From Spectacle to Deterritorialisation: Deleuze, Debord and the Politics of Found Footage Cinema

Claudio Celis Bueno
Universidad Academia de Humanismo
Cristiano, Chile

Abstract
The aim of this article is to explore how the differences between Guy Debord and Gilles Deleuze delineate two different interpretations of the politics of found footage cinema. To do so, the notion of cinematic interval is crucial. While Debord’s practice of détournement presupposes a Hegelian-inspired notion of interval that allows for self-awareness to be achieved, Deleuze puts forth a Bergsonian concept of interval that functions as a condition of possibility for creating an ‘image of movement in itself’. To explore these two interpretations, this article uses Guy Debord’s 1973 film The Society of the Spectacle as a case study. By focusing on this specific object, the two interpretations of the cinematic interval make it possible to compare two alternative ways of dealing with the representability – or unrepresentability – of capital, and hence to sketch two alternative views on the politics of found footage film practices.

Keywords: Deleuze, Debord, Society of the Spectacle, found footage cinema, representation, capital

I. Introduction

One of the most challenging methodological problems faced by Marx was the question regarding the representability of capital. Most famously, Louis Althusser (2009) developed a thorough yet controversial...
interpretation of the category of *Darstellung* as the key concept in Marx’s method. From Althusser’s perspective, any attempt to represent capital conceptually had to face a series of questions: how can the intrinsic temporality of the capital–labour relationship be represented under a static structural image? How can a concept subsume a structure that requires a temporal dimension in order to function? In brief, how can difference in itself be represented through the logic of identity? Althusser’s solution was the distinction between *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung* and the concept of structural causality. ¹ Similarly, Deleuze spent most of his life trying to solve an analogous problem within the field of philosophy.² Like Althusser’s reading of Marx, Deleuze’s critique of the dogmatic image of thought is an exploration of how difference in itself can challenge the stable formations of identity and representation that are inherent to what he will later call State philosophy (Deleuze and Guattari 2004a).

The critique of representation has also affected the understanding of cinema and its potentiality. Despite their radically different approaches, both Guy Debord and Gilles Deleuze developed a critical account of the representational dimension of cinema. On the one hand, Guy Debord’s critique of the society of the spectacle is a critique of the contemplative character of the value-form (Debord 1983: 24). As Jameson puts it, Debord’s critique of the society of the spectacle is based on the dictum that ‘the image is the final form of commodity reification’ (Jameson 2011: 28). On the other hand, Gilles Deleuze (2004) developed a critique of representation as a philosophical critique of the image of thought. The image is that specific mechanism through which thought subsumes difference in itself under the empire of representation and identity. In his books on cinema, Deleuze displaces the critique of representation to the cinematic apparatus, arguing with and against Bergson that cinema has the potential of giving us a non-representational image of movement and time. Paradoxically, both Debord and Deleuze saw cinema as a potential weapon suitable for developing a critique of representation. For Debord cinema was an artistic medium with the help of which it was possible to develop a ‘situationist’ critique of capitalism. Putting this idea into practice, Debord produced in 1973 a cinematic version of his book *The Society of the Spectacle*. In similar fashion, Deleuze conceived cinema as the most adequate medium for the presentation of time and movement beyond the logic of identity and representation that defines Western metaphysics.

The aim of this article is to explore how the differences between Guy Debord and Gilles Deleuze delineate two different interpretations of the
politics of found footage cinema. To do so, the notion of cinematic interval is crucial. While Debord’s practice of détournement presupposes a Hegelian-inspired notion of interval that allows for self-awareness to be achieved, Deleuze puts forth a Bergsonian concept of interval that functions as a condition of possibility for creating an ‘image of movement in itself’. To explore these two interpretations, this article uses Guy Debord’s 1973 film *The Society of the Spectacle* as a case study. By focusing on this specific object, the two interpretations of the cinematic interval make it possible to compare two alternative ways of dealing with the representability—or unrepresentability—of capital, and hence to sketch two alternative views on the politics of found footage film practices.

II. Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*

In 1973 Guy Debord produced *The Society of the Spectacle*, a film based on the homonymous book published in 1967. Unlike Debord’s previous films, *The Society of the Spectacle* ‘employs exclusively found materials’ (Levin 2002: 382). These recycled materials come from all sorts of sources: advertising clips and stills, institutional movies, American and Soviet feature films, news reels, etc. The found footage is then cut together and accompanied by a voice-over—of Debord himself—which reads different passages from his book.

In similar fashion to the book, the film version of *The Society of the Spectacle* ‘does not offer a few partial political critiques but proposes instead a holistic critique of the extant world, which is to say, of all aspects of modern capitalism and its general system of illusions’ (Guy Debord, qtd in Levin 2002: 396). Likewise, Debord’s stylistic and formal strategies—mainly the appropriation and montage of found footage—do not merely attempt a partial critique of specific ‘spectacles’, but rather aim at a total ‘destruction’ of cinema (Noys 2007: 396). As part of these stylistic and formal strategies, the notion of the cinematic interval plays a key role. In order to appreciate this, however, it is useful to briefly refer to the notion of image deployed in *The Society of the Spectacle*.

According to Debord, ‘the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images’ (Debord 1983: 7). This means that the society of the spectacle cannot be identified merely through the quantitative accumulation of specific spectacles—‘the visual deception produced by mass-media technologies’—but should be thought of as the materialisation of a given ‘world-view’, that is, ‘a view of the world that has become objective’ (Debord 1983: 7).
The spectacle is hence a prolongation of the process of fetishism that characterises the commodity-form as analysed by Marx in the first chapter of Capital. For Debord, in the society of the spectacle the totality of the use value of any given commodity ‘has come to be seen purely in terms of exchange value, and it is now completely at its mercy’ (Debord 1983: 23). This inversion between use and exchange value defines the basic trait of the general inversion that characterises the society of the spectacle. Furthermore, Debord argues that exchange value is always defined by an abstract relation between the commodity and the subject. This is so because exchange value is always measured in terms of abstract human labour time, indistinct from the singularities of concrete labour. The generalisation of exchange value to the whole of society creates a new social scenario where this ‘contemplative’ relation between the subject and the commodity becomes objective and it hence becomes the norm that defines all social relations between people. It is for this reason that Debord defines the society of the spectacle not as ‘a collection of images’ but rather as a social relation ‘mediated by images’; that is, a social relation mediated by the abstract—and visual—character of exchange value. In this ‘visual’ version of capitalist society, money becomes a commodity which one ‘can only look at, because in it all use has already been exchanged for the totality of abstract representation’ (Debord 1983: 24).

