

Mystical Cinema: inside the World-Language split

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ABSTRACT

Despite its birth in a specifically technical sphere, and as partial ‘compensation’ for its mechanical nature, cinema has traditionally been associated with the sphere of the imaginary and the realm of shadows, with accents frequently close to the register of magic and mysticism. Wittgenstein’s philosophy, for its part, has identified the ‘Mystical’ as a specific theoretical notion, connected to the theme of the internal limits of language, to a particular vision of the world (*sub specie aeterni*) and to a precise emotional tone. These three aspects of the Mystical find expression in certain cinematographic images (see Deleuze 1986, 1989), whose main characteristic is the attempt to overcome the separation between language and world, that is, between a word and its denotation (*Bedeutung*). Among these images, a particularly evident example is Godard’s film *Adieu au langage* (2014), in which the use of quotation, the role reserved for animality, and the construction of purely visual situations indicate the possibility of a typically cinematographic overcoming of the separation between language and world; that is, what is at stake is not to state what the world is, rather to let the world appear by itself.

KEYWORDS

Cinema, Mystical, Godard, Deleuze, Language, World

1. *Technical genesis and mystical attitude of cinema*

Since its emergence at the end of the 19th century, cinema has been met with mixed feelings by art theorists: its nature as a mechanical device, apparently automatic and capable of reproducing images from the real world without any human action, made it difficult to place it in the ‘system of arts’ alongside forms of expression such as painting, sculpture, music, etc. (Angelucci, 2009, pp. 7-27). The technical genesis of the cinematic device seemed to remove the image from the traditional mimetic regime, centered on the human capacity to produce images resembling objects in the natural world. However, from the very first theoretical reflections

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on cinema, the ‘inhuman’ aspect of the technical image opens up to two possible interpretative directions: one, as mentioned above, based on the mechanical and automatic nature of the device; the other founded on cinema’s singular feature, i.e., to make visible a fantastic unreal world, a realm of shadows and spirits. This double declination of the cinematic ‘Uncanny’, on the one hand technical, on the other spiritual, is historically reflected in the first diffusion of cinema, connected to magic shows and fairs, and anticipated by optical devices such as the ‘magic lantern’. Mechanical genesis and magical fascination also characterize the beginnings of the cinematograph: the first element is evident in the development of the medium by the Lumière brothers (Auguste, 1862-1954, and Louis, 1864-1948), who well represent the technical and entrepreneurial side of cinema, while the phantasmatic and mysterious side is particularly evident in the work of George Méliès (1861-1938), the first experimenter of the technique of film editing and special effects – who not by chance had been an illusionist and conjurer before being a filmmaker.

It is therefore not surprising that the first theorists who dedicated themselves to a reflection on cinema, seeking to accredit the new medium as an artistic form within a broader aesthetic reflection, frequently confronted this doubly ‘inhuman’ character of cinema, sometimes attempting to compensate for the ‘defect’ due to the technical nature of the medium precisely by emphasizing its spiritual potentialities. With regard to this second aspect, the semantic sphere used is very broad and ranges from the magical to the fantastic, even touching on the religious and in some cases the mystical (Leonard, 2009, pp. 10-19).

Among the theorists who explicitly refer to a mystical aspect of cinema, Ricciotto Canudo, who happily defines cinema as the ‘seventh art’, writes in his pioneering article *Trionfo del cinematografo* (1908, p. 3): “Il misticismo profondo diffuso, riconoscibile per mille segni, se pur non anche concentrato nella volontà di un messia o di uomini messianici, crea lentamente il tempio spirituale della nuova dea [i.e., the speed of cinema]”¹. Canudo conceives of cinema-going public as belonging to a new religion, involved in a new cult with its own temple, a hall where people can ecstatically experience this new art form combining the arts of space (plastic arts) and the arts of time (music and poetry).

