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The Con·temporary in Cinema

Cristóbal Escobar

ABSTRACT

This article examines some epistemological aspects of the notion of the contemporary in order to trace an image that is turned towards its past while also looking into the future. This is the Con•temporary in cinema; an image invested *with* temporality that brings together the old and the new by manifesting an ideal continuity along its path. Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* and Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* will be used as two examples to illustrate a philosophical notion of the contemporary that treats the past and the present as parts of a crystalline structure. Here, by employing an archaeological montage-technique that portrays an overall vision of the history of cinema (in Godard), or the history of art (in Warburg), both artist-historians develop a method of cinematic arrangement that remixes and recollects what has been lost in order to renovate it into something new. Their work – which is a product of their time, and yet it transcends their time – will be said to be contemporary inasmuch as the signatures of the archaic and the old are inscribed in the most recent and modern.

KEYWORDS

Film-Philosophy; Contemporaneous; Trans-Temporality; Warburg; Godard

"In your labyrinth there are three lines too many," he said at last. "I know of a Greek labyrinth which is a single straight line. Along this line so many philosophers have lost themselves that a mere detective might well do so too" (. . .) "The next time I kill you," said Scharlach, "I promise you the labyrinth made of the single straight line which is invisible and everlasting.

Jorge Luis Borges, "Death and the Compass"

There are two labyrinths of the human mind: one concerns the composition of the continuum, and the other the nature of freedom, and both spring from the same source – the infinite.

Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*

The Latin word *contemporarius*, from *con* [together with] plus *tempor* [time], implies that to speak of contemporariness one must address the question of time. In everyday parlance, this suggests that the conjugation of the contemporary is the present itself, that is, the presence of a certain present, or an action happening in the "here" and "now". For Borges, however, as the above epigraph illustrates, this temporal synthesis becomes problematic as soon as one speaks of contemporariness in terms of a labyrinth in which each present is divided into past and future *ad infinitum*. This would indicate an all-encompassing form of time capable of endless divisions: the long time of a time that does not belong to chronology. Borges's sense of time, as remarked by Susan Sontag at the beginning of her letter to the poet, is different from most people: "The ordinary ideas of past, present, and future seemed banal under your gaze. You liked to say that every moment of time contains the past and the future [where] the present is the instant in which the future crumbles into the past" (111). The idea of the contemporary, following Borges's logic, would thus imply a more complex expression of time that straddles past and future without ever quite being present. Or rather, it at first seems to be indifferent to the present, holding a dialogue with something arcane or originary that determines the possibility of being *in* and *with* time instead of being behind (in the past) or ahead (in the future) of it.

In what follows, as in Borges's epigraph, the idea of the contemporary will be said to contain the mark of eternity – an invisible and everlasting line. This is an ideal continuity that the Stoics have called, after the Hellenistic deity, the time of *Aiôn*. According to the Greeks, in contrast to the time of *Chronos*, which divides into past, present, and future (hence, a more linear, progressive and historical conception of time), *Aiôn* represents an unbounded temporality in which the past and the future subsist as two infinite enlargements of the present: it goes in one direction from the present to the past and in another direction from the present to the future (Grosz 35). *Aiôn* is here understood as an ideal continuity because it occurs in the infinity of a time where the present is simultaneously contemporaneous to its future and its past. Following Jacques Lacan's definition of contemporariness as a return to the *arkhē*, that is to say, to an archaic time where the past pulls the present into itself, I argue that the con•temporary in cinema similarly recollects what has been lost or effaced (in the past) to renovate it into something new (in the present). Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* and Jean-Luc Godard's body of work, in particular his *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, will be used to portray such theory of contemporariness that treats the old and the new in terms of a crystalline image that stretches back towards the past and is simultaneously directed ahead towards the future.