What is significant here is that, even if Debord saw the overcoming of the society of the spectacle as a destruction of cinema, he nonetheless chose cinema as a strategic weapon through which a critique of the society of the spectacle could be achieved. His notion of cinema was very specific, however, implying cinema’s self-reflexivity through the montage of found footage. It is in relation to the specific use of found footage that the notion of cinematic interval becomes a key element for grasping the critical value of Debord’s cinematic work.

In one of the few books on the topic, William Wees (1993) has argued that found footage cinema can be understood as a critical film practice that aims at the interruption of the unreflective consumption of images. By appropriating and recycling found footage, these films ‘invite us to recognize it as found footage, as recycled images, and due to that self-referentiality, they encourage a more analytical reading than the footage originally received’ (Wees 1993: 11). Additionally, Wees (1993: 52) argues that found footage film practices have to be understood as a continuation of the avant-garde practices of collage and montage. In this sense, found footage films aim at the interruption of any unreflective reception of representations—where the meaning of an image imposes
itself as a natural and unmediated totality. More specifically, Wees suggests that there are two ways in which found footage films can produce this interruption.

The first form refers to external interruption, that is, the interruption of the ‘natural’ or ‘original’ context in which the recycled material exists (Wees 1993: 54). This external form of interruption can refer to a drastic change in the framework of production and consumption of an image (for example, the use of television footage for producing alternative meanings), or to a temporal displacement that recycles past images in a present context (for example, the montage of archival material as a way of rewriting an alternative history). The second kind of interruption is the ‘interruption that is intrinsic to film collage’ (Wees 1993: 55). This is achieved through the ‘juxtaposition of shots with no apparent relationship between them’ in order to create a new meaning that does not belong solely to any of the shots juxtaposed (Wees 1993: 55). This form of intrinsic interruption implies a specific notion of the cinematic interval which functions as the condition of possibility of montage. Here, the interval is not understood as a mere gap between two frames but as a productive mechanism through which found footage cinema juxtaposes two heterogeneous elements and hence generates an interruption of the material’s unreflective and unmediated reception. For this reason, we can state that the critical dimension of found footage film practices relies mainly on the cinematic interval.

In Debord’s film *The Society of the Spectacle*, the productive force of the interval is closely linked to the broader practice of what the International Situationists termed ‘détournement’. According to McKenzie Wark, ‘détournement’ can be translated as ‘a diversion, a detour, a seduction, a plagiarism, an appropriation, even perhaps as a hijacking’ (Wark 2009: 145). More specifically, it has to be understood as ‘the integration of present or past artistic productions into a construction that surpasses them’ (Wark 2009: 145–6). Like found footage cinema, détournement can also be seen as a continuation of the artistic practice of collage. As Peter Bürger (1984: 73) has shown, collage and montage were two of the key characteristics of the critical perspective aimed by avant-garde artworks. Nevertheless, the rapid development of means of technical reproduction during the twentieth century created a radical massification of the practices of collage throughout all the different cultural fields. This massification of the practice of collage caused the weakening of its critical power, turning appropriation into a mere form of quotation (Wark 2009: 146). As a reaction against this neutralisation of the critical power of artistic
appropriation, the Situationists saw in the notion of détournement a form opposite to quotation:

Détournement as a critical practice is the opposite of quotation, of an authority invariably tainted if only because it has become quotable, because it is now a fragment torn away from its conditions of production, from its own movement, and ultimately from the overall frame of reference of its period and from the precise option that it constituted within that framework. (Wark 2009: 146)

Debord presupposes that in the society of the spectacle all images are already separated from their real conditions of production. After all, the society of the spectacle is ‘the culmination of separation’ (Debord 1983: 6). In this context, a critical artistic practice cannot aim at the mere denaturalisation of fetishised images, but must attempt to reconnect them with the material conditions of production from which they have been separated. Thus, as a critical practice, détournement depends on a twofold character: first, the appropriation and montage of found footage creates a denaturalisation of the given meaning and value of images—which is also a statement about the general power of art to appropriate other images, thus disrupting the notions of originality, authorship and property; second, détournement aims at reconnecting images to their ‘conditions of production’ and their ‘overall frame of reference’ (Wark 2009: 146).7 Similarly, Benjamin Noys (2007: 396) contends that détournement depends on the twofold meaning of the Hegelian notion of destruction that is at stake in Debord’s idea of critique:

The situationists set out to ‘destroy’ cinema. This ‘destruction’ might be characterised more precisely as a negation of cinema, in the Hegelian sense. That is, the negation of cinema as Aufheben: an act that ends, abolishes or annuls at the same time that it raises, picks up or preserves. (Noys 2007: 396)

Hence, détournement implies both a destructive and a productive moment: a destruction of the fetishised dimension of images—a denaturalisation—and the reconstruction of the link to their real conditions of production. And it is precisely because of this twofold movement that the notion of interval becomes so crucial in understanding the critical value of Debord’s cinematic work. As mentioned above, William Wees (1993: 54–5) identifies a twofold dimension of interruption in found footage film practices: an external interruption that disrupts the social and historical context of an image, and an internal interval that allows heterogeneous images to be brought
together in order to create new forms of cinematic meaning. The film *The Society of the Spectacle* illustrates these two forms of the interval as the two phases towards the ‘destruction’ of cinema and the critique of capitalist society. On the one hand, Debord’s film uses the interval in order to denaturalise images and hence interrupt their fetishist consumption. This is the destructive moment *per se*. But on the other hand, there is the productive moment of the interval: the interval as the condition of possibility for establishing a connection between two heterogeneous images and, in doing so, reconstructing the relationship between images and their material conditions of production and their overall framework of consumption.°