A “widespread deep mysticism”, as Canudo writes, was also

¹ “The deep, widespread mysticism, which can be recognized by a thousand different signs, even if it isn’t also focused on a desire for a Messiah or for messianic men, slowly creates the spiritual temple of the new goddess.” [Translation by Siobhan Quinlan]

recognized a few years later by Jean Epstein, French filmmaker and theorist who did not hesitate to write: “LE CINÉMA EST MYSTIQUE” (Epstein, 1921, p. 115) since “le ciné nomme, mais visuellement, les choses, et spectateur, je ne doute pas une seconde qu’elles existent” (ivi, p. 116). A theorist of the purely visual quality of the cinematographic image, which he calls ‘photogenic’, using a term borrowed from Louis Delluc, Epstein recognizes that cinema has a capacity for grasping reality that goes far beyond its narrative power, which he considers secondary to the visual and revelatory aspect.

The reference to a “mystique of cinema” (Calvet 2010) is common to several authors but becomes particularly explicit in the short essay by French art historian Élie Faure entitled *Introduction à la mystique du cinéma* (1934). Here Faure writes:

Si le cinéma est mis au service d’un effort social unanime capable de nous délivrer de l’*individualisme* en exaltant et en utilisant toutes les ressources spirituelles de l’*individu* pour assurer le développement de cet effort, nous avons raison de voir en lui l’instrument de communion le plus incomparable, au moins depuis la grande architecture, dont l’homme ait encore disposé (Faure, 1934, p. 6).

Just as during the Middle Ages, the architecture of the great cathedrals involved a civilization animated by strongly spiritual ideals in a collective effort, nowadays for Faure cinema can become a tool to overcome the individualism of secularized society. Cinema is therefore seen as a new artistic form that, in continuity with some artistic expressions of the past, can promote a renewed spirit of communion, a collective feeling of a religious kind.

The awareness of this dual character of cinema, technical and mystical, is particularly evident in Walter Benjamin who very soon manages to integrate these two aspects in an overview of the phenomenon of technical reproducibility and its effects on the nature, and reception of the work of art. The well-known thesis of the loss of the aura that the work of art encounters in the age of its technical reproducibility on the one hand poses a form of disenchantment, due precisely to the substantial loss of cult value determined by technical reproducibility, but on the other hand it recognizes some subtle forms of re-enchantment. In this sense, for example, Benjamin thinks that cinema responds to the decline of the aura of the actors on the screen by creating, outside the studios, the cult of the movie stars. Even more fundamentally, Benjamin recognizes the effectiveness of re-enchantment within the disputes about the belonging or not of cinema to the field of art, in many ways already anticipated by the debate on the artistic

nature of photography. On this point, Benjamin notes:

It is instructive to see how the desire to annex film to “art” impels these theoreticians to attribute elements of cult to film – with a striking lack of discretion. [...] It is revealing that even today especially reactionary authors look in the same direction for the significance of film – finding, if not actually a sacred significance, then at least a supernatural one (Benjamin, 1936, p. 29)

According to Benjamin, for reactionary theorists it is necessary to recognize a sacral character in cinema that, on the basis of some of the authors we have mentioned before, we could define as ‘mystical’, in order to bring cinema into the field of art, conceived essentially on the basis of its cult value.

The examples we have indicated are only some of the most known and explicit ones in which the cinema is recognized as a mystical device, understood in a broad sense of contact with a dimension beyond the ordinary, in many ways equivalent to the sphere of religious experience. There is, however, a technical sense of the term ‘Mystical’ that on the philosophical level indicates a specific type of experience, distinct although similar in some respects to religious experience (see Cimatti, 2009). This way of understanding the Mystical can help to determine more clearly in what sense the cinema has a mystical attitude, specifying how the cinematographic image fits into a reflection that, as we shall see, concerns in particular the relationship between language and reality.

2. *The Mystical: visio sub specie aeterni and feeling of the world*

In the introduction to the first volume of his work *La fable mystique (XVIe-XVIIe siècle)*, Jesuit historian Michel de Certeau gathers some voices of contemporary philosophy in a concise picture in which the theme of mysticism resounds in a recognizable way. Certeau wonders whether, beyond the documents and texts, we can suppose a stable referent – an experience or a reality outside the text – common to all mystical literature. Without dwelling on Certeau’s articulate response, it is interesting to note his contemporary references and the terms of the question.

