, copying, mixing, ripping, somehow reflect the micro level of agency, the disruption of 'permissions', of the re-staging of interactions with culture that are about subverting capital?

this when she refers to those participatory performances which retain viewing as an important part. ²⁰⁸ In these performances, she suggests, workers may experience viewing a performance, based on their own exploitation in capitalism, as a 'perverse pleasure'. ²⁰⁹ In this, she recalls an important part of the viewing process – that is our ability, in the safety of the viewing role, to consume performances or images of those who are in a similarly disadvantageous or less desirable situation than us. This is a reversal of the kind of 'hegemonic' ascent which the cinematic mode might most suggestively enable. Rather, in this case, a viewer may feel empowered when faced with the less favourable position of the person viewed. An example of this would be the infiltration of reality and game shows on television where people are frequently tested, lined up, seen crying, rejected; albeit willingly. ²¹⁰ What is fundamental here is our capacity to lack empathy for others, to affectively distance ourselves from their disadvantage, even pain or distress, and potentially gain entertainment from it. ²¹¹

Again, perspectives in Attachment Theory and Family Therapy can be used to connect viewers' capacity to view people without empathy in life, to their capacity to do the same through screens. The link between disturbed attachment and the inability to empathise with others is

For instance, Bishop discusses Pierre Bal-Blanc's participatory performances, which are based on the writings of Pierre Klossowski's formulation of bodies as 'living currency'. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 233-34

²⁰⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 236. This extends Mulvey's analysis regarding sadism in cinema, to the experience of viewing others labouring in a similar or worse situation than our own in a participatory performance.

²¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze connected the rise of such popular television shows to their accuracy of the conditions of labour by stating that, 'if the most idiotic television game shows are so successful, it's because they express the corporate situation with great precision,' Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', *October* 59, Winter 1992, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp.3-7. p. 4

People's potential to watch the pain of others relates to Hannah Arendt's well known analysis of the Holocaust in terms of the 'banality of evil'. The findings of the Stanford Prison experiment and Stanley Milgram Experiment also add support to this. The Stanford Prison Experiment in particular is relevant. Here, the presence of an 'authority' figure to which people (acting as prison guards) reported, enabled them to feel absolved from blame when ordered to cruelly punish others. Relatedly, each guard's occupation of a 'higher' position than the 'prisoners', in the light of my arguments here, suggests this higher position supported their ability to eschew empathy for others. This also ties with the earlier mentioned artwork by Thomas Hirschhorn in emphasising the viewer's position of power over the person watched. An interesting corollary to this is provided by Lisa D. Butler and Oxana Palesh. They noted the large number of commercial films that depict mental disorders, and now that dissociation is more common than previously thought, 'that many film directors and cinematographers skillfully use cinematic devices to convey and dramatize the dissociative experiences of their characters—and the force of these techniques may issue from the movie-viewer's personal knowledge of relatively normative dissociative experiences related to traumatic or stressful life events.' Here the power of cinema to enable viewers to experience a person's equally, or less preferable reality is notable. Lisa D. Butler and Oxana Palesh, 'Spellbound: Dissociation in the Movies', Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, (2004), 5: 2, 61-87, (pp. 62-65).

suggested by a number of commentators. ²¹² This associates disrupted attachment in early childhood experience (some say in combination with genetic factors), with a limited ability to feel for others. It again supports the importance of affect and attachment to our relationship to other people in images. The 'power' to avoid feeling, the 'agency' not to care for or be affected by others we watch, becomes a position which may be an 'ego' supporting activity, in Laura Mulvey's terms. ²¹³ The ability to watch a figure unsympathetically was explored by Mulvey where she sets out the fetishistic and sadistic currents in Hollywood cinema. ²¹⁴ Yet, given the significance of attachment being discussed here, Mulvey's approach could be said to emphasise internal psychological processes, and desire, at the expense of the social relevance of viewing patterns. However, Mulvey seems to provide an ideal metaphor for separation, one that supports the relevance of 'distanced' psychological relationships to viewers' use of images. ²¹⁵

Yet by treating the viewer's relationship to a viewed protagonist as a social one, this can be linked to the support of 'the self' in Attachment Therapy. ²¹⁶ Here, 'the self' would most ideally be generated through a range of processes linked to the strengthening of identity, amidst

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²¹² Simon Baron-Cohen asserts that extreme forms of insecure attachment as a result of negative experiences of lack of parental care in early childhood and possible genetic underpinnings impact on the capacity for a person to 'lack empathy' to the extent of psychopathology. In this he adds support to the findings of John Bowlby and Attachment Theory. Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty*, (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 48-50.