Being contemporary, in this *originary* new sense, thus establishes a close relationship with *origins*. A "classic," after all, represents in philosophy the permanence of a question in history (e.g., the idea of Being) as much as its original posing in a specific time and space (e.g. the era of *theoria* launched by the ancient Greeks). In cinema, quite similarly, a classic not only stands for those pioneering filmmakers working in the early days of the medium, but more broadly includes all those creators who have brought, at various intervals of its history, the new language of film. This is, as discussed in my book *The Intensive-Image in Deleuze's Philosophy* (2023), the case of Carl Theodor Dreyer's fragmented close-ups in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928); Mário Peixoto's ellipses in *Limite* (1931); Maya Deren's choreographic movements in *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945-46); or Godard's archeological montage-technique in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989-99), the latter being a case in point for my analysis in this article. [1] Here, I suggest that Godard's original language not only stands for the usual artistic meaning we assign to the notion of *originality* but also for an image that is situated near to, and maintains a close relationship with, *origins* (Agamben 59-67). As such, and by collapsing the separation between past and present, or classicism and modernism, the con•temporary in cinema offers a more cyclical understanding of the old in connection with the new, as it is in this coexistence of past and present, or beginning and end, that filmmaking can revitalise itself under the constant elaboration of the new. This is a matter of the very old that, as in the case of *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1988-98), is producing something new: "Godard's montage [in the final four-hour version of his video series *Histoire(s) du cinéma*] is a unique attempt to visualize a hundred years of (film) history not as a text but as a condensed mix of superimposed images, sounds, written inserts, and recontextualized quotations" (Pantenburg 15).

In this line, Jacques Lacan's definition of contemporariness is probably the closest to my own definition of an origin in cinema. "In order to be

[1] It is precisely Godard, our "contemporary," who once said that "in cinema the *present* never exists, except in bad films" (Deleuze 38; my emphasis).

contemporary," as A. J. Bartlett, Justin Clemens, and Jon Roffe suggest in relation to Lacan, "it is necessary to return to the origin" (9). That origin, for a psychoanalyst like him, bears the name of Sigmund Freud, "albeit not so much to the latter's key propositions, but to the new fault-lines – "problems"? "questions"? – that those propositions at once open and occlude" (9). Similar remarks are highlighted by Martin Heidegger, who states that the problem of Being in philosophy (or the problem of the Real in Lacan) constantly repeats itself by revealing the primordial possibilities contained in the original question, so that Being represents at once the revelation of that origin (hidden in the initial question), as well as its transformation via the line of the problematic. In analogous terms, the con•temporary in cinema is also said to return (eternally!) to its primal source or energy, so that contemporariness is what preserves, while mutating, the inherent problems enclosed in the early moving image. This represents, in other words, a double movement: one that pushes the cinema forward in images that constantly differentiate in time, and another that moves the cinema backward in the eternal recurrence of its origin.

Put differently, it is next to the archaic that the contemporaneous connects to the original and the new. It is a line of flight that, while looking forward, is also glimpsing backward in time, very much like Walter Benjamin's reading of the monoprint by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus* (1920), which the philosopher describes in terms of a contemporary artwork whose face "is turned towards the past [while also looking] into the future" (qtd. in Sennett 311). As Giorgio Agamben suggests in *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*: "Contemporariness inscribes itself in the present by marking it above all as archaic. Only [s]he who perceives the indices and signatures of the archaic in the most modern and recent can be contemporary. 'Archaic' means close to the *arkhē*, that is to say, the origin" (50).

Such coexistence between past and present, or the old and the new, bears direct resemblance to Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* – an immense repertoire of archaeological items and avant-garde objects left unfinished by the art historian in 1929 after overcoming a severe psychosis in Germany. The *Mnemosyne Atlas*, which sets the foundations for a new theory of the image in Western aesthetics, is conceived by Warburg as a collage of visual gestures taken from both classical-antique and modern-renaissance periods, and which arises not from the opposition between these two periods, but from their common "rifts, denotations, and deflagrations" (Michaud 253). It is, in the words of Philippe-Alain Michaud, a technique of "cinematic arrangement" (240) that Warburg constructs "not to find constants in the order of [the] heterogeneous but to introduce difference within the identical" (253).

Figure 1: Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* fusing artworks from Antiquity and the Renaissance period.

Similarly, one could also visualise the con·temporary image as one shifting repertoire of cinematic gestures interconnected through a common theme or technique: a tableau expressing a large series of visuals becoming confused with their own past, rearranged in the present moment and thus transformed by their amalgamations *in* time. The atlas stands here for an instrument of cinematic orientation designed to produce nomadic relations between images: "it is not exactly a question of extracting constants from