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Cinephilia Falls to Earth: Thinking the Image after Daney

Garin Dowd

This essay explores the posterity of Serge Daney's writings by proposing a series of provisional categorizations in the manner of Daney, who often worked with tripartite distinctions. To think the image after Daney is here to think both in his aftermath and in his lineage (i.e. with him). It is to continue to think with the repertoire of concepts and approaches enshrined in his writing and to think with the conflicted practice of cinephilia that we find in his understanding of his own career as a critic. To think the image after Daney, I propose, is paradoxically to continue to think about the contemporary in a manner attentive to and following his own already retrospective disposition.

*"Les films du cinéma atterrissent à la télévision
comme s'ils venaient d'en-haut, d'un écran
dans les hauteurs ou d'un ciel."*

Cinephilia after the End of Cinema

On my visit to Paris in the year of the 50th anniversary of the events of May 1968, the vitrines of the Champo cinema were adorned with publicity materials to mark seasons devoted to Fassbinder and Wenders respectively. Around the corner in another cabinet on rue Champollion a period poster featured painted representations of John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara in Ford's *The Quiet Man/L'Homme tranquille*. Beside that, behind another pane of glass, Nastassja Kinski in *Paris, Texas* was represented by a low-resolution image on A4 paper, which had clearly been printed by the cinema rather than either drawn from a repository or derived from an archival negative as might have been the case thirty years before. Posters dating from the original French release dates of Wenders's *Les Ailes du désir/Wings of Desire* and Fassbinder's *Veronika Voss* adorned other surfaces around the curved corner on which Rue des Écoles's much loved *cinéma d'art et d'essai* stands.² A little further up the rue Champollion the Reflet Médicis cinema had, in its main poster glass side by side, a period poster for *La Fiancée du pirate/A Very Curious Girl* by Nelly Kaplan and one for the 4K restoration of *La Chair de l'orchidée/The Flesh of the Orchid* by Patrice Chéreau.

A few people positioned at different points along the frontage of the Champo looked at posters and read printouts of reviews

- 1 "Cinema films land on television as if they came from on high, from a screen in the heights or from a sky."
- 2 On the mannerism of *Veronika Voss*, see Daney 1986, 109.

and historical source materials.³ They joined each other to wait until it was time to queue for the 11.30 Friday morning screening of Wenders' *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty*. Others began to arrive. Eventually a queue formed and the staff placed a sign on the pavement of Rue des Écoles to control its direction.

All the films and all the filmmakers represented on the walls of the approximately 150 square meters of façade embracing two cinemas on this one corner of Paris at some point came under the scrutiny and received the critical appraisal of Serge Daney. The manner, however, of the presence of the majority of the films mentioned both on the walls of the exterior and within the *salles* (movie theaters) has radically changed since the period in which Daney and his contemporaries—and certainly the cinephiles of his generation—might themselves have frequented such cinemas. The Champo retains its vitrines; it retains moreover the preference for analog publicity (for example, original posters from the French releases) when it is accessible. Even though some of the publicity materials appearing behind the glass may these days be printed out from a digital source which can make the presentation seem amateurish, the vitrines of the Champo continue to reflect a time that at first glance resembles and thus includes Daney's time. The queue, the line, the *file d'attente* on the rue des Écoles may even have comprised members of a queue that formed there for the first run of *Wings of Desire*, the same and different.

Daney, our contemporary?

Writing in his journal in 1990, having viewed Straub and Huillet's *Moïse et Aaron* (Daney 1993, 256), Daney recounts that there were ten of them in the *salle* at the Panthéon, adding the question:

3 Daney, in recalling the role played by the ritual of attendance at the 9 o'clock screenings in the company of his mother in the cinemas of the 12th arrondissement, remembers how they would often look at the photos outside and end up missing the film due to their hesitation (Daney 2015, 190).

122 were we/they errant spectators or a virtual sect? Elsewhere Jean Douchet, in the *Cahiers du cinéma* special commemorative issue on Daney (no. 458), recalling the Cinémathèque française, recounts how within its walls and before its screen, first of all one belonged to a tribe, then a group, then in turn a sub-group, and finally a tendency, as in the phrase “tendance Rossellini, tendance Godard” and of course immortalized in the negative formulation in the title of Truffaut’s famous attack on the *qualité française* (Truffaut 1954). Rarely, in such a community, did one belong to oneself.

Thinking the image after Serge Daney is a notion which must consider heterogeneous temporalities, depending on the Serge Daney one has been able, according to linguistic aptitude, to encounter. For the non-reader of French, it has been considerably more difficult to follow Daney in his manner of thinking the image, to follow him at the time of writing and to continue to be influenced or inspired by him after his death. The translations are scattered and to date the only book to be published in English is given the title *Postcards from the Cinema* (Daney 2007), which contains merely the sketch of a possible book by Daney rather than one signed by him during his lifetime.⁴

But there are other ways in which following Daney in France, following his writing, has become difficult. Some of the books in which his texts were collected are now out of print. While the books were always already collections of articles, they were encountered by a generation as *books*.