All of these discourses do, indeed, tell of a passion of what *is*, of the world such as it “goes on,” or of the thing itself [*das Ding*] – in short, a passion of what is self-authorized and depends on no exogenous guarantee. They are shores exposed to the oncoming sea. They aspire to lose themselves in what they show, like those landscapes by Turner that disappear into air and light. Modulated by pain, enjoyment, or “letting be” (the Eckhartian *Gelâzenheit*), an absolute (unfettered) inhabits the torture, the ecstasy, or the sacri-fice of the language that can only *say* it

by effacing itself. That absolute owes nothing to the language it haunts; it is absolved from it. But what name or what identity should be ascribed to that “thing,” taken independently of the work – in each case local – of letting it appear? The Other that organizes the text is not an outside of the text. It is not the (imaginary) object that one might distinguish from the movement by which it [*Es*] is sketched. To locate it apart, to isolate it from the texts that exhaust themselves trying to express it, would be tantamount to exorcising it by providing it with its own place and name, to identifying it with a remnant not assimilated by constituted rationalities, or to transforming the question that appears in the guise of a limit into a particular religious representation (in turn excluded from the scientific fields and fetishized as the substitute for what is lacking). It is to postulate behind the documents a something or other, a malleable ineffable that could be fashioned to fit any end, a “night in which all cows are black” (Certeau, 1982, p. 15).

Together with Martin Heidegger (recalled through the term *das Ding* and the reference to the resumption of the Eckhartian concept of ‘abandonment’) and psychoanalysis (recalled through the reference to the *Es* and understood by Certeau from the ‘return to Freud’ operated by Jacques Lacan), Certeau recognizes in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s thought (referred to in the note) one of the most significant contemporary presences of mysticism (see Oliva, 2021). The key terms of this elaboration concern the question of the limits of language and the apprehension of “the world such as it ‘goes on’”.

These issues are at stake in the Wittgensteinian conception of the Mystical, expressed in some concluding propositions of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922). Here we find that “Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is” (prop. 6.44) and “The contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni* is its contemplation as a limited whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling” (prop. 6.45). Finally, “There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical” (prop. 6.522).

It is not possible to deepen in this article the role that the Mystical has in Wittgenstein’s early writings (Atkinson, 2009), nor the function that it plays within the *Tractatus*. What is of interest here, in order to reflect on the relationship between cinema and mysticism, is precisely the presence of three aspects in the Wittgensteinian definition of Mystical that, as we shall see, provide a valuable tool for reflecting on some of the possibilities inherent in the cinematic image.

First of all, the Mystical coincides with the limits of language, that is, with an impossibility of *saying* which, however, corresponds to the possibility of *showing*, to use a famous Wittgensteinian distinction. The inexpressible cannot be said but can show itself: the Mystical therefore indicates the reflexivity of a self-exhibition irreducible to the rules of correspondence be-

tween words and facts that, according to the *Tractatus*, structures the language.

Secondly, the Mystical indicates a particular mode of vision of the world *sub specie aeterni*, or under the aspect of eternity. Wittgenstein finds this expression, which comes from Scholastic philosophy and is frequent in Catholic theology, by reading Schopenhauer's *The World as the Will and Representation*, who in turn acquires the term from the philosophical lexicon of Spinoza. What is important for our reflection is that the Mystical is connected by its very nature with a certain way of viewing, that is, with the ability to grasp the necessary aspect in what may appear merely contingent. To see the world in its necessary aspect is to observe it with a mystical gaze.

Third point, this way of observing the world by grasping its necessary aspect brings within a feeling, the mystical feeling, which now appears as a characteristic emotional tone connected to the completeness of the world, to its appearance as a whole. It would be simplistic to define this state as happiness (although Wittgenstein speaks of the world of the 'happy', radically different from the world of the unhappy), but we can use this term to the extent that it does not indicate a particular joy (happiness for this or that object, event, etc.) but a condition raised by space and time, comparable to what Spinoza calls *beatitudo*.