²¹³ Here, the ego as a self-oriented part of the mental apparatus emphasised by Freud and Lacan, facilitates separations between self and others, also the idealisation of the ego, in the ego-ideal. An image of self as strong and defensive, able to deflect hurt or emotional pain may ensue, where strength is gained from its perceived separation. The commonality of 'egotism' in capitalism would perhaps accord with this.

²¹⁴ See note 179.

Mulvey recently re-emphasised distance, more so from the perspective of the fetish, yet in a way which adds a further context to this argument, when she claimed, 'the human body, which was always quite detached from real life, particularly in the eroticised representation of women, is now becoming further detached in digitalisation...I think we come back to the question of the commodification of the body.' For this argument, the question becomes what 'function' such a distance may have for the viewer. Sassatelli, p. 134

²¹⁶ This has accords with Michel Foucault's notion of the 'Care of the Self' which is 'a certain way of considering things and having relations with other people', an 'attitude towards self, others, and the world', it is a 'form of attention, of looking'; 'a certain way of attending to what we think and what takes place in our thought' and it also names a series of actions 'exercised by the self on the self' and 'by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself.' Simon O'Sullivan describes this as an ethics based on a particular form of attention, one that seems to have accords with the modes of democracy described by Arendt. Michel Foucault, 'The Hermeneutics of the Subject' (Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982) in Simon O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p. 63-64.

important collaborations and interactions with others.²¹⁷ In this, the desired break down of 'the ego', in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, may rather be exchanged for the generation of an experience of 'self' that is contained enough to enable agency, yet is also social; enabling empathic and collaborative action and sharing.²¹⁸ Given the basis of attachment to identity this suggests the importance of feeling and empathy to political agency.²¹⁹ It also frames a viewer's potential for emotional distance in relation to a viewed protagonist as enabling them to feel in a better position than the person they watch. Albeit doing so in a way that positions the protagonist's undesirable position as a means of affectively leveraging the viewer's position in life. The importance of a lack of empathy seems clear here, in a way that again situates empathy as critical to a social, rather than individual, conception of agency. Viewed this way, it is distance which, in Bishop's terms, becomes most 'troubling', as it becomes a search for agency based on a withdrawal from the social.

Taken together, a viewer's capacity for direct empathy with, or conversely to lack empathy for a protagonist in an image, are two extremes of an important continuum of relating that seems central to a viewer's 'search' for agency via the moving image. This supports the politicised situation of the viewer, but also reaffirms the relevance of the viewer's position to that of the agent in social life. Both extremes occupy poles of a continuum of modes of relating which are rooted in affect and empathy, where our ability to feel like another person is contrasted with our ability to avoid feeling like that person. Here, empathy becomes, via its close relationship

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Heard, Lake and McCluskey in their text Attachment Therapy with Adolescents and Adults define this as follows: care seeking, care giving, interest sharing, affectionate sexuality, shaping the external environment, the internal environment, self defences. Richard Sennett has also recently discussed political collaboration in relation to notions of 'the self' where he says, 'The 'self' is a composite of sentiments, affiliations and behaviours which seldom fit neatly together; any call for tribal unity will reduce this personal complexity.' He adds that where, 'Cooperation can be defined, drily, as an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounter,' he emphasises 'dialogic skills' such as 'listening well' in its realisation. He sets out how 'collaboration enables the human infant's mental development', reaffirming Bowlby's findings and showing the centrality of cooperation to developments of the self, and of political life. Richard Sennett, Together (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 4-10.

Psychotherapist Gwen Adshead describes the person's experience of her own subjectivity as 'being a constant process of organising and disorganising'. She suggests it is people's aim to achieve a 'manageable' sense of self. Gwen Adshead [Consultant Forensic Psychotherapist at Broadmoor Hospital], Start the Week, Radio 4, (9:00 BST, 2 May 2011)

Where attachment is central to a 'secure' self, the self itself is socially constituted; that is built up through social interactions. It suggests that affect and attachment aid collaboration, provide a context and secure basis for multiple engagements. It also indicates that, in Arendt's terms, providing a context in which people are seen and taken seriously by others is a key context for the promotion of agency.

to a viewer's search for an alternative to her social reality through her relationship to others in images, a politicised empathy, one based in a social relation.²²⁰ 'Becoming' through the image, or rejecting another's situation to one's own empowering profit, become two contrasting, yet interlinked ways, in which the social is explored through the image. Where affect is the basis of the secure self, and is also central to the viewing relationship, it supports a kind of becoming which is personal, and social.²²¹ This suggests accords between a viewer's experience of agency via a viewed protagonist in visual culture, and the basis of a person's agency in contemporary life.