To exemplify this twofold use of the interval, Benjamin Noys focuses on Debord’s use of nude and semi-nude female bodies taken from advertising and pornographic sources. At one level, Noys suggests, the détournement of ‘these “objectified” images of female sexuality functions as a synecdoche for wider processes of commodification; this is in a similar fashion to the use of prostitution as a metaphor for alienated labour’ (Noys 2007: 397). At another level, these ‘are images of “pleasure” denied by this commodification’ (Noys 2007: 397). This means that sexuality would have the potential to ‘transgress bourgeois conventions’ (Noys 2007: 397). At a third level, however, these two preceding readings may risk reproducing ‘a conventional and sexist “male gaze”’ that repeats the “objectification” that they are critiquing’ (Noys 2007: 397). In light of these three levels of interpretation, Noys argues that it is a matter for the viewer to decide whether the détournement of nude and semi-nude female bodies in *The Society of the Spectacle* ‘devalue[s] the objectifying gaze and revalue[s] pleasure, or whether they repeat the “male gaze”’ (Noys 2007: 397). The first two interpretations belong to the destructive phase in which the fetishist relation to images is interrupted. The third interpretation, however, implies a productive and more complex moment in which the consumption of images itself is connected to certain historical and social conditions, particularly the normalising male gaze that characterises the history of the cinematic apparatus.°

Noys’s analysis illustrates the destructive and productive phases at play in the notion of interval that defines the practice of détournement. In addition to this, both Benjamin Noys’s (2007) reading of détournement and William Wees’s (1993) account of found footage cinema make it possible to argue that Debord’s film *The Society of the Spectacle* is defined by a Hegelian-inspired notion of cinematic interval. Put differently, Debord’s use of found footage
can be understood through the threefold perspective of Hegelian dialectics in which the cinematic interval operates as the force of negativity. First, there is an initial state of unmediated consumption of images—the fetishist character of the commodity-form that defines social relations in the society of the spectacle. Second, there is a negative—destructive—moment in which the cinematic interval is used to interrupt this unmediated consumption of images. Third, there is a productive moment in which the cinematic interval allows for new conceptual connections that create a state of self-awareness regarding the mediating nature of images. The cinematic interval is thus seen as a means through which awareness of the constitutive mediation that traverses every social relation—despite how immediate these relations may appear to us in the first place—can be achieved. For Debord, the use of found footage aims at a Hegelian ‘negation of the negation’, that is, an overcoming of the spectacle as a ‘negation of life’ (Debord 1983: 9).

Gilles Deleuze’s cinema books (2005, 2011) present an opposite notion of image to the one in Guy Debord. While the latter attempts a Hegelian-Marxist negation of images understood as the false appearance of a real relation of production, the former follows Bergson and Nietzsche in order to redefine the notion of image as movement (Deleuze 2005: 60) and to affirm the ‘powers of the false’ (Deleuze 2011: 127). This difference also implies divergent ways of defining the cinematic interval which in turn determine two different positions regarding the political dimension of found footage cinema. Following Deleuze’s concept of the movement-image, a novel and more radical interpretation of Guy Debord’s film practice can be achieved. In other words, Deleuze’s movement-image can be used to read Debord’s film The Society of the Spectacle ‘beyond’ Debord’s Hegelian notion of the cinematic interval.

III. Gilles Deleuze’s Movement-Image

In Gilles Deleuze’s film theory, the notion of interval plays a crucial role for understanding what Deleuze himself, following Henri Bergson, has called the movement-image. According to Deleuze (1997: 13), Bergson’s philosophical method can be defined using the notion of intuition. When faced with the problem of analysing the conditions of possibility of human knowledge, Bergson discovers that human perception is always an indivisible mixture of two heterogeneous elements: extensity and duration (Deleuze 1997: 22). For Bergson, even if we can never experience duration and extension as pure elements of perception
and possess no means of knowing (connaître) them, intuition as a philosophical method can allow us to grasp them as tendencies: ‘The composite must therefore be divided according to quantitative and qualified tendencies, that is, according to the way in which it combines duration and extensity as they are defined as movements, directions of movements’ (Deleuze 1997: 22–3).

Following the method of intuition, Deleuze identifies three theses on movement in the work of Henri Bergson. Deleuze will use these three theses as the starting point for his own theory of cinema. According to the first thesis, movement should not be confused with the space covered; movement is the act of covering (Deleuze 2005: 1). The space covered is past; the act of covering is present. And although it is in fact true that in the past we have a space covered, in the present we have nothing other than the act of covering (Deleuze 2009: 22). For Deleuze, the confusion between the act of covering and the space covered stems from the confusion between duration and extensity. Movement, as the present act of covering, belongs to the sphere of duration. This means that movement has to be understood as constant change. The space covered, on the other hand, belongs to the sphere of extensity. Movement as duration is indivisible, whereas the space covered is infinitely divisible (Deleuze 2009: 22). Duration and extensity, however, are just tendencies within the heterogeneous mixture that constitutes human perception. As such, they cannot be perceived autonomously.

Following the first thesis on movement, Bergson develops a critique of the ‘spatialisation of time’ that characterises Western metaphysics. For Bergson, Western philosophy has not been able to go beyond the definition of movement as space covered, limiting itself to a homogeneous, abstract and divisible understanding of time. Put differently, by defining movement from the perspective of the space covered, Western metaphysics has ‘spatialised’ time. In Bergson’s philosophy, however, duration should not be understood in terms of spatialised, divisible time. On the contrary, duration refers to the constant variation of the Whole (Deleuze 2005: 10–11). According to Deleuze, this definition of movement as constant change is grounded in the concept of interval: ‘movement occurs always between two given positions, [it occurs] in the interval between them’ (Deleuze 2009: 24). No matter how much we try to divide the space covered by movement into immobile sections, ‘there will always be an interval where movement will take place’ (Deleuze 2009: 24). This conception of movement from the perspective of the interval resists any form of measurement based on a ‘homogeneous, abstract time’ (Deleuze 2009: 24).
Bergson’s second thesis on movement states that although Western metaphysics has provided a spatialised definition of time, there are actually two ways in which this ‘illusion’ has been reproduced. For antiquity, movement was defined as the passage from one privileged instant to another, from one ideal pose to the next, ‘as in a dance’ (Deleuze 2005: 4). By contrast:

the modern scientific revolution has consisted in relating movement not to privileged instants, but to any-instant-whatever. Although movement was still recomposed, it was no longer recomposed from formal transcendental elements (poses), but from immanent material elements (sections). (Deleuze 2005: 4)