In fact, mimicking Deleuze’s three phases of cinema for Daney (which in turn is an enumeration made by Deleuze in tribute to Daney’s own penchant for thinking in threes), as outlined in his preface to *Ciné-Journal* (Daney 1986), one might say that there are, in France and for those who read French, three phases of

4 Semiotext(e) published recently the first volume of a translation of *Le Maison cinéma et le monde* (Daney 2022).

following Daney as a reader: first, there is a reading that goes in tandem with publication, in *Cahiers* and then in *Libération*; second, there is the retrospective reading of the collections *as collections* (a period that may be complicated in that the reader of the first category may overlap partially); third, there is the encounter with the writings as presented in the four volumes of *La Maison cinéma et le monde*, a period that of course also is that of the period post-Daney and manifest in a form that in fact does not reprint many important texts from the individual books published during his lifetime.

Hence those who come after in this context may consist of a following that is contemporaneous—Daney leads, readers follow—but equally a following that is retrospective, just as it also embraces one that is posthumous. Is the Daney encountered in each of these different temporalities of engagement the same? A focus on the *passeur* and the allied theme of community makes this question relevant.

To explore temporal complications further, there is a pre-68 and a post-68 *Cahiers* or a *Cahiers* under Daney's editorship as one that needs to be set apart; a *Libération* phase; a tennis-journalist phase overlapping with a *zappeur* phase; and of course, finally, a *Trafic* phase (encompassing both the period of its planning and his brief tenure at the helm).

One might then—to broaden the perspective and to add yet another tripartite distinction—consider the question of the status of the cinematographic and the audio-visual image during each of these phases—phases that are marked by three distinct modes of engaging with his writings (contemporaneously, retrospectively, posthumously) in turn symbolized by the article in its original form, the article collected in *La Rampe* (Daney 1983), for instance, and the article as collected in the four P.O.L. volumes (Daney 2001–2015). The first phase would loosely coincide with the continuation of the development of what Deleuze identified as Daney's preoccupation with the great pedagogical lines; the

124 second with Daney's exploration of the new image regime of television and video. The third is our period, the one Daney could not have foreseen, the one of streaming, Netflix, boxsets (without boxes), and films produced by Amazon.

As a way of approaching these themes one can propose that there are (again) three modes of encountering the work of Daney, and therefore three modes of disseminating his thought—three modes of its *passing* which includes being passed on, as we say in English of the act of bequeathing upon death. (I say this because, in taking up the baton of *Trafic*, Raymond Bellour, Sylvie Pierre, and the other editors have enabled Daney's final project to be passed on to us as an inheritance.) At the same time I want to invoke the idea that there are at least three communities in the village named Daney, born in different decades and belonging to different generations. I want to think about the specificities of these readerships both in terms of their relationship to the historical period, considered especially in terms of technological communications developments (but also political developments), and to the mode in which Daney was writing as their contemporary (magazine, newspaper, book), to their relation to the technology and/or to the mode, and whether this relationship was one of contemporaneity or retrospection.

With and After Daney

Thinking the image after Daney? In terms of an encounter through English, the time lag between a possible and an actual *being-with* Daney can be immense, for reasons well documented. But there are isolated signs of some catching up. In a 2016 article for the art theory journal *October* James Tweedie asserts that Daney is a precursor of media archaeology. Tweedie challenges the widely held view that Daney disdains television. He acknowledges inconsistencies in Daney's view of the medium, but asserts that the rediscovery of film on television forms part of an already anachronistic view of cinema, both in terms of an

acknowledgement that we are already at the end of cinema, with something such as Pasolini's *Teorema* in 1968, and in the era of the victory of mass industrial cinema. Hence the rear-view mirror (*rétroviseur*) idea, which Tweedie adopts from Daney as the organizing metaphor for his reappraisal.

In a much earlier appraisal, on the tenth anniversary of Daney's death, Jean-François Pigouillié, who contributed to *Cahiers* in the 1990s, presents a quite different argument about Daney's posterity, suggesting that in the issue of *Trafic* devoted to Daney in 2002 it is really only the notions of the *ciné-fils* (cine-son) and of cine-biographical relations that endure (Pigouillié 2002, 84). He complicates this perspective by what he regards as Daney wanting to maintain at all costs a strict correspondence between his life and that of modern cinema.

Both articles, however, share an acknowledgement of the indelible presence of the melancholic disposition in the Daney version of cinephilia and both in distinct ways attest to the figure of anamnesis and, hence, to the ultimately psychoanalytic tenor of the late writings and thought of Daney.⁵ Pigouillié even goes so far as to diagnose narcissism in the error that he attributes to Daney, of mistaking the year of Rossellini's film *Rome, Open City* as 1944. This may be historically correct, but Pigouillié is guilty of his

- 5 Very Oedipal, for example, is how he characterizes his early ritualistic film viewing (Daney 2015, 190). Elsewhere, he comments that the salary paid to him for his work in *Libération* was modest but enough to keep a psychoanalyst from abject poverty and to keep at bay transference from the couch (Daney 2015, 105). In another interview he improvises a psychoanalytic "reading" of how Straub and Huillet play out a Lacanian theater through their work (Daney 2015, 111). The specifically Lacanian tenor of many articles such as for example on *Le Diable probablement/The Devil Probably* (Robert Bresson, 1977) is noteworthy, as indeed is Daney's comment that he is more Lacanian than Deleuzian. In a characterization that recalls aspects of Barthes's distinction between a normative pleasure of the text and a transgressive *jouissance*, Daney identifies an out voice and a through voice (482). In the out voice cinema fetishizes the emergence of the voice from the lips, from which, in his Lacanian formulation, the *objet a* separates.

