“Yet reading is not a parasitical act, the reactive complement of a writing which we endow with all the glamour of creation and anteriority. It is a form of work... and the method of this work is topological: I am not hidden within the text, I am simply irrecoverable from it: my task is to move, to shift systems whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the ‘T.’”

Roland Barthes, *S/Z*

**Introduction**

*I am doing it*

*the it I am doing is*

*the I that is doing it is*

*the it I am doing*

*it is doing the I that am doing it*

*I am being done by the it I am doing*

*it is doing it*

Ronald Laing, *Knots*

*I am reading. Yet to engage in this activity, I do not hold a book on my lap or prop it upright on my desk. In fact, I don’t have a printed page in front of me at all. Rather I’m standing in a darkened gallery, viewing a text as it is projected on a movie screen. The text has been literally filmed from a book, page by page, and, as a result, I am confronted with a curious, hybrid object: a film that is read as a book and a book that is viewed as a film. For lack of a better term, let us call this phenomenon a ‘reading film’ even though the phrase doesn’t seem quite adequate to the experience. The notion of a reading film, namely, might suggest a symmetrical relationship between the media of book and film whereas in actuality there is none. Which is to say, the reading film does not assume the form of a literary film adaptation, whereby words are translated into images, nor does it constitute a critical reading of a filmic text in a strictly semiotic sense of the word. The reading film is located, rather, in the nexus between the dual registers of the visible and the sayable or, one might equally state, that it is concerned with the very event of translation between the mutual domains of words and images. I shall come to unpack this complicated notion further in the following pages, but suffice to say that the reading film presents an unruly category that simultaneously refers to a substantive or object – a reading that is filmed – and a transaction or performance – a film that is read.

The notion of a reading film is not mine. Its invention, insofar as I know, can be ascribed to David Lamelas and the viewing/reading situation I have just described refers to two films that the artist made in 1970. I shall return to these films at greater length below, yet let me first take address the pesky question of originality. For if Lamelas invented the term, he is certainly not the only or the first artist to conceive of a film that is not only to be viewed, but is literally to be read as well, like a book. Other examples of the hybrid practice of the reading film can be found in such diverse places as the cinematic practices of Hollis Frampton or Marguerite Duras, which are both, more or less, contemporary to the examples of Lamelas.¹ No doubt the list can be extended. But why this fascination with the juncture between

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¹ For instance, Frampton’s *Poetic Justice* (1972) or Duras’s *Le Camion* (1977).
film and text during the period of the later sixties and early seventies?

If we take into account that the Duras and Frampton considered themselves to be writers before becoming filmmakers, it is perhaps not surprising that Frampton and Duras, each in their own manner, would feel compelled to investigate the interval between writing and filming. But, of course, this observation does not explain why they took up the medium of film in the first place. It is not the individual decision of a certain artist or writer to act in the interstices of writing and filming that is of importance here. What we need to understand are the specific historical conditions that made such an act seem intelligible, significant, or even compelling at this juncture in time. What are we to make, for instance, of the circumstance that the hybrid genre of the reading film emerges at the same moment that the book and the movie, with increasing frequency, were viewed as obsolete media within the cultural context of Western society? (That is to say, a certain genre of writing, the ‘classical novel,’ and a particular mode of filmmaking, ‘classical cinema,’ were often, and prematurely, declared dead during the sixties and seventies.)

Duras and Frampton are both quite clear on this topic of the demise of the novel and cinema, although their arguments certainly did not overlap. In 1969, for example, Duras suggested during an interview that in contrast to former generations, the ‘revolutionary’ generation of the 1960s showed no attachment to the traditions of literary culture and, as a result, her own novels should be treated as disposable wares. Film, on the other hand, represented for Duras a way out of this cultural impasse. It provided her with a means of communication with a younger audience who could no longer be trusted to read her books. Duras did not stop writing, of course, but, as she happily pointed out to her interlocutors, her style of writing had begun to assume the quality of a film script. Frampton, on the other hand, was less sanguine about the future of film as a medium of social communication. In 1971 he would refer to cinema as the “last machine”: a relic of the industrial age that had outlasted its social purpose of adjusting the viewers to the shock and stress of modernity. An observation that did not cause Frampton to stop filming, just as Duras never stopped writing. Frampton’s version of the death of cinema, namely, was crafted in such a fashion to open up a new set of aesthetic, rather than social possibilities for the medium. Cinema might have lost its instructive purpose, Frampton conjectured, but film would continue to have an after-life as a kind of structuralist game, generating endless variations within its combinatory matrix of formal elements. Like some infinite, Borgesian archive, Frampton envisioned the post-history of film as a simultaneous “meta-history” that would contain all the virtual possibilities of cinema that never happened.

To complicate things further, Lamelas did not come to film from literature, but from the field of the visual arts which during these very years was undergoing a ‘linguistic turn.’ And it is interesting to note that the discourse of conceptual art was not only modeled on structural linguistics, but also on the nouveau roman, represented by novelists and essayists, such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor and, of course, Marguerite Duras herself. To identify Lamelas as a conceptual artist, however, is a tricky proposition for various reasons that I shall explore in the following. Suffice to say for now that Lamelas’s work emerged within a gallery setting, if
increasingly contesting the institutional boundaries of this space, modulating its architectural environment and opening it spaces towards the media of mass communication.

Employing the medium of film within the gallery space for the first time in 1967, the artist would continue to show his films (and film installations) within the same institutional context of the visual arts. That is to say, until the moment he directed his first feature-length movie, *The Desert People* (1974) in which five individuals describe their visit to a reservation of aboriginal Americans called Papagos.

Lamelas has described *The Desert People* as a “study of American movie making” and its proper mode of screening is within a cinema auditorium. Without dwelling on the contents of the movie at this point, it is important to understand that *The Desert People* does not constitute a pure affirmation of the aesthetic system of Hollywood cinema. Quite the opposite is the case. Although the movie mimics certain devices of narrative cinema, its ultimate effect – similar to the reading films – is to deregulate the conventions of the cinematic genres it quotes, such as the road movie or cinématographie. Certainly, *The Desert People* introduced a more professional mode of film production within Lamelas’s career, involving the use of a crew and actors, but this does not imply that the artist exited the gallery space completely. In fact, his previous work had paved the way for the tactics of subversion employed in *The Desert People* or what may be better described as a strategy of “becoming-minor.” As one character in the movie states about Manny, a member of the Papagos who lives off-reservation and acts as mediator between the visitors and the aboriginals, he “is a rather interesting kind of paradox in our society.”

paraphrase this comment in less troubling terms, Manny does not live a marginal existence, outside the dominant culture, but exists as a foreigner within a major language: he acts as a *minoritarian* agent of deterritorialization placing the cultural and social codes of meaning in a state of variability.

How this procedure of becoming-minor operates in the *The Desert People* is not of immediate concern. I shall reserve a more extensive discussion of this film for later. Rather it is the kind of paradoxical space fashioned by the film, whereby the strands of the visible and sayable are interwoven only to continuously unravel again, which introduces our first thematic of discussion. The readings films of Lamelas, Duras and Frampton are equally engaged in exploring this turbulent zone where a dominant distribution of the sensible, a formalized system of words and images is undone; where, in sum, a major language of the book, cinema or sculpture becomes minor. Frampton’s notion of a metahistory, for instance, is an attempt to formulate what is at stake in submitting a dominant or major practice to a constant process of variation: “The notion that there was some exact instant at which the tables turned, and cinema passed into obsolescence and thereby into art, is an appealing fiction that implies a special task of the metahistorian of cinema.” Yet this notion of a metahistory seems to imply the virtual existence of a total archive of cinema, containing all possible permutations of the formal and technical elements of cinema. What I have in mind is a socio-political concept of the archive, or what I shall more accurately describe as a dispositif, which does not simply pass into obsolescence in order to enter the territory of art. A dispositif consists not only of a formalized system of

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6. In 1967, Lamelas exhibited *Puntalla (Screen)* where a film projector projected a frame of light on a screen. It apparently consisted of a one-day event in the auditorium of the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires. The first film by the artist to contain actual footage was, most likely, *A Study of the Relationships Between Inner and Outer Space of 1968.*

7. The Native Americans are identified as Papagos by the characters in the movie. But the name Papagos was given to the people by the conquistadors. The call themselves *Tohono O'odham*, which translates as “The Desert People.”


10. Frampton, “For a Metahistory of Film,” p. 137.
knowledge and power, which structures the field of action of others, as Michel Foucault once put it, and delineates a specific horizon of expectation whereby each new event finds its place within a continuously expanding space of determination. Rather a dispositif possesses at the same time an antagonistic character; it forms a field of struggle that triggers the production of ‘undecidable propositions.’ Which is to say, that which a social system must incessantly conjugate in order to retain its stability, is precisely what opens the system to the production of alternative, ‘revolutionary’ connections. Thus it is easy to recognize how the decoded flows of capitalism give rise to multiple processes of re-territorialization and de-territorialization.

Returning to my earlier question – why the emergence of the reading film at this time? – I can now propose at least the beginning of an answer. The reading films of Lamelas provides us with a paradox in the simple and elegant form of the phrase ‘I am reading,’ a paradox that often conceptual art conveniently sought to overlook. A paradox, furthermore, that has something to say about a historical moment in which the processing of language, the control of information and the very production of time will become factors in the colonization of a new space of primitive accumulation, a new phase in capitalist development, which goes by the name of post-Fordism. What is crucial is to my argument is that Lamelas’s reading films do not belong to the historical archive that “outside us, delimits us,” to speak with Foucault once again. Rather his films occupy that very threshold of time where a certain dispositif of power is on the verge of mutation: a tricky balancing act in which values of negation and affirmation, anticipation and resistance cannot always be distinguished with ease. In reviewing the reading films, we are indeed facing a set of undecidable propositions in the Deleuzian sense of the word.

An Excursus on Method
If the notion of a ‘reading film’ be taken in its most literal sense then two films of Lamelas immediately qualify for consideration, namely Reading Film from ‘Knots’ by R. D. Laing and Reading of an Extract from ‘Labyrinths’ by J. L. Borges. Both films were made in 1970 and deserve to be reviewed in tandem. I shall add another film to this list, ‘Interview’ with Marguerite Duras, also of 1970, for reasons that will duly become apparent. In the two former instances the premise is a similar one, although the actual activity of reading is structured differently in each case. The script (if not the scenario) of each film is provided by a book in a very literal sense. The film is not restricted, however, to a mere reproduction of the printed page even though the Laing film appears to start out in that fashion. The reproduction of the text is a means to foreground the intervals within and between the aural and visual tracks of cinema, to interrupt their synchronicity. In Reading of an Extract from ‘Labyrinths’ by J. L. Borges, for instance, a young woman is shown reading out loud a passage from Borges’ essay “A New Refutation of Time.” The movie, however, is recorded without sound and the spectator can only follow what the woman says by reading the captions that are added to the film. But Lamelas throws up a further roadblock. The viewer’s comprehension of the text is undermined by the velocity of the passing captions, not to mention the truncation of the sentences in order to fit them on the screen.

Our second example, Reading Film from ‘Knots’ by R. D. Laing, was made subsequently to the Borges film. Here, Lamelas, produces a further complication of the relationship between sound and image. At first, the spectator is given the actual text to read – the fifth and final section of Laing’s text – which is filmed straight from the printed page. In contrast to the Borges film, the shots are timed in such a fashion as to make a reading of the text possible in a relatively leisurely fashion. (I shall come to discuss how this quantification of reading time is relevant to the reading films.) But now it is the actual character of Laing’s writing that thwarts the viewer’s easy understanding. The recurrent use of anastrophic and paratactic forms in the text, wedded to the typographical layout of the text, which mimics the visual form of poetry, not only makes it difficult for the reader to locate oneself in relation to the text, but also actively confuses the distinction between enunciatory positions of speech within the text. The pronouns I and You,
He and She, are constantly shifting place, distributed across various sites of agency within the discursive field. Hence, the ‘I’ that is ‘doing it’ mutates into the ‘it’ that ‘is doing it.’ The neuter ‘it,’ therefore, becomes both subject and object, or perhaps it is better to state neither of the above. Typically, Laing deploys a dialectical device of inversion to represent the progressive breakdown of a communicative mode of interpersonal exchange. The eponymous knots refer to this process of infinite regress that is established between the two interlocutors and leads into a schizophrenic state where the self is overwhelmed or engulfed by the other. We are provided, as it were, the working scenario of pathogenesis. But more on this topic later.

By dividing the original, vertical page to fit the oblong format of the screen, Lamelas further decomposes an already fragmentary text. In addition, by automating the reading of the text as a function of the cinematic machine – ‘it is doing it’ – Lamelas succeeds in further splitting the viewer’s experience of the text. Yet that is not all. When the film comes to the final two sentences of Knots after approximately four-and-a-half minutes have elapsed, the screen goes blank for a second, only to flicker back into life with the image of a young woman. This woman (who is not the same as in the Borges film) proceeds to read the previous section from Knots out loud, depriving the viewer once more of a private relationship to the text. And to complicate things further, one may presume that the viewer does not watch this film alone but in the presence of other visitors to the exhibition space.

The reading films constitute rather obstinate objects. Like the texts they quote, they are difficult works to categorize. Perhaps this explains why these films have received scant attention in the literature on Lamelas. Several of Lamelas’s other works from the same period have acquired canonical status in the history of conceptual art and with good reason. I am thinking, for instance, of his installation at the Venice Biennale of 1968, which carries the lengthy title Office of Information about the Vietnam War at Three Levels: The Visual Image, Text, Audio, the three-part film Time as Activity (1969), the slide-and-film installation Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning) (1972) and the already-mentioned movie The Desert People. Whereas the Office of Information occupies a seminal status within the genealogy of conceptual art, constituting one of the earliest instances of institutional critique, The Desert People marks a kind of tipping point within this same trajectory. Mimicking certain devices of narrative cinema, The Desert People assumes a radically different artistic strategy in relation to the anti-narrative stance of the preceding films of Lamelas.

I shall not pursue a discussion of Lamelas’s film and video practice beyond the point of 1974 as my main focus will remain on the reading films. Regarding the latter, it will be instructive to situate these works, in so far as possible, in relation to a standard history of conceptual art, which has been consolidated within, more or less, the past decade. Before proceeding, however, I must place a number of caveats. First of all, conceptual art did not constitute a homogenous field of practice and although one may conjecture that there are several models of conceptual art, I shall focus on a basic dualism that runs through the specifically Euro-American context of conceptual art. Suffice to state, for now, that I shall differentiate between a strictly linguistic model of conceptual art (as represented by, among others, Joseph Kosuth and Art & Language) and an alternative model of institutional critique. In this light, it becomes apparent that Lamelas’s production cannot be designated as ‘conceptualist’ purely on the basis of such often-cited features as the use of language, the implementation of technological media, or the abandonment of the traditional materials and skills of the artist. Furthermore, Lamelas does not simply inhabit the discursive terrain of conceptual art, adding to its long list of artistic statements and propositions. As most of his artistic projects, the reading films operate in a highly self-reflective fashion, which mimics rather than embraces certain characteristics of ‘conceptual art.’ Like his friend Marcel Broodthaers, Lamelas did not identify with a conceptualist position, like that of Kosuth, which attempted to establish a condition of self-evidential truth for artistic production on the foundational ‘bedrock’ of language. The problem, for instance, with Kosuth’s translation of the self-critical method of modernism into linguistic terms
DAVID LAMELAS

- a strategy summed up in his famous proposition “art as idea as idea” - is that such interrogations of the autonomous status of modernist art by means of text leave the status of the text as such out of view. Hence, the reading films in which the very process or performance of reading becomes an integral part of the work.

Lamelas was very aware of such conundrums of conceptualism that, as we will see, takes the common form of a map attempting to map itself. In brief, one might state that an internal distance is built into the work; that is, a kind of doubling of discursive or perceptual positions so that his work, at its best, confounds our desire to obtain a total view of the whole or to extract a stable meaning from the process of reading. His work often operates, as it were, at a second remove itself - I am being done by the it I am doing - submitting the linguistic turn of conceptual art to a language game of his own.

Let me provide one example of this procedure of doubling in Lamelas’s work that is contemporary to the reading films. Publication (1970) is an exhibition in the format of a book that collects the responses to three propositions which were sent to a number of artists and critics:

1. Use of oral and written language as an Art Form.
2. Language can be considered as an Art Form.
3. Language cannot be considered as an Art Form.

Fashioned in a quasi-syllogistic manner, the three propositions take up a central concern of conceptual art - 'oral and written language as Art Form' - yet refuse to lead to a dialectical conclusion. The propositions effectively cancel each other out because if language is to be an “art form” it cannot function simultaneously as the object and medium of expression (barring some kind of pictographic mode of script). Therefore the book merely presents the cumulative statements of others - the invited artists and critics - avoiding any editorial viewpoint, which would detract from the mirroring structure of Publication that doubles as a means of exhibition and exhibited object. The bland, self-referential title, Publication, says as much: it is not any specific proposition regarding the viability of art as language that matters. Such propositions, namely, will only lead to all kinds of self-contradiction; a situation that the conceptual artist Mel Bochner marvelously captured in his wall-painting “Language is Not Transparent” (1970) which formulates an updated version of the classical paradox of the Cretan Liar.

Clearly Lamelas’s project is not concerned to defend a purely linguistic model of conceptualism. Rather its purpose is to materialize the discursive and institutional system in which such propositions circulate. As the artist explained in an interview of 1972:

 “Too much emphasis has been placed upon the statements in the book, but I was interested in the context not the subject. Publication implies a syllogistic form; the book was the exhibition but the exhibition was the actual piece. Similarly the subject of the book was ‘oral and written language as an art form,’ which also dictated the structure of the work as a book. I was interested in changing the status of the replies to my questions, some were art criticism others were art works but each fulfilled the same purpose.”

Lamelas’s later commentary on Publication not only points to a transformation in the exhibition value of art, whereby it is neither the object or idea that continues to be significant, but something we might call the ‘publication value’ of an art work: the manner in which art comes to occupy the new spaces of information within advanced capitalism. This problematic was explored by other artists at the same time, for instance, in the magazine pieces of Mel Bochner, Dan Graham, and Robert Smithson. But Lamelas also indicates that this shift produces a confusion between such conventional, literary genres of ‘art criticism’, the ‘artist’s statement’ and ‘art theory’.

11. See, for instance, the submission to Publication of Marcel Broodthaers which Lamelas received too late for inclusion in the book.
which prompts a further question, namely what is actually entailed by the performance of reading in the context of conceptual art? This problematic was rarely confronted by conceptual art in a direct fashion but, as Publication demonstrates, its ramifications deserve our closer attention.

So much on Lamelas's mimicry of the linguistic strategies of conceptual art at this time. I shall now turn my attention to the basic opposition that has been running through the previous account of conceptual art; namely, a purely linguistic model of conceptual art and a model of institutional critique. This division within the field of conceptual art has been the topic of much debate, but I shall not contest its historical accuracy. As I have already indicated, Lamelas's work has deservedly obtained recognition as a prominent example of institutional critique. Where I shall deviate the most from the established, reception of Lamelas's work is to question its peculiar historical fate. His practice has become inscribed within a predominantly Euro-American notion of institutional critique, which is not surprising as he mainly worked on those two continents after he left Argentina in 1968. Nevertheless, as Benjamin Buchloh has observed, in a series of works already begun in 1967 Lamelas was able to anticipate “the future (and by now fully realized) transition from a culture once situated and supported within the relative autonomy of the institutions of the bourgeois public sphere into the era of corporate culture, sponsorship and control.” Indeed Buchloh, who has written the most incisive essay on the artist, is right to claim that the work of Lamelas represented “one of the most advanced artistic positions” in the later sixties and this focus and direction of the work was arrived at independently of the hegemonic centers of cultural production in Europe and the United States. One crucial strategy that contributed to this diagnostic or anticipatory value of his practice, as Buchloh observes, was Lamelas's deployment of media technologies, such as film and television, in his work. As a result, the artist's previous sculptural practice, loosely comparable to the strategies of minimalist art, was transformed. The use of media allowed the artist not only to displace the attention of the spectator from the sculptural object onto the architectural conditions of display — a phenomenological effect already achieved by minimalism — but, more importantly, to question how the public sphere was becoming mediated and colonized by the rapidly expanding networks of communication in a society of advanced capitalism (or what I shall come to define as post-Fordist society).