Group Photo alludes to both extremes of this relationship: between on the one hand, visual material designed to promote the viewer's wish to experience the preferable reality of the protagonist, and on the other, visual material in which the protagonist is in a much less desirable situation than the viewer. By presenting images that are 'warm' in colour, in which only couples are framed, and that allude to romantic cinema, what is most ideal about this experience of images becomes, in this work, a mode of constraining and limiting the image. The warm image that we would want to affectively enter, becomes a place where the actors variously do and don't meet the expectations of romance. They toy with and seem conscious of the expectations of the camera, and its aesthetic, while ultimately eschewing it. This means that what is 'symbolically' inviting about the warm image is denied in a context of distanciation in which this 'cinematic' effect jars against 'cool' images. These blue-toned images exemplify

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Where, for Marx, the capital relation is a social relation, it is to the nature and experience of the social, of interactions, that concerns about social change and political agency may turn. Watney described Marx's 'problem' of 'how to picture consciousness as an "ensemble of social relations" rather than as a historically given "essence", and how to relate this picture to the rest of material life,' connecting it to the notion of 'false consciousness'. Yet, Marx's view, shown in his Early Writings, of consciousness as 'social' can be connected to my discussions here where 'the self' is fundamentally a collective entity. Ideally produced within a context of secure attachment, any self - being produced in different social scenarios, also in relation to culture - will always differ. Hence the impossibility of generalising 'consciousness' is clear, while the question of how to create connections between 'social' selves, remains. Assuming 'selves' are often 'insecure' it would be for political discourse to create spaces in which political subjectivities can be enabled. Ultimately the political 'treatment' of working people in a condition of capitalist labour needs to be supportive of their 'social' self, the one that would enable collaboration in a safe context, also that would enable their existing positions to be understood. Simon Watney, p. 156.

²²¹ Where Jameson notably claimed the 'waning of affect' in the 'Postmodern' age, the foundational basis of affect to attachment, for any growing child affirms that however affect may be 'managed' or displaced, that its centrality remains to social life, as much as to our relationship with images. Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 15

the visual aesthetic of such Brechtian-inspired cinema directors as Michael Haneke. Here, the distant camera and cold imagery cause us to look at the subjects in images, and to be very conscious of our looking. While, in this work, the acting oscillates between apparently 'staged' and 'natural' actions, the intention of this work is to stage the important political relationship between lived, and desired realities. The intention, in using cool images, is to disrupt the kind of empathy that warm images suggest: what is 'cold' about their aesthetic correlates too neatly with what is in the image - interrogating assessments of human bodies. The aesthetic of the work becomes a way of prefiguring the treatment of the bodies in it. That is, we come to expect what is disturbing about these images: the cold and merciless scanning of bodies, the camera's exploration of parts, gestures, the inability of the camera to see the group, the way it has to break it down, to disrupt it. The distanced feel of the image accords with the position of this group which is less than ideal; they are effectively 'trapped' in the context of a photograph and only manage to change their roles within the work, not beyond it. This might indicate a problem for realism; where a truthful image might be sought, that 'shows reality as it is', this may actually work to support the capacity for a viewer to feel in a better position than the protagonist viewed. The ethics of our relationship to images is based in how the viewer positions herself in relation to the protagonist. If, as Bishop suggests, the viewer is indiscriminate in her viewing, it is a jarring work such as this one that both refers to, and aims to unsettle, the viewer's 'usage' of others through images.