126 own error in claiming that Daney says the camps were *liberated* in 1944. In fact Daney only states that their existence came to the knowledge (of the Allied forces) in this year (to assert an *ethical* lapse, or worse, manipulation by Daney is unwarranted).

The one attributes to Daney a prescience that propels him into the future while the other claims that he deprived himself of his own legacy. But each ponders legacy.

Daney after Daney

The texts comprising the posthumously published volume of fragments in *L'Exercice a été profitable, Monsieur* are notable for the frequent invocation of the question of environment and location. The *salle obscure* (or movie theater—the fetishization of which Daney claimed to be not at all susceptible to, as in the famous dismissal “les salles, je m’en fous” (“I don’t care about the movie theaters.”) (Daney 2015, 199)⁶—is of course here as elsewhere invoked, but in macrocosm France, symbolically stood in for by the French “films of quality,” which, in Daney’s eyes, make such a pernicious comeback in the 1980s and continue beyond his death. The battle, in Daney’s eyes, is between a voracious post-modern regime of the visual and some form of “resistance,” but the latter he finds holed up or in hiding.⁷ Hence the metaphor of

6 Reprised in another text: “je me suis toujours foutu de la salle” (“I never cared about the movie theater”) (Daney 2015, 181). Less colorfully in the interview with Viviant he comments, “chez-moi, l’amour du cinéma c’est jamais confondu avec l’amour de la salle. Dans la salle il y avait encore trop de société, de consensus” (“For me, the love of the cinema is never confused with the love of the movie theater. In the movie theater there was still too much society, too much consensus”) (Daney 2015, 194).

7 Repeatedly in the pieces collected about films on television, Daney refers to the specificity of the material viewing circumstances. He addresses his readers as fellow TV watchers (invoking a kind of community and occasionally an imagined village—a concept to which he often returned). He refers to his own susceptibility to the flow of television—the phenomenon referred to by Dork Zabunyan as the “‘visionnage’ distrait qui absorbe avec indifférence le défilement des images: un nouveau somnambulisme”

a new Occupation, marked superficially by films with the “aroma” of Vichy (as he states elsewhere) but more generally by all that he detests in Besson, Beineix, Annaud, and Berri.⁸ Daney’s pessimism is not total: within the same volume of fragments he suggests that the filmmakers he prizes have all retreated into territorial enclaves but also that there is hope to be found in younger directors of the period of the late 1980s such as, notably, Leos Carax and Wim Wenders. Cinema had lost its place by the time these fragments were written and Daney had been through the “non-legendary years” of *Cahiers* but also of French society of the 1970s. The *maison* (house) he had once shared within the hermetic cinephilia of the journal, along with the dominance of the *salle obscure*, have gone.

Hence, the pressing question of the public, which is notable in the volume, but also of habitability. The topic is there at the beginning of the journal. The question often translates as how to live in France under the new “Occupation.” But it has resonances with the more abstract and macro question as posed by Godard in *Soigne ta droite: Une place sur la terre* (1987), whom indeed Daney directly cites, in stating “une place sur terre comme au ciel” (“a place on earth as in heaven”).

Cinephilia

Ciné-fils: Daney made innumerable references to this, his Lacanian formulation, and as Tweedie has reminded us, through this endlessly returned-to word, he deliberately took a critical distance from the founding cinephilia of *Cahiers*. He also referred in this context, in *L’Exercice*, to being kidnapped by cinema. As

“distracted ‘viewing’ that absorbs with indifference the scrolling of images: a new somnambulism” (Zabunyan 2011, 169).

8 “La France est occupée et le studio représente l’Occupation dans le champ du cinéma” (“France is occupied and the studio represents the Occupation in the field of cinema”) (Debray in Daney 1999a, 40).

128 reflected in an exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo by Jean-Jacques Lebel, which was in its final weeks in May 2018, objects *collect us*. The objects in this case: the local cinema, the publicity material, the street corner, the films themselves. Daney was a collector but he was also himself appropriated by cinema: cinephilia is not simply a uni-directional projection of love onto an object; the cinephile is also apprehended by the object of their desire.

In the notes he was writing in preparation for the publication of *Devant la recrudescence des vols de sacs à main* (the volume that deploys the title from the public awareness message projected in the heyday of the *salle*), Daney begins by asking what it is that is in crisis in cinema at this time. The question, he elaborates, is not “the crisis in cinema” as such but *what exactly* is in crisis. The answer is divided into two: *la salle obscure* and *l’enregistrement* (recording). At one point in his deliberations he writes that in the great films everything in the *tableau* (the image) moves, but at different speeds—from which he concludes that skies, and in particular skies with clouds, are the best metaphor for such films. We shall return to these skies later.