Once the term Mystical is understood in the proper philosophical sense and is defined, in the light of Wittgenstein, as a feeling of the world as all concluded, due to a certain way of seeing the world as necessary and connected to the question of ineffability, that is to say, the internal limits of language, we can return to our reflection on cinema. In fact, beyond a generic reference to the mystical attitude of cinema understood by the first scholars as a connection among the cinematographic image, the kingdom of mystery, and the spiritual, it is possible to trace a type of cinematic image that is strictly mystical, that is to say, it shows the three characteristics that we have encountered through this quick reading of the *Tractatus*. The 'mystical image,' understood in the narrow sense, will face the issue of ineffability by adopting a mode of vision *sub specie aeterni* capable of giving consistency to a feeling of the world different from the multiplicity of feelings that from time to time we can experience. Not primarily narrative, this mystical image must however thematize its relationship with language questioning its referential ability.

3. To see what is impossible to see

Take the case of such a simple assertion as ‘there is a cat on the mat’. Let us also imagine that it is true that there is a cat on the mat, that is, that a cat is effectively upon a mat. However, the cat is black and is smiling, the mat is red and is laying above an ancient parquet, outside the window it is a wonderful sunny day, in the precise moment we say ‘there is a cat on the mat’ a silver airship is passing by through the sky, and so on. That is, any assertion somehow ‘decides’ (Cimatti, 2021) what it is its own field of reference, what makes it true or false, at the same time leaving aside all the other elements that could have been summoned in their place. This means that what is the referent of any linguistic entity (that is, what makes it true or false in the so-called extra-linguistic world) is previously decided by such a linguistic entity. Take the case of the word ‘book’: any actual book has a huge set of characteristics (potentially they are infinite), but only a very small subset of these ones is considered pertinent when one uses the word ‘book’. That the book is the referent of ‘book’ is not a semantic matter, rather it is nothing but the consequence of a previous linguistic metaphysical assumption that ‘decided’ that the world is made of objects. What is mysterious is not how the connection name-object is established, rather why should we presume as self-apparent that the world is a sort of huge bag full of things.

Therefore, to sustain that the referent (*Bedeutung*) of the English word ‘book’ is a book, means nothing but that its referent is already decided by the word ‘book’. That is, also the referent of a word is not properly outside language, quite the contrary, the notion of ‘referent’ is as a linguistic entity as it is a linguistic entity the ‘word’. As Wittgenstein wrote in *Philosophical Remarks*, «every instruction can be construed as a description, every description as an instruction» (Wittgenstein, 1998, p. 10). The point is that any linguistic operation at the same time presupposes and sets up a certain state of affairs: it presupposes it because an assertion – by definition – ‘describes’ a certain state of affairs. Without the prior existence of such a state of affairs there would be nothing to assert. At the same time what a certain state of affairs is depends on what the assertion, that should simply describe, has previously and inadvertently decided it to be. In this sense any description is at the same time an ‘instruction’ of how to arrange the state of affairs in such a way to fit with a corresponding assertion. There is a circularity between the state of affairs and the assertion that is supposed to simply describe it.

For the present discussion, the main consequence of such a situation is that the linguistic representation of the world, put into action by language, consists in considering it as a series of separate objects that can be assembled to form a certain ‘state of affairs’. Therefore, any living being that sees the world through the unconscious mediation of language sees it as an enormous ‘collections’ of disparate objects. It is against this backdrop (at the same time anthropological and metaphysical) that the question then arises as to what a mystical vision of the world could be. If any linguistic act at the same time describes the world as it is and prescribes how the world must be divided into different objects, what Wittgenstein calls the «Mystical» is such a position on the part of the human subject where such a double auto-contradictory stance is made inoperative. To see the world in a mystical way means not to see it as an immense set of objects arranged into states of affairs. It means to see it as a whole (this means to see the world *sub specie aeterni*). It is obvious that such a vision is precluded to the human subject, since s/he is nothing but an extraordinary tiny speck of such a whole: an eye can never watch itself directly (an eye seen in the mirror is just one of the objects we can see; the point is not to see the eye as an object, rather to *simultaneously* see the world and the eye that is seeing the world which contains the same eye that is seeing it). However, the logical and physical impossibility of a part to see the whole to which it pertains does not prevent her/him to try to make such an impossible experience.