In *Group Photo* the people who become the focus of the 'romantic' camera, are also the focus of the 'interrogating' camera. In this, what is indiscriminate about viewing is applied to the protagonists in the artwork. The two aesthetic extremes become the contrasting realities and forms of representation that the group have to negotiate. This starts with the 'photo' – the depiction of which is distorted by the aesthetics used – and continues with the actors' seeming assent to these aesthetics, and ultimately their rejection of them. What the group do in the work is connected to how they interact, and the valences of feeling suggested here, connect

agency with affect. In Group Photo the movement of bodies is tied to the aesthetic extremes of the work. This connects what is affective about the actors' actions to the viewer's search for different feelings from images. These different feelings are represented by extremes extrapolated from familiar forms of imagery. The proxy agencies we want to occupy, through viewing a protagonist in a preferable reality in an image, are set against their opposite, the more disturbing capacity to view the actions of others coldly. Yet in this work, what might be singular or satisfying about both experiences is disrupted, as neither 'effect' is allowed to last very long. Here the cool, distant aesthetic and the warm, romantic aesthetic, despite all that is derivative about them, become extremes employed together. They become visual tools used to explore different ways of experiencing agency via images. This work, as all my work, is rooted in a self-conscious exploration of the political relationship I see between viewers and the images they view, the agencies they might seek there and quite often the pathos and tragedy that underpins their search for other people, and realities through it. Tragic endings have been common in my work, but what I see as the final 'state' in Group Photo, is suggestive of a collaborative agency and play. This 'state' is the product of actors' successfully negotiating (and transcending), two extremes of empathy and emotional distance which, as discussed, seem key both to our relationship to agency via images, and also to our relationship to agency in social life.

Conclusion

I have always been interested in exploring some of the most unsettling aspects of image-making: the control that underpins their production, the potential to limit how a person is read through the way they are framed in an image, the apparent power of the viewer over the viewed protagonist, the presentation of events as 'true' when they are choreographed, the difficult line between what is 'natural' and 'staged', the reading of images as ubiquitous and to an extent democratic, and also depictions of class subjects and inequality in images and how these are addressed by viewers and producers. Such concerns, always an undercurrent within my art practice, have been clarified during the PhD process in a way that enables me to explore them more knowingly in my artwork, future writing and research.

The factors that work against achieving forms of collectivity in a meaningful political sense have also always concerned me, as much as those factors that may enable it. This correlates with my intention in this document – to set out a fundamental connection between the capacity to feel for others, as well as to withdraw feeling from others, through images, and the pursuit of agency there, and in social life. This conclusion deliberately sought to encompass both the positive and negative implications of our relationship to others as regards political futures. The parallels between my own work and that of Jerome Bel, Ian White, Artur Zmijewski, Yvonne Rainer, Pavel Althamer, Gail Pickering, Hito Steyerl, Omer Fast, Victor Alimpiev also the cinema of Michael Haneke, Ulrich Seidel, Andrea Arnold and Luis Buñuel are relevant to these concerns. Equally, the fictional writings of Michel Houllebecq, J.G. Ballard and Elfriede Jelinek are important. The artistic practices mentioned approach the presentation and choreography of human action within staged live performances and moving image work in specific, generally self-conscious ways. All retain and address the viewer, and their expectations, in a way that is directly contextualised by conventions of exhibition making, cultural and image production. They also each address realities of human experience and

feeling in ways that serve to disrupt the concerns of the image and even the artwork. Each also sees ethical concerns as existing in the way that people are addressed in life and culture. I am interested in a particular area of cultural production that has strong roots in mainland Europe and has underlying connections with the political responses to the Holocaust. The concern about what people are capable of doing, or allowing, in relation to others, correlates directly with the 'uses' of images of people whose position we would not want to occupy.

I see potential in the propositional implications of the thesis I have set out, existing beyond my own art practice in the realm of political practice. The centrality of affect to agency, and our suggested tendency to seek feelings or impressions of agency through people in images, indicates particular ways in which political groupings can be realised. Where agency, sought through the image, may be read in terms of the disparities between people, these differences can be contextualised by a search for direct empathy and understanding. This means that we can turn to the conditions of the personal relationships and societal situations which seem to drive viewers to the image - to delineate a political setting where agency can be explored. It seems fruitful to consider how groups might be formed that can best facilitate political dialogue in a way that is rooted in each person's own exploration of her personal circumstances and experiences within capitalism. Importantly, this would be a setting where each person, regardless of insight or experience is treated equally, where everything heard and said is acknowledged and taken seriously. Such means of enabling political agencies, based on the needs of 'the self', connect with both Arendt's 'agonistic' politics and types of Family Therapy discussed here. The potential for subtle forms of facilitation and means of connecting local groups seems to exist in a way that is suggestive for the creation of autonomous contexts for negotiating experiences of the economy. Yet I do not seek to realise such political outcomes in socially engaged artworks. Rather, I intend my works to negotiate what is powerful and political about addressing our expectations of, and relationships to, other people via imagery. However, I am interested in the wider implications of this research and in

considering the ways that looking for literal political answers in the space between the viewer and the protagonist they view can be explored.