Lamelas was not alone in exploring this route. As several others have argued, among which Alexander Alberro, Argentina produced its own model of conceptual art during the sixties; a model that critically investigated the apparatus of the mass media and its power mechanisms. Lamelas travelled in the same circles as Eduardo Costa, Raúl Escari (who would later collaborate in several projects of Lamelas) and Robert Jacoby, who collectively published “A Media Art (Manifesto)” in 1966. They took their cue from, among other places, the information theory of Marshall McLuhan, yet stripped the latter's thought of its techno-utopian perspective or, at the very least one might state that the threesome approached the mass media with a greater sense of ambivalence. Above all, it was the artificial, “de-realized” status of the media event that caught their critical attention: “Now we propose a work of art in which the moment of production disappears. In this way it will be made clear that works of art are, in reality, pretexts to start up the apparatus of the media.” The manifesto thus announced a new genre of media art where it is no longer important what is communicated, but how it is transmitted. And in statements such as these we may recognize not only a perverted version of McLuhan's catchphrase ‘the medium is the message,’ but also an affinity with the self-reflective procedure of works such as Publication.

We know a lot more about the artistic developments in Argentina during the sixties due to the pioneering work of scholars such as Andrea Giunta and Ana Longoni, however Lamelas is

mostly absent from such histories. In the following, I propose to revisit these early years in Lamelas's career because one might say that he has been too quickly entered into an Euro-American mold of conceptual art and too quickly excised from the Argentinean history. Of course, this is not to return to any strictly national or regionalist notion of writing art history. We need to be sensitive to the interpenetration of the global and the local as it played itself in the Argentinean social, political and cultural context; sensitive, that is, to the uneven temporalities of Argentinean history which co-determined the shape of Lamelas's own 'theory of information.'

In view of this line of inquiry, what I find most striking about Lamelas's practice is its incessant modification of temporality. To experience time in all its disjointedness, unfixed from any narrative order, such is the recurrent fascination exerted by the work. In a manner of speaking, his work is about the fabrication of time - industrial time, media time, collective time - and, above all, about the production of singular events that, at least potentially, possess not only the purely negative capacity to resist all narrative frameworks, but to exist in excess of such sequences. Singular events, that is to say, that do not easily submit to the cumulative procedures of the mass media - one event after another - or do not fit easily within a dialectical system of historical analysis.

There is a name during the sixties and seventies for such events that open onto the possible, rather than the expected, namely the 'pure event' (Deleuze). In contrast to the media event that exists only in a cumulative present, one event following upon the other, the pure event has no present: "It rather retreats and advances in two directions at once, being the perpetual object of a double question: What is going to happen? What has just happened? The agonizing aspect of the pure event is that it is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen; never something which is happening." The revolutionary event is nothing different than such a pure event to the extent that it represents a point of bifurcation, a rupture with causality, which is not merely accidental or aleatory in nature; that is to say, in the revolutionary event there is always "one part of the event that is irreducible to any social determinism." The global upheaval of May '68 is the prime example of such a pure event where time appeared to be suspended, out of joint. An event, to be sure, that surpassed the general horizon of expectation that dominated the living present of industrial capitalism; a horizon that subjugated all temporal difference to a spatial continuum of accumulation. This problematic of the event - how can a pure force of temporal difference take flight within the reproductive system of capitalism? - constitutes perhaps the central issue of political debate during the 1970s. And I maintain that it is this problematic of the event that informs the work of Lamelas as well.

Here I touch upon an issue that is central to determining the current relevance of Lamelas's work. The problematic of the event has been revisited with great frequency in recent times and to make this link apparent I previously used the phrase 'horizon of expectation' in an advised manner. Reinhart Koselleck introduced this term in order to describe the historical condition of modernity which, as the German historian observed, was marked by a basic disjunction between the space of experience and the space of expectation. This disjunction is what determined modernity's progressive view of history. An interesting issue raised by Koselleck's essay is the dialectic of the expected and the unexpected, which as Peter Osborne has noted, is not sufficiently reflected upon by the German philosopher of history. How one should conceive of the category of the 'unexpected event' remains a question that is not fully answered. It is only the unexpected event, Osborne declares, that can penetrate or puncture the horizon of expectation.

from 'beyond,' as it were, and reorganize the relation between experience and expectation. Osborne proposes to clarify this question by comparing Koselleck's analysis of the horizon of expectation to a phenomenological conception of the horizon, which delineates or 'intends' in advance the empty form of a world. Phenomenology posits the horizon as an endlessly receding line: there is no 'beyond.' Perception gives rise to a continuous, outwardly expanding movement of determination, and the 'unexpected' event is always already encapsulated within the moving limit—just one more event to be determined. The edge of the world, to Edmund Husserl, might exist as an "empty mist of obscure indeterminateness" yet it always "populated with intuited possibilities or likelihoods." Hence, phenomenology does not allow a place within its system for the truly unexpected event (or it would have to be Martin Heidegger's category of the anticipatory; but I shall leave aside this point). To cut this digression short, "in the unexpected," Osborne asserts, "meaning is produced (insofar as it is produced) through dialectical negation—not further determination—of the expected."20

Fair enough, but the appearance of the *qualitatively historically new,* which Osborne associates with the unexpected event, seems to demand another mode of explanation. The 'dialectical negation of the expected' works according to a logic of inside versus outside, or so it appears. I will propose, therefore, that we construct another topological model of the event, which no longer operates according to the oppositions of closed/open or inside/outside; a model, furthermore, which can assist us in understanding how the reading films function, as it were, on the very edge of time, working through the ideological materials of their present, but also making connections of a 'revolutionary' kind.

Let me clarify this statement by approaching Koselleck's historical category of the horizon of expectation from a slightly different angle.

Ernesto Laclau has proposed that we differentiate between a phenomenological and structuralist notion of the horizon in considering Koselleck's term. In view of the fact that the historical shift from minimalism into conceptual art is generally framed in similar terms, Laclau's discussion already contains much of interest to us. Yet I shall only zero in on one salient detail of his argument. In order that a signifying system can produce meaning, he reasons in structuralist fashion, two conditions must be met. First of all the semiotic play of difference must be artificially limited; in short, a horizon must be established. Secondly, a place must be given to a so-called *empty signifier* within the semiotic system. The empty signifier is what constitutes the very potentiality of meaning; it allows differences to circulate within the system. Lacking any specific meaning—a null sign—the empty signifier is also, paradoxically marked by an excess of meaning that cannot be exhausted or contained by the signifying system. In other works, this empty signifier, like a horizon, is both open and closed at the same time: "In a horizon the signifier signifies something different from its usual signified—i.e., it signifies the ultimate impossibility on which the process of signification is based." The horizon does, therefore, is to introduce an effect of distortion in structure of the sign; it requires the production of empty signifiers. And it is precisely the production of such empty signifiers in Lamelas's work, such as the numerous blank screens that populate his oeuvre, which I shall investigate in the following.

Keeping this non-dialectic notion of the empty signifier in mind, we now arrive at the crux of the matter. Conceptualism has generally been discussed in terms of its critical relationship to the dominant *structures of signification* and *institutional conditions of production* that make up, what we may call, the ideological apparatus of artistic presentation. What goes hand-in-hand in this type of analysis is a dialectical critique of radical negation (or, what Osborne refers to as a

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“commitment to experimental practices of negation”) and a semiotic critique based on the dismantling or deconstruction of ideological codes. During the 1970s, dialectics and semiotics attempted to join hands in fabricating what is known as ideology critique. Within the field of film criticism, for instance, this approach has become known as apparatus theory, a hybrid fusion of Althusserian and Lacanian concepts, or what, D.N. Rodowick, in more general terms, has called the discourse of political modernism.23 As Rodowick explains, the discourse of political modernism developed an aesthetic politics of textuality or écriture (i.e. a theory of filmic reading) within the domain of avant-garde film, which was subverted by such dialectical oppositions as modernism/realism, theoretical/ideological practice, and deconstruction/code. Yet equivalent modes of ideology critique were operative in the field of contemporary art as well (and, in fact, apparatus theory was cognizant of modernist theories of art): institutional critique is to a large extent the counterpart in art history of apparatus theory in film history.

Both critical theories – apparatus theory and institutional critique – were directed at a demystification of the mythical effects of their respective cultural ‘apparatus’: classical cinema and the modernist museum. Whereas apparatus theory derives its name from Louis Althusser’s concept of the ideological state apparatus [appareils idéologiques d’État], institutional critique has a somewhat different derivation, descending by way of Peter Bürger’s Theory of the Avant-Garde.24 Both models of political aesthetics, however, share a similar understanding of the repressive nature of the cultural institution. The ideological apparatus (whether that of cinema or the museum) situates the viewing subject within an enclosed space, seemingly without a connection to an exterior, in order to bestow upon this captivated subject the illusion of sovereignty. In other words, the ideological apparatus secretes or individuates a transcendental subject; that is, an individual whose conviction in the presentness of the filmed reality or work of art is absolute. Perhaps this abbreviated formula leaves something to be desired, but I shall not unpack this question in all its density here. In a succinct fashion, we may state that classical cinema proceeds by enforcing the spectator’s identification with the projective mechanism in itself, whereas the modern museum prods the spectator into identifying with a universal subject of aesthetic judgment.

Several authors, including myself, have identified a structuralist procedure of decomposition at work within the films of Lamelas. The artist was in fact cognizant of semiotic theory during the later sixties and had been drawn in particular to the writings of Roland Barthes.25 In such films as Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning) or Cumulative Script (1971), which develop various permutations of a basic set of filmic segments, it is not difficult, as Jean-Cristophe Royoux has suggested, to discern the demonstration of “a generic law governing the construction of all narrative frameworks.” Yet the reading films do not allow us to frame the film-text – here to be understood in a quite literal manner – strictly within a semiotic theory of reading. That is to say, the reading films do not present the film-text as a closed system of meaning, as in Barthes’ notion of the ‘classic text,’ that is to be dismantled into its component parts in order to expose the conventionality of its narrative codes. In the Laing film, for instance, the text not only constitutes as the literal object of the film, but also a kind of performative script that gradually erodes all subjective positions of self-identity, entering the ‘reading subject’ into a discursive field of relationships that remain in flux: I am being done by the it I am doing/it is doing it.

25. In conversation with the author, April 2, 2011. Notes on Barthes’s Elements of Semiology are contained among Lamelas’s personal papers at the Getty Center.
But there are still two lingering questions that need to be resolved before I can conclude this excursus on method: How did a historical dialectic of conceptualism become articulated? And why doesn’t this dialectic allow a proper place for the notion of the event I have been gradually unfolding? For this I shall need to return to the essay of Buchloh. Without violating the complexity of his argument, it is possible to distill the basic dialectical framework which guides his account of conceptual art in general and Lamelas’s work in particular. Here, for instance, is Buchloh’s impressive summation of the historical project of conceptualism:

“Inasmuch as conceptual art insisted on the assimilation of the technologies of the increasingly global communications industries, it removed itself further than any avant-garde internationalism from the framework of cultural specificities, be they those of discursive conventions, social institutions or the cultural orders of the nation state… A new model of internationalism and ‘abstraction’ had been developed therefore by conceptual art… Two contradictory tendencies then seem to operate at the center of this new abstraction. One aspires to be emancipatory and self-critical, to purify the aesthetic of narrative and representation from its implicit parasitical dependency on myth and cult. The other enacts an oppressive and controlling condition, erosive of the very possibility of aesthetic experience altogether, inasmuch as the aesthetic could have been defined as an anamnetic practice within which historical experience could be reflected and reconstructed.”

The ‘bad object’ within Buchloh’s dialectical schema, without doubt, is the model of linguistic conceptualism. And it is equally apparent that the Office of Information and Time as Activity, to name two examples, constitute perfect representatives of the emancipatory tendency within conceptual art, which the author refers to. A tendency, moreover, that I have already identified by the name of institutional critique. These two works not only explore the intermeshing of the institutional spaces of art and the global networks of communication, but also go to extreme lengths in order to empty the work of all narrative or symbolic content. It is on the basis of these two tactics – a reduction of the content of the work of art to an abstract state of ‘pure information’ and a deconstruction of the institutional and discursive framework of art production and display – that Lamelas’s practice is entered into the same genealogical series of institutional critique as, for instance, the artists Marcel Broodthaers or Daniel Buren who, as a matter of fact, both collaborated with Lamelas on certain projects.

However, as Buchloh acknowledges, the twin tendencies of conceptual art – ‘emancipatory’ versus ‘controlling’ – constitute two sides of the same coin. They are, indeed, fatally conjoined from the outset. When we conceive the project of conceptual art in such dialectical terms, namely as a radical critique of representation that turns the ideological apparatus of the mass media against itself, this project becomes ensnared in a double bind. The objectifying logic of the mass media spectacle cannot be escaped by evacuating all narrative meaning and reducing the medium to a zero degree. Ultimately, conceptual art ends up internalizing the principle of reification it attempted to negate: “to the degree that [conceptual art] eliminates representation as a privileged convention of artistic knowledge and historical memory, it also prolonged – at the very center of a cultural practice of resistance the elimination of experience that the principles of a technologically advanced culture of spectacle enforced.” And thus we come to a rather dramatic conclusion: If the self-critical project of conceptual art is best understood in terms of such a relentless pursuit of negative aesthetics – and on a certain level of analysis I would agree it must – then it will find itself locked into a blind alley. Coming full circle, conceptual art will assume the very features of the “advanced society of total administration” (Buchloh) that it attempted to oppose.

The circle will close, that is, unless artistic practice is capable of latching onto a different field.

of social antagonism. For instance, *The Desert People* can be understood, as Buchloh proposes, to offer a timely exit from the impasses of conceptualism. Constituting his first feature film, *The Desert People* adopts the narrative conventions of mainstream cinema in order to venture, as Buchloh writes, further into the territory of the culture industry. Rather than resisting the media apparatus from without, *The Desert People* can be shown to dismantle the ideological codes of the media from within, disrupting in paradoxical fashion the difference between the cinematic genres of fiction and documentary and dispersing the identificatory mechanisms that structure the viewing experience of narrative cinema. The dialectic is thus displaced onto another ground of operation, burrowing deeper into the cultural apparatus of cinema itself.

I don’t disagree with the aptness of this argument when it comes to analyzing the apparatical level of artistic production, which modernist aesthetics, more often than not, had obscured. However, there is a limit inscribed within the method of ideology critique that even Osborne’s notion of the event as ‘dialectical negation of the expected’ is not able to overcome. In other words, the paradoxical nature of the event, this strange topological fold in time, which Laclau has defined as a co-existence of openness and closure, cannot be theorized from the methodological position of dialectics. What we need, in the words of Michel Foucault, is not only an archival analysis of the past, but a diagnostic analysis as well; that is to say, a manner of discerning the anticipatory value of Lamelas’s practice and not just its critique of existing systems of signification and institutional control. What has been said of apparatus theory, may be said of institutional critique as well: it comprehends its object of analysis – the closed, ideological apparatuses [appareils] of cultural production and display – at the very moment of its passing into history.

Writing during the 1970s, Foucault argues that the archive is not what establishes our identity, but what separates us from ourselves: “[The archive] establishes that we are difference, that our reason is the difference between discourses, our history the difference between times.” The historical archive forms an “edge of time that surrounds our present, overlooks it and indicates its alterity; the archive is what, outside of us, delimits us.” Therefore, if the archive constitutes a specific historical, stratum of knowledge, a certain regularity of the sayable and visible, it is not the reproductive mechanisms of any repressive system of signification, which forms the focus of Foucault’s diagnostics in contrast to the analytic practice of ideology critique. Rather Foucault is concerned with those thresholds of transformation, those singular points of mutation where a ‘difference between times’ opens up.

Whereas the stratified domains of history – the archive – are susceptible to analyses of a dialectic or semiotic nature, Foucault will come to argue that the “difference between times,” whereby the social order of the archive becomes fundamentally transformed, requires another, genealogical mode of analysis that is focused on relations of power. An analysis that, so to speak, takes root in those agonistic zones of strategic conflict, where a struggle between social forces unfolds, which potentially results in a different regime of domination. Ideology critique has provided us with a useful concept to identify one such specific, repressive regime of power, namely the ‘ideological state apparatus,’ but it was Foucault’s essential contribution to retool this notion, defining the apparatus not as a closed, institutional space determined by rigid codes, but as a (potentially) open system, or dispositif, consisting of a network of relationships between a heterogeneous assemblage of institutions, technologies, laws and discourses. Periodically, this dynamic system of relationships becomes stabilized within specific formations of knowledge (i.e. archives), modes of visibility and forms of subjectivity that characterize a particular, historical order of society (e.g. the disciplinary regime of industrial society). A dispositif, therefore, designates a socio-political regularity that determines which ways of seeing, speaking and acting are acknowledged as normative modes of thought and behavior during a

definite historical period. Yet, and here lies the crux, a dispositif is *not* reducible to a fixed system of rules; that is to say, it has a "dominant strategic function." The dispositif "is always inscribed within a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain limits of knowledge that arise from it and, to an equal degree, condition it." What counts, ultimately, is how the dispositif functions as a response to an urgency, how a concrete intervention takes places within an existing relation of social forces "either so as to develop them in a particular direction, or to block them, to stabilize them, and to utilize them."

Gilles Deleuze, one of Foucault's most perceptive readers, has asserted precisely this vectorial spatiality of the dispositif where not only continuous lines of stratification or sedimentation are deposited, but also lines of fissure emerge which break apart chains of variables, disperse groups of statements, and scatter discursive positions of speech. To be exact, a dispositif is made up of three moving lines – the entwined trajectories of Knowledge, Power, and Subjectivity – but each line is subject to multiple derivations, mutations and transformations. Thus Deleuze felt compelled to rectify a common misperception of Foucault's later work: "Some have thought that Foucault was painting the portrait of modern societies as disciplinary apparatuses in opposition to the old apparatuses of sovereignty. This is not the case: the disciplines Foucault described are the history of what we are slowly to be and our current apparatus is taking shape in attitudes of open and constant control that are very different from the recent closed disciplines.... In every apparatus we must untangle the lines of the recent past from the lines of the near future: the archive from the current, the part of history and the part of becoming, the part of analysis and the part of diagnosis." Famously, Deleuze cast the 'difference between times' in terms of a difference between disciplinary and control regimes of power. A difference that today, more commonly, is theorized as a difference between Fordist and post-Fordist societies. We might equally state, in light of the previous discussion, that the horizon of expectation that characterized a disciplinary society has become transformed in ways that were only gradually becoming intelligible during the seventies.

And so I return, in the end, to the familiar theme of the horizon which acted in phenomenological theory as an indefinite boundary between inside and outside. We might now gain an alternate appreciation of the topological character of the horizon, one more attuned to Laclau's thesis that "a horizon requires the production of tendentially empty signifiers." Clearly, any social mechanism of confinement refers to an outside. Yet, as Deleuze has stated, *that which is confined within a social dispositif of power is precisely its outside. To be more precise, he continues, we must in fact distinguish between three different categories of the outside or exterior: there is the outside which exists as zone of non-formalized forces; there is the exterior as the domain of concrete assemblages, where relations between forces are formalized; and there are the forms of exteriority which establish a dispersion or distribution of words and things. Hence, "forces always come from an outside, from an outside that is farther away than any form of exteriority." Thus each regime of power is constituted as a network of relationships between forces, a connective system between singular points that is deposited in the historical assemblages of the archive. Yet each regime also includes relatively free or unbound points, "points of resistance" or "mutational points," that pre-empt any permanent form of closure. A dispositif is meta-stable at best; it always folds back into the informal outside where the between the points of resistance are "tossed about" and relational field of forces becomes decomposed. And concluding, Deleuze observes with rhetorical flair that "strata merely collected and solidified the visual dust and

31. Deleuze, "What is a Dispositif?," pp. 345-346.
32. Laclau, "Horizon, Ground, and Lived Experience," p. 108
34. Idem, p. 121.
the sonic echo of the battle raging above,” whereas the informal outside is “a domain of uncertain doubles and partial deaths, where things continually emerge and fade.” This informal outside is in no way comparable to the “misty and never fully determinable” horizon of phenomenology nor is it determinable within the dialectic schemas of ideology critique. It is to a consideration of this informal outside, inhabited by the paradoxical temporality of the event that I shall not turn.

1. Reading Borges

*The Aporias of Time*

Let me begin by reading along with the film, narrowing our vision down to the specific paragraph that Lamelas lifted from Borges’s “A New Refutation of Time.” In this passage, Borges recalls from memory a passage from Mark Twain, who evokes a fleeting instant of semi-consciousness as it flickers into being between two moments of sleep. Huckleberry Finn awakes in the middle of the night on his raft, “lost in partial darkness.” He opens his eyes, and sees “a vague number of stars, an indistinct line of trees” and then “sinks back into his immemorable sleep as into dark waters.”