Before proceeding any further, it is important to make explicit what prevents the human subject to have a mystical experience, since one could sustain that if such an analytical gaze is peculiar to the linguistic attitude, it is not peculiar, for example, to visual perception or imagination. The point is that once one has learned to think of the world – through the mediation of the linguistic apparatus – as a set of objects and events, s/he will keep on *seeing* or *imagining* it in such a way. Now one *sees* objects and events, even if s/he does not translate what s/he is seeing into words and sentences. In such a case one sees the world through the words of the language in which s/he unconsciously thinks and imagines. Once one begins thinking through language, an unaware mediation creeps into every cognitive and practical action. Take the case of color perception (Zhong *et al.*, 2018; Forder, Lupyan, 2019). For example, there is evidence that while the brain substratum of prelinguistic categorical color perception in infants is located in the right hemisphere, that is, the non-linguistic one, on the contrary the adult categorical color perception is mainly dependent by the left hemisphere, the linguistic one: “language-driven Categorical Perception [of colors] in adults may

not build on prelinguistic Categorical Perception, but that language instead imposes its categories on a Left Hemisphere that is not categorically prepartitioned” (Franklin *et al.*, 2008, p. 3224). Therefore, according to this kind of neurocognitive research, “there is a form of Categorical Perception [of colors] that is nonlinguistic and Right Hemisphere based (found in infancy) and a form of Categorical Perception [of colors] that is lexically influenced and biased to the Left Hemisphere (found in adulthood)” (*ibidem*). When an infans learns how to use language, it also begins thinking and perceiving through the categorial distinctions of such a language which leaves the infans unaware of such an unconscious influence. In the end one begins seeing what the language offers it to see: and language mainly offers to see objects and states of affairs. For this reason, the effective possibility of a mystical experience seems to be precluded to human beings on one side, but also an experience that is always about to show up on the other side (Wulff, 2014).

However, such an impossibility does not prevent the anthropological need (before which, it was religion that tried to offer an answer) to see the world into a completely different way, to see it not as a set of separate objects and states of affairs but rather as a unitary whole. In this perspective the cinematographic technique of editing is nothing but another manifestation of the fundamental linguistic operation of splitting the world into pieces. For this same reason “the human brain had rejected editing, as it violates the continuity to which evolution and experience have accustomed us” (Gallese, Guerra, 2020, p. 121). However, what is at stake about cinema is exactly how this seemingly radical analytical device is used as a means to produce the opposite effect, that of a unitary perception of wholeness. It is in this context that cinema can be seen as a technique that has as main (metaphysical) goal to produce on the part of the viewer what we have defined as a mystical experience. A technique, which is an artificial operation, that aims to overcome under the gaze of the viewer the analytical and spatial effects generated by the mediation of language. In this perspective cinema is a technique that tries to produce a non-technical experience of the world. A technique that tries to generate mystical – that is, non-technical – experiences. As Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*:

hence the importance of *false continuity* in modern cinema: the images are no longer linked by rational cuts and continuity, but are relinked by means of false continuity and irrational cuts. Even the body is no longer exactly what moves; subject of movement or the instrument of action, it becomes rather the developer [*révélateur*] of time, it shows time through its tirednesses and waitings (Antonioni) (Deleuze, 1989, p. xi).

What is at stake exactly is such a «false continuity», that is a continuity that is not direct and immediate, but rather an effect of continuity obtained through radical anti-continuous means. Take the case of how Deleuze describes the 1951 Ozu Yasujiro's film *Early Summer* (麦秋, *Bakushū*):

Ozu's spaces are raised to the state of any-space-whatevers [*d'espaces quelconques*], whether by disconnection, or vacuity [...]. The false continuity of gaze, of direction and even of the position of objects are constant and systematic. One case of camera movement gives a good example of disconnection: in *Early Summer*, the heroine goes forward on tiptoe to surprise someone in a restaurant, the camera drawing back in order to keep her in the center of the frame; then the camera goes forward to a corridor, but this corridor is no longer in the restaurant, it is in the house of the heroine who has already returned home. As for the empty spaces, without characters or movement, they are interiors emptied of their occupants, deserted exteriors or landscapes in nature. In Ozu they take on an autonomy which they do not immediately possess even in neo-realism, [...]. They reach the absolute, as instances of pure contemplation, and immediately bring about the identity of the mental and the physical, the real and the imaginary, the subject and the object, the world and the I. (ivi, pp. 15-16).