Digital After-Images

To return to my allegory of the Champo, some of the experiences of the setting and indeed of the experience of the *salle obscure* are the same, but some have been altered by the digital revolution. The second *salle* of the Champo still has a 35mm projector but in its own description this is in order to be able to screen films not yet converted to DCP format rather than due to a commitment to 35mm in itself.

Many commentators have addressed the question of a purported loss that occurs when the defining context of cinema and cinephilia centered on materiality and projection is removed, namely the movement, migration, or mutation entailed in wresting an experience defined as requiring a viewing experience in a *salle* (such as evoked in my quotation at the start) on to platforms and

portable devices. Raymond Bellour, for example (2012), in his demand that the cinematographically specific rests on regarding cinema in terms of the *dispositif*—made with projection in mind and then in fact projected—has among the more emphatic of such positions.⁹

The French film scholar Martine Beugnet, writing in English in her essay on watching films on iPhones, singles out Odin and Daney as the only French voices—at her time of writing—who ponder something other than a narrative of loss. In a footnote on Daney she points out in fact Daney’s acknowledgement that the small screen could improve some films (for example *The Ten Commandments*, and even, he quips in *Devant*, the films of Claude Lelouch (Daney 1991, 41). Readers of Daney will know that it is true to say that he insisted on his retention of cinephilic disposition as distinct from the gaze of the telephile—thus asserting on his own behalf and within viewing conceived of as an act of mourning a modality of resistance even within the field of the saturating visual.

Community

Amid the notes and drafts collected posthumously as *L’Exercice a été profitable, Monsieur* lie Daney’s transcription of several quotations dated April 22, 1988 and taken from Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community* (1983/1991). Daney transcribes phrases that link the idea of community to mortality and finitude and, in this context, to Nancy’s distinction between the individual and the singularity, the latter to be understood as entailing an

9 The sort of position with which Daney marked his divergence. For Daney there were those for whom even in a completely empty screening (ideal for *India Song* as he quips, Daney 2015, 194) the film/cinema would still be happening through the mere fact of projection, “c’est-à-dire le dialogue d’un lieu obscur et d’un lieu éclairé” (“that is to say the dialogue of a dark place and a lighted place”) (Daney 2015, 177). Indeed, the same text contains Daney’s claim that the *politique des auteurs* at *Cahiers* was a regime against the *salle* (177).

130 exposure to alterity.¹⁰ The longest passage transcribed concerns the state of *between* “you” and “I” in which such exposure is manifest as *comparution* (co-appearing). The notes, arguably, have a resonance in different planes or facets of Daney’s practice and theorization of cinephilia. The community of the *Cahiers*-immersed cinephilia was the refuge in which Daney the critic was formed, while the *ciné-fils* (according to his late self-categorization) who saw himself as at a remove from the generation of the Cinémathèque rats might be thought of as exemplifying the paradox at the heart of Nancy’s conception of community. Community found itself addressed by other authors in the decade, Maurice Blanchot (to whom Nancy was in part responding) and later Giorgio Agamben. As many have done before, not least Daney himself, in his “cine-biographical” final phase, one can chart his career as one whose potentiality stirred facing Preminger and Hitchcock at the age of 15, who finds its first community in *Cahiers*,¹¹ then breaks with the cinephilia of the latter in favor of the collective political militancy of the journal after 1969, regrouping under his editorship after 1974, only further to remove himself both from politics in the post-’68 sense and from the journal and the standard practice of the film critic in the 1980s, when he became a journalist with a remit far wider than cinema for *Libération*. During this trajectory, ideas of community (affiliation, belonging) and of emergence (becoming) recur, but each of these is characterized by the foundational melancholia so often identified by commentators on Daney.

10 “There is nothing behind singularity—but there is, outside it and in it, the immaterial *and* material space that distributes it and shares it out as singularity, distributes and shares the confines of other singularities, or even more exactly distributes and shares the confines of singularity—which is to say of alterity—between it and itself” (Nancy 1986/1991, 27).

11 In the 1992 interview with Arnaud Viviant, Daney recounts how he began to read *Cahiers* in 1959 just before the release of *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* / *Last Year at Marienbad* and then started to attend the Cinémathèque immediately after.