Nonetheless, the collaborative and discursive scenes in *Group Photo* did allude to the above political conclusions in ways that were important for this work, and marked a sharp contrast to the other more 'static' states of its actors. All my work has been concerned by what is political about the relationship between people viewing others in images, and how this relates to people's interactions with others in life, and also within the work. This interest, now informed by greater knowledge of productive forms of group engagement, has potential extensions, yet may principally be explored in subtle ways that enable me to produce performative work that expands how we imagine social relations to occur both through, and beyond images. In my work I have increasingly sought to accurately simulate particular effects from cultural productions, forms of human communication, and ways of being in life, so that what I make might most directly recall aspects of life and culture that are familiar to viewers. In this, the work is intrinsically tied to the 'effects' it might have on viewers. Yet, as a significant aim is to unsettle what is already seen, such recollections of what is 'familiar' have never been imagined in a way that might engender agency in viewers. Instead, effects are imagined at the level of the image, in a relational way, rather than being something that exists as an outcome, with the viewer acting or behaving in a particular manner.

While my work is focused on our relationship to other people through images, it is an art practice that is also engaged in a certain form of image production. My work has always sought to produce an image that refused to meet all its possible expectations. There is something deliberately underwhelming about my productions, much that is left out. As I have discussed in this thesis, the historical and current impact of cinema, and the recent 'cinematic' form of television series, have a direct tie to the work that I make. The ability to immerse oneself in another's reality is political. Yet the emphasis of mobile media and similar contemporary

cultural aesthetics on the absorption of attention seems tied to the 'dissociative' effects of media, their ability to 'fill awareness'. Where another person's reality is sought through the image, the capacity of the image for depth is marked. The extent of our possible connection to others through images, as much as in life, becomes the locus of the works I produce. The simulation of people and replacement by graphic entities, seems in some ways suggestive of an absence, for viewers seeking agency through images. By avoiding the provision of affective routes to agency, such images, by filling attention, may disable what is most suggestive about the reproduction of others in images.

Yet the suggestion that our future resides in the image accords with the concerns of this thesis; what happens in the image can be treated as an extension of our lived realities. Yet, the development of the image may gather pace, as the realities of our own social, relational, environmental existences remain surprisingly static, or decline. In order to address the image or the moving image today, it is possible to assert its politicised relation to the perceivable, felt reality that is both socially and materially present. As Arendt asserted, what is 'common' about our reality, is provided by what is agreed among us collectively. Hence, the agreement of certain realities must necessarily occur in the social, as well as via forms of communication that allow us to share them more widely than ever before. This relation, between the imagebased world of culture and communication, and that of the lived reality of the viewer, is one that I affirm here as being profoundly important to the consideration of both political futures, and the nature of art practices to come. The intention is that the images I produce close down the gap between human life, and visual representation in capitalism; always problematizing this relationship. It is this concern that underpins my thesis, and is one that I will continue to explore within my art practice. The work I make, rooted as it is in our relationship to images, embodies the space between the lived reality and the image that seems most suggestive of the ways in which future agencies might be constituted. By addressing this relationship selfconsciously, it is my intention to provocatively occupy the boundary of what is familiar about

life in capitalism and what we want to experience through the image, as it is here that 'agency
resides.

Artworks, Exhibitions and Publications: 2010 – 2014

Moving Image and Live Performance Artworks produced

Group Photo 9'00" 2014 (Commissioned by Gallery II)

Presentation Skills (extended) Live performance 2013

Presentation Skills 1'00" 2013 (by invitation, Kerry Baldry)

Stacy's Risk 18'00" 2012-13

Values, Efficiency and Commitment 1'30" 2011 (Commissioned by LUX)

Sky High Quality and In Great Shape 18'27" 2011

Works on paper:

Family in a therapy meeting/ Family in a round table 2012 (3 works by invitation, Wysing

debate (Copy of a sketch)

Arts,)

Found public seating with monoliths (Tracing of a photographic image)

A well-known method of survival among animals

(Text on A3 paper; folded)

Credits for Group Photo:

Actors: Alyson Marks, Carmen Martorell, Ross Newell, Sarah Oldknow, Kesh Sharma

Cinematographer: Will Simpson, Omni Pictures Ltd

Equipment & Installation: Lumen, Leeds

Additional Technical Assistance: Sam Belinfante

Direction and Editing: Claire Hope

Exhibitions 2010-2014

Group Photo (Solo Moving Image Commission)

14/2/14 – 15/3/14 Gallery II, University of Bradford

A solo exhibition of commissioned moving image work curated by Amy Charlesworth (supported by the Arts Council). The exhibition included an event on the 11th March - a live reading by actress Alyson Marks of a specially commissioned text by Sean Ashton.