The purpose of this paraphrase by Borges is to illustrate the basic contention of his essay that “every instant is autonomous.” The universe is not a sum total of all events, he argues. Only each individual moment that we experience can be said to truthfully exist. This singular present of Huch, this brief interval of consciousness sandwiched between moments of oblivion, contains his whole existence. (Psychology teaches us, Borges wryly observes, that the present lasts between several seconds and the smallest fraction of a second and thereby gives us the full measure of the ‘history of the universe.’) Phrases such as the ‘life of a man’ or ‘one night in his life’ are but fictional conflations of such autonomous moments. The continuity of a single time in which all events are linked, Borges concludes, is but an illusion of human consciousness.

We do well to take a more extended look at Borges’s text, not because it contains some kind of key to unlock the meaning of Lamelas’s work, but because it will allow us to think or, if you will, read with his films. Let me, therefore, back up a bit and start at the beginning. In “A New Refutation of Time,” Borges applies himself to the task of presenting a serious case for the ‘refutation of time’—a proposition that Lamelas wholeheartedly subscribes to—but we also need to pay attention to the formal logic in which this proposition is cast. What are the logical rules according to which Borges plays his game and how might these rules be of significance to Lamelas’s film?

According to his own account, Borges follows a method “as old as Zeno’s arrow.” That is to say, he proceeds by way of a *reductio ad absurdum*. Idealism, Borges argues, has demonstrated that nothing exists outside the mind’s perception of things: neither primary qualities of things (e.g. solidity or extension) nor absolute space can be said to be anything else than a fabrication of the mind. If the relationship between things (or between things and their predicates) were to exist outside the mind’s perception of them, then one’s thought process would be condemned to a form of infinite regression. Behind each perception that I perceive there would have to be another perceiver, *ad infinitum*. What would be more absurd, Borges declares, then “to add to the river and the riverbank Huck perceives the notion of another substantive river and another bank.” Indeed, he opinions, “to add another perception to that immediate network of perceptions, is, for idealism, unjustifiable.”

In the “A New Refutation of Time,” Borges shows himself to be a true heir of the empirical skepticism of Hume (a philosophical heritage that Deleuze has also claimed as his own.) Borges cites the Scottish philosopher in “A New Refutation of Time,” declaring that each individual is but “a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity.”

35. ibidem.
There is no transcendental self, no Cartesian ego, that persists behind this succession of perceptions and thoughts. The notion of personal identity is therefore anathema to Hume as well as to Borges. One cannot even speak of the mind’s perceptions, Borges states, since the mind does not exist outside the series of perceptions as such. Instead of ‘I think’ there is only ‘it thinks’: “there is not behind the face, a secret self governing our acts or receiving our impressions; we are only the series of those imaginary acts and those errant impressions.” Indeed even the concept of a temporal series of perceptions or ideas is misplaced inasmuch as we live in a “world of evanescent impressions, a world without matter of spirit, neither objective nor subjective; a world without the ideal architecture of space; a world made of time... an inexhaustible labyrinth, a chaos, a dream.”

Will the instant in which the drifting Huck briefly awoke ever surface in his consciousness again? And will the instant at the moment of its re-emergence be retrofitted to form a meaningful episode within Huck’s personal history? We don’t know. Borges either won’t say or can’t remember. We don’t even know how this moment might have contributed to the establishment of Huck’s character in Twain’s own readerly narrative. Which is precisely the objective of Borges. Huck is not a character but a singularity: a pre-individual consciousness of time that is yet to be subdivided between a past and a future. Which is precisely how such a pure or involuntary image of memory manifests itself, namely as a floating image unhinged from any chronological order. Similar to Proust’s recollections of the disorientating experience of awakening, ‘Huck’ does not exist as a fully embodied subject who recognizes himself in a particular situation or state of affairs. Which is not to say that the nocturnal image as such lacks individuation; it is just not an individuation of persons, bodies or things. Deleuze has a name for such moments, namely haecctities, which may concern an hour, a season, an atmosphere, a degree of heat, even an intensity of white. We are not dealing with clock time here. A haecctity does not simply oppose the singularity of an instant to that of duration. Persons and things acquire form and a substance within duration, but a haecctity possesses the potential, if not definitive power to affect and direct the metamorphosis of subjects and things. What Borges described is the “becoming-night” of Huck: Huck and nocturnal landscape, body and milieu are immersed within each other. “Haecctity, fog, glare. A haecctity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it always in the middle.” Haecctities, in short, belong to the paradoxical time of the event which never takes place as a chronometric instant, but is both going to happen and just happened.

Accordingly Borges opinions that it is senseless to provide Huck’s nocturnal event with an exact date and time. We may ascertain, for instance, that it took place on the night of June 7, 1849, between 4:10 and 4:11, but that is to reassert chronological time and deprive the moment of its eventness. What then of Lamelas’s frequent, almost obsessive notation of such chronometric facts in a series of works he made between 1969 and 1970? For instance, Time as Activity consists of three stationary shots of Dusseldorf, each four minutes long, taken between 11.25 AM and 11.29 AM (the parking lot of the Kunsthalle where the film was exhibited during Prospect 69), between 3 PM and 3.04 PM (a flowing fountain along the upscale shopping street Köningsallee), 5 PM and 5.04 PM (a bird eye’s view of a busy traffic intersection between the major department stores). Similarly the photo-series Antwerp-Brussels (People and Time) inscribes each photograph with a caption identifying the photographed individual, the place, and the exact time of day: “Anny de Decker Antwerp 1.20 PM.” “Marcel Broodthaers Brussels 2.13 PM.” or David Lamelas himself who is captured on camera in Brussels at 1.55 PM. Or to give one final example, during Film 18 Paris IV.70 (People and Time - Paris) three performers - Raül Escari, Pierre Grinberg, and Daniel Buren - announce the time at the beginning of the film and at its end. Daniel Buren, for instance, selects a starting point 4:25 PM – and checks his watch until three minutes have elapsed. He pronounces the time 4:28 PM – and then the film ends.

What are we to conclude at this point? Is it possible to continue reading the practice of Lamelas with Borges or do we need to part ways? Must we infer that Lamelas refutes Borges' refutation of the existence of (chronological) time? Before we reach such a hasty (and faulty) conclusion, we must remember what Borges stressed about our experience of time: is not a question of a dialectical opposition between the present as a mere measure of the actualization of the event (chronological time) and the pure event as that which has no present but is always of the past and the future. The pure event, therefore, does not enter into a cinematic dialectics of the still and the moving image. As Deleuze has argued, drawing among others on the writings of Borges, we must reckon with a reciprocal exclusion between the two readings of time:

*Sometimes* it will be said that only the present exists; that it absorbs or contracts in itself the past and the future, and that, from contraction to contraction, with ever-greater depth, it reaches the limits of the entire Universe and becomes a living cosmic present. It suffices in this case to proceed according to the order of the decontractions, in order that the Universe begin again and that all its presents be restored. Thus the time of the present is always a limited but infinite time; infinite because cyclical, animating a physical eternal return as the return of the Same, and a moral eternal wisdom as the wisdom of the Cause.  

In this sense we might note that Borges got it wrong in "A New Refutation of Time": the pure event does *not* belong to the temporality of an eternal return of the same, unless, that is, one misconstrues the event as an indivisible and autonomous present, like an individual cell of time. The pure event, as Deleuze argues, is of a very different nature. It belongs not to *chronos* but to the empty form of time, to *aion*, which constitutes a present that is endlessly subdivisible within itself:

«Sometimes, on the other hand, it will be said that only the past and future subsist, that subdivide each present, ad infinitum, however small it may be, stretching it out over their empty line...such time is not infinite, since it never comes back upon itself; it is unlimited, a pure straight line the two extremities of which endlessly displace themselves from each other and become deferred into the past and the future.»

And to illustrate this counter-intuitive image of non-linear time which appears as a line, “straight and without thickness,” Deleuze cites from Borges' short story “The Death and the Compass,” referring to a Greek labyrinth that consists of “a single straight line that is invisible and endless.” The singular points of each event are distributed across this line, but they are endlessly subdivided, causing all events to communicate with each other. All events are non-linked in the sense of forming a sequence or succession, but they can be potentially re-linked as a new series. Thus the event can be said to exist on the line, but it exists as a *virtual* point without density. We may think, for instance, of Borges tale “The Lottery of Babylon” where the reader is asked to imagine a game in which chance would intervene during every aspect of the drawing. Such a game would require an infinite number of drawings, but in order to execute the game it is not necessary to conceive time as infinitely extended (chronos), but only as infinitely subdivisible (aion). Which leads us back, once more to Zeno’s famous set of paradoxes, which haunted so many discussions from Bergson to Deleuze of the cinematic illusion of movement. But also delivers us to the doorstep of that quintessential science of topological problems, namely set theory, which teaches us that the mathematical division of a straight line not only produces an infinite set of points, but an endless multitude of infinite sets.

In his book on cinema, Deleuze proposes that the movement-image belongs to the sequence of *chronos* that unfolds within an infinitely extended, absolute space. In this context, we may also recall the three topological aspects of the dispositif mentioned above: the movement image is concerned with an integration and differentiation of the forms of exteriority: the establishment of

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trajectories and territories, the integration of verbal and visual images. The movement-image is the product of a rational cut (as in continuity editing), which forms part of the sequence that it separates and divides. The time-image, on the other hand, relates to the informal outside, it “sets the interval free.” Rather than creating the impression of an external world, which is grounded upon a real or possible extension or depth, the time-image is the product of an irrational cut between incommensurable images. The irrational cut establishes an absolute contact with a non-totalizable, asymmetrical outside and inside, a confrontation of an inside and an outside independent of distance. The irrational cut relates, therefore, to the “points of resistance” or “mutational points” that prevent a dispositif from closing in on itself; the irrational cut destabilizes the disciplinary apparatus of classical cinema. The series of the time-image is traced by an aleatory point the irrational cut — that subdivides the singular points of each event and causes them to communicate.

This notion of an irrational cut is perfectly illustrated in The Desert People, the first feature movie that Lamelas made in 1974. I have discussed this movie at great length elsewhere so I shall limit myself here to a few explanatory comments. The Desert People mimics the aesthetics of both documentary and commercial film, threading two complementary strands of cinematic representation together in such skillful fashion that the whole narrative edifice collapses in the end, revealing the whole film to be based upon an impossible ‘accident’ — an singular event that cannot be incorporated within either chronological series. The premise of the film is based on the epistemological contradiction of anthropological research, namely the inability of the fieldworker to extract him- or herself from the object of study. In other words, the relation between the anthropologist, carrying his camera and other recording tools, and the native is not a symmetrical one. The Desert People transposes this dilemma to the United States, examining the internal ‘colonialism’ of white, middle-class society in its relationship to the aboriginal population of Papagos. The guiding theme of The Desert People is the desire of the film characters to imagine a tribal form of commonality that might compensate for the privatization of public life in a market economy.

The movie is constructed from separate interviews (harking back to the procedure of the Duras film) with the protagonists. They consist, among others, of an anthropologist, a student, and a journalist and represent a cross-section of American society. Their meandering and sometimes contradictory recollections of the desert people only succeed in shrouding the latter in further mystery. It becomes clear from their comments that the Native Americans form a projective screen for the characters’ own feelings of social disaffection. As mentioned in my introduction, the last interview is conducted with Manny, an actual member of the Papagos people, who is the only one who “speaks the truth” in the movie, as Lamelas has pointed out. Filmed against a desert landscape, in contrast to the urban setting of the other interviews, he comments on the imminent annihilation of his native culture and the need to rescue it. In the film he plays a guide who will lead the others to the reservation, but then, in a sudden lapse of character, he states: “This is one way of doing it, I think, performing.” He switches into Spanish, and then into his native tongue. There is no translation. In the next shot, the car that had been carrying the group to the reservation for a second visit, careens off the road, plunging the travelers to their death. What is to come and what has arrived are thus unable to meet up in time.

The Desert People is constructed around an impossible accident, an aleatory point, that marks the spatio-temporal gap between two incompossible series of movement-image that Deleuze calls the time-image. The accident is an unexpected, if not paradoxical event that cannot be reduced to any chronological order. Nothing quite as radical disturbs the temporality of the reading films, although they do institute a slight sense of dissynchrony between the times of reading, viewing and projecting. Likewise, if we consider the three works Time as Activity, Antwerp-
it would seem that only the category of the movement-image is in play. Time as Activity, in particular, provides us with spatialized images of time: the moving traffic, the spraying fountain. A time, furthermore, that is additive in nature, consisting of an accumulation of identical time-units, like the rows of stationary cars in the parking lot. There is even an accident in one shot of Time as Activity – a car that breaks down on the intersection – which constitutes precisely the kind of accident, in contrast to the car accident in The Desert People, that can be reduced to a mere episodic incident that does not disrupt the linearity of narrative time. Everybody remembers the accident in Time as Activity, Lamelas has remarked, which only goes to show how an indifferent series of images is subjected to the workings of voluntary memory: a point of narrative interest is discovered, however slight, in order to relieve the boredom of the viewer. Indeed Time as Activity lacks all narrative suspense. Its perception of time is that of time objectified.

And yet, and yet…. There is something utterly strange about these three works. Note for instance that in each case the precise time is given, but no date. A very precise interval has been liberated, as it were, from chronological time. In watching Time as Activity or Film 18 Paris IV.70 we become acutely aware of watching an indirect representation of time – like watching a clock – but also, particularly in the latter film, of participating in a collective production of time.

The Production of Time

What might Deleuze’s notion of “setting the interval free” mean in relation to the practice of Lamelas? To explore this question I shall turn to two film installations, Cumulative Script and Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning) that date from 1971 and 1972. Starting with the latter, the installation Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning) consists of a silent film loop that consists of simple, everyday actions involving a single woman: she walks in a park, gets into a car, enters a building, sits at a desk, answers a telephone. As Lamelas points out, there are only two moments or events that potentially disrupt or intervene within the mundane, ‘documentary’ quality of the images: a water glass that is accidently broken and a telephone call that interrupts the woman’s solitary activities (as the film is silent, the viewer does not know what the call is about). Film Script is constructed around these two moments leaving the spectator undecided how these events modify the film: are they merely contingent events belonging to the reality of documentary film or are or are they functional devices within a narrative plot? Film Script makes no distinction. Indeed the film presents an “accumulation of scenes to create a film syntax perceived by the viewer as fictional facts in the theatrical film and as the truth in documentaries.” The narrative and documentary series converge, as it were, upon the two incidents and since the film is projected as a loop the two series keep intersecting and diverging. There is only moment of stoppage in the film, which does not coincide with the breaking glass or the ringing telephone but occurs when the woman, after leaving the room and entering the street, briefly swerves around to face the camera. At this point Lamelas inserted a brief freeze-frame.

The film is not shown alone but alongside three slide projections, each re-assembling the filmic syntax in a different manner. The first slide projection replicates the original, consecutive order of the images, providing, in the words of the artist, “full information” of the film, whereas the second projection presents “altered information” by editing one of the film sequences in a different order and the third projection shows “less information by erasing one scene altogether. The purpose of the slide projections, according to Lamelas, was “to show how fact can be manipulated through film – because of censorship, commercial aims or political manipulation for example.” In decomposing the film into its individual elements and re-articulating the relationship between these elements, Lamelas implemented in a deliberate fashion what may be
IN PLACE OF FILM

called a structuralist reading of film—a method of ideological critique that remains implicit in the reading films. Whereas the film appears to circle around an accidental core, the whole installation submits the film to a process of permutation and randomization. However, once again, it is the complex temporal logic of this film that primarily interests me—its eventness, so to speak—rather than its deconstruction of the dominant codes and mechanisms of cinematic experience. For reasons I have already pointed out, it is not sufficient to fully align the films of Lamelas with the semiotic strategies of ‘political modernism’ or apparatus theory. Another perspective, another ‘diagnostic’ mode of analysis is required in the present.

Although Film Script might easily be situated within the trajectory of counter-cinema, following the tenets of apparatus theory, there are no doubt distinct major differences between Lamelas’s practice and the institutional setting in which the structuralist filmmakers of, for instance, the London Film Co-op operated. Furthermore, it is not difficult to point out that a film like Jean-Luc Godard’s Le Gai Savoir (shot immediately directly after May 1968) develops a far more sophisticated investigation of the ideological codes of the media system. But such comparisons are of limited value and should not detract from the necessity of establishing an acute sense of the precise formal logic that is applied in Lamelas’s film. To this end, it should be noted that Film Script is wholly constructed from, what Roland Barthes called, “catalyzer” functions.” These are supplementary types of action, a kind of filler material, that serve to delay or accelerate the pace of the narrative. Perhaps we may also call them “affective” scenes since the catalyzer functions set a mood—a kind of light or atmospheric circumstances. To be sure, an affect is not the same as a subjective emotion, it belongs to a singularity (a haecctiy) that is not integrated within a plot. Catalyzers do not determine the direction of the story. The decisive moments in a plot, rather, are formed by so-called cardinal functions, which force a character to choose between alternative courses of action. Cardinal functions provide a narrative with its destiny, but they are absent in Film Script. Or perhaps it is better to state that we cannot decide which action could be of cardinal importance in Film Script. The installation confines the difference between these functions; it mixes their codes.

Cumulative Script like Film Script is suspended within an interstitial time and space. The film is based on six separate shots which are added together in order to present an elemental sequence of events: two men arrive from different directions in a park where they spend some time, first conversing and then fighting with each other, then they depart along the same path they previously took. Even though the order of events is evident, the editing of the film is quite unusual, undermining the impression of continuity by repeatedly returning, as it were, on its own tracks.

The shots are mounted in such a fashion as to construct a staggered structure that takes the form of an inverted, mathematical progression: $a + (a + b) + (a + b + c + d) + (a + b + c) + (a + b + c) + (a + b + c) + (a + b + c) + (a + b + c) + (a + b + c)$, whereby the letters $a, b, c,$ and $d$ represent the individual shots. Shots $a$ and $b$ show each man walking down a different street towards the park and shots $a'$ and $b'$ show the same activity in the reverse direction. During shot $c$ they meet and converse—a scene that is repeated in $c'$—and in the shot $d$, the middle point of the film, they fight with each other. Note, however, that the inversion is not perfectly symmetrical in shape.

Together with the fact that the individual shots are connected by jump cuts, the film creates the impression of continuously coming together and pulling apart. Cumulative Script is a film that repeatedly erases itself and recommences again.

Once more Cumulative Script presents us with the aporetic structure of time: chronos and/or aion. The film composes time in an additive fashion, as an accretion of present moments. Yet this succession of presents doesn’t just spread out in space, but is simultaneously submitted to a process of internal subdivision. As a result the event (i.e. the encounter of the two men) can be perceived to ‘take place’ in chronometric time and to be always either on the verge of happening or already

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transpired. The temporality of the film is unhinged; an impression that becomes quite poignant in that fleeting instant where one of the performers, as in *Film Script*, briefly looks into the camera providing a slight jolt to the viewer. For a fraction of a second the film is interrupted before the performers resume their previous behavior as if oblivious to the camera. This returning of the gaze, opening a distance between the spectator and the performer, can be understood to a slight nod in the direction of a post-Brechtian aesthetics of defamiliarization. By acknowledging the camera, the performer indicates that he is not an actor seeking to merge with the character he plays. Furthermore, his direct address of the camera underscores that the encounter does not record ‘how it must happen’ or ‘how it has happened,’ but simply how it *may* occur. We are witness to but one actualization, one fulfillment, of a possibly infinite event. The encounter of the two bodies – their conversation and physical struggle – provides a metaphor of the editorial process of ‘matching’ the variable elements of film as such. *Film Script* constitutes a form of disjunctive synthesis: the crossing and interconnection of two different semiotic series – here represented by the dual trajectories of two bodies in space which violently intersect in the park – after which each series diverges in different directions.