In considering the image after Daney, and thus after his death, one wonders if the lessons of Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* resonate retrospectively. Daney regarded the cinephilia of his youth as belonging to the past, and his writings on the falling to earth of film on to television already take the form of an act of mourning.¹² The community felt by Daney was not only of his virtual sect—and he invoked mysticism over religion many times (not the “mass” of television viewing, which signaled conformity, nor of the *salle*—too much society, too much consensus, he said)—but also the films, directors, and stars whom he bumped into via the broadcasting of a film on television: “how are you?” “what’s new?” “good to see you,” he observes in a short entry. The community was already felt to be impossible, in this case through an awareness of a mutation in the media complex—to use Paul Virilio’s term (Virilio 1994)—of which it was becoming part (symbolized by the parasitic relationship of television to cinema, the increasingly saturated field of the visual and the contamination of cinema by advertising, so scathingly blamed on Besson and Beineix).¹³ *Pace* Beugnet, it is perhaps worth recalling that Daney’s reflections on what constitutes cinema is not confined to the viewing context, so that for Daney, the experience of *Diva* in a film auditorium would not be an experience of cinema but only of advertising. There is no supplement for Daney in *Diva*, just the gliding of images over images. The didactic dimension

12 He makes this comment in the interview with Roger. Films are said by Daney to fall from the sky to television (also Daney 1991, 31), a highly Godardian metaphor designed to indicate a reduction in scale and in power (mannerism), but also to indicate a theological dimension: films “sanctify” television, or at least when those films are by someone such as Visconti (Daney 1991).

13 The interaction with Virilio, which resulted in the dialogue between their pieces in *Libération* on the Gulf War, also results in sporadic references to his writings. Virilio’s observations on the “vision machine” (the title of one of his books) are published in *Trafic*. Daney’s observations on being able to see what was not seen (in relation to the camps) refers to Virilio’s text (Daney 2015, 216).

132 of his disdain for Beineix in particular notwithstanding, *Diva*, he remarked, was—on TV—like a fish in water.¹⁴

The community of cinephiles in the context of Paris—the Cinémathèque, the Champo, the Pantheon, the Pagode, wherever—and the groups formed around *Cahiers*, these were already acknowledged by Daney as governed by finitude, deriving from the impending swamping of the reservoir of the visual and the cliché.

After the End/Until the End of the World

To return to a mixture of those who were there with Daney and those who came after or who did both: what, one wonders, would Daney make of the fact that the long-lost film made in May 1968 by his “petit frère” Philippe Garrel, *Actua 1*, can now be viewed by anyone on YouTube? Daney declared himself in favor of pirate videos in an interview with Philippe Roux, so one would imagine he would approve (Daney 2015, 178).

Given his interest in the concept of information (i.e. data), what would he think of films with frames in which it is impossible to perceive what is going on because so much digital information is teeming beyond the range of human perception on the screen? What for example of *Dr. Strange* or of the film in which Benedict Cumberbatch reprises his superhero in *Avengers: Infinity War*? A film, the closing credits of which list up to five separate companies of visual effects artists? Would Daney have migrated from television to streaming? No doubt the answer is yes—in

14 He would point out in an interview for *Esprit* that he watches television with a cinephile’s eye always feeling implicated, “Alors qu’un téléphile est toujours à la même distance du poste, bien placé pour engranger de l’information pure, peu impliqué” (“While a telephile is always at the same distance from the television set, well placed to gather pure information, little involved”) (Daney 2002, 27).

L'Exercice after all he mentions the installation of cable in his home.¹⁵

Analog cinephilia remains possible for, in Daney's phrase, the "nostalgique de la salle" ("nostalgia for the movie theater") (Daney 2015, 307) of our times. The Lincoln Center's Philippe Garrel season for example in 2018 showed almost everything on 35 or 16mm prints, but exposure such as this is becoming rarer and rarer with institutions such as the British Film Institute and the Cinémathèque française adopting a policy geared towards preservation of prints when a digital alternative is available. But is it possible now only as part of a prolonged act of mourning for cinema? Daney, we must remember, regarded viewing films on television as already being involved in mourning.

To return, once more, to the vitrines of the Champo in May 2018, in *Wings of Desire* Bruno Ganz plays an angel who sacrifices his guaranteed continuation in the ether in order to be on earth, where he will succumb not only to the effects of gravity but also become mortal. Wenders's film also features Peter Falk playing himself and recognized by Ganz as the actor who played Columbo. I call this an allegory of cinephilia falling to earth, or cinephilia in the era of television and latterly of streaming. It is the trajectory of Daney's own cinephilia, which ended up becoming manifest in the figure of the *zappeur* flitting about in the continuity of "life's parade" (in the words of *All that Heaven Allows*), the cathode ray tube.

Listening to the 1987 interview with Wenders on the France Culture series *Microfilms* hosted by Daney to mark the release of the film, I was struck by the remarkable felicity with which the dialogue corroborated my own projection or fabulation.¹⁶

15 Elsewhere Daney suggests that television is mutating into a "ciné-vidéo-câblo-phillie" (Daney 2015, 108). His statement regarding cinema being "finished" is playfully extended into the notion that it is finite because its metamorphoses are not infinite.

16 *Microfilms*, episode 7, 1987.

134 Wenders states that he made a film about angels as a pretext to show humans and to show the quotidian with fresh eyes and new images. It is in this sense that Daney thinks Wenders can in fact *resist* within the context of the regime of the visual. He directly asks Wenders about the *salle*, and Wenders ponders a possible future with an immense television screen replacing the traditional apparatus of projection. Daney goes on to talk about the vast circular screen at the Géode, not long in operation at the time. What would Daney have made of the fact that the first UK screening of Godard's *Livre de l'image/The Image Book* took place at the BFI Imax cinema—a film which one might regard as the very antithesis of the visual spectacular screened in a “cathedral” largely devoted to the merely spectacular (Godard one week, 1917 the next!)?