One Minute Volume 7 (Group Screening)

25-6/1/14 & 1-2/2/14 Furtherfield Gallery, London

Screenings curated by Kerry Baldry, Presentation Skills, 2013 shown.

One Minute Volume 7 (Group Screenings)

6/9/13 – 12/6/14 Various venues, UK and International Screenings curated by Kerry Baldry; *Presentation Skills*, 2013 shown.

A Priori (Group Exhibition)

29/9/13 – 15/10/13 Hanover Project, UCLAN, Preston

Group exhibition in which *Presentation Skills*, 2013 was shown on a monitor and *Presentation Skills (Extended)*, 2013, a new live performance was shown.

London Seizure (Part Two) (Group Screening)

30/6/13 Arbeit Gallery, London

Group screening of works focusing on the current politics of housing and space in London, curated by Carmen Billows; *Complex Financial Instruments*, 2008 was shown.

Playing with Space (Group Screening)

27/6/13 Firstsite, Colchester, UK

A group screening about how urban space can both invite and repress playful and performative behaviour curated by Lawrence Bradby as part of RIBA Love Architecture Festival; *In all honesty there's nothing I'd like more*, 2005 and *Boy Nature*, 2009 were shown.

London Seizure (Part One) (Group Screening)

23/5/13 Bermondsey Project, London

Screening of works on the current politics of housing and space in London, curated by Carmen Billows; *Boy Nature*, 2009 shown.

Taking Place (Group Screening)

25/2/13 Black Maria, Granary Building, London

Group screening exploring physical, imaginative and ideological constructions of architecture organized by the British Artists Film & Video Study Collection; *Complex Financial Instruments*, 2008, shown.

Solid on our Source Planet (Group Exhibition)

30/9/12-28/10/12 Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge

Group exhibition of works by the artists on the 2012 Wysing Arts retreat on 'The Self'; A Determined Search beyond Romance, 2010, and works on paper shown.

Wysing Arts Open Weekend

14/7-15/7/12 Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge

Group activity and screening of Sky High Quality and In Great Shape, 2011.

In Production (Event)

31/3/12 David Dale Gallery, Glasgow

Screening of *Stacy's Risk* moving image work in production, with Corin Sworn, guest speaker Kitty Anderson and curated by Beth Bramich.

Public Screens (Public Moving Image Project)

2/5/11 – 8/8/11 i/o/lab, Stavanger, Norway

Values, Efficiency and Commitment, 2010 shown in public locations as part of new LUX commissioned programme.

Residencies, Retreats, Placements

2012 Documenta Research/Work Placement June-September 2012: 3

public events produced as part of *The Self in Dialogue with the Economy* and the Paul Ryan installation: 18/8/14 with Adam Kleinman and Stuart Ringholt; 23/9/14 with Marcos Lutyens and Marina Vishmidt and a workshop with Johanne Timm, Sheenagh

Geoghegan and Julek Kreutzer.

2012 Wysing Arts Retreat on 'The Self' (curated Mark Titchner) (28-31

May 2012)