Based on this second thesis, Henri Bergson saw cinema as ‘the last descendant’ of the modern lineage of scientific revolutions that defined movement as the homogeneous succession of any-instant-whatever. As Deleuze puts it, Bergson understood cinema as ‘a system which reproduces movement as a function of any-instant-whatever, that is, as a function of equidistant instants, selected as to create an impression of continuity’ (Deleuze 2005: 5). From the perspective of Bergson, cinema appears as the latest version of Western metaphysics: a continuation of the spatialised definition of movement as the composite of immobile cuts and abstract time.12

Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Henri Bergson could only interpret the cinematic apparatus as yet another way of reproducing movement from the perspective of the space covered. Cinema was seen by Bergson as the combination of immobile cuts and a linear, abstract and homogeneous time. According to Deleuze, however, Bergson’s condemnation of cinema was marked by a confusion between the perception of movement and its reproduction.13 Cinema, Deleuze argues, should be seen as a machine which artificially reproduces movement. As such, it should not be confused with the natural conditions of human perception. Put differently, cinema reproduces movement by means that are different from those through which human perception perceives movement (Deleuze 2009: 27). Nevertheless, the artificial character of cinema’s reproduction of movement should not be dismissed as mere illusion. It is important to remember that for Bergson the natural perception of movement is always a compound of extension and duration. Natural perception will never be able to experience space and time as pure elements. It is only through intuition as a philosophical method that we can identify these elements as tendencies. Accordingly, Deleuze’s novel understanding of cinema contends that the artificial character of the cinematic apparatus makes it possible to overcome the
limits of natural perception and hence reproduce the pure elements that constitute movement and time. These pure elements are defined with the notions of movement-image and time-image. In reference to the movement-image, Deleuze writes:

Cinema creates the artificial conditions which make it possible to perceive pure movement, having said that this pure movement is precisely what natural perception cannot perceive because of the unavoidable mixture of space and time [...] Cinema’s artificial conditions give us a pure perception of movement, one that was impossible under the conditions of natural perception. We express this pure perception of movement with the concept of movement-image. (Deleuze 2009: 28; my translation)

In order to develop the concept of movement-image, Deleuze uses the first chapter of Bergson’s 1896 book *Matter and Memory* (Bergson [1896] 1911). The publication of this book coincided roughly with the first public cinematic projections by the Lumière brothers. For this reason, it was impossible for Bergson to even consider the existence of this new technical device while conceiving the philosophical understanding of the image deployed in the first chapter of this book and which functions as the starting point for Deleuze’s notion of the movement-image. It was only in 1907, in the fourth chapter of *Creative Evolution*, that Bergson would explicitly refer to the cinematic apparatus (Bergson [1907] 2007). For Deleuze, *Creative Evolution* is the first book in the history of philosophy to explicitly consider cinema as its object (Deleuze 2009: 19). Nevertheless, Bergson confuses natural perception with the cinematic reproduction of movement and hence dismisses cinema as yet another form of metaphysical illusion. In an apparently counterintuitive reading of Bergson, Gilles Deleuze suggests that *Matter and Memory* offers a much more radical understanding of cinema than that of *Creative Evolution*. This is so because *Matter and Memory* invented in the domain of philosophy something that cinema invented in the domain of perception: the notion of movement-image (Deleuze 2009: 19) Thanks to this notion, *Matter and Memory* offers a radical framework to define cinema which goes beyond the subsequent criticism developed in *Creative Evolution*.

According to Deleuze (2009: 142), one of the most striking features of the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* is that it manages to create a correspondence between the concepts of matter, images and movement. Matter is understood as an image simply because it ‘appears’. But that which ‘appears’ is always a constant variation, or movement. Furthermore, each image establishes an action/reaction chain with other images (which are themselves in constant movement). Hence,
matter (that is, the totality of movement-images) constitutes a plane of immanence which Deleuze defines as the plane of ‘universal variation’ (Deleuze 2009: 153). In this manner, Deleuze argues that Bergson gives us a non-representational understanding of images as a ‘dynamic and material reality’ (Deleuze 2009: 153). It is important to note that neither Bergson nor Deleuze confuses this immanent plane of movement-images—that constantly interact with each other—with a mechanistic approach which reduces reality to a mere chain of causes and effects. The main difference is that while mechanism presupposes the idea of a closed totality, the notion of movement-image refers to an open totality characterised by constant and universal variation. The ‘openness’ of the movement-image is granted by Bergson’s notion of duration and exposes the Whole to an ongoing and endless process of transformation.

The question that arises from this immanent definition of matter as images in movement is the following: how is the perception of singularities possible within the immanent field of movement-images? For Deleuze the answer lies precisely in the concept of interval:

What happens and what can happen in this acentred universe where everything reacts on everything else? We must not introduce a different factor, a factor of another nature. So what happens is this: at any point whatever of the plane an interval appears—a gap between the action and the reaction. All Bergson asks for are movements and intervals between movements. (Deleuze 2005: 63)

This means that in the field of immanence there are certain images on which the action enforced by other images will not produce an immediate reaction. Between the action and the reaction, some movement-images will introduce a delay, an interval (Deleuze 2009: 156–7). Thus, perception occurs when a living organism ‘allows to pass through them’ certain external influences while others remain ‘isolated’, delaying the reaction that these isolated influences cause on the organism (Deleuze 2005: 64). As Deleuze puts it:

[perception] is an operation which is exactly described as a framing: certain actions undergone are isolated by the frame and hence they are forestalled, anticipated. But, on the other hand, executed reactions are no longer immediately linked with the action which is undergone. By virtue of the interval, these are delayed reactions, which have the time to select their elements, to organise them or to integrate them into a new movement which is impossible to conclude by simply prolonging the received excitation. (Deleuze 2005: 64)
Considered from the perspective of the luminous aspect of the plane of immanence, the interval can be understood as the result of certain images that function as a black screen (Deleuze 2005: 64). In this sense, the brain has to be understood not as a container of images but as an image among others. For Deleuze, the brain functions as a screen, as ‘an interval, a gap between an action and a reaction’ (Deleuze 2005: 65). Consequently, the subject should be understood as a ‘centre of indetermination’ which is formed ‘in the acentred universe of movement-images’ (Deleuze 2005: 64). As Elena del Rio puts it, in Deleuze’s cinema books, the subject is not ‘the locus of consciousness’ but ‘the interval that interrupts the flux of infinite images to expose one singular shot or frame out of that flow’ (del Rio 2005: 77).