There is something else I need to say about these films. They tend to combine two heterogeneous series of images or events only to disconnect them again. In *Manipulation of Meaning*, for example, we may speak of two types of image sequence: a documentary and a fictional one. The documentary series may function as the signifier of the fictional series, but the reverse is also possible. Either the contingent, ‘real’ events acquire intelligibility by converging upon the woman’s story, or the narrative of the woman is an empty framework that allows the world to present itself (according to, say, the realist doctrine of cinema proposed by André Bazin). What I am suggesting is that Lamelas’s films can be defined as *structural objects*. In order to qualify as such, three conditions must be met:\(^1\): (1) There must be two heterogeneous series whereby one is determined as signifier and the other as signified (e.g. the autonomous series of sound and image in film); (2) Each series is constituted by a system of differential relationships according to which the symbolic elements determine themselves reciprocally (i.e. the individual images and shots that enter into the montage structure); (3) The two heterogeneous series converge upon a paradoxical element that is their ‘differenciator’ (défini-

The third condition of the paradoxical element is what shall hold our attention as it returns us to the notion of the empty signifier raised in my introduction. This ‘differenciator’ is what Claude Lévi-Strauss has called the *machine*, among other names, and Deleuze the object = x. This object = x constitutes the factor that allows the symbolic elements or variables within each series and between the two series to undergo a displacement relative to each other. Without such slippage, as Deleuze points out, the two series would reflect each other and the whole system would fall into the static order of the imaginary. In order that meaning be produced, therefore, the object = x must operate like the empty square [*en vide*] in a board game which always jumps around and makes it possible for the pieces on the board to move. In the absence of such an empty place within a symbolic system all variation of variables would cease and semiosis would come to a halt: “distributing the differences throughout the entire structure, making the differential relations vary with its displacements, the object = x constitutes the differenciating element of difference itself.”\(^2\)

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47. Deleuze, “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?,” p. 186.
The object \( = x \) is therefore always displaced in relation to itself; it remains constantly in circulation, traversing the heterogeneous series. In other words, it constitutes the *absolute* place upon which the *relative* places of the elements within the structure depend. That is why Deleuze also calls the object \( = x \) the ‘mobile element’ and we may recognize here what structural linguistics in general refers to as the ‘floating signifier’ or ‘symbolic zero value.’ If our purpose is ‘to free the interval’, then the object \( = x \) is what possesses this power of the interval and can organize the codes of the structural object, but also bring about their dissolution. The object \( = x \) brings into focus what I have previously called the *mutational point* or point of resistance. We may also call it an aleatory point, because its power is one of probability not determinism. The object \( = x \) coincides with a *mutational point* that defines the site where a practice of resistance may take hold in that “it designates a point of permanent revolution, or of permanent transfer.” But how does this notion of the structural object and the mutational point translate back to *Cumulative Script*?

In a perceptive essay on Lamelas, Severo Sarduy has argued that *Cumulative Script* operates as a film that both constitutes and annuls itself in one and the same gesture. The film places the event under erasure, blocking the actualization of the event by means of a false return. The repetition within the film is not readable according to the conventional cinematic codes of a flashback or premonition. There is no narrative sequence, but also no performative act: the event is dissolved into its syntagmatic elements. *Cumulative Script* consists of an accumulation of a-signifying elements. And then Sarduy makes a poignant comment: referring to the clattering sound of clattering projector, he moves that this noise provides a sense of the mutational nature of the structural object as such. Like the crackling of the telephone or radio receiver, which foregrounds the entropic condition of all information chains, *Cumulative Script* points to what lies beneath the interlacing of narrative links – the space of information as such and the necessity of its organization of information. The a-signifying structure of *Cumulative Script* thus refers to a sense of annulment, erasure or lack, but also to a sense of excess or repleteness; that is, to noise. *Cumulative Script* would have us view a world in which patterns of behavior become visible, yet without apparent reason. The movement of the filmic apparatus is not in step with itself. One might be tempted to say, then, that this film projects a blank image, which is not the same as to say that the image is empty of potential significance.

The notion of blankness has surfaced before in relation to Lamelas’s early films, yet there its meaning was harnessed to a dialectical argument. In an admirable choice of words, Buchloh has suggested that certain of Lamelas’s films, dating from 1970, embody an “aesthetic of pure information.” To be sure, Buchloh does not have *Cumulative Script* or *Film Script* in mind: these two films are wholly absent from his essay and, as a matter of fact, so are the two reading films. Instead Buchloh is speaking of the slightly earlier *Time as Activity* (1969) and *Film 18 Paris IV* (1970) which are governed in his words by the twin procedures of “indexical specificity” and “performative precision.” As such these films fit well within the emancipatory and self-critical project of the avant-garde, which seeks to purify the media of any ideological or mythical dimension. All representational content must be removed in order to counter the spectacular effects of the media, which leads straight into a familiar conundrum of negative dialectics, namely a loss of historical memory within the work of art:

Yet in Lamelas’s rigorous reduction of the filmic image to its most elementary functions (pure duration, pure recording, and pure indexical presence), the dialectic of late modernist

48. In his famous analysis of the Polynesian word *manu*, Claude Lévi-Strauss, argues that the “apparently insoluble antinomies” that adhere to this polyvalent term derive from its semiotic function as a symbol in its pure state. That is to say, *manu* is a floating signifier with a *zero symbolic value* “marking the necessity of a supplementary symbolic content over and above that which the signified already contains, which can be any value at all, provided it is still part of the available reserve, and is not already, as the phonologists say, a term in a set.” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, p. 64-65.

49. Idem.
rationality suddenly appears: that the elimination of narrative and of agency, of representation and the imaginary from the (filmic) image, driven by the desire to dismantle the ideological conditions of media representation, manifest the very order of technocratic and administrative rationality that the calculated and industrially produced forms of narrative and myth conceal.\textsuperscript{20}

Following this dialectical series to its end, Buchloh states that Lamelas reaches an impasse in 1970. The artist is said to be in danger, namely, of affirming those social conditions he set out to critique. There is no way forward, one can only attempt to back out of this \textit{cul de sac} by seeking to reintroduce a dimension of representation into one’s work. Thus Buchloh performs his own jump cut in time, skipping forward to \textit{The Desert People} movie, which he presents as Lamelas’s exit from conceptualism. Achieving a symbiotic relation with the mechanisms of the culture industry, according to Buchloh, this movie engages in an exploration of identity as \textit{representation}; that is to say, as linguistically, culturally, historically determined. Which, indeed, is a very accurate description of this movie’s thematic.

\textit{And yet… and yet}. As I also stated in my introduction, Buchloh provides a convincing account of the trajectory Lamelas’s work, highlighting its distinct mode of aesthetic politics. Yet the dialectic mode of analysis followed also contains its limitations. I would maintain that to identify \textit{Time as Activity} and \textit{Film 18 Paris IV.70} as dead ends, or shall I say blanks, is to short-change these works. Does one not, by this line of reasoning, reduce them to a symptomatic instance of the spectacular regime of capitalism they inhabit? Can it not be said, instead, that these films indicate an absence at the heart of the spectacle? An absence, furthermore, which promises at least the potential of some form of resistance? I don’t deny that \textit{Time as Activity} reflects certain aspects of spectacular time, which consists of a mere accumulation of separate instants bearing no relation to lived experience. Yet having said this, \textit{Time as Activity} and \textit{Film 18 Paris IV.70} can also be considered as pure intervals of time that lack any connection to a pre-determined framework or narrative. The new media spaces of information may consist of an accumulation of such instants, but it is the function of the media apparatus to integrate these instants within its logic of control and command, to provide connections between disconnected moments, notwithstanding how tenuous and fleeting such connections may be. But how is one to integrate a film like \textit{Film 18 Paris IV.70} where chronological time not dictates the form of this film, but also constitutes the substance of which it is made? Lamelas employs industrial time, the time of regular, equi-distant units of time, in order to a filmic event that lacks exchange value, either as an episode within a greater narrative structure or as an artistic product that is placed on the market. What is three minutes of film-time worth? A film like \textit{Film 18 Paris IV.70} is measured by industrial time, the mechanical time of the apparatus, yet the time that is \textit{constituted}, which is a product of collective or social labor, does not merely extend the mechanisms of a “technocratic and administrative rationality” (Buchloh). What is the time of industrial society actually made of? On the one hand, time serves as an external measure of the labor process. The time of the clock, the instrumentalized time of Fordist production, measures the difference between use value, the bare time needed to reproduce the labor force, and surplus value, the profit extracted from non-paid labor. One might also put it in the following manner, as Toni Negri has shown:\textsuperscript{51} time becomes the medium between the \textit{measure} and \textit{substance} of industrial labor. In order that there be a measure, there must be a distinction between what is measured and the measure, between a figure and the absolute ground against which the figure can appear. In the example of industrial time, this difference between figure and ground relies on a primary distinction between the separate, or interior domain of commodified labor and a non-productive, non-commodified expanse of everyday life. We are dealing, then, with a Newtonian, chronometric notion of time as the absolute envelope of the order of events. But this antithesis

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between the measure and the substance of labor, between the inside and outside of the capitalist system of production, applies only to the first phase of capitalist accumulation where only an ‘undifferentiated’ form of wage laborer exists. What happens, as Negri asks, during the next historical phase of ‘real subsumption’ where there no longer can be spoken of an outside to the capitalist system of valorization. Labor has then assumed a collective, social form (a process initiated in the factory where workers at various levels of the organization need to work together) in which ‘qualified’, not undifferentiated workers are assimilated. In short, it becomes impossible to distinguish between time as measure and time as substance. Real subsumption, in this case, refers to a renewed process of primitive accumulation where it is time, rather than space, that is dispossessed or de-territorialized only to be re-valorized or re-territorialized within the reproductive cycles of capitalism. In post-Fordism, that is to say, what is produced is time itself. Post-Fordism seeks to control what escaped from Fordism: the excessive time of the event. It seeks an interpenetration of logical, analytical time – the horizon of capitalist command – and the ontological time of self-valorization – the horizon of the event. Lamelas work keeps returning to this problematic of the event, competing with capitalism’s drive to control the event, to appropriate the time of life and not just the time of work.


One is inside
then outside what one has been inside
One feels empty
because there is nothing inside oneself
One tries to get inside oneself
that inside of the outside
that one was once inside
once one tries to get oneself inside what
one is outside:

R.D. Laing, Knots

Experiencia 68

Political tensions within the Argentine art scene came to a head in May 1968 during the Experiencia 68 exhibition at the renowned Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires. The military had seized power in Argentine two years previously and was rapidly instituting a more repressive regime after the period of liberal democracy that preceded it. Not long after the opening of the exhibition in which Lamelas participated, Roberto Plate’s installation El baño [The Bathroom] was censored by the police. Consisting of the reconstruction of a public bathroom with empty stalls that the visitors could enter, the walls had become covered with graffiti. Apparently this was sufficient to provoke the authorities who demanded that Plate’s work be removed. As a result the exhibiting artists decided to withdraw from the exhibit. Photographs taken on June 6, a few weeks after the opening, show Jacoby and others casting their dismantled works onto the street. Two weeks earlier, on May 23, a “Final Statement of the Participants in Experiencias 68” circulated, in which the artists declared their solidarity with the labor and student movements who, as the tract states, are “the principal targets of persecution.” Among the signatures of the statement was that of David Lamelas, although his name was signed in absentia since the artist had left the country earlier in May. He had disembarked for Europe in order to exhibit in the Argentine pavilion at the Venice biennale.

Lamelas left, therefore, right at the moment that events within Buenos Aires were reaching a climax. The politicization of the art scene in Argentine clearly manifested itself in Experiencia 68. The exhibition is part of what Ana Longoni has called the itinerario del ‘68 in which the neo-avantgarde in Argentine gradually dissolved the


53. Lamelas has noted in conversation with the author that he had not read the statement to which his name was appended.
boundaries between artistic and political action. As she describes it this trajectory of radicalization consisted of “a vertiginous sequence of actions and definitions that joined avant-garde and revolution; a political rally bursting into an art opening; with flyers, shouts, and firecrackers; disrupting an award ceremony at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes; and during a lecture in Rosario, kidnapping Romero Brest in what they called 'a simulacrum of a terrorist attack,' cutting off the electricity and shouting a prepared statement; responding collectively to the censorship of a piece by destroying their own works and throwing their remnants into the street.” The sequence culminated in the collective exhibition *Tucumán Arde* ['Tucumán is Burning'] in which artists banded together with the radical wing of the trade union organization in order to protest the economic conditions in the northern province *Tucumán* where the sugar mills were being shut down and thereby cutting off the livelihood of the local working class. The former factory workers were being deprived of steady employment and forced to contend with a more mobile and precarious position within the labor market. This massive re-organization of the economy of Tucumán can be considered to be the combined effect of a governmental policy of developmentalism, which was instituted at the end of the 1950s and opened the country to foreign investment, and the inauguration of a new capitalist phase of primitive accumulation that was unfolding on a global scale.

If I may paint a slightly crude picture of this transformation, the example of Tucumán is symptomatic of the bankrupt policies of developmentalism, which strove to open Argentine to the international markets and rapidly expand its economic base. What was not foreseen by this project of economic expansion was that a shift was already taking place in the industrialized nations between a Fordist and a post-Fordist mode of capitalist organization. In other words, Tucumán brings a process of uneven development into the open, a disynchronous melding of industrial and post-industrial orders, disciplinary forms of social administration existing alongside emergent, informational forms of control. Contemporary conditions on the ground in Argentine were obviously different than in Western Europe or the United States, and I do not propose to offer anything close to a detailed socio-economic analysis of the Argentine situation. Yet something is brought into focus here in the confluence of political, social and artistic orders that is of essence to the practice of Lamelas; that is, to our understanding of what may be called the political aesthetics of his work which is an altogether different matter than the type of artistic engagement displayed in the *Tucumán Arde* project. *Tucumán Arde* has been exhaustively discussed elsewhere and I shall avoid treading too much on familiar ground. What can be observed about this exhibition, however, can also be remarked about *Experiencia* 68: it implemented an anachronistic....


55. After the presidential democracy was reinstated in 1958, a developmentalist strategy was implemented on the basis of the notion that the political legitimacy of government could only be backed up by strong economic growth. Therefore the Argentine market was opened to foreign investment and government and industry were to join hands in order to strengthen and expand the social, economic and cultural institutions of the country. In this fashion Argentine sought to secure a place for itself within the group of industrialized Western countries. A series of cultural institutions were founded around the turn of the decade, such as the Museo de Arte Moderno, the American Art Biennial, sponsored by Kaiser Industries, and Di Tella Institute. The purpose of these institutions was to promote a sense of national culture and to cultivate cross-national exchanges by means of international exhibitions and the award of prizes. The institution building of a developmentalist form of governmentality may be called an attempt to play catch-up with the more advanced social systems of administration in Western Europe and North America. A family of industrialists who already possessed an art collection founded the Di Tella Institute in 1960. The program of the Institute, however, had a much wider scope: it served as a center of advanced research not only in the arts, but also in the fields of economics, medicine, and sociology. The Art Center of the Di Tella Institute formed the center of artistic debate within the Argentine capital until 1968. Directed by Jorge Romero Brest, who was a vocal advocate of a progressive model of the avant-garde, the Art Center presented a dynamic exhibition and lecture program that not only involved many local artists, but also brought a steady stream of foreign critics, curators and artists to Buenos Aires. Without doubt, the Di Tella Institute filled a void for a lengthy period, providing a space of relative freedom where artistic experimentation could take place. Yet in the end the Di Tella Art Center was tainted by the very developmentalist politics that brought it into existence.
composite of political and artistic strategies. On the one hand, we encounter a mode of engaged, activist art, which is designed to counter the ideological machine of industrial society, using documentary methods to mediate the experience of the working class and counter the 'official' truth of what was happening in the province. Importantly this strategy considered the identity of the workers, above all, to be forged within the community of the unionist organization. (We need to keep in mind that it was the unions, as much as the communist party, that were to betray the non-aligned, extraparliamentary movement of May '68 in France.) On the other hand, as I pointed out, the social crisis in Tucumán provided advance notice of a global restructuring of capitalism: the diminishing of the industrial base of capitalism and the emergence of new informatized forms of labor. The artists responded to this crisis by establishing an alternative ‘information circuit’ on the basis of a collaborative form of knowledge production. Tucumán Arde, in other words, establishes the very organizational form of social labor that is characteristic of post-Fordism, whereas it responds to a situation that is still conceived in terms of an industrial, disciplinary society. It lies beyond the scope of the present text, to elaborate this thesis, but we know that the counter-information effort of Tucumán Arde quickly ran into the forces of overt censorship and violent repression (and thus yet another system of power the Argentine situation). Following the example of Tucumán Arde, critical practices of art in Argentina dispersed to other institutional spaces than the art gallery or museum and, to a degree, would even go underground. The ‘great refusal’ of the institutional spaces of the art world, which was common to many conceptualist practices towards the end of the sixties took, therefore, a more dramatic turn in Argentine than in the United States or Western Europe.

As I noted, the contradictions that exploded on the surface in Tucumán Arde were already present in Experiencia 68. Oscar Bony, for instance, exhibited La familia obrera [The Working Class Family], paying a family to pose on a plinth for the entire duration of the exhibition, accompanied by a sound recording of their daily domestic activities. Although this work may appear to forge an alliance between performance art and political action in order to raise a set of troubling ethical questions, as Bony explained himself, this work may also be considered to displace its own critical strategy. What is put on display in this tableaux vivant? A living representative of the proletariat or the embalmed specimen of an industrial working class (and bourgeois family structure) that was becoming extinct? Which is not to say that rise of a post-Fordist society – which was still a long way off in the Argentine of 1968 – involved the total disappearance of all Fordist forms of social organization and collective identity. It is generally true, nevertheless, that a social reality only becomes legible at the moment that it passes into history. By posing the ‘working class family’ in a gallery, Bony is not just translating their existence into an aesthetic spectacle, but he has transformed their actual labor power into a form of acting. Whatever scandal this work may have elicited – and this was not the work that caused the exhibition to be shut down – it did not concern a return of the repressed (i.e. industrial labor) within the inner sanctum of art. La familia obrera does not present an image of exploitation. For sure, the family was paid to sit on the pedestal, posing like studio models during opening hours, but their wage labor produces only the spectacle of itself. What is put on display is not an authentic, if marginalized form of experience, but a total aesthetization of life whereby the distinctions between domestic and public, productive and non-productive activities, become indistinguishable. In short, La familia obrera is less symptomatic of a Fordist than a post-Fordist organizations of society in which, to employ a notion of Paolo Virno, we have all become ‘virtuosic’ actors within the communicative matrix of social labor.

Let me elaborate on this subject. In post-Fordism capital does not only command or measure the time of production, like a punch-clock in a factory, but it is time itself that becomes the very substance of production: capital produces the time of life. The static, identificatory positions within the social institutions of the family, political party or labor union are displaced by the collaborative networks of complex, intellectual labor in which we are all performers, rather than workers. As a result the well-known paradox of the
actor can be said to make a return within post-Fordism. Not in the guise of Sartre’s famous example of the café waiter, however, who serves as the model of a self-alienated individual, forced to play a social role, but as a singularity, that does not impersonate a character, but acts out something perpetually anticipated and delayed. Someone, that is, who plays the sense of an event, acting out other roles when acting one role. We need to recall at this point that the performative in art has often been associated with the site specific, since it ‘does what it says’ on the spot. The performative, therefore, appears to avoid the mechanisms of mediation or representation. Yet when post-industrial labor has become dominated by the linguistic aspects of the performative, the performative as such cannot guarantee any direct and unmediated access to the real. To play the sense of the event, however, is not the same as being virtuosic in one’s performance; it is, rather, to keep the potentiality of the event in play, whereas the aim of capital is to valorize the event in a determinate shape.

I shall take up this topic of the performative again, but first let us return to Experiencia 68 and to the contribution of another artist, namely Roberto Jacoby. Two years previously, Jacoby had drafted the famous media art manifesto “An Art of Communications Media” together with his co-signers Eduardo Costa and Raúl Escari. Jacoby, Costa and Escari (who would later collaborate with Lamelas on two occasions) departed from the premise that the “actual artistic event” of exhibitions or Happenings had been superseded by the information system of mass media: “in the final analysis, it is of no interest to information consumers if an exhibition took place or not; all that matters is the image of the artistic event constructed by the media.” Costa, Escari and Jacoby proposed to intervene within the media by creating a false report, a pseudo-event that is fed to the media. By this means the media are made into the subject of the work. The project was not simply about deception, but about the “materialization through the mass media, of imaginary events.” As Barthes once stated, one needs to devise an artificial myth in order to combat ideological myths.

At Experiencia 68 Jacoby presented an installation that included a poster protesting the Vietnam War and a teletype machine of Agence France Press that transmitted live coverage of the student uprising in France. Part of his installation was also Mensaje en el Di Tella [Message at the Di Tella], a flyer in which the artist linked the utopian project of the avant-garde – the merging of art and life – to the new global networks of exchange and communication: “All of the phenomena of social life have been converted into aesthetic material; fashion, manufacturing, and technology, the media of mass communication, etc. … The work of art has also ended because life and the planet itself are becoming art.” Jacoby’s declaration of the merging of information technology and modern life should not be too quickly conflated with the techno-optimism of McLuhan. In the media art manifesto he had shown a less sanguine view of the ecological system of mass media, arguing in favor of a interventionist strategy. But we can also see how the former avant-garde project of inventing new forms of life becomes hard to distinguish, at least in Mensaje en el Di Tella from a post-Fordist instrumentalization of affective labor: “The future of art is not connected to the creation of works, but to the definition of new concepts of life, with the artists as propagandist for these concepts…. [Art] is the creation of the most gigantic collective work in history: the conquest of the earth, the conquest of freedom by and for all human beings.” So much is clear for Jacoby: art is not to be concerned with the production of new objects or images, but with the invention of new subjectivities. Artistic practice is intersect with a libidinal economy, entering an arena that it shares with the desiring-

56. I am paraphrasing Deleuze, Logic of Sense, p. 150.
machines of capitalism. And somehow the students protesting in the streets of Paris are connected to Jacoby's project of the aesthetization of life, although in what precise manner remains unclear in this rather inconclusive and disjointed installation.