Through such an apparent loss of spatial-temporal coordination that still characterized what Deleuze calls the “classical cinema”, on the contrary Ozu – through “disconnection” and “vacuity” – succeeds in attaining the “absolute”, that is, a state that brings “about the identity of the mental and the physical, the real and the imaginary, the subject and the object, the world and the I”: what is such a situation if not the Mystical? It is a mystical vision that is not directly attained since such a directness is prevented by language mediation which does not stop producing separation and dualism. Thus, what is crucial here is the indirect-direct perceiving of a pure time which is no more divided into hours, minutes, and seconds. In fact, the main consequence of language is that of transforming the continuity of time into spatial disconnected fragments (Bergson, 2013). However, what specifically modern cinema does, according to Deleuze, is using a spatial device, in particular film editing, as a peculiar tool to overcome such a subordination of time to space: modern cinema, “instead of being concerned with movement-images from which it extracts an indirect image of time, it is concerned with the time-image, and extracts from it the relations of time on which aberrant movement must now depend. To adopt a word of Lapoujade's, montage has become ‘montrage’” (Deleuze, 1989, p. 41). The paradox is that such a cinema makes visible the invisibility of time through spatial – that is, non-temporal – devices.

Since the impossibility of perceiving and feeling the continuity of experience is the first and major consequence of the fact that

human cognition is mainly a linguistic cognition, cinema, on the contrary, allows to experience a mediate-immediateness, or an indirect-directedness. While language divides and prescribes the world to present itself as 'state of affairs', the time-image unites and let the life flow freely. In this vein Deleuze comments on Wells' cinema as follows: "in this freeing of depth which now subordinates all other dimensions we should see not only the conquest of a continuum but the temporal nature of this continuum: it is a continuity of duration which means that the unbridled depth [*profondeur déchaînée*] is of time and no longer of space" (ivi, p. 141). The mystical experience is the pure experience of time.

Another way to individuate such a 'mystical' character of cinema is with another Deleuze's fundamental concept, that of "virtual image": "if virtual is opposed to actual, it is not opposed to real, far from it" (ivi, p. 41). The classical opposition between the possible and the real is nothing but a way to sterilize the creativity, that is, unpredictability, of time (since the possible already preexists to the real, while the latter is only the realization of the first). On the contrary the virtual escapes from such a dualism, that is, it is always richer than the possible and the real. In this sense it is another means to experience the radical excess of time instead of trying to lock it up into an object or a state of affairs. While the dualism of the possible and the real perfectly fits the usual functioning of language (for example, in the classical separation between competence and execution, or literal and contextual meaning), the virtual as such cannot grasp any word or sentence. Finally, it is clear that the problem of the Mystical has to do with the relation between language and cinema, that is, between a technical device whose main function is to rid itself of time on one side, and another technical device whose main function, conversely, is to make inoperative language.

In this perspective the cinema of time-images is at the same time a technical operation, which could be impossible without language and its entities, as objects and states of affairs; however, and on the contrary, cinema represents the opposite possibility to overcome this same spatial language that makes possible its own existence. Therefore:

Cinema is not a universal or primitive language system [*langue*], nor a language [*langage*]. It brings to light an intelligible content which is like a presupposition, a condition, a necessary correlate through which language constructs its own 'objects' (signifying units and operations). But this correlate, though inseparable, is specific: it consists of movements and thought-processes (prelinguistic images), and of points of view on these movements and processes (pre-signifying signs). It constitutes a whole 'psychomechanics', the spiritual automaton (ivi, p. 262).