In brief, the first chapter of Matter and Memory depicts a plane of immanence characterised by an identity between matter, images and movement, where an interval interrupts and postpones the action–reaction chain that defines the universal interaction between images, hence making the perception of singularities possible. Unlike Guy Debord’s notion of image as the illusion of an unmediated social relation and the interval as the negative force that allows for the self-awareness of its mediated nature, Deleuze presents an affirmative concept of image as movement and the interval as the necessary gap for the perception of movement to become possible. While for Debord the subject becomes alienated from the social body through images, for Deleuze the subject refers to a centre of indetermination. In the case of the former, the interval operates as a vehicle for achieving a state of self-awareness in which the subject acknowledges the mediating nature of images in capitalist society. In the case of the latter, instead, the subject appears as the ‘effect’ of an interval which interrupts the permanent flow of images.15

Additionally, Deleuze establishes a parallel between the concept of interval in Bergson’s philosophic system and the notion of interval in cinema, thus furthering the difference with Debord’s critique of the image as the reification of false consciousness. For Deleuze, in the plane of immanence that defines matter as well as in cinematic perception, the interval functions as the founding element of movement. In Matter and Memory, the interval interrupts the plane of immanence in order to allow perception. In cinema, the interval makes it possible to artificially reproduce and organise movement. In other words, the interval allows cinema to reproduce artificially the pure conditions of movement. In order to establish a parallel between the interval in Bergson and the interval in cinema, Deleuze (2005: 83–6) refers specifically to the work of Dziga Vertov and his theory of the interval.
IV. Dziga Vertov’s Theory of the Interval

Dziga Vertov and his notion of interval play a crucial role in Deleuze’s account of the movement-image. According to Deleuze, the movement-image, when ‘related to a centre of indetermination’ divides into three varieties: perception-image, affection-image and action-image (Deleuze 2005: 70). As mentioned above, the centre of indetermination is Deleuze’s formula for referring to the subject as a black screen that interrupts the flow of movement-images and hence makes perception possible. Furthermore, the description of the three types, or varieties, of movement-images can be understood in genetic terms, that is, as ‘moments of the constitution of the material subjectivity underlying the cinema books’ (Hughes 2008b: 23). Deleuze refers to Vertov’s theory of the interval precisely when explaining the formation of the first type of movement-image, that is, the perception-image. Given the constitutive character of this particular type of image for the whole Deleuzian taxonomy, it would be safe to say that Vertov’s theory of the interval is a key element for grasping the concepts of image and interval at stake in Deleuze’s cinema books.

For Deleuze, the importance of Vertov’s theory of the interval lies in Vertov’s firm conviction that the interval is the founding element of any cinematic representation of movement. The *Kino-Eye* project, Deleuze argues, aimed at attaining or regaining through cinema ‘the system of universal variation’ (Deleuze 2005: 83). In this sense, Vertov’s theory of the interval focuses not so much on movement itself, but on the capacity of the interval to articulate and bring together different forms of movement in order to create an organic whole (Deleuze 2009: 157). At the same time, Vertov’s theory can be used to illustrate the importance of the notion of interval within Deleuze’s ‘Bergsonian’ understanding of cinema. For Deleuze (2009: 89), all of Vertov’s materialist theories of cinema are based on two core notions: movements and the interval between movements. From the perspective of Deleuze’s own theory of cinema, the interval appears as the condition of possibility of cinema’s capacity to produce perception-images—the first type of movement-image in his taxonomy of images.

Dziga Vertov introduces his theory of the interval in his 1919 manifesto ‘We’ (Vertov 1984: 5–9). According to him, cinema is an art that aims at the creation and organisation of movements. Hence, Vertov’s utter rejection of narrative cinema stems from the fact that in narrative cinema, movement is subordinated to dramatic action. Moreover, Vertov claims that it is mainly the interval between
movements—namely, montage—which allows for the cinematic creation and organisation of movements:

Intervals (the transition from one movement to another) are the material, the elements of the art of movement, and by no means the movements themselves. It is they (the intervals) which draw the movement to a kinetic resolution. The organisation of movement is the organization of its elements, its intervals, into phrases. In each phrase there is a rise, a high point, and a falling off (expressed in varying degrees) of movement. A composition is made of phrases, just as a phrase is made of intervals of movement. (Vertov 1984: 8–9)

In Vertov’s theory of the interval, cinematic movement is produced mainly through the montage of different shots, and not simply within a given shot. Vlada Petric suggests that Vertov’s notion of interval has its roots in music theory, ‘specifically in the contrapuntal theory of composing a musical phrase’ (Petric 1978: 35). In music, the interval operates as the gap between two elements which makes it possible to apprehend the difference between them. Put differently, we can only apprehend musical notes as long as there is an interval within the musical flow. Likewise, we can only perceive real cinematic movement—that is, a conflict between diverse elements—thanks to an interval that can articulate heterogeneous shots. From this perspective, the interval appears not as a negative feature—like a gap that pulls apart two different shots—but should be understood in positive and productive terms, as the gap that makes it possible to bring together heterogeneous elements in order to produce a new relationship that would otherwise not exist.