Lamelas's contribution to Experiencia 68 did not play a prominent role in the conflict. Lamelas's piece was simply called *Proyección* and assumed a less confrontational appearance than the work of Bony, Jacoby or Plate. Like Jacoby, Lamelas also employed a technological medium - in this case the slide projector - but he did not use it as a communicational device. Instead he created a spatial environment, which was not uniform in nature. *Proyección* consists of two slide projectors, placed back to back in the center of a room, which project their beams of white light in opposite directions. Apparently, the work was situated in Experiencia 68 in such a fashion that one projector cast a beam of white light onto a smooth surface of the gallery wall, whereas the opposite projector radiates its light into empty space, causing the cone of light to disperse.62

And so we return to the notion of the blank image. Is *Proyección* to be read as an instance of pure mediality; that is, a medium reduced to its elementary conditions of visibility? *Proyección* casts a white image on the wall (at least on one side) and thereby connects to the modernist series of the monochrome. Yet the work does not make an essentialist statement: Lamelas does not equate the frame of white light with a modernist notion of medium purity. Rather, Lamelas is concerned with the apparatual structure of the medium, its positioning of the viewer in relation to the projected image (or its absence). *Proyección* is internally split. It juxtaposes two different geometries projection. On the one hand the projector establishes a closed space of communication where the viewer is assigned a fixed place in relation to the projected image. Here the idealist subject described by apparatus theory is re-installed. The opposite projector connects to an indefinite space without boundaries (if we disregard the architectural shell of the gallery). In this open field of visibility the viewer is allotted a greater mobility and enters its space as both a subject viewing others and an object viewed by others. In short, *Proyección* articulates divergent dispositifs or topologies of communication: one that is centralized and other that is dispersive.

A similar dichotomy runs through many of Lamelas earlier works, such as *Conexión de Tres Espacios* (1965), about which Lamelas has stated that "the basic concept was to create a piece that would not be immediately perceived as one thing but as a fragmentation of information," or *Dos Espacios Modificados* (Two Modified Spaces), which was installed at the Bienal de São Paulo in 1967.

I shall pass over this section of Lamelas's early work, however, in order to concentrate on the function of the blank image in *Proyección* and other pieces of the period 1967-68.

The zero of form of *Proyección* is not the same as that modernist zero of form. To the modernist painter, zero was the mathematical symbol of a pictorial project devoted to a notion of ontological purity. Painting, as Kasimir Malevich once put it, sought to enter the desert, not in order to drift, but to strip painting down to its bare skin and start all over again with a clean slate. Malevich deliberately appropriated this metaphor of the desert after his critics had attempted to use it in a pejorative sense, accusing his paintings of being devoid of meaning. For Malevich the zero of painting represents a total contraction of the pictorial series. The white monochrome contains all possible paintings as a "living Cosmic present."

To Malevich's contemporary successors, such as Rodchenko, the zero degree would exactly mean the exhaustion of the series of modernist painting: the living present revealed as an eternal return of the same. Rodchenko would thus declare the end of painting by painting three monochromes in the primary colors. Lamelas's zero degree, however, relates to another notion of the desert, not Malevich's original surface, but a deterritorialized space crossed by a nomadic point. The zero degree in Lamelas's work operates as a point of relay that sets the relational elements of the medium in a state of constant play and variation.

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Proyección belongs to a series of installations that Lamelas conceived in 1967, which not only represent the first time that Lamelas deployed technological media in his work but all reduce the medium in one way or another to a state of degree zero. Besides Proyección the series consists of Limite de una Proyección I [Limit of a Projection I or Light Projection in a Dark Room] in which a spotlight is aimed at the floor of a darkened room, creating an intangible pillar of light; Limite de una Proyección II which directs a spotlight at four, adjoined acrylic panels placed on the floor; and Pantalla [Screen] constituted by a film projector projecting a rectangle of light on a screen. What these works hold in common, more than any conceptualist idea of de-materialization, is the fact that space is not conceived as a neutral or abstract ground. Instead it is understood as a dynamic, topological dimension in which inside and outside are folded into each other. The language of Lamelas may still be sculptural – he describes Limite de una Proyección as “a (dark) space occupied by another (illuminated) space” – yet this occupation of one space by another does not imply the sculptural situation of an object placed on a pedestal, but a kind of phenomenological threshold whereby the different zones of light and dark don’t divide the space into equivalent parts. As in the case of Proyección to step into the light is to fundamentally alter one’s position in relation to others. In this sense, Limite de una Proyección resembles an older work of Lamelas, the outdoor installation Señalamiento de tres objetos, [Signaling of Three Objects] (1966) which consisted of three objects – a tree, lantern and deck chair in a park – that were encircled by metal plates as if dotted lines were drawn around them. Lamelas placed the objects within brackets, not in order to isolate them, but to demonstrate how the relations of inside and outside are constituent of each other.

Señalamiento de tres objetos sets up an intersubjective situation, a relay of gazes, which invites, or so it seems, a phenomenological mode of analysis. Three reasons can be given to proceed in such a fashion. First of all phenomenology evidently has a perceptual model of the intertwining of gazes and it is this phenomenological scenario of the ‘viewer viewed’ that is played out in Señalamiento. The ‘signaled’ objects act merely as the props of this phenomenological event. Secondly, and more importantly, Foucault’s notion of the dispositif was developed exactly in order to counter a basic premise of phenomenology, namely its recourse to a pre-reflective ground of ‘primordial’ visuality. It is the existence of such a non-cultural stratum of perception that Señalamiento ultimately denies. And finally, in the third place, Señalamiento is clearly in dialogue with minimal art and its own phenomenological model of a situated viewer who experiences the work in a fully embodied, peripatetic manner. I shall leave a discussion of Lamelas’s connection to minimalism for later, taking up the preceding two points first.

Let me set the scene by considering a famous case scenario in Jean-Paul Sartre’s chapter on “the gaze” in Being and Nothingness: “I am in a public park. Not far away there is a lawn and along the edge of that lawn there are benches. A mass passes by those benches. I see the man; I apprehend him as an object and at the same time as a man. What does this signify?” Sartre proposes that if I see this stranger only as an object, then his relation to the other objects within my view would be purely additive; that is, he would walk out of sight without perceptibly changing the relations between the other objects. “In short, no new relation would appear through him between those things in my universe: grouped and synthesized from my point of view into instrumental complexes, they would from his disintegrate into multiplicities of indifferent relations.” But to see the stranger as a man is to see a distance unfolding from the man: “a relation which is without parts, given at one stroke, inside of which there unfolds a spatiality which is not my spatiality; for instead of a grouping toward me of the objects, there is now an orientation which flees me.” The appearance of the other corresponds to a decentralization of the world, a disintegration, as if the universe has a drain hole in its midst through which the being of this world is

perpetually flowing off. If we were to apply Sartre's reasoning, then to step into the circles of *Señalamiento de tres objetos* or to enter the beam of *Límite de una Proyección I* is to become aware of this drainage of being. Yet it is not sufficient to make holes in reality to actually strike a fatal blow against phenomenology, since as Sartre insists we are not dealing with a flight of the world out of itself. The subject is folded into the world, but phenomenology invented its famous thesis of 'intentionality' (i.e. consciousness is always directed towards something and gains significance in the world) in order to keep the subject from actually becoming emptied out (i.e. into Deleuze's informal outside). Hence, Sartre can claim that the 'the universe, the flow, and the drain hole are all once again recovered, reapprehended and fixed as an object.'67 As Deleuze would quip, phenomenology folds too quickly.

To put the complaint of Deleuze (and Foucault) against phenomenology in succinct terms: in final reckoning, phenomenological thought does not surpass the psychologism and naturalism that it was meant to defeat. Sure, Deleuze concedes, we can believe in intentionality if we remain at the level of words or on the level of things, but the rub lies in the irreducible gap between the domain of language and visibility. “[Phenomenology] restores the psychologism that synthesizes consciousness and significations, a naturalism of the ‘savage experience’ and of the thing, of the aimless existence of the thing in the world.”68 However, to paraphrase Deleuze, knowledge is irreducibly double – we do not speak about what we see, or see what we speak about – and therefore there can be no intentionality. Secondly, there is nothing below or prior to knowledge so there is no ‘savage experience.’ Take the example of signaling: phenomenology states that to signal or indicate something is not to excise that object from its surrounding, but to activate a shared ground of intelligibility, which Sartre, following Heidegger, calls an 'instrumental complex.' The gaze of the other, however, opens up a *distance* within the world by relinking the objects in my world in a manner that escapes me even though I take part in it. Lamelas would connect the camera with the gaze of the other (rather than with the intentional gaze of classical cinema69) in *Gente di Milano* [People from Milan] (1970). Here Lamelas used the stationary camera as a surveillance device, filming everyone who happened to pass in front of the Francoise Lambert gallery within the precise time-frame of 11:58 to 12:02: “I looked at the camera as if it was taking possession of the space in front of it. And because it was my space, I decided to take a picture of everybody who walked in front of my space, like a surveillance camera.”70 But this kind of distantiation by the camera is still not the kind of temporal fold, the mutational point, that belongs to the event. For this I need to return to my discussion of the blank image in Lamelas’s practice.

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68. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 108.
70. Lamelas in *David Lamelas: A New Reconfiguration of Time*, p. 82.
space its presence becomes dominant." Invasion, modification, and domination: Lamelas describes *Situation of Time* with a set of terms that provide the impression that a certain violence is wrought on the empty space of the gallery (even though "modification" carries another connotation than "domination").

The exceptional status of *Situation of Time* can only be grasped by locating it within the intersection of three historical currents, which it does not merely reflect, but critically responds to. In the first place, a minimalist aesthetic of public space, which has been elaborately demonstrated by Buchloh; secondly, the developmentalist policies of institutional power; and in third instance the emergence of a new informational organization of capitalism, accompanied by new forms of primitive accumulation, which no longer concern the dispossession of the worker's physical means of labor, but the appropriation of their intellectual faculties or what ultimately is their *time*. The blank screen of the television thus raises the question once more of the mutation point: are these indeed objects of control, a means of 'boxing-in' the entropic flow of information, or does the technological object offer itself as a potential means of deterritorialization? How are we meant to orient ourselves in the space of information delineated by *Situation of Time*?

We may very well ask what minimalism teaches us in this regard, since *Situation of Time* could be understood to re-make a typical Flavin installation but now with television sets instead of fluorescent tubes. I would argue, however that minimalism is not simply cited in *Situation of Time* as a formal influence, but overturns a minimalist spatiality that is grounded on a phenomenological notion of lived experience. What *Situation of Time* implicitly demonstrates is that phenomenology, in final reckoning, does not surpass the psychologism and naturalism that it was meant to defeat: "[phenomenology] restores the psychologism that synthesizes consciousness and significations, a naturalism of the 'savage experience' and of the thing, of the aimless existence of the thing in the world." It is the sensory-motor schema of the viewer, as Deleuze might very well put it, that synthesizes the modular repetitions of minimalist installations, gathering up their cuts into space, creating a subjective montage that reconstitutes the temporal whole of duration. Minimalism operates along the lines of the movement-image as defined by Deleuze, which consists of three levels: a determination of closed systems (i.e. the serial permutations of minimal art); a movement which is established between the parts of a system (i.e. the ambulant viewer), and the changing whole which is expressed in movement.

A good example of how this phenomenological (and cinematic) schema applies to minimalism would be Richard Serra's outdoor piece *Shift*. Thus *Shift*, which consists of six rectilinear cement sections, the direction, shape, and length of each being determined by the slope of the ground, initiates a "dialectic between one's perception of the place in totality and one's relation to the field as walked" whereby a cumulative sense of experience emerges, a contraction of the intervals in space, so that, as Serra writes, "looking back across the valley, images and thoughts are remembered which were initiated by the consciousness of having experienced them." This temporalized, mnemonic space of minimal sculpture is not linear, but volumetric; it is not centered, but allows "one to perceive and locate a multiplicity of centers."

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72. Buchloh has noted that the television sets were provided by the Di Tella factories, correlating the institutional space to the economic policies of developmentalism. But we can be more specific: the accumulation of television sets in *Situation of Time* reads retrospectively as a very poignant statement about the current stage of the integration between the 'ontological time of self-valorization' (Negri) and the emergent time of informatized production.
73. Thus the closing of the sugar mills in Tucuman can be explained as an instance of this new form of accumulation by dispossession: a migrant labor population is created in advance of the flexible labor market yet to be installed.
74. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 108.
In other words, *Shift* has a moving center that provides a means of “measuring one-self” (Serra) against the indeterminacy of the land. The center is always displaced in relation to itself, which is fundamental property of what Deleuze has called the structural object.

In Serra’s *Shift* the sections create an assemblage of cuts within the landscape, establishing a series of displacements – “the work does not concern itself with centering” – which place the viewer in circulation, measuring oneself, as Serra states, against the landscape. What *Shift* holds in common with all structural objects is that it reveals that subjectivity is always rooted in the intersubjective. Indeed the structure of *Shift* was literally determined in an intersubjective manner as it derives from the correlated movements of Richard Serra and Joan Jonas as they circumnavigated opposite ends of the field, establishing a topological definition of the space by keeping each other constantly in view. The sections or cuts, located along the steepest inclines, establish a distribution of singular points, similar to the points in a graph that are used to plot the direction and curve of a vector. As a result, what at first appeared to be the indeterminacy of the landscape, its non-differentiated character, to Serra and Jonas is organized within a symbolic structure; a structure to which the viewer remains immanent, in contrast to any perspectival view, yet *Shift* also keeps the mutation point in check. The work (and the landscape it structures) is inscribed within a horizon of experience, it is integrated at the level of the body’s sensory-motor schema and at the level of one’s memory similar to the operations of the movement-image in classical cinema. (Serra is, in fact, quite fond of using cinematic metaphors to describe the experience of his sculpture.)

For all its references to the modular forms of minimalism, to its industrial series, which are nevertheless converted into “a naturalism of the ‘savage experience’ and the aimless existence of the thing in the world” (Deleuze), *Situation of Time* superimposes a technological space of information upon the bodily space of the ambulant viewer. Of course, one could think of a way of immersing the viewer within such a technological space just as minimalism attempted to do, even though it would mean entering an immaterial rather than bodily space of interaction. But it is obvious that Lamelas has refused this option, preferring that the television screen go blank rather than forming a vehicle for a kind of global Happening with its McLuhanesque collective ethics of simultaneity, immediacy, and involvement in depth. Lamelas certainly had enough examples to go on had he desired to take this path. For instance the work of Marta Minujín, in particular her happening *Simultaneity in Simultaneity* that was televised in Buenos Aires, New York and Berlin at the same time. *Simultaneity in Simultaneity* was performed at the Center for Audiovisual Experimentation of the Di Tella Institute in 1966. Lamelas who was an acquaintance of Minujín took part in one of her earlier performances, *La Mentesunda*, in 1965. In the same year as *Situation of Time*, Jacoby published his text “Against the Happening” in which he accused Happenings of creating a false dichotomy between the spectacular experience of the media and the collective immediacy of the Happening situation. Indeed Happenings had become just another media event, widely reported on in the Argentine press. By way of contrast, *Situation of Time* turned the gallery during daytime into a nocturnal space, when television was (still) off the air – a time not yet integrated into the global spectacle.

The electronic buzz of the television screens call to mind Sarduy’s discussion of the crackle of the media as presenting a level of a-signification within the apparatus of communication – a decoded flow of information lacking organization. All that we may conclude, however, is that the relation of *Situation of Time* to the new spaces of information and communication is a highly ambivalent one. Yet if this installation leaves certain questions unsettled, Lamelas will face them head on the following year. As said Lamelas left Buenos Aires for Europe in May 1968, at the time *Experiencia '68* opened. He had been selected to exhibit at the Argentine pavilion of the Venice biennial and the work he installed, *Office of

78. See the documentation on Minujín in *Listen Here Now!* A program of *Simultaneity in Simultaneity*, containing hand-written notes by Lamelas, is contained in the Getty archive.
Information about the Vietnam War at Three Levels: the Visual Image, Text and Audio would not have seemed misplaced in Experiencia 68. In this piece, Lamelas employed a strategy similar to that of Jacoby by hiring a press agency to send a constant telex update on the Vietnam War to the exhibition. There was a significant difference, however, in the mode of presentation. Lamelas sectioned off a part of the gallery space, which he shared with other artists, by installing a glass wall. Behind this panel a secretary was stationed at a desk. She would read the telex news in six different languages using a speaker system so that the sound would fill the exhibition space. The news items were also recorded on tape so that all the news that was received during the months that the exhibition was open was made available for listening by the visitors. It is improbable that anyone would actually want to listen to all the recorded information. The purpose of the tape is only to demonstrate in a quantitative and wholly absurd fashion the accumulative logic of capitalism as it penetrated the realm of modern communication. The 'office of information' succeeds in this sense the 'factory' of Andy Warhol, producing intangible news items in a serialized fashion, just as Warhol previously joined the studio practice of painting to the reproductive logic of publicity images. And in this fashion, the Office announces another socio-economic paradigm of artistic practice, which may have been anticipated by Warhol, but was still cast by the pop artist in the anachronistic 'industrial' mold.

Like the serial production methods of industrial society, the series of news events are printed on telex tape, each successive item taking the place of the preceding one in an endless present. The logic of serial production, which segments time into equivalent units, is transferred from the factory floor to the domain of communication. Each news bulletin simply takes the place of the preceding in a present that constitutes an endless return of the same. This cumulative aspect of an informatized production system becomes even more clear in Analysis of the Elements by which the Massive Consumption of Information Takes Place, that Lamelas showed at the Prospect 68 exhibition in Dusseldorf. This work juxtaposed auditory, visual and printed media channels, including six hours of pre-recorded radio broadcasting, daily and weekly newspapers, and a randomly selected film commercial. We are presented a kind of panorama of the production of time within a post-Fordist society – an extended, spatialized time, which would pile up like the telex tape in the glass office, ultimately smothering the secretary, were it not for the ability of the informational apparatus to erase the outcome of its incessant data-processing, to re-set time to zero.

Lamelas requested that the press agency send information on the Vietnam War because he wanted the Office of Information to circulate one current event that had global proportions. Therefore, it is not the content of the work that makes the work political but the manner in which it manifests a dominant distribution of the socio-political economies of information. In fact, the Office of Information does not consist of one institutional space, but of an assemblage of apparatuses, branching off in different directions: the telex system, the secretary locked into her glass cubicle, the mobile visitor placed on the exterior of the office; the gallery interior that is constituted in relation to an exterior that is not the same exterior to which the secretary has access. And between these juxtaposed and partially intersecting spaces, there is no possibility of intercommunication. This is not yet the full-blown, networked space of an informational society.

Buchloh observes that the Office of Information recalls “a seemingly lost public and political dimension of the institutions of political reflection and historical identity formation in the bourgeois public sphere.” Yet I suspect he will agree with me that the bourgeois public sphere of the nineteenth-century with its ideal of rational, discursive subjects, functions as a poor model to diagram the rapid restructuring of the information system underway in Lamelas’s time. We must pay attention, therefore, to the way that this emergent system is being organized, not only to whom might gain access to the media, or what means of distribution are at their disposal, but how these

subjects are wrapped up in the mechanisms of power that are inherent to the dispositifs of communication they inhabit. In a now classical essay, Buchloh has raised a similar issue in discussing conceptual art. He has noted how conceptual art installation frequently exhibit a kind of administrative aesthetic, submitting information to obsessive systems of numbering and classification. In liberating artistic practice from the mystification of modernist aesthetics, it seems that a new form of repressive rationality has reared its head. The central statement of conceptual art is that ‘I am reading,’ but is this the neutral activity it is made out to be? To answer this question we must now turn to the second reading film on our list.

3. Reading Laing

“Thus there is a structuralist hero: neither God nor man, neither personal nor universal, it is without an identity, made of non-personal individuations and pre-individual singularities. It assures the break-up of a structure affected by excess or deficiency.”

Gilles Deleuze

_The Schizophrenic as Hero_  
While Lamelas worked towards establishing a degree zero of the media in Buenos Aires, elsewhere a segment of the political intelligentsia was seeking greater exposure in the media. Here we can pick up the trail of that other purloined author of the reading films, namely R.D. Laing. During the summer of 1967, the Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation took place at the Roundhouse in London. Organized by two of the founding figures of the anti-psychiatry movement, R.D. Laing and David Cooper, the conference brought together an illustrious group of political and cultural theorists, such as Herbert Marcuse, Lucien Goldmann, Paul Goodman, and Gregory Bateson, with political activists, such as Stokely Carmichael, and members of the counterculture like Living Theater director Julian Beck and poet Allen Ginsberg. Several artists, among which, Carolee Schneeman and Gustave Metzger attended the many workshops and a film crews were in attendance to make sure that coverage of the conference got out to the general public.