Publications

2014 Group Photo review, This is Tomorrow, Adam Pugh
 2014 Group Photo, publication accompanying the exhibition

2013 'Between the Lines', Curated Selection, Axis website, Helen Hillyard

2011-12 Dec/ Jan Listed in '100 Artists to Watch' in Modern Painters Magazine

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Filmography/Videography

Victor Alimpiev, Corona, (2012) Pawel Althamer, Weronica, (2003/4) Andrea Arnold, Red Road (2006); Fish Tank (2009) Clio Barnard, The Arbor, (2010) Ed Atkins, Us Dead Talking Love, (2012) Michelangelo Antonioni, L'Eclisse, (1962); The Passenger, (1975) Robert Bresson, Mouchette (1967); The Devil Probably (1977); L'Argent, (1983); Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne (1945) Peter Brook, Marat/Sade, (1967) Luis Buñuel, Belle de Jour, (1967); Exterminating Angel, (1962) Victor Burgin, Watergate, (2002) Paul Chan, Waiting for Godot, (2007) Adam Chodzko, Plan for a Spell, (2001); Around, (2007); The Pickers (2009) Alan Clarke, Psy-Warriors (1981); Beloved Enemy (1981) Christine (1987); Elephant (1989) Patrice Chéreau, Intimacy, (2001) Keren Cytter, 2.6.04 (serious) (2004); Four Seasons (2009); Something Happened, Serious (2007); Avalanche (Lonely Planet) (2011) Rod Dickinson, The Milgram Re-enactment, (2002) Stephen Dwoskin, Dyn Amo, (1972) Omer Fast, Continuity, (2012); Everything that Rises Must Converge, (2013) Melanie Gilligan, Crisis in the Credit System, (2008) Michael Haneke, Seventh Continent (1989); Benny's Video (1992); Funny Games (1997); Piano Teacher (2001); Caché (2005); Funny Games (2007); The White Ribbon (2009); Amour; (2012) Camille Henrot, Coupé/Décalé, (2010) Thomas Hirschhorn Touching Reality, (2012) Claude Lanzmann, Shoah, (1985) Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Suddenly Last Summer, (1959)

Renzo Martens, Episode 3 – 'Enjoy Poverty', (2009)

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Paul McCarthy, Class Fool, (1976); Piccadilly Circus, (Video and Installation, Hauser & Wirth,
 London, 2003); F-Fort, (2005)
Nathaniel Mellors, Ourhouse, (2010)
Jennifer Montgomery, Threads of Belonging, (2003)
Bruce Nauman, Anthro/Socio, (1992)
Joshua Oppenheimer, The Act of Killing, (2012)
Hila Peg, A Crime Against Art, (2007)
Pier Paolo Pasolini, Accattone, (1961); Medea (1969); Mamma Roma; (1962); Salò, of the 120
 Days of Sodom (1975); Porcile, (1969)
Catherine Sullivan, The Chittendens, (2005)
Stephen Sutcliffe, Come to the Edge, (2003)
Gail Pickering, Hungary! And Other Economies, (2006)
Yvonne Rainer, The Lives of Performers (1972); The Man Who Envied Women (1985)
James Richards, Voices Hits and Near Misses Compilation, (2007)
—— and Steve Reinke, Disambiguation, (2009)
Emily Roysdon, Story of History (2009); A Motion Picture (2009)
Eyal Sivan, The Specialist (1999)
Ulrich Seidl, Import/Export, (2007)
Hito Steyerl: November (2004); Lovely Andrea (2007); Guards, (2012)
Laure Prouvost, You are the Only One, (2008)
Luchino Visconti, Rocco and his Brothers; (1960), The Leopard; (1963), Death in Venice; (1971)
Barbara Visser, Last Lecture, (2007)
Emily Wardill, Ben, (2007)
Gillian Wearing, Self Made, (2010)
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Artur Zmijewski, Repetition (2005); Them (2007)

Live Performances

Jerome Bel, Disabled Theatre, (2012)

Gregg Bordowitz, Sex Mitigating Death: On Discourse and Drives: A Meditative Poem (Tate Modern, London, 2011)

Dan Graham, Like (1969) Lax /Relax (1969-1995) Past Future Split Attention (1972) Performance/Audience/Mirror (1975)

Anibal López, Testimonio, (2012)

Gail Pickering, Mad Masters (South London Gallery, London, 2008)

—— Zulu (Speaking in Radical Tongues) (Tate Modern, London, 2008)

Adrian Piper, Catalysis I-VII, (1971)

Yvonne Rainer, *Trio A Pressured* and *Where's the Passion? & Chair and Pillow*, (Tramway, Glasgow, 2010)

Emily Roysdon, Work, Why, Why Not, (2008)

Grace Schwindt, Chapter 01 - The individual account, (ICA, London, 2010)

Tino Sehgal, Kiss, (2003); This Variation; (2012); These associations; 2012

lan White and Jimmy Robert, Marriage à la Mode et Cor Anglais, (ICA, London; 2009)

Ian White, Black Flags (Tate Modern, London, 2009)

—— Democracy (DAAD Galerie, Berlin, 2010)