For Gilles Deleuze (2005: 84), Vertov’s theory of the interval and montage refers to a more profound dimension than to a mere theory of movement. The interval defines an interruption in the plane of immanence that makes the perception of movement possible. However, this can only be grasped by adopting a positive understanding of the interval. In the plane of immanence, that is, in the universe of movement-images, the interval has to be understood:

no longer [as] that which separates a reaction from the action experienced, which measures the incommensurability and unforeseeability of the reaction but, on the contrary, [as] that which—an action being given in a point of the universe—will find the appropriate reaction in some other point, however distant it is. (Deleuze 2005: 84)
The close proximity between Deleuze and Vertov stems from the fact that in both cases the interval operates as a productive gap. As Deleuze puts it:

the originality of the Vertovian theory of the interval is that it no longer marks a gap which is carved out, a distancing between two consecutive images but, on the contrary, a correlation of two images which are distant (and incommensurable from the viewpoint of our human perception). (Deleuze 2005:84)

Thanks to the interval, cinema can produce perception-images, that is, it is able to create the conditions of possibility for grasping the universal variation that characterises the plane of immanence (Deleuze 2005: 83). Accordingly, Vertov’s call for a materialist and objective cinema should be understood through the concepts of movement and interval as defined so far. Put differently, Vertov’s celebratory account of cinema for its capacity to give us ‘the real as such’ stems directly from his understanding of the cinematic interval (Deleuze 2009: 222). And this ‘real as such’ should not be interpreted as something hidden that lies beyond the surface of cinematic images and which needs to be unveiled—as in Debord—but rather as the ‘ensemble of images’ captured in their ‘universal interaction’, that is, a system in which images are shown in their constant variation and in their constant interaction with other images which are themselves in constant variation (Deleuze 2009: 223). In Deleuzian terms, the Vertovian ‘real as such’ is none other than the plane of immanence defined by the universal variation of movement-images. Hence, Deleuze concludes that ‘the materialist Vertov realises the materialist programme of the first chapter of Matter and Memory through cinema, the in-itself of the image’ (Deleuze 2005: 83). From this perspective, montage—which is nothing more than the organisation of intervals—appears as the condition of possibility for a materialist cinema. Montage allows cinema to connect any two images in any given temporal order and hence to give us ‘the real as such’. For Deleuze, this profound materialism of the Kino-Eye project—the depiction of ‘the universal variation of the plane of immanence’—constitutes the most basic definition of the notion of ‘documentary cinema’ (Deleuze 2009: 213).

V. Documentary Cinema and the Unrepresentability of Capital

According to Deleuze (2009: 213), the term ‘documentary cinema’ should be used strictly to define those films that achieve the presentation
of the universal variation of movement-images through montage, that is, through the organisation of intervals. From this perspective, and although it may seem counterintuitive, it could be argued that the artificial character of montage—which uses the cinematic interval to render visible the universal variation of matter—turns found footage cinema into a materialist art form **par excellence**. Following Deleuze’s definition of documentary cinema, it is possible to return to Guy Debord’s cinematic project and to suggest an alternative interpretation to the one presented above.

From the perspective of Wees (1993) and Noys (2007), the political value of Guy Debord’s film lies in its capacity to use the interval in order to interrupt the unreflective consumption of images and to present them as the result of a concrete process of production which is socially and historically mediated. This defines a specific notion of image as illusion—fetishism—and a specific notion of interval as the moving—negative—force towards self-awareness. Debord’s appropriation of found footage aims at interrupting the unmediated consumption of images and creating awareness of how images mediate social relations in capitalist societies.

From the perspective of Deleuze’s film theory, however, the critical potential of found footage films can be understood in a different manner. Given Deleuze’s notion of cinematic interval, it can be said that found footage practices unveil the conditions of possibility—the pure tendencies—for the presentation of the universal variation of the plane of immanence. A key to this alternative reading of Debord’s film can be found in a short text by Giorgio Agamben: ‘Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord’s Films’ (2002). According to Agamben, Guy Debord’s film teaches us that the specific character of cinema as a whole ‘stems from montage’ (Agamben 2002: 315). But what are the conditions of possibility of montage? For Agamben, these are ‘repetition and stoppage’ (Agamben 2002: 315). It can be added now that these are also the conditions of possibility of found footage cinema: appropriation of an already existing material that is repeated in a new context, and the interruption of its original meaning through the interval.

If we agree with Agamben that montage constitutes the specific character of cinema and that repetition and stoppage constitute its conditions of possibility—in a Kantian sense—then we can argue that found footage cinema in general carries the potential not only to ‘destroy’ (negate) cinema but mainly to present the universal variation that characterises the plane of immanence. Put differently, if the plane of immanence is defined as universal variation and the interval
is conceived as the condition of possibility for the perception of movement, then found footage cinema—characterised by repetition and stoppage—becomes a privileged territory for the critique of images by means of images. In a world where there is no outside to images—plane of immanence—the appropriation and recycling of images tends to appear as the ideal, if not the only, medium for giving an image of the ‘real as such’. For this reason, Agamben suggests that in order to achieve a revolutionary practice of cinema today, ‘there is no need to shoot film anymore, just to repeat and stop’ (Agamben 2002: 315). In this context, he adds, ‘cinema enters a zone of indifference where all genres tend to coincide, documentary and narrative, reality and fiction. Cinema will now be made on the basis of images from cinema’ (Agamben 2002: 315). Furthermore, this ‘materialist’ understanding of found footage cinema makes it possible to readdress the problem of the unrepresentability of capital in Marx’s method.

According to Althusser (2009), the main methodological problem implied in Marx’s category of capital was how a static concept can accurately represent a structure that requires a temporal dimension in order to function. In Marx’s own account, the very existence of capital is traversed by a twofold movement: it is reified living labour which has the capacity to buy more living labour, but at the same time it appears as capital only to the extent that it buys labour power in order to produce a surplus. In short, capital exists as capital—and reproduces itself as capital—only to the degree that it remains in constant, perpetual movement. Hence, a theory of capital will always be confronted with the limits of thought to represent an object which is itself in permanent movement.

In this context, cinema appears as a privileged medium for addressing the limits of the representability of capital. Already in 1927 Sergei Eisenstein intended to create a cinematic version of Marx’s Capital. In his Notes, Eisenstein writes that a filmed version of Capital is ‘the only logical solution’ (Eisenstein 1976: 3). His preoccupation was not so much with the ‘themes’ but with Marx’s ‘method’ (Eisenstein 1976: 23). For Eisenstein, the dialectical potential of montage could show the dialectical method of Capital and even teach the spectator—the worker—‘to think dialectically’ (Eisenstein 1976: 10). Eisenstein’s formal model to film Capital was James Joyce’s Ulysses, and a tentative narrative structure was to start from a banal event, say ‘a day in a man’s life’, where ‘the elements of this chain would serve as points of departure for the forming of associations through which alone the play of concepts becomes possible’ (Eisenstein 1976: 15). As Annette Michelson
(1976: 15) correctly points out, by that same year Dziga Vertov was producing *The Man with a Movie Camera*, which can be interpreted as the ‘supreme and most complex exemplification’ of how a simple day in a man’s life is rendered from the perspective of the social networks that traverse modern cities and modern life. Keeping in mind Vertov’s theory of the interval, it is possible to claim that *The Man with a Movie Camera* is in fact a superlative attempt to represent the social interactions that characterise the life of individuals under modern conditions of production.

Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* was yet another attempt to offer a cinematic depiction of Marx’s critique of political economy. Speaking of the difference between Eisenstein and Debord, the International Situationists wrote the following:

> We know that Eisenstein hoped to film *Capital*. We might wonder, however, given that filmmaker’s formal ideas and political submissiveness, whether his film would have been faithful to Marx’s text. And for us, we have no doubt that we will do better. For example, as soon as it is possible, Guy Debord will himself produce a film adaptation of *The Society of the Spectacle* that will certainly not fall short of his book. (SI 2002: 188)

For the Situationists, the biggest strength of Debord’s project lay precisely in the notion of détournement, that is, in his systematic use of found footage. In fact, the French Situationist René Viénet explicitly referred to the appropriation of found footage as the most adequate strategy to produce a film version of *Capital*:

> Cinema, which is the newest and without doubt most useful means of expression of our epoch, has made no progress for close to three-quarters of a century. [...] Let us appropriate the stammerings of this new form of writing; let us, above all, appropriate its most accomplished and modern examples, those that have escaped the ideology of art to an even greater extent than American B-movies: I mean, of course, newsreels, trailers, and most of all filmed advertisement. Made in the service of the commodity and the spectacle, indeed, but when freed from that support, filmed advertisements can lay the foundations for what Eisenstein foresaw when he spoke of filming *Capital*. (Viénet 2002: 184)

From a Situationist perspective, Debord’s found footage cinema appears as an exemplary practice for a critique of capitalism and the society of the spectacle. Its intrinsic capacity to interrupt and reconnect grants found footage cinema a unique potential to develop a cinematic critique of the commodity form. Put differently, by interrupting the unmediated consumption of images and establishing new connections
between images and their conditions of production, found footage cinema challenges the essential separation that characterises social relations in the society of the spectacle. In doing so, found footage cinema would be able to achieve a ‘representation’ of the ‘unrepresentable’ nature of capitalist societies.

Alternatively, Deleuze’s movement-image makes it possible to suggest a different account of the relation between cinema and capital that moves beyond the question of representation. As shown in *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b), capitalism puts forth a deterritorialising force that challenges the traditional notion of representation. This is so mainly because capital is an ‘asignifying semiotic operator’ (Guattari 2009; Lazzarato 2014). Capital does not ‘represent’ a given social relation—as in Marx or Debord—but rather ‘operates’ a given relation of social–machinic–flows. Consequently, the relation between cinema and capital can no longer be thought of as a relation of representation. Instead, film images need to be conceived of as part of the realm of ‘asignifying semiotics’, that is, a realm beyond representation and individual subjectivation which offers the potential to deterritorialise both the image and perception, and hence the ‘unity of the subject’ (Lazzarato 2014: 108). On the one hand, film images ‘cannot be directly encoded, marked out, and framed by the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes that ensure the relative stability and invariance of meanings as in language’ (Lazzarato 2014: 109). As such, film images are able to render visible the machinic and asignifying dimension that characterises contemporary capitalism. On the other hand, however, film images have been captured by the film industry, and thus returned to the realm of representation. As Lazzarato puts it, with the film industry, ‘we have a textbook case of how the signifying machine comes to neutralise, order, and normalise the action of asignifying semiotics which exceed the dominant significations’ (Lazzarato 2014: 108). This means that, like psychoanalysis, the film industry reinforces ‘the construction of the roles and functions’ and the ‘fabrication of the individual subject and his unconscious’ (Lazzarato 2014: 108).

The significance of Deleuze’s concept of movement-image is that it makes it possible to resist the appropriation of cinema by the logic of representation. This concept brings film images back to the realm of asignifying semiotics, and hence opens the door for rendering visible the universal variation that defines the immanent field of capital—its deterritorialised, machinic and asignifying character. By arguing that cinema gives us the possibility of having a pure image of movement, Deleuze sets the ground for a cinematic conceptualisation of capital.
Put differently, the universal variation of the plane of immanence that defines the category of capital may resist being subsumed under the signifying logic of representation, but finds in cinema’s potential to render movement-in-itself visible a new territory from where to rethink its asignifying dimension. From the perspective opened by Deleuze’s concept of movement-image, found footage cinema appears as a privileged strategy not for ‘representing’ capital—as in Debord—but for bringing film images back to the machinic realm of asignification. While for Debord an image referred negatively to the alienating character of the commodity-form, for Deleuze a cinematic image should be conceived as pure movement. In this sense, the political potential of the cinematic interval cannot be reduced to the Hegelian process that goes from an unmediated consumption of images to the self-awareness of its mediating nature, but should be conceived as the condition of possibility of cinema to give us an ‘image’ of capitalism’s deterritorialising drive. Debord’s found footage cinema, then, is not a medium to represent capital—or its unrepresentability—but a privileged ‘documentary’ practice that uses the asignifying nature of film images in order to render visible the ‘universal variation’ that characterises capitalism—understood as the only social machine that, instead of coding the social flows, must deterritorialise them (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 35).

Acknowledgements

This article was supported by CONICYT (Chile) under the grant Fondecyt Postdoctorado 2016 (No. 3160053).