The Dialectics of Liberation had a sprawling program including lectures, public debate, poetry performances, music and film. The range of topics covered the current state of capitalism, the potential of revolution, and the rise of new movements such as radical ecology and environmentalism. As the back cover of the final publication explains: “The aim of the congress was to create a genuine revolutionary consciousness by fusing ideology and action on the levels of the individual and of mass society. These speeches clearly indicate the rise of a new, forceful and (to some) ominous style of political activity.” Herbert Marcuse, for instance, presented a talk on “Liberation from Affluent Society” in which he called for a ‘technology of liberation’ in which the practices of technique and art, work and play would converge: “And now I throw in the terrible concept: it would mean an ‘aesthetic’ reality – society as a work of art. This is the most Utopian, the most radical possibility of liberation today.” In reading these words, we are immediately reminded of Jacoby’s statement _Experiencia_ 68 the following year to the effect that all of social life must be treated as aesthetic material. And then Marcuse makes a further prophetic comment, stating that the intelligentsia has been called ‘the new working class’, if prematurely so. They are still the pet beneficiaries of advanced capitalism and cannot be called a revolutionary class today, but the intelligentsia also represents a ‘non-

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81. See the documentaries by Peter Davis, _Anatomy of Violence_ (1967) and Ian Sinclair and Robert Klinkert’s _Ahl Sunflower_ (1967), which was commissioned by German television. Outtakes of the film by Davis show Schneemann and Metzger participating in a workshop. Coverage of the conference in the media was widespread and all the talks were published on LP records. The following year several of the speeches were published by Penguin Books and reissued in 1969 by Collier Books under the title _To Free A Generation!_.
integrated social group’ that stands at the source of the contradiction between a liberating and repressive use of technology and science. Therefore, intellectuals and particularly the educational system serve as a potential catalyst of revolutionary change. Little did Marcuse realize how close his prediction was to becoming reality, even though not in the ultimate form that he. But more on this later.

Clearly the program of the Dialectics of Liberation was not shorn of ambition, but did it deliver on its promise? The conference was “supposed to be about dialectics,” Cooper observes in his afterword. His hesitant phrasing suggests that these very dialectics had become overly strained during the conference. Indeed they were to break down at least one moment due to public feud between Carmichael and Laing, who was uncomfortable with the confrontational rhetoric of the Black Panther spokesperson. Cooper’s afterword is mostly devoted to patching up this split, but one may also question whether the conceptual framework provided by the title Dialectics of Liberation was adequate to the historical moment. As I have argued, a theory of dispositifs was developed in the aftermath of the events of May ’68, which appears to have swept away a dialectical model of social change, replacing macropolitics by a micropolitical model of power and we shall see how the conference was already moving in this direction. But this is not our immediate topic.

To a certain extent the two main organizers of the conference, Cooper and Laing, embodied Marcuse’s thesis of the revolutionary class of intellectuals. The conference is above all a symptom of a new political (and media) consciousness on the part of these psychiatric professionals. As Cooper writes in his introduction to the conference publication, Laing and himself came to perceive a parallel between the social victimization of those “people who are called mad” and the inclination of Western society towards systemic forms of violence. Schizophrenics, Cooper explains, are the scapegoats of an intrinsically disturbed family structure. The represent a “point of intensity” within the conflictual network of family interrelationships. “The doctors,” he states, “would be used to attach the label ‘schizophrenia’ to the diseased object and then systematically set about the destruction of that object by the physical and social processes that are termed ‘psychiatric treatment.’” The pathogenesis of schizophrenia is therefore due to a strictly organic or personal disorder, but is rooted in the intersubjective or micropolitical domain of the family. From this realization it seemed but a small step to diagnose a violence-prone Western society as suffering from a similar malady. The anti-psychiatrists (a name that Laing, by the way, disliked) proposed an etiology of social alienation that can be traced back to the schizoid structure of family relationships. And so we witness the birth of a new hero, the schizophrenic who becomes a dominant figure in the sixties of the social outcast and potential revolutionary although, to be sure, Laing and to a lesser degree Cooper would downplay the idea of any direct link between familial dysfunction and social violence.

Lamelas would have been drawn to Laing as an archetypical figure of the 1960s. A public intellectual who challenged the institutional hierarchies of a disciplinary society, embraced the politics of the New Left, experimented with new forms of communitarian living, wrote several countercultural bestsellers, cultivated media attention to his person, and ultimately sought an exit from the conflictual reality of Western society in Eastern spiritualism. By the early seventies, Laing would rapidly fade out of the picture, only lingering on as a subject of admiration and critique in the post-68 writings of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. But this abbreviated biography is perhaps to wrap a complex and

contradictory set of statements, actions and events into a tidy narrative. What does the proper name Laing designate? More than a life story, it covers an assemblage of statements that ranges across a heterogeneous set of scientific and literary discourses, including psychiatry, psychoanalysis, existential phenomenology, neo-Marxism, set theory, game theory, cybernetics, modernist literature, religious philosophy, and mysticism. His writings were not only published in the professional journals of psychiatry, but also appeared in such places as the *New Left Review* and the *Psychedelic Review*. In the latter one might, for instance, come across an article by Laing called ‘Transcendental Experience in Relation to Religion and Psychosis’ which would by republished in his bestseller *The Politics of Experience*. In this essay, Laing famously identifies the psychotic as the “hierophant of the sacred.” A schizophrenic person, Laing writes, is “an exile from the scene of being as we know it, he is an alien, a stranger, signaling to us from the void in which he is founderinng.” Yet, he adds, “madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death.” What we encounter here is a transvaluation of the experience of ‘madness,’ which is no longer to be treated as a personality disorder, that is to be subjected to treatment within a mental asylum, but is to be appropriated as a revolutionary force (or at least its equivalent) that we must make our own.

How did Laing come to this heroic portrayal of the psychosis? After giving up ‘pressing the button,’ as he put it in his autobiography, the psychiatrist published a series of books at the turn of the decade that undertook a fundamental revision of the clinical views of schizophrenia. In rethinking the morphogenesis of psychosis, Laing was heavily influenced by existential phenomenology, but he was to surpass the scenario of Sartre we encountered before by situating the subject not over and against, but as it were within the ‘drain hole’ of reality. Psychosis is not the symptom, according to Laing, of purely personal disorder but a result of interpersonal communication. Following phenomenology Laing defines the self as a being-in-the-world who only exists for others, whereas these others reciprocally exist for the self. Due to this interpersonal system of alienation, the subject never falls together and knowledge of oneself will be endlessly displaced. To be inducted in society, therefore is to enter a process of endless regression (a situation that idealist philosophy, as Borges noted, sought to prevent). If we do not acknowledge this contingency of ourselves upon the world, others and language, communication will reach an impasse and assume a psychotic form. Self and other become tied up in knots and schizophrenia is generated as both a flight from a threatening situation and a creative response to it.

What Laing calls the family nexus is to be indicated as the root of all evil. Within the family, love tends to become a pawn in an endless game of recrimination and guilt. The family structure thus creates a ‘double bind’ (a hypothesis derived from Gregory Bateson) in which incompatible demands between freedom and dependence are constantly held in play. Unable to answer to these competing demands, the patient will develop a psychosis, developing a paradoxical state of consciousness in which connections are forged between normally irreconcilable elements and events. The schizophrenic thus occupies a ‘point of intensity’ where social order appears to break down and as a result he or she is victimized, placed under clinical control in an asylum. The schizoid is the one upon whom the intolerable tensions within the ‘family nexus’ have been unloaded.

In his series of lectures on Psychiatric Power given between 1973 and 1974, Foucault clarified the essential contribution that Laing made to the development of a disciplinary theory of power and the possibility of resisting its institutional force. First of all, anti-psychiatry demonstrated that “power relations constituted the a priori of

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DAVID LAMELAS

psychiatric practice.” Power relations, Foucault underlines, “conditioned the operation of the mental institution; they distributed relationships between individuals within it; they governed the forms of medical intervention.” Accordingly Laing was an outspoken critic of the sequestering methods of the asylum, opting for an alternative form of non-hierarchical, collective therapy that strove to remove the distance between doctor and patient. In 1965 Laing started a communal treatment center at Kingsley Hall in London which became something of a cause célèbre. Kingsley Hall was not only visited by celebrities, but produced its own media star and visual artist in the figure of Mary Barnes, a former nurse, who made the schizophrenic ‘journey’ back to recovery and subsequently exhibit her paintings at the Camden Art Center.

Anti-psychiatry did not simply place itself on the exterior of the asylum, but worked on the boundaries of disciplinary power. There was no given distinction between patient or doctor, for instance, only a constant differentiation of roles. Psychoanalysis had attempted to move out of the asylum space altogether after the famous fiasco of Charcot’s diagnosis of hysteria in which the patients only parroted the doctor’s speech. The talking cure of psychoanalysis strove to listen to the patient without influencing or directing their thoughts. However a pre-existing discourse of truth (the Oedipal scenario) always needed to be at hand in order to prevent that the psychoanalyst became lost in the process of transference. In listening to the voice of the unconscious, in coming to know the desire of the other, the analyst must be able to extricate himself from this web of desire in the end. The randomized patterns of speech needed to be organized into the semblance of a rational message. Which is why psychoanalysis was more successful in treating neurosis than psychosis; the latter, namely, represents a process of thought that is explicitly devoted to the subversion of all rationality (or what goes by the name of rationality within a given society).

Within the practice of psychoanalysis there is still an uneven distribution of power and knowledge, even though it shed the spectacular form of power on display in Charcot’s institution. The characteristic reversal of antipsychiatry consists, as Foucault explains, in placing the relations of power, “on the contrary, at the center of the problematic field and in questioning them in a primary way.”

Antipsychiatry rather than withdrawing to the exterior the asylum space, undertakes a systematic destruction of the disciplinary dispositif through an internal effort (opening the asylum space towards an ‘outside without distance’ as Deleuze put it). Kingsley Hall meant to transfer to the patients themselves the power to produce their own madness and the truth of their own madness. The truth value of this undertaking can therefore not be measured in terms of medical knowledge (e.g. diagnostic correctness or therapeutic effectiveness).

The ‘mad’ subject, as Laing repeatedly stated in his writings, is overwhelmed by the negative force of self-annihilation. It is as if the self is being devoured or emptied out by others. Despite this experience of terror, Laing emphasizes that there is a more positive aspect to psychosis. He discovers in the schizophrenic a “profound transposition of his position in relation to all domains of being.” Psychosis causes confusion in the relationship between self and other, inner and outer, before and after, that is the potential beginning of a healing process or ‘journey’ that leads through the void to rebirth, to an experience of “liberation and renewal.” The schizoid condition, in other words, actively processes the social, re-arranging the materials of historical reality, in order to fashion its own world. Far from being locked away in a solipsistic seclusion, the schizophrenic is something of a bricoleur who inhabits a different rationality. Félix Guattari stressed this creativeness of the schizophrenic, who passes beyond the self in order to find the subject “scattered across the four corners of the historical universe: the

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88. See Foucault, “Course Summary.”
89. Idem.
delirious person speaks in foreign tongues, he hallucinates history.” Class conflicts and wars become instruments of expression for him. Guattari compares this psychotic condition whereby individual unconscious and history communicate to the topological figure of a Moebius strip. The schizophrenic has become something of a mad inventor of alternative societies, of other, possible worlds. Hence, the popular expression the ‘mad days of May.’

This socio-political transvaluation of madness was not restricted to Laing; it spread in many directions and radiated from many centers. One only needs to think, for instance, The History of Madness of Michel Foucault (which had received a favorable review by Laing) or the two volumes carrying the subtitle Capitalism & Schizophrenia by Deleuze and Guattari. To these cultural critics, the schizophrenic came to embody the point of mutation or ‘knot’ where the dispositifs of power and knowledge fold into their own outside.

Psychosis is the most deft of all deterritorializing machines of desire: “a syndrome in disarray at every point, ceaselessly retreating from itself.” And the point of mutation, as the reader will recall, is characterized by being both replete and empty at the same time, as marking an excess and a lack in a semiotic system. Likewise the psychotic patient oscillates, as Laing has observed, between feelings of omnipotence and abundant creativity, like a container that is full of air under tremendous pressure, and feelings of dreadful emptiness and lifelessness, whereby the self experiences itself as a vacuum. Once again, we encounter the paradox of the empty signifier: a liminal both pregnant with meaning and vacant of sense, which has become personified as a ‘structuralist hero’ Or, in the words of Guattari. “The capitalist economy proceeds by decoding and deterritorialization: it has its extreme cases, i.e., schizophrenics who decode and deterritorialize themselves to the limit; but also it has its extreme consequences – revolutionaries.”

Reading/Seeing Knots
When Lamelas made Reading Film from ‘Knots’ by R. D. Laing in 1970, Laing’s fame was already on the downswing. At the time of Knots’ publication (also in 1970), Laing was rumored to have retreated to Sri Lanka in order to meditate. The signs of this withdrawal are already apparent in the last section of the book, reproduced in Lamelas’s film, which makes several references to Buddhist thought. Kingsley Hall would be closed during the same year, leaving the former community center behind in a derelict state.

Knots was to be Laing’s last successful book. It is a slim booklet that describes a series of intersubjective moments in which communication repeatedly misfires or breaks down altogether. As a matter of fact, Laing does not actually describe as much as script these scenes. In fact Knots would be adapted for the stage by Edward Petherbridge in 1973. I quote from Laing’s preface:

The patterns delineated here have not yet been classified by a Linnaeus of human bondage. They are all, perhaps, strangely, familiar. In these pages I have confined myself to laying out only some of those I actually have seen. Words that come to mind to name them are: knots, tangles, fankles, impasses, disjunctions, whirligogs, binds. I could have remained closer to the ‘raw’ data in which these patterns appear. I could have distilled them further towards an abstract logico-mathematical calculus. I hope they are not so schematized that one may not refer back to the very specific experiences from which they derive; yet that they are sufficiently independent of ‘content’, for one to divine the final formal elegance in these webs of maya.

What Knots strives to make apparent in an almost formulaic manner is an ‘anti-calculus’ of

92. Deleuze, “The Two Regimes of Madness,” in Two Regimes of Madness, p. 22. Also: Essentially, the schizophrenic is a functional machine making use of left-over elements that no longer function in any context, and that will enter into relation with each other precisely by having no relation – as if the concrete distinction, the disparity of the different parts became a reason in itself to group them together and put them to work, according to what chemists call a non-localizable relation.” (p. 18)
94. A film version of the play was made in 1975, directed by David Munro.
Western rationality. A differential calculus, if you will, were it not the solution that counts but the topological distribution it engenders. And this anti-calculus operates on me as I read, as I am forced to bound from one enunciative position to another.

Laing's text is not easy to classify, which is one of the reasons why Lamelas probably chose it. Centered on the page, arranged in a stanza-like manner, the fragmentary sentences develop a kind of metric cadence that immerses the reader within their convoluted logic. Thus the reading self becomes, as it were, engulfed by the text. One shuttles between incompatible perspectives as the statement ‘I am doing it’ transforms into ‘it is doing it.’ The effect that Knots provides is that of a text that is reading itself and of course at some bodily level of perception this is happening. This impression is only heightened by Lamelas's processing of our activity of reading through the filmic machine. We are then plugged into the schizoid machine of the “it-process” (Laing’s term) where a molecular splitting takes place and the apparent unity of the spoken and the visible is broken down into partial assemblies or systems.

In Lamelas's film language becomes externalized. At first I am carried along by the sentences I read, but the words on the page to devolve into a dense array of letters, a jittery visual pattern. And as I continue to read, dictated by the speed of the projector, my eye becomes entangled in this thicket of recurrent phrases and words. Knots is a text that demands a performative reading, always in the here and now. But this here and now is split down the middle or rather an internal gap is opened within it. The reader is implicated within the linguistic, corporeal, and machinic dimensions of the apparatus of reading while simultaneously being placed, as it were, in exile, observing the apparatus from without. Twisted inside out, the two series of the “I am doing it” and the “it is doing it” communicate with each other like the continuous surface of a Moebius strip as Guattari proposed in the previously cited text. Furthermore, as he notes in the same place, this is a very different mode of communication then constructing “a passage from the one to an other.”

As the film reaches the end of Laing's text, the phrases begin to occupy less and less space on the screen. The white of the page and the blankness of the screen start to merge as the phrases become more sparse and isolated. At this point, Laing's text indicates the absolute blank that constitutes the very exteriority of language to the speaking subject, the empty place of language that makes all movement within a semiotic series possible, “the differentiating element of difference itself” or Deleuze's object = x:

Every expression, and every form,
is to what is expressionless and formless
what a finger is to the moon
all expressions and all forms
point to the expressionless and formless

But the finger points to what cannot be pointed out because the object = x is without place. The formless does not belong to the phenomenological domain of signaling or Sartre’s instrumental whole, but to the informal open. And as we near this informal open the differentiated, social functions of the body and language, carefully regulated by a disciplinary order of power, regress to an oral phase: “What a beautiful finger. Let me suck it.” When I read the final sentence – “the finger is speechless” – four-and-a-half minutes have passed in silence. Yet I have not reached the end of this reading exercise. After the concluding phrase disappears off the screen, the text is suddenly lent a face and a voice. A close-up of a young woman is shown who proceeds to re-read Laing's text in a clear, yet dispassionate tone of voice. The woman makes no effort to inflect her presence on the text, she does not ‘express’ its character. She acts out something perpetually anticipated and delayed, not impersonating a character but playing the sense of an event that is advancing and retreating.

The Psychoanalytic Scene of Reading
Reading Film dispossesses us of our parasitical relationship to the classical text. Which is not to say that the resultant situation is completely alien to us, because there are two cultural scenes of

95. See Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, p. 150.
(female) reading to which it may be compared: a pedagogical and a psychoanalytical one. What are these two archetypes of the woman who speaks or reads out loud?

The prior scene dates back to what Friedrich Kittler has called the pre-technological discourse network of 1800. It concerns an educational myth that attributed a transcendent power to the maternal voice. It is the function of ‘Woman’ within this pedagogical regime ‘to get men to speak’: the maternal voice is the origin of language. The mother, who reads to her children, inducts them into the space of language by means of her loving voice, embodying the originary meaning of words; not as articulated speech, however, but as language in a nascent, pre-alphabetical state. She is the inspiration or “pure breath” of language that leaves woman as primary instructor without a place to produce a discourse of her own. The woman’s voice thus becomes the poetic medium of nature and truth, infusing language with a primary orality, a sonorous presence, which places a stop on the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs. “She exists as the singular behind the plurality of discourses” and, therefore, in her very role as instructor she is rendered near mute and restricted to a speaking in the tone of a murmur.”

Kittler observes that the pedagogical regime of the maternal voice conforms to a psychoanalytic scenario of the Woman as being the one who brings men to speech, but who is herself incapable of speaking of her own desire. It is the unraveling of this pedagogic-cum-psychoanalytic scenario that Reading Film brings to mind, leading the reader/viewer into an impasse where it is not any ‘murmured meaning’ of the world that speaks itself (as in classical cinema), but a zone where “the statement is pointless” and “the finger is speechless.” This speechless zone, moreover, is dissimilar to that primordial spatiality where the phenomenologist thought to detect the whisper of another voice “as if signification haunted the visible which in turn murmured meaning.”

Here the manipulation of the speed of reading in the reading films becomes significant. As we have seen, in order that time can be liberated from its bondage to space, it had to pass through the smallest of loopholes where the measurable is transformed into the immeasurable. Time is either substance or measure. The temporality of the infinitely brief, a zone that capitalism moves ever deeper into, was first explored and colonized by physiology. One is reminded of those psycho-physical experiments at the turn of the century with tachystoscopes that were invented to determine the absolute threshold of legibility, the minimum amount of time the human eye required to recognize differences between letters. Apparently 10 milliseconds is the minimum amount of quantifiable time that the average human eye requires to grasp a word in its unity against the white background of the page. In this manner physiology reduces the activity of reading to a perceptual problem of figure versus ground. The physiological threshold of reading coincides with a moment of sheer recognition, not comprehension, and as a result reading has been relegated to the level of an unconscious inference, to the mechanism of a reflex arc. Reading becomes a bodily automatism: “it is doing it.”