4. Conclusion: the mystical image: Godard's *Adieu au langage*

Let's try to imagine watching a film not in the usual, narrative way, as the gradual development of a story with some characters, including a beginning, a series of events, and a conclusion, with perhaps also a 'moral' added to the whole story. Such a vision is not that far from the way one could *read* a novel, that is, a prototypical linguistic entity. On the contrary, let's try to see it in the inconceivable way a non-human animal, a dog for example, could see a film, assuming it might be interested in seeing a film *as* a film (Fagot *et al.*, 2010; Cimatti, 2017). This is the first point that Godard implicitly shows us in *Adieu au langage*. In fact, one of the main characters of the film is a dog, starring in different movie scenes, even if it probably is not aware of being a character of a film. This is a point worth stressing because if such a thing like the Mystical can exist, such a Mystical is not perceived by a subject (even a non-human one) as any other usual object. The Mystical shows itself, and who participates in such an event is not aware of being part of a mystical situation. The dog, for us viewers, is properly the image of a dog, while the dog simply lives its own dog-life: to be a dog means to not distinguish between reality on one side and representation of reality on the other side. The Mystical is a situation where such a fundamental split collapses upon itself. Maybe this is the reason why in the opening scene Godard projects two sentences from the science-fiction novel *The World of Null-A* (1945) by the American writer Alfred Elton van Vogt: "Tous ceux qui manquent d'imagination se réfugient dans la réalité. Reste à savoir si la non pensée contamine la pensée".

The Mystical shows itself when «la non pensée contamine la pensée», that is, when one suddenly sees the world as a dog perceives it, directly. Usually, we perceive the world through the mediation of language, that is, as an object of our discourses and activities. Therefore "la non pensée" is nothing but the deactivation of the linguistic thinking that keeps on shielding the direct vision of the world through the mediation of the thought and spoken world. On the contrary a dog does not perceive the world as a linguistic or thinking object: for a dog there is simply the world that there is (Cimatti, 2020). One can see all *Adieu au langage* as an attempt to represent the world in a non-human way, that is, in a direct and non-linguistic way. For this reason, maybe one shouldn't consider the numerous excerpts of speech of the film as properly meaningful; rather they are mere verbal human-made sounds, as a non-human animal – the dog – could consider them. At the same

time, one must not forget that such an effect is mainly obtained through movement-images (Deleuze, 1986) and words, that is, the Mystical can only be attained through indirect means. The Mystical is not an object of perception, neither is possible to actively and purposely build up a mystical situation; it can only happen when one allows oneself to follow the flow of life. “Je ne dirais presque rien. Je cherche de la pauvreté dans le langage”² a voice says at a certain moment. The “pauvreté dans le langage” is still a form of language, even if such a language has given up prescribing the world the way it should be. The “pauvreté dans le langage” lets the world be as it simply is. Therefore, one can consider *Adieu au langage* a ‘mystical’ film because it tries, with linguistic and stylistic means, to deactivate our need to see a film as a story, that is, as a linguistic representation of reality. And when seeing the representation of something one forgets that s/he is not seeing the world, but only a *sign* on the world. Once, Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Remarks* observed that we do not perceive the flow of time, that is, ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ are nothing but linguistic abstractions. To illustrate such a point he refers to films as an example: “I do not see the past, only a picture of the past’. But how do I know it’s a picture of the past? On the film strip there is a present picture and past and future pictures: but on the screen there is only the present” (Wittgenstein, 1998, pp. 14-15).

Adieu au langage reminds us that “on the screen there is only the present”, and that one must force oneself to see the film as a dog would see it so that s/he doesn’t forget such an empirical evidence. However, sustaining that on the screen there is only the present does not mean at all that such a present is the same present of the chronological succession past-present-future; quite the contrary, such a present is properly outside time, it is a pure time without divisions. In the last ‘sequence’ of the film we see fronds of a tree moved by the wind; we can listen to the wind. Then the dog on a couch, two red poppies on the edge of a paved road, and in the end – while listening for the umpteenth time a very short passage from Beethoven Seventh Symphony – an *infans* moaning. In fact – as the same Godard wrote in a summary note about the film: “ça [the film] finira par des aboiements et des cris de bébé”³ – *Adieu au langage*, rather than finishing with the ultimate abandonment of language (this is impossible for any member of *Homo loquens*

² Modified quotation from Maurice Blanchot (1962, p. 19): “Ils cherchaient l’un et l’autre la pauvreté dans le langage”.

³ <https://artsmeme.com/2015/01/24/the-gorgeous-language-of-godards-goodbye-to-language/>

species), discloses a different ‘minor’ language, and a different – dog-like – way to stay in the world. As Deleuze wrote in *Cinema 2*, «language system only exists in its reaction to a *non-language-material* that it transforms» (Deleuze 1989, p. 29). The Mystical is such a «*non-language-material*» made visible through language. This is the internal limit of language.

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