Notes

1. For a thorough exposition of Althusser’s main ideas regarding the problem of representation in Marx’s thought, see George Hartley’s book The Abyss of Representation (2003).
2. It is interesting to point out the significant, yet often unaccredited, influence that the publication of Althusser’s Reading Capital had on Deleuze’s own philosophy. As Ted Stolze (1998) has shown, not only was Deleuze’s text How Do We Recognize Structuralism? written as a response to the publication of this book, but Deleuze even sent it to Althusser in order to ask for his opinion on it. Most significantly, this essay on structuralism (written in 1966) lays down the basic methodological approach to the problem of representation and identity as it will be presented in Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition.
3. According to Thomas Levin, Debord’s film The Society of the Spectacle ‘is not simply the film version of the book (whatever that might mean, given the work
in question). First, of the 221 theses in the printed version less than half are incorporated into the soundtrack; second, the order in which they are presented is not identical to the original sequence; and third, various additional texts not contained in the book have been introduced in text frames and subtitles; in short, the film offers ‘a rereading by Debord of his own work’ (Levin 2002: 381).

4. For a thorough analysis of the theoretical background behind Debord’s claim that the society of the spectacle is a generalisation of the visual essence that defines the commodity-form, see chapter 7 in Martin Jay’s book Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (1994).

5. Wees adds that ‘found footage films offer an implicit critique of the film industry’s conventional, standardized representations of the world, and […] they interrupt the endless recirculation and unreflective consumption of mass media images. […] Recycled images call attention to themselves as images, as products of the image-producing industries of film and television, and therefore as pieces of the vast and intricate mosaic of information, entertainment, and persuasion that constitute the media-saturated environment of modern life’ (Wees 1993: 32).

6. For a thorough analysis of the importance of collage in art, see chapter 4 of Peter Bürger’s Theory of the Avant-Garde (1984).

7. According to McKenzie Wark, ‘the key to détournement is not to appropriate the image, but to appropriate the power of appropriation itself’; in other words, ‘the trick is to turn the possibility of copying into an act that restores agency to the act of appropriation, rather than merely adding to the stock of worthless copies that surround us’ (Wark 2009: 146).

8. To a certain extent, there is an important intersection between the Situationists’ concept of détournement and Bertolt Brecht’s concept of estrangement. For a further analysis of their similarities and differences, see Ray 2012.


10. Debord contends that ‘a critique that grasps the spectacle’s essential character reveals it to be a visible negation of life—a negation that has taken on a visible form’ (Debord 1983: 9).

11. According to Deleuze, the three theses on movement are: first thesis: ‘movement is distinct from the space covered. Space covered is past, movement is present, the act of covering. The space covered is divisible, indeed infinitely divisible, whilst movement is indivisible, or cannot be divided without changing qualitatively each time it is divided. This already presupposes a more complex idea: the spaces covered all belong to a single, identical, homogeneous space, while the movements are heterogeneous, irreducible among themselves’ (Deleuze 2005: 1); second thesis: there are two ways in which the illusion about movement (that is, reconstituting movement from immobile cuts) can be reproduced: the ancient form that identifies privileged instants of movement and the modern one that reconstitutes movement through ‘any-instant-whatever’ (Deleuze 2005: 4); and finally, the third thesis: ‘not only is the instant an immobile section of movement, but movement is a mobile section of duration’ (Deleuze 2005: 8). This means that duration refers to the constant change of the Whole, ‘it changes and does not stop changing’ (Deleuze 2005: 8).


13. For a similar analysis of how Bergson and Husserl confuse perception with reproduction, see chapter 2 of Bernard Stiegler’s Technics and Time, 3 (2011).

15. The question of subjectivity marks a significant distance between Deleuze and Debord regarding a politics of cinema. For Debord, cinema can be used to create a state of self-awareness in the subject. For Deleuze, instead, the politics of cinema (particularly from the perspective of the crisis of the action-image and the emergence of the time-image) can be seen as a critique of agency. For a further exposition of the question of agency and subjectivity in Deleuze’s cinema books, see Marrati 2008.

16. Deleuze (2005: 72) goes back to Dziga Vertov’s theory of the interval when introducing the three types, or varieties of movement-image: perception-image, affection-image, and action-image.

17. It is worth mentioning that for Deleuze, ‘there is reason to believe that many other kinds of images can exist’ (Deleuze 2005: 70).

18. For a systematic analysis of the movement-image from a genetic perspective, see Hughes 2008a, 2008b.

19. It is important to note that the movement-image and the time-image imply two different notions of the cinematic interval. In the time-image, ‘montage changes its meaning’ and ‘takes on a new function: instead of being concerned with movement-images from which it extracts an indirect image of time, it is concerned with the time-image, and extracts from it the relations of time on which aberrant movement must now depend’ (Deleuze 2011: 40). From this perspective, Vertov’s theory of the interval may concern the production of the universal variation that characterises movement-images, but is insufficient to account for the aberrant movements of the time-image.

20. André Bazin’s (1997) analysis would be an example of a negative definition of the role of the interval within the montage of different shots in order to articulate and organise movement. As such, Bazin’s definition of ‘cinematic realism’ falls at the opposite pole of Vertov’s ‘materialist’ idea of cinema. Against Bazin’s celebratory account of *cinema vérité*, the Dziga Vertov Group (led mainly by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin) contended that cinema is not about representation (where the issues of realism and illusion become relevant) but about presentation (transforming the political role of cinema into how to teach to think differently, that is, dialectically).

21. At this point of the argument, Agamben (2002: 315) establishes a strong connection between Debord’s film project and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Histoire(s) du Cinema*. According to Agamben, what both projects have in common is their systematic use of found footage and montage as a political strategy.

22. As Deleuze and Guattari note in *Anti-Oedipus*, the fundamental asymmetry that defines surplus value determines the intrinsic limit of capital and pushes for the continuous and infinite expansion of capitalism’s external limits at an ever larger scale (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 251). This permanent movement, they add, ‘belongs essentially to the deterritorialisation of capitalism’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 251).

23. In his brilliant book *Cine-Capital* (2014), Jun Fujita Hirose develops a strong connection between Marx’s critique of political economy and Deleuze’s cinema books. Unlike the reading attempted in this article, Fujita Hirose explores the question of capitalist representation using Deleuze’s concept of time-image, particularly Deleuze’s analysis of the relation between cinema and money (Deleuze 2011: 75–6). According to Deleuze, by confronting its most internal presupposition (i.e. ‘time is money’), cinema shifts from the movement-image to the time-image (Deleuze 2011: 76).
References


Lazzarato, Maurizio (2014) Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).