The spacing of letters and words, or the visibility of language, has now become more significant than the access to an imaginary world that was provided by the orality of a maternal voice. Meaning is created out of spacing, as Kittler notes, referring to the invention of a typographic poem, such as Morgenstern’s Fish’s Night Song that consists of typewritten circumflexes and dashes. We have reached the “absolute minimum economy of the signifier” which can only be transcended by the white page.” Now compare how the empty spaces in Laing’s text, the indentations, intervals and interruptions, which are further attenuated in the Lamelas film, act as if to devour the interiority of thought.

97. Deleuze, Foucault, p. 111.
98. Kittler, Discourse Networks, p. 257. On the relation of Morgenstern’s typogram to the previous oral paradigm of language, Kittler observes: “Fish’s Night Song” is the cancellation of Goethe’s ‘Wanderer’s Night Song II.’ In the latter, a human voice outlasts the surrounding sounds of nature for one breath in order to express the promise that it, too, would find rest in the lap of Mother Nature.” (p. 258).
The woman reads to us in a calm but authoritative voice. Nevertheless her performance contains a lack since the typographic oddities of Laing’s text do not allow themselves to be verbalized. It is fair to say, therefore, that *Reading Film* is a film constructed of visual and discursive intervals, of the gaps in speech, the gaps between signs, the gaps in communication. In a note that Lamelas wrote preceding the making of *Reading Film*, the artist considers that his film should consist of two components: an analysis of the linguistic structure of the text and a reading of the text whereby mistakes would automatically occur. The errors of speech born of a *misreading*: physiology was only interested in what happened above the threshold of reading, all that remained below, the lapses and anomalies of reading were treated as sheer non-sense. But it was precisely from this refuse of the psychotechnical lab that psychoanalysis would attempt to construct sense. Physiology can be credited with having discovered a new terrain of knowledge, a pathology of reading with its various symptoms of asymbolia or aphasia that emerged at the level of bodily automatisms, but it was psychoanalysis that found a use for the knowledge, working over the accumulated detritus of physiological experiments and extracting a surplus value from it.

The tachystoscope is the opposite of the cinematic apparatus: the one broke language down into relational terms and differences—a proto-semiotics—and the other suppressed the differences. It is for this reason that writers feared that film would replace literature as the placeholder of imaginary. It seems unnecessary to elaborate on the fact that *Reading Film* inverts this dichotomy. It is equally obvious how the film can be understood to disturb the psychoanalytic situation of the analyst and the analyzed, whereby the former listens in silence (and unseen) to the voice of an other. However, there is one more, contemporary scene of reading that we need to visit before leaving the *Reading Film* behind.

*The Reading Room of Conceptualism*

In an afterword to a later edition of the *History of Madness*, Foucault comments on the “strange proximity” between madness and modern literature. Foucault speaks not of classical literature or the oral literature of Romanticism, but of a writing that discovers in the phenomenon of *madness* “a terrifying other in which, nevertheless, we recognize ourselves obliquely.” He notes that madness and literature both constitute a double language on the basis of a linguistic code that does not exist except in its utterance. There is no external code, because this language is all exteriority. Therefore we cannot decide whether language says what it does or does what it says. He illustrates this ideas with the paradox of Epidemes ‘I am lying’, suggesting that I am delirious and I am writing are similar *paradoxes* whereby the event of writing or being mad can never be reduced to a coherent form of knowledge, because this event moves exactly outside the historical limits of our mode of rationality.

One may propose that ‘I am reading’ consists of a paradox as well. *Reading Film* of Lamelas has proven ample evidence of this fact. It is neither strictly performative in nature (completely ‘here and now’) nor is it a readerly text. But this is not what the linguistic model of conceptualism was up to in general. Conceptual art, more often than not, was not concerned with the actual performance or activity of reading. Its primary aim was to disassemble the work of art in order to establish the axiomatic system of rules upon which the ‘concept’ of art is based. An example of such an approach may be found in the programmatic text, “Proceedings,” produced by The Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis in 1969.

The Society was a group founded by the *Art & Language* members Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden and they declared the establishment of “an epistemology of the art-area” as their primary goal. The aim of the Society was to map “the arrangement of the sustaining concepts and the unity of the constructional principles determining the various...

IN PLACE OF FILM

classes within the art-area.” Yet to define the work of art in such an axiomatic fashion is to invite a fundamental problem. As symbolic logic teaches us, axioms are by definition not amenable to proof or demonstration. A coherent set of elements cannot map itself onto itself or takes its own measure without calling a paradox into existence. Not that the Art & Language group was innocent of the potential aporias that might derive from their systematizing logic. In fact, they reserved a special place in their oeuvre for the cataloging of such paradoxes.

To reserve, in the sense of placing something to the side, is indeed the operative verb here. Kosuth’s Sixth Investigation (1969), for instance, collects some of the logical puzzles that are contrived by Lewis Carroll in his Symbolic Language. The Sixth Investigation incorporated examples of the mathematician’s soriteses, which were meant for the ‘mental recreation’ of the reader. The purpose of these conundrums and riddles, however, was not to demonstrate how logic could get bogged down in absurdities. Rather, Carroll hoped to endow the reader with the ability to detect fallacies in ordinary language. These riddles, in other words, could be resolved, but in other works of Carroll, such as The Hunting of the Snark or Sylvie and Bruno, a truly blank and enigmatic region of thought is designated by Carroll. And it is these texts, above all, which would direct the Art & Language group (to which Kosuth also belonged on occasion) towards the creation of such tautological works as “Map of Itself” (1967) in which a grid maps its own area.

It follows that Burn and Ramsden could not escape the evident limitations of their epistemological project in conceiving the ‘Proceedings’ of their Society. Indeed their statement acknowledges that it will be impossible to draw up a “comprehensive genealogy of the class of art-object” since “it is difficult to imagine” that the artistic framework originates “from a system of fundamental postulates.” But at this point, Burn and Ramsden come to personify the situation of the analyst, who during a psychoanalytical session threatens to be drawn into the unconsciously woven web of the analysand’s discourse. Unmoored from the everyday codes of communication, language gives way to an interminable series of signs, one displacing the other. No exit from this discursive labyrinth would exist were it not that the analyst comes equipped with a navigational chart upon which a triangulation of all points can take place: the Oedipal map of familial relations. In a similar fashion the conceptual artist-as-cartographer threatens to become lost, as Burn and Ramsden write, within the endless “chains of overlapping and interconnecting genealogies.” Unless they are willing to give into defeat, they must seek to bring the proliferating series to a standstill. The Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis recommends, therefore, that the institutional boundaries of the visual arts be actively policed: limits are to be demarcated, social conventions defined, and stable discursive positions assigned. In short, contemporary art is to be stratified as an archival system; a method that Art and Language would even apply to themselves in Index 01 (1972) which consists of a complex cross-referencing system connecting all their various projects and writings.

I don’t wish to push this argument too far. The collective practice of Art & Language has undergone various changes and it is not difficult to find in such later works as Sighs Trapped by Liars (1997) or Index: Wrongs Healed in Official Hope (1998-99) the development of a different perspective on the earlier pieces I have just discussed. Nevertheless, this brief detour was necessary in order to establish where the sentence ‘I am reading’ begins, as it were, to lose its common sense. It will be helpful, at this point, to recall the definition of a symbolic structure I have already provided above. To follow Deleuze, a symbolic structure consists of two aspects: “a system of differential relations according to which the symbolic elements determine themselves reciprocally, and a system of singularities corresponding to these relations and tracing the space of the structure” [my emphasis].

101. My reading of Lewis Carroll is largely based on Deleuze, The Logic of Sense.
103. Deleuze, “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?,” p. 177.
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terms offered by the “Proceedings” of The Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis then the symbolic element will be embodied by the “art-object” and the “class of art-object” will formalize the differential relations between art-objects within the institutional domain of art. Furthermore, the system of singularities will be identified with the particular distribution of enunciatory positions that constitutes the “epistemology of the art-area”: a discursive network that is centered upon the sovereign subject of the “Proceedings” itself. In short, the “Proceedings” describe a specific dispositif of linguistic conceptualism – an axiomatic system that establishes a fixed regime of knowledge, power and subjectivity in the wake of its analytical gaze. It is such a conceptualist apparatus that Buchloh has referred to in a disparaging manner as extolling an aesthetics of administration.104 I concur with Buchloh that works such as Index threaten to become locked into a tautological process of self-reference – the map mapping itself – and as a result suppress all links to any region of experience beyond their own discursive horizon, whether this exterior be conceived in terms of historical memory or social experience. In other words, this trajectory of conceptual art reached an impasse that could only be circumvented by establishing a dialectical relation between inside and outside, breaking the tautological order of radical self-referentiality.

But what if we phrase the problem differently? What if we dwell a bit longer on the place of the paradox within the systematizing efforts of conceptual art? Are such paradoxes, as the case of Art & Language suggests, to be shunted aside and placed in a ‘reserve’ so that they do not disturb the axiomatic structure of meaning? Or, conversely, are we to be on the look out for those moments of blankness that indicate that a particular historical dialectic has run its course? Modernism is rife with such moments in which the ‘revolutionary practice of negation’ reaches a limit where it is no longer legible what is being negated, resulting in an impasse. But perhaps there is a third option. Both options listed above attempt to negate the paradoxical event, either by displacing onto the horizon or by attempting to sublate it within a dialectical process of determination (or, if all else fails, to abandon this dialectical cul-de-sac). However we might also explore another, positive aspect of the paradoxical event, which we have already captured in terms of the empty signifier. Signifying, as Laclau stated, the ultimate impossibility on which the process of signification is based, the empty signifier is that singularity that introduces a distortion in the symbolic system.

What happens, for instance, if the horizon is folded back over the territory? In other words, the empty signifier is collapsed on top of the signifying system. In Carroll’s Sylvie and Bruno there is mention of a map made on a scale of one mile to one mile. This map, as the narrator explains in Sylvie and Bruno, was never unrolled because the farmers complained that it would cover the whole country. “So now,” he happily states, “we use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well.” David Lamelas would certainly enjoy such a tale (which has its variant in Borges). As a matter of fact, he added his own item to this list of cartographic absurdities in the very same year that The Society for Theoretical Art published its “Proceedings.”

Working with a professional crew, Lamelas shot a film in 1969 called A Study of the Relationships between Inner and Outer Space for a group show at the Camden Arts Center in London. The film can perhaps be best understood as a parody of the sociological survey. With deadpan humor, the film makes a structural analysis of the relationship “between a certain place-environment and its system of use.”105 In a series of incremental steps, executed in seemingly logical fashion, the film moves from the “enclosed space” of the gallery at the Camden Arts Center to the “open space” of London City. First the film makes a tour of the gallery, creating an inventory of the characteristics of the gallery interior (physical dimension, lighting, acoustics). Then it examines the various “activities which take place on an average day,” such as closing and opening doors or switching the

lights on and off. Next the various administrative functions of the staff are presented: a Jamaican guard, a female clerk, and white British supervisor explain their duties. As the frame of vision widens ever further, the camera transports us outside the museum, in order to inform the viewer about the transport system and communicational infrastructure of the city, even zooming in on the peculiarities of its microclimate. Yet just as the camera seems only capable of pulling further away, moving upwards into outer space, the camera descends to street level again. And the cameraman, in what might appear to be a final ironical twist of the narrative, commences to interview random passers-bys about the main media event of the day, namely the Apollo 10 landing on the moon. But I would maintain that this final scene demonstrates that more is at stake in *A Study of the Relationships between Inner and Outer Space* than an ironical gesture. There is a profound absurdity involved in any attempt to map the informational flows of capitalist society. Capitalism may try to control this multiplicity within the unified space of the global media spectacle, yet Lamelas’s film suggests its flip-side, the virtual map without relations:

“Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!
But we’ve got our brave Captain to thank:
(So the crew would protest) “that he’s bought us the best –
A perfect and absolute blank!”

4. Reading Duras

“Characters? Yes, they are in the position of characters – men, women, shadows – and yet they are points of singularity, immobile, although a movement’s path in a rarefied space – in the sense that almost nothing can take place in it – can be traced from one to the other, a multiple path, through which, fixed, they constantly exchange themselves and, identical, they constantly change.”

Maurice Blanchot, *Destroy*

In 1970 Lamelas collaborated on another film project with Raúl Escari,* namely *Interview* with Marguerite Duras. During this short film Escari’s off-screen voice is heard while he interviews the French writer. Filmed in a documentary fashion, *Interview* was recorded in the domestic setting of Duras’s country home. Duras is shown in a continuous, medium shot, talking and smoking, as she sits in a wooden chair against the background of a roughly plastered stonewall. Occasionally we are offered a glimpse out a curtained side window as she bends forward to tip her cigarette in the ashtray. The whole film lasts slightly over five minutes. It begins with a slight pause on the part of Duras, as if she is considering a question she has just been posed, after which she commences to speak: “For *Destruction* I already had three characters....”

*Interview* with Marguerite Duras drops the viewer into the middle of the conversation without providing any introduction or explanation. Contemporary viewers who were familiar with the work of Duras would realize, however, that Duras is referring to *Destroy, She Said* (*Détruire, dit-elle*), which is not only the title of the first novel she wrote after the events of May ’68, but also the name of the first movie that the French author directed herself. *Destruction* describes the encounter of four individuals in a secluded hotel at the edge of a dense forest: Max Thor, an aspiring author who is attracted to Elisabeth Alione, the wife of an industrialist who recently suffered a miscarriage, and Stein, who in turn is infatuated by Alissa, Max’s young wife and former student. This tale of mutual entanglement is truly a story about the annihilation of self, whereby the characters sense of individuality and social decorum gradually dissolves before our eyes. Indeed *Destroy, She Said* demands to be read as an allegory of the revolutionary project; that is to say,
as the minute account of a social group that undertakes the radical act, semi-consciously it seems, of purging itself of the laws and institutions that bind capitalist society together. The novel stages a 'capital destruction,' to use Duras's own phrase, of the proppings of the bourgeois subject. Played out within an intimate, almost claustrophobic setting, Destroy, She Said places the four protagonist under a process of steady erasure until, towards the very end, the imminent arrival of an event of apocalyptic proportions is hinted at by the distorted sound of music rolling across the horizon of the forest.

No such synopsis of the novel/film, however, is offered in 'Interview' with Marguerite Duras. The conversation ranges across a number of topics related to the writing of the book, how she views the characters and motifs in her book, and then verges upon a rather striking comment that Duras makes in the trailer to the movie, which is itself phrased as an interview. During this dialogue, Duras compares the figure of the revolutionary (and, by implication, the characters in the film) to a madman and a “German Jew.” Duras, who actively participated in May '68, is referring to the well-known slogan of the students ‘We are all German Jews.’ Asked by Escari to explain this remark, she states that she was not only thinking of the mot d'ordre of ’68. There is something more to it, she reflects, calling upon the suggestion of her fellow soixante-huitard Maurice Blanchot that the Jewish condition is somehow related to the idea of the ‘absolute.’ Leaning back, she allows herself to slightly elaborate, proposing the additional terms of anxiety [angoisse] and bitterness [amer], at which point the interview is cut as abruptly as it began.109

This exchange, suddenly discontinued as it is, can certainly be considered perplexing on several levels. To start with, the emblematic figures of subversiveness that she offers, the madman and the Jew, would cause some critics to raise an eyebrow, although the figure of the madman-as-revolutionary had, as we have seen, already gained general currency in this period. In particular, the connection she draws between Jewishness and the absolute may be easily misconstrued and without needing to come to her defense, what Duras probably had in mind was Blanchot's essay “Being Jewish.”110 Here Blanchot approaches the conflicted nature of the topic head-on: “The Jew is uneasiness and affliction. This must be clearly said even if this assertion, in its indiscreet sobriety, is itself unfortunate.”111 Blanchot maintains that Judaism has bestowed a great gift upon Western thought, namely the “exigency of uprooting; the affirmation of nomadic truth.” For Blanchot, the word exodus and exile express not a state of deprivation or lack, but a “positive relationship with exteriority, whose exigency invites us not to be content with what is proper to us (that is, with our power to assimilate everything, to identify everything, to bring everything back to our I).”112

What Duras seems to imply in Interview, therefore, is that Jewishness represents a force of total refusal. Since, as her friend Blanchot asserts, Jewish thought inhabits a state of errancy that does not know mediation and refuses speech as mediating: “to speak to someone is... to recognize him as unknown and to receive him as foreign without obliging him to break with his difference.”113 Blanchot thus associates Jewishness with the exteriority of language as such that undermines all imaginary forms of communion or identity. Duras speaks, therefore, of the absolute not as constituting some final unity of understanding (it is anti-Semitism that attempts to reduce the irreducible), but as a permanent questioning, an infinite conversation, that maintains an ‘absoluteness of difference’: a thought of pure relationality that is without common measure.

But why should I bother to clear up this detail? What significance could it have to Lamelas's practice? If such significance can be proposed

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then it is not an exegetical one. Lamelas has read Duras and seen her films, but it is not the content of her work as such that is of concern to him or to us. We may certainly call into doubt Blanchot's celebration of the diasporic principle, his invocation of a paradisical imagery, considering that the current conditions of globalization that have given a quite different meaning to such terms as exile, exodus, exteriority and estrangement; terms that for Blanchot and Duras could still represent the 'origin of all positive value.' We may also criticize Duras's metaphors of the madman and Jew. However little is to be gained from such an approach. The exact content of Duras's speech is not of concern here. It is above all the manner in which language and politics meet in her work, coming together under the motto of 'capital destruction' (i.e. the destruction of identity, memory, and even work itself) that is relevant. And more significantly, it is important to investigate how this non-dialectical process of destruction, which in the words of Blanchot is to give birth to a communism without heritage touches upon the actual practice of Lamelas.

‘Interview’ may be characterized as a self-destructive gesture of filmmaking. The film literally places the genre of the media interview between quotation marks: we are treated to an arbitrary excerpt of what is presumably a longer interview and the film raises more questions than it answers. The citational gesture of the film, furthermore, directly mimics the writing style of Duras. In the course of the sixties, namely, her writing was becoming more fragmentary in nature, reduced to sparse and laconic conversations between a few characters. Her writing makes it difficult to decide whose actual viewpoint is being represented at which point in the text. Her characters become exchangeable, merging with another.114 Destroy, She Said, for instance, consists of desultory exchanges between the four main characters (no minor characters are present), broken by intermittent pauses and silences, and interspersed by even shorter descriptive passages. “I don’t think there are any sentences left” in the book, she has commented. “And there are directions mindful of scripts; ‘sunshine’, ‘seventh day’, heat,’ etc....These are usually stage directions. That is to say I would like the material to be read to be as free as possible of style; I can’t read novels at all anymore…”115 She was writing, as she has claimed on numerous occasions, for a younger generation who no longer read, who prefer to visit the cinema and watch movies. Hence her writing assumed the look of a scenario. Duras wanted to write something that could be used in multiple ways – to be read or acted or filmed, or “simply thrown away.”116 Besides partaking in an annihilation of the novelistic tradition – a familiar preoccupation of the nouveau roman – Duras's book seems to have gone a step further by internalizing the condition of the paperback as disposable commodity. But is there more to this intentional debasement of the work? And how might it concern Lamelas?

A striking feature of Duras's novel – or should we call it an anti-novel? – is the lack of an overarching narrative voice. This prompts a debate in an interview Duras gave to the editors of Cahiers du Cinéma whether the camera has abandoned the fixed role of objective observer. Abandoning, therefore, also the function of the narrator in a novel by incessantly changing position, switching between inner and outer perspectives, without the spectator always being able to tell for sure whose viewpoint was being occupied. Essential here is that the book as well as the film are structured in a discontinuous fashion, placing all certainties of time and location in question. The trailer to the film makes this abundantly clear. Duras is posed a question: "Where are we?" She answers: "In a hotel, for example." The dialogue continues: "Could it be some other place?" “Yes. It is up to the spectator to

chose.” Don’t we even know what time it is?“ No, it is either nighttime or daytime.” And so forth. The proceedings (more about this later) take place upon the vacant grounds of a hotel, in an unspecified time and place.

What ‘Interview’ mimics is precisely this disjunctive and dialogic structure of book and film: “[the film] is a decomposition of the interview in order to reach a written form, which is her way of working, at the exact moment when conceptual artists were using language as a form of art.”

The decomposition of which Lamelas speaks is not only achieved by cutting the interview at arbitrary moments. If one listens carefully, it is possible to make out another sound than the talking voices. In the background is the faint clicking of a photograph-camera. While Escari and Duras were engaged in conversation, Lamelas took photographs, fragmenting the interview further into a series of still images. When the work is exhibited, the projected film is juxtaposed with the photographic series. Each photograph is accompanied by a text panel which transcribes the exact sentences spoken at that moment by either Duras or Escari, dislodging the sentences from their original communicative context not dissimilar to the way that the captions in the reading films disintegrated the texts of Laing and Borges into partial phrases.