The conversation with Wenders turns to the question of weight and already the freeing of the apparatus of cinema from gravity. The correlation between cinophilia and the angelic is complete, and it is the gaze of the child that is enabled to see the angel. Novelty of gaze, novelty of image, restoration of the new and the fresh but also of the finite: in coming down to earth to experience the sensations of the embodied and to participate in the terrestrial community the angels are emblems of the double-edged sword of life and death, and the backward, rear-view mirror (*rétrovisseur*) look of Wenders is thus co-opted into Daney's melancholic archive.

The fundamental distinction manifested in the late writings of Daney is that between the visual and the image, allied to the concept of mannerism, which he took as the key to understanding what was at stake in certain filmmakers of the period as well as in the interstices of television where David Lynch caught his attention. Daney found something in Lynch's TV work that he did not in the films—to date he had made *Eraserhead*, *Elephant Man*, *Dune*, and *Blue Velvet*. Prophetically as far as *Cahiers* is concerned, he says of *Twin Peaks* that it comes from/of cinema (Daney 1993,

333)—the return by Lynch some 25 years later would see the series top the end of decade list for the then editorial team.

Jonathan Rosenbaum, who was among the first to acknowledge Daney's importance in the coming era, notes the aspects of scale and occasion that mark the specificity of cinema and that these were crucial to the interest Daney had in films on television (Rosenbaum 2005). In his review of Coppola's *One from the Heart*—the film which famously featured the director's Zoetrope¹⁷ experiment in directing from the interior of his famous Airstream trailer, the "Silverfish"—Daney reaches for what will become a thoroughly malleable and reproducible metaphor concerning the celestial and the earthly domains: the camera is in the sky, the characters in the rain.¹⁸

Daney's review of Wenders's *Wings of Desire* argues that the "desire" part of the French title gets things wrong. Daney says the film harks back to silent cinema, which knew how to film the sky, and places it with Godard's *Passion* in this respect (Daney 2015, 30). In fact, I would add that there is another important sky sequence in Godard's *Soigne ta droite*, at the beginning. This scene is itself an echo of the opening sequence of *Playtime* by Tati. Godard begins his film with a shot from a plane and a voiceover debating the location or whether there is any location. A place on earth (Daney 2015, 101) is a genuine question in Godard. Of course, in *Soigne ta droite* Godard boards a plane with his film canisters and ends up flat on his face—this is Godard's most Tatiesque film after all.

17 "L'image est (grâce à la vidéo) 'bien traitée' tandis que les acteurs sont (à cause de la vidéo) 'sous surveillance'" ("The image is (thanks to video) 'well processed' while the actors are (because of video) 'under surveillance'") (Daney 1986, 125).

18 Coppola, Daney argues, shows how "le jamais-vu redevient trop vite du déjà-vu" ("the never-seen-before becomes déjà vu all too quickly") (Daney 1986, 123). "Mannerism in cinema is defined as nothing happens to the characters, what happens happens to the image. The decor and the characters do not belong to one another; they do not, unlike in Minnelli, have the same weight as one another. The camera is in the sky, the characters in the rain."

136 The trope returns repeatedly in Daney. For example, he likens himself to a silent era hero required to land a plane safely without even holding a pilot's license (Daney 2015, 302). Daney writes that in *Tarnished Angels*, Sirk films the aeronautic display like a domestic scene and intimate scenes as if they were dogfights. He also refers to the coming down to earth of these films, many of which land badly (like in *Tarnished Angels*). They can land badly on television for a number of reasons and with a number of consequences. Technical factors for example may impinge, such as a cinemascope film boxed in by two bands which cannot be as black as they need to be. Or they can be revealed through a particular mode of viewing to have been artistic failures, such as *Some Like It Hot*.

Image

The late writing of Daney places a lot of faith in Wenders and Carax. Another way to ponder a thinking and a practice of the image after Daney would be to consider their subsequent work in light of the faith Daney placed in them and, as I shall argue in Carax in particular, for reasons linked to the themes of cinephilia and community, the role of the *passeur* and the "end" of cinema.

Recalling that what he hoped for in these two filmmakers was the capacity for a single image—an image charged for him with salvific properties, and he invoked Godard's formula too, "just an image"—it is perhaps of note that Carax would continue to operate in the singular way Daney identified close to the beginning of his career. In this light it is fascinating to reflect that the other film at the top of the *Cahiers* top ten, in second place, Carax's *Holy Motors*, is in its way about cinephilia fallen to earth in the era of the visual.¹⁹ The character of Merde, expanded by

19 Daney had a nurturing attitude to Carax who attended (without being registered) the course at Censier he taught with Danièle Dubroux (whose 1991 film *Borderline* made an enormous impression on Daney). But he frequently leavens his praise with statements of perplexity (Carax wastes too much

the director from his segment of *Tokyo!* (2008), did not fulfil the promise made at the end of the short film of a “Merde in the USA,” but rather was absorbed retrospectively as one part in the playing out of an assignment to an actor in what can be read as a scripted reality show taking place across Paris filmed by invisible cameras. The film was also made during the hiatus in the planned film “Scars,” which at the time of writing remains abandoned. It was Carax’s hope to shoot on film but finances did not permit this. Daney often repeated his assertion that every film is the story of its own elaboration and to an extent the depiction of its own context of production. Arguably the context of the non-production (that is, *on film*) and the difficulty perennially experienced by the director (allied to personal grief) forms the backdrop of *Holy Motors*.