I have noted how the film starts not so much in the midst of speech, but with a pause. And it ends on something like a dotted line. Duras struggles to find a proper response to a question, but we’ll never know if she completed her train of thought. The striking character of ‘Interview’ is to place the gaps and intervals of speech in the foreground, whereas we normally consider pauses within a conversation to be detrimental to proper communication. Interestingly, it is Blanchot who has suggested we reverse this relationship. What is his definition of a conversation?

When two people speak together, they speak not together, but each in turn: one says something, then stops, the other something else (or the same thing) then stops. The coherent discourse they carry on is composed of sequences that are interrupted when the conversation moves from partner to partner... The fact that speech needs to pass from one interlocutor to another in order to be confirmed, contradicted, or developed shows the necessity of the interval."

Thus Blanchot’s inversion of the commonplace: What appears to play a minor role in the conversation, the interruption of speaking, is what permits speech to be constituted as a conversation in the first place.

If intermittence makes dialogue possible, what may we conclude from this proposition? Blanchot offers two possibilities. First of all, the arrest-interval can function as the “respiration of discourse”; that it to say, it interrupts, perhaps even impedes common speech, but it always does so against the horizon of common sense. It does not depart from a belief in some unitary truth upon which all discourse converges, even if this moment of total understanding may never be reached. We may call such pauses, therefore, interrupting for the sake of understanding. And this kind of pause belongs to dialectical thought. Yet there is another interruption – “more enigmatic and more grave” – that maintains an irreducible distance between the interlocutors. For brevity’s sake, I can summarize Blanchot’s argument by stating that interpersonal communication can either tend towards a form of unity – the ‘I’ may attempt to annex the other, to find within the other another myself, or to fuse with the other – or it can recognize the radical foreignness of an other, an alterity which is “neither another self nor me, nor another existence” but the “unknown in its infinite distance.” Let us call, this arrest-interval, then, non-dialectical. This interruption is not a blank or a gap – that would be too crude, Blanchot writes – rather, it brings about a change in the very structure of language. A change, furthermore, that is metaphorically comparable to the transformation of Euclidean into topological space. ‘To speak on a Riemann surface’ is how Valery
once put it, according to Blanchot. Two pauses, therefore: a dialectical one that permits exchange, whereby one interrupts oneself in order to understand, and a topological one that measures an infinite distance, whereby a gap emerges that is “anterior and exterior to all speech and to all silence,” asphyxiating speech while announcing the outside of language that is always within language itself.

‘Interview’ quotes the interview format in order to turn its rhetorical strategies back upon itself, to interrupt its proceedings. For this reason Lamelas’s selection of Duras was far from arbitrary, although this statement needs to be qualified. Lamelas: “It was not Duras’ persona that interested me, the film is not a portrait of her. What interested me was her work with text.” 120 Like many other artists of the conceptual generation, Lamelas was an admirer of the **nouveau roman**. He was well-versed in the literature of Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet, among others, and had also seen the movies — *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *Last Year in Marienbad* — that these writers had scripted for Alain Resnais. Let it be clear that it was not the ‘personality’ of Duras that interested Lamelas, but her method of writing that was increasingly inflected through the medium of film. Although he originally intended to conduct three interviews on the “political and cultural situation in France after May 68,” Lamelas was not collecting a pantheon of literary or political nor was he conducting a kind of sociological survey.121 Roland Barthes was to be another of the candidates for an interview, but ultimately the artist felt it was sufficient to limit himself to Duras. The reason that he abandoned his more ambitious, initial plan is that the interview project did not attempt to map the totality of a cultural system. ‘Interview’ provides, rather, the mise-en-scène of a specific dispositif exemplified by the media interview with the critical intellectual. Yet, at the same time, ‘Interview’ designates the singularities or points of mutation within this system, drawing them into focus along the concrete plane of intersection between language and film.

In Lamelas’s film, the interview with Duras operates in an emblematic manner. The actual content of what is said by Duras and Escari is less important than the decomposition of the interview format as such, its dispersal across the series of photographs and captions. This does not mean, however, that *Interview* is amounts to no more than a formal exercise in deconstruction. The specific character of Duras’ literary and filmic practice, in particular as it developed during the sixties, are not irrelevant to Lamelas’s project. Duras features in this film, we might say, as a symptomatic figure, who occupies a highly contradictory position within the socio-political situation of post-68 France. It is the vexed condition of her concept of authorship and her troubled relation to the domain of publicity that appears to interest Lamelas, especially as it manifests itself within her writing and cinematic work. Indeed her writing and cinematography are bound together in a not altogether symmetrical relationship. Cinema provides her with an antidote, a means of coping with the waning cultural authority of literature. Nobody reads books any more, she would frequently state in the sixties and seventies. Therefore, she starts to make films or, rather, she writes books that read as film scripts and are quickly transferred by her onto celluloid. Yet there is a sense of complaint in her comment, a sense that in order for literature to remain resilient, she must simultaneously work in film and thereby establish a connection to that very poisonous realm of the mass media that brought about the fall of the book in the first place.

Perhaps one might say that Duras performs a difficult balancing act between two historically divergent modes of public existence: the intellectual and the celebrity. The intellectual, whose task is to serve as the voice of reason and act as the nation’s conscience — a task that Duras to a certain extent relishes — is a historical product of the bourgeois public sphere of the nineteenth-century with its thriving literary culture. During the sixties, however the public figure of the

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120. Lamelas, “The Work Have to Develop its Own Consciousness.” Several of Lamelas’s contemporary photo-works investigate the construction of celebrity within the mass media.
intellectual, which Sartre could still embody with much flourish during the preceding decade, was showing some signs of strain. The protesting multitudes of May ’68, for instance, demonstrated a common distrust of the more authoritarian traits of the intellectual’s mode of speech, as exhibited by their resistance to appointing representatives or leaders of the movement. We have seen this ambivalence before in the position of Herbert Marcuse. Yet it is not so much the power of the intellectual – the one who speaks in the name of knowledge – that is in question, nor its substitution by the other public figures who come to occupy the nexus of knowledge-power, such as the technocrat. More important here, is the refashioning of the intellectual into a media celebrity – a process that was already successfully negotiated (up to a certain point) by R.D. Laing among others.

Duras was certainly not shy of media attention and would often speak out in public. However as a soixante-huitard she simultaneously resists the lure of the mass media, eager to confront the mechanisms of power that regulate the meaning of the events that are covered by the media. In her films, Duras counters the media’s tendency to fix the non-determinate event within an ideological order, to transform the unexpected into a mere historical ‘accident’ that can be safely inscribed within a system of historical or social determinism. One of her strategies, which would become more pronounced in the films after Destroy, She Said, is to disconnect the visuals and the soundtrack. Image and sound not only become the autonomous components of a single audio-visual image, as Deleuze observes, but “two ‘heautonomous’ images, one visual and one sound.”22 The purpose of the voice-over, in Duras’ own words, is to hamper the unrolling of the film, not to facilitate it. The dissynchrony or disjunction between image and word is a device that Lamelas employed to a lesser extent in the reading films. Yet in the later Desert People, which extends the use of the interview, Lamelas would develop the fault between spoken word and the visual evidence of the film in such a fashion that the progress (and eventual closure) of the film is not simply disturbed. Rather the spectator becomes trapped in the fold between two heterogeneous series from which there is no exit: although at first the two series appear to complement each other, the visuals seeming to back up the spoken testimonials of the performers, in the end they contradict each other. Instead of a dénouement, the spectator is presented an inextricable knot in the shape of a film that never could have taken place.

But I am getting ahead of myself. We have seen how Lamelas keeps returning to the problem of the event; that is to say, the event as it is neutralized within the media, but also the event in its capacity to resist such recuperation. The two reading films, Situation of Time, Film 18 Paris IV:70 (People and Time – Paris) Cumulative Script, Film Script, among other works, were all concerned with this dichotomous sense of the event: on the one side its actual existence as a corporeal state of affairs that ‘takes place’ within chronological time and on the other hand its virtual existence as a pure singularity that is “incorporeal, unlimited, an empty form of time” (Deleuze). The achronological or virtual event is endlessly subdivisible and therefore possesses the potential to ramify in ever new directions, both advancing and retreating at the same time. Escaping causal logic with its strict order of before and after, the event becomes the “perpetual object of a double question: What is going to happen? What has just happened?”23 Indeed I know no better way of describing the agonizing aspect of watching The Desert People, which does not allow past and present to settle into a stable relationship with one another.

For the generation of Duras (and Lamelas as well), the prototypical ‘event’, the temporal void to which one returned again and again was May ’68. For Duras, May ’68 functioned as the supreme example of an event that could not be integrated within the ideological apparatus of the State or the media. As her fellow soixante-huitard Blanchot writes, during the fateful days of May “a sort of communism declared itself, a communism of a kind

122. Deleuze, Cinema 2, p. 251.
123. See n. 14.
never experienced before and which no ideology was able to recuperate or claim as its own.”24 If May ’68 saw no serious attempts at reform, then it was because of its total disregard of power, its refusal to take an adversarial approach, and thus the May revolution “in the eyes of men of power and eluding their analyses, could only be put down with typical sociological phrases such as chienlit, that is to say the carnivalesque redoubling of their own disarray, the disarray of a command that no longer commanded anything, not even itself, contemplating, without seeing it, its own inexplicable ruin.”25 “The event?, Blanchot asked himself, ‘had it really taken place? May ’68 was an exception, it provided no solution, “even if it gives an idea of a revolution that does not need to succeed or achieve a fixed goal” since “it is sufficient unto itself, and since the failure that eventually rewards it is none of its concern.”26 An event, therefore, that is to be preserved at an infinite distance, an absolute interruption of the capitalist spaces of information and communication.

For some May ’68 would come to occupy the place of the placeless; it is the non-locational event par excellence. May ’68 is an event that never took place, because it is irreducible to causality or determinism. The possibilities it contained were fully unforeseen and unpredictable (somewhat like the Paris Commune which took Karl Marx by surprise). Blanchot would argue this point in an essay called The Unavowable Community which includes a commentary on the writing of Duras.127 Reminiscing about those spring days, Blanchot unfolds one of his central tenets, namely that the proper aim of any communal project is not to achieve a communitarian fusion, but to initiate a continuous testing of its own radical immanence even though this meant that the communal project was placed under constant erasure. The model of such a radical communism without an established horizon or project was May ’68: an “incomparable form of society that remained elusive, that was not meant to survive.”26 The revolutionaries of ’68 were united in their radical refusal to accept power, by their “virtual and absolute powerlessness.”27 As a result, Blanchot declared, the political committees represented a multiplying force which kept up the pretense of organizing disorganization.

Blanchot speaks out of experience. Both Duras and himself were members of the Student-Writers Committee. Here is Duras’s own take on committee’s absolute refusal of all forms of organizational identity:

“Nothing holds us together but refusal. Delinquents of class society, but alive, unclassifiable but unbreakable, we refuse. We push our refusal to the point of refusing to be assimilated into the political groups that claim to refuse what we refuse. We refuse the refusal programmed by the institutions of the opposition. We refuse that our refusal, tied up and packaged, bear a trademark.”28

Deleuze and Guattari would present the same thesis, to no great surprise. In their jointly written “May ’68 Did Not Take Place,” they declare that the event is only to be understood as “a splitting off from, or a breaking with causality, an opening onto the possible which is never outdated.”29 Accordingly an “event [such as May ’68] creates a new existence, it produces a new subjectivity (new relations with time, sexuality, the immediate surroundings, with culture, work... ).” In their estimation, French society was not capable of responding in an adequate fashion to the demands of the event, to redeploy the new forms of subjectivity produced by May ’68.

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127. Blanchot discusses Duras’s La Maladie de la Mort in The Unavowable Community.
For others, however, such as the Italian post-operaists, the verdict on May ’68 would be very different, despite their extensive borrowings from Deleuze’s thought. Paolo Virno and Toni Negri, among others, have proposed that the emergence of a new revolutionary class of students in 1968, in its very attempt to emancipate itself from a disciplinary regime of work, anticipated the full integration of cooperative forms of intellectual labor into a post-Fordist paradigm of economic production. According to this less sanguine view, in other words, May ’68 did take place; its potential was not expended, but revalorized by capitalism. A paradoxical turn of history that prompts Virno to speak of a communism of capital which has succeeded where the revolutions of the sixties and seventies failed, namely the abolition of industrial work and the dissolution of the State. The notion of a communism of capital, whether apt or not to our present circumstances, certainly presents a radical perversion of Blanchot’s notion of a communism that forever (that is, for a brief interlude in history) resists the demand towards communitarian fusion, towards forming a people that is placed upon the multitude by the exigencies of governmental rule and capitalist production. Perhaps, then, we are merely dealing with two sides of the same coin. Be that as it may, for the moment I would like to keep these two divergent views on May ’68 in play, because they are both pertinent to Lamelas’s practice.

In filming ‘Interview’ Lamelas was very aware of how the ‘consciousness industry’ was feeding upon the representatives of the nouveau roman and nouvelle vague. We might even say that this paradoxical phenomenon of a literary avant-garde that not only turned to the media in order to assume the role of producer, but had also achieved vast attention within the mainstream media, was what attracted Lamelas in the first place. He was struck by the coincidence between Duras’s career and the slightly later turn of conceptual art towards both language and film. As the visual arts moved into the realm of language, literature was in the process of ‘destroying itself’: creating a fragmentary, objectified mode of writing that Lamelas thought was not dissimilar to the decontextualized phrases and statements of the conceptual art.

As said, Lamelas was not interested in portraying the private demeanor of Duras, however the fact that the writer possessed a media persona can be considered an integral factor of ‘Interview.’ Lamelas’s film does not set out to capture the quirks of her behavior, the idiosyncrasies of her speech, or to record her personal statements on affairs of national importance, which is the ordinary business of the media portrait of a famous intellectual. Like Laing, however, Duras had become something of a media myth. As a result, Duras could easily come to fulfill the allegorical function of “a personification of an idea of Parisian culture” which Lamelas intended with ‘Interview.’ She personified to him an “end of an era of writers,” as Lamelas recalls.

Even if Duras is no more than a symptomatic case — a personification of an idea, as Lamelas puts it — specifics are still what matter. To begin with, Duras did not act the part of a passive victim of the media; she was aware of her own mythical status and willingly participated in its construction. In the frequent interviews she gave to the press, she encouraged the public perception of an entanglement between her private life and her fictive characters. Furthermore, she publically engaged in a running dialogue with her own work, continuously reassessing and exploring the multiple aspects of her characters, their possible combinations and potential lines of development. In short, Duras willingly assisted in the construction of her media persona, which has made her vulnerable to the criticism that she only too willing to guided the public’s perception of her books. Whereas the all-knowing narrator has been excised from her novels, there she is, in the role of media commentator, filling in the gaps.

Enter Blanchot: what does all the chatter of Duras amount to? Does she truly bring about a unified concept of her oeuvre in which all fits together or does she bring about something quite different. Does she not through conversation open up her work to its possible ramifications? Does the interview not produce an element of chance, an

132. David Lamelas in conversation with the author.
unexpected interruption, which makes thought
take an unpredictable turn? If we accept this line
of reasoning — and the point is not to choose sides
here, but, as I wrote before, to keep both options in
play — then Duras is not only creating a persona,
but placing this persona under erasure.

This persona is as unstable as the characters
and events in her books and films, subject to an
interminable re-editing of Duras by Duras. A re-
edition that, as others have noted before me, does
not return not to a constant theme or individual
character, but to an empty center; a void such as
the vacant hotel in *Destory, She Said* and the
deserted forest that the characters appear to fear
entering. ‘What is the forest a symbol of?’, asks
Escari. “The forest means what you wish, I don't
care. I can only say what it is not,” Duras answers,
deftly avoiding the trap of affirmative speech in
which the media would ensnare her. Not unlike
Lamelas, Duras is involved in a constant emptying
out of the image, freeing it not only of an
imaginary presence but also of a secure anchoring
in a symbolic space. Any-space-whatever is the
name given by Deleuze to such a deterritorialized
space where the connection between movements,
gestures, and looks is radically unsettled. An
interstitial space and interrupted time were
Duras’s characters strive do almost nothing, to
exist in a near inoperative state. A stillness that
Lamelas makes literal with his photographs of the
interview. And this same strategy of decomposition
would be used again, as we have already seen, in
subsequent films such as *Cumulative Script* and *Film
Script (Manipulation of Meaning)*.

*Destory* is an apocalyptic tale, but not without
hope. It is a political film “where politics are never
spoken of.” It is a film about the annihilation of
the social links that bound the subject to the
institutions of family, class, and state. And it is a
film, finally, about passing through a void of
‘madness’ (Duras) where only a nomadic
distribution of singularities can exist. Therefore in
*Destory, She Said* the characters are multiplied; they
begin to mingle and interchange, just as the
differences between the book and cinema are
corroded. Lamelas may very well have recognized
in this project of ‘capital destruction’ his own
invention of the reading film. Casting off from the
disintegrating world of *Destory, She Said, Interview*
enacted a further dispersion of image and sound,
scattering its fragmentary elements across the
space of exhibition. *Interview* not only disrupted the
expectations of the viewer by interrupting
synchronicity of sound and image, but also by
opening an empty space between the images and
sentences themselves. Somewhere in the gaps of
this non-work the distant echoes of May ’68 may
still be heard, reverberating in unison with the
disintegrating language of *Destory, She Said* that
towards the end becomes punctuated by ever
longer lengths of silence.

**Postscript**

“My name was black. My name was a freedom. It
was a name I could leave at any time, not
because it was lost, but to start again. The name
I used was my own.”

— Murielrea

“I was very impressed with a story that Herbert
Marcuse told us. During the Paris Commune,
before they started shooting at people, the
Communards shot at the clocks, at all the clocks in
Paris, and they broke them. And they did this
because they were putting an end to the time of
the Others, the time of their rulers, and they were
going to invent their own time.” Thus the closing
words of David Cooper to The Dialectics of
Liberation conference. What is meant by the time
of the Others, to speak with Cooper, is the time of
industrial society; that is to say, time as external
measure of the labor process. In the interest of
“fusing ideology and action,” David Cooper and
Herbert Marcuse apparently got their wires
crossed: the anecdote concerning the revolutionary
stopping of the clocks stems from the July
Revolution and not the Paris Commune. Why
Marcuse would remember this story incorrectly I
cannot say, although one may conjecture that the
Paris Commune provided a revolutionary model
that was more easy to identify with in 1967 than
the 1839 uprising. The Paris Commune might be
viewed as a revolution that operated on a more
micro- than macropolitical scale of events. At least,
that is what Cooper would have us think:

“It seems to me that a cardinal failure of all past revolutions has been the dissociation of liberation on the mass social level, i.e. liberation of whole classes in economic and political terms, and liberation on the level of the individual and the concrete groups in which he is directly engaged. If we are to talk of revolution today our talk will be meaningless unless we effect some union between the macro-social and micro-social, and between ‘inner reality’ and ‘outer reality’.” And he goes on to deliver an upbeat depiction of the communal spirit fostered by the Congress, spreading out like waves into the surrounding urban environment:

So I think what our Congress was all about was not the dishing up of solutions to world problems already prepared, but an opportunity to think the thing out together. This is why the ‘principal speakers’ mixed so freely and spontaneously with the ‘audience’. It is why so many young people actually took to living in the Round-house and then took their seminars out into local pubs, cafes and public places.

Despite being called a ‘congress’, Cooper’s characterization of the collective process of thought performed by the participants hardly adheres to the traditional forms, mediations and identificatory structures of party politics (or academic conferences, for that matter). Clearly he’s expressing the desire (the reality is more difficult to judge) that the priority given to the micro-social during the Congress was directly manifested in the micropolitical, proliferating network of the participants, which was not containable, nor representable by the institutional framework of the congress.

Concomitantly, the image of stopping of time dead in its tracks was an attractive one, as Cooper’s echoing of Marcuse’s words demonstrates. Yet, in retrospect we might object that this image provided a fully inadequate means to reflect the present. In the moment of the later sixties it could no longer could be a question of returning the counter to zero, to begin counting again in a collective fashion from Hour Zero, Year One. Remarkably, Blanchot would rememorize the very same anecdote during the following year, appending it to a fragmentary text he wrote as the events of May 1968 were unfolding in the streets of Paris. Living in the revolutionary moment itself, Blanchot declares that its essence can only to be experienced as a stoppage, a suspension of time, an interruption of history: “The only mode in which revolution is present is that of its real possibility.” In discussing the *Office of Information* I have spoken of the tendency of capitalism to push the reset button, to return time to zero. The problem that Lamelas would have us ponder is how this zero time can be thought differently, not simply as a pause within history or even a dialectical break, but as a point of mutation.