The cinephilia espoused by the early Daney was regarded by him as a specific cinephilia of *Cahiers*; Carax himself is steeped in this both due to the frequency of his appearance (as both reviewer and reviewed) in the journal (not least Daney’s championing of his debut film *Boy Meets Girl* in *Libération* while he was still on the editorial board of *Cahiers*).

In this regard the film may be regarded as the falling to earth of Carax’s own cinephilia in a context marked by technological constraint on the one hand (he is unable to shoot on film due to financial constraints) and opportunity on the other (at least he can make something). Carax would go on to make a film which surpasses the quintessential meta-film—at least for the Daney of 1969—in the extent to which it embeds within itself a critical reflection on the industrial and technological framework embodying at once these constraints and possibilities. Whereas in 1969 Daney argues that Pasolini’s *Teorema* is the pinnacle

time trying to find out what he wants, in the interview with Viviant). He answers his own question “Who can new filmmakers copy now?” by saying they, like Godard, follow Lang. They can’t copy Carax, he says (Daney 2015, 210). The reason is not entirely clear but perhaps it is because Carax already reprises and recycles aspects of Godard and Garrel.

138 (Daney 2022, 101–4), Carax in 2011 would, in the era named post-cinematic by some, prolong the lineage (which we in part associate with Daney) of the interrogation of the question of spectatorship in the *salles* and in the expanded vision machine of our era. The film opens with the awakened director escaping through a panel in what appears to be a hotel room to the interior of a cinema, with an inert, apparently sleeping audience incapable of registering any response to the screen. Is this Carax's depiction of the era of the end of the *salle*? The vignettes that unfold subsequently do so out of this opening, the aperture into the space of the empty historically cinematographic (the film is projecting *without an audience*, in that the people are *not spectating*): filming, production, projection. The "heavy machines" of old, referred to in the conversation between the mysterious impresario played by Michel Piccoli and M. Oscar, were also the ones that, paradoxically, produced Daney's skies; the new ones, being so small and ubiquitous in a world become reality show, leave us firmly on earth (as does the character *played by the character played by* Kylie Minogue, Eva Grace). Daney had written about reality shows in *Le Salaire du Zappeur* very early in the development of the genre or form now so ubiquitous on our television screens. The reality show is the new occupation, according to Daney. It is as if Carax's film takes up the baton from Daney in its elaboration of a metaphorical display of this.

In this period where some talk of a post-cinema or, as William Brown does in a Laruelle-inflected idiom, a *non-cinema* of the digital era (Brown 2018), one can only speculate as to what Daney would make of departures from industrial practice such as films made on smartphones (Soderberg²⁰) or Godard and Wenders's mannerist use of 3D or of the dissemination and proliferation of multiple viewing contexts of our present moment.

20 "Soderberg, c'est malin" ("Soderberg's clever"), remarks Daney in 1992 (of *Sex, Lies and Videotape*), but he doesn't think he can go very far (Daney 2015, 187).

Regarding the output of our times, Daney was prescient about a transformation that he observed toward what he termed the vectorial *mise-en-scène* of some US cinema of the time—Daney cites Tim Burton’s *Batman* in particular (Daney 2015, 163)—where we do not come across the space bit by bit (as we would in Lang). Is this now even more the case in Hollywood blockbusters? Carax’s *Holy Motors* interrogates this too in its way, in the green-screen and motion-capture episode. CGI in cinema today is even more prone to deploy the potentiality of technology to render the vectorial experience that is produced by contemporary communications technologies in a media-saturated world. In CGI cinema, which is so full and contains densities of layers that although perceptible to the machine eye are imperceptible to the human, we are arguably ever more plunged into a world without the gaps of the Daneyian *visuel*.

If the community for whom Daney functioned as *passer* is to be considered, to sound like Blanchot, unavowable or, to sound like Nancy (sounding like Blanchot), inoperative, it is so in a way that is open to an ethics. In the essay “Before and After the Image” cinephilia is linked insistently to an ethical project. There Daney defines love of cinema as the knowledge of *what to do with the image that is missing*. When the other comes to be missing, each side takes refuge in their “visual,” the one in its real State, the other “in a state” of its imaging (Daney 1999, 190). Thus in the context of the audio-visual representation of the Other there is a pervasive failure to “go to the Other” (31). When this failure arises—as on television it almost always does—then we give ourselves images of ourselves as our way of failing to go to the other. The task of the critic for Daney was to enumerate and write about the ways in which this failure is endemic. Daney had produced powerful examples of the failure to go towards

140 the other, notably the coruscating attack on a televised concert associated with *Live Aid* and television coverage of the Iraq war.²¹

The question posed by the project edited by Dork Zabunyan, *Que peut une image*, is pertinent as a reference point for this essay. It rests on two responses, in the style of Daney as identified by Deleuze: inviting an optimism bordering on naïve—an image can change everything—or on a pessimism, throwing one's hands in the air and exclaiming in defeat: "as if an image could ever do anything" (Zabunyan 2014, 4). Daney, as we know, wavers in the end, still believing in one image, *une image*. Carax's film may in its way be discussed as the answer which the future would provide.

Carax aims to show us a world where everything is image, the instantaneity being such that acting out and viewing are simultaneous; reality TV equated with reality, visual with world, or so intermingled that one cannot exit it; a world in which M. Oscar as hooded vigilante can shoot M. Oscar as banker outside Fouquet's. Does Carax manage to give us an image, just an image?

Singularity

For Daney it was still possible for a single image to produce and embody a moment of resistance to the regime of the visual, even if by depending on it cinema could still, through mannerism, effectuate some element of anamorphosis—which we might think both metaphorically, as in a distortion or stretching of normative perception and knowledge, and as manifest in images themselves, as for example in the universes of David Lynch.

In a text in which Daney is cited, Bernard Stiegler sums up for me one response to the intervening period, the period when Daney is still our contemporary:

21 Of the video clip "*We Are the World*" he wrote: "a dissolve makes the dying and the famous dance together" (34).

Controlling primary and secondary identification leads to psychic dis-identification, which in turn leads to a process of collective disindividuation, that is, to a destruction of the social body itself, and engenders disaffected psychic and social individuals. It does so in a dual sense: it engenders their disaffection [*désaffection*], ruining their affective capacities; and it engenders their withdrawal [*désaffectation*], the loss of their place, that is, of their ethos. For this amounts to the question of ethics: ethics, which is the knowledge of the abode [*séjour*]. Ethics, as the translation of the Greek word ethos, is that which gives me my place within the circuit of affects through which the process of psychic and collective individuation constitutes itself. Insofar as it establishes such places, ethics is also what weaves that process of *transmission linking together the succession of generations*. [emphasis mine] (Stiegler 2012, 7)

It seems to me that Daney's late writings are diagnosing such a dislocation—written about in Benoît Goetz's recently re-published book (original publication 2001), prefaced by Nancy, *La Dislocation: Architecture et philosophie*. Daney, in his articulation of a passing (or already past) era and his interaction as *zappeur* of the squeezed space of television, is producing an ethics, as it were, on the run and in the intermittently available loci of a topological mutation.

25 years after the series admired by Daney, David Lynch delivered a further installment of *Twin Peaks*. The first series for Daney was a moment where an affirmative mannerism could inhabit and work against the dominant culture of the televisual, whereas the second, 25 years later, occurs in a period of television characterized for many by telephilia and by the emergence of new modes of series construction and dissemination.

Agent Cooper is beyond individualization (and Daney suggests of the original series that he has something of Cary Grant in *North by Northwest*). Whereas M. Oscar individuates and disindividuates

142 according to scripted, costumed assignments throughout the reality show that has supplanted the world and his own agency, in a different way Cooper, the agent and *agency* that is Cooper, is usurped and suspended in his inadvertent unconscious and unself-aware fractalization, circulating the cosmos, not least in the famous episode 8 of *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

At the beginning of *Soigne ta droite*, Godard, though the voiceover, looks for a place on earth, asking the question that one might attribute to Heidegger, of the *être-là*, being there. Already in his films identified with the question of the sublime, Godard is posing a question about what we now refer to as the Anthropocene and the ethical question of how cinema is to act when being-there is fractured and recognized comprehensively as finite.²² The question of being there as posed by the jolt of the camera in the sky at the beginning of *Soigne ta droite* has intensified in the intervening period. Godard lies on the runway at an airport, film cans strewn around his body. No longer the same; the question of being on the planet has changed, both since Godard asked this question and since Daney pondered the stakes of being a *passeur*.

The words of Patrice Rollet sum up the introduction to the first volume of Daney's writings as collected in *La Maison cinéma et le monde* as follows:

[H]e wrote that in it, cinema was "a home for images that 'no longer have a home'." The cinema home, like the "Sirk home" that he speaks of in *Trafic*, and not the home of cinema (its official institutions), cinema as a home for the shelterless image, vulnerable to the inclemency of history and the world, but also a home base from which one may set off again once the wind of image rises. (Rollet, in Daney 2022, 12)

22 In the interview with Viviant Daney cites Valéry: "Nous savons que nous sommes mortels, nos civilisations" ("We know that we are mortal, our civilizations") (Daney 2015, 195). Valéry said: "nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles".

In different ways the examples of Carax and Lynch continue to show us the after-images of the cinema as Daney understood it, now even more emphatically dislocated from both the *salle* and its official institutions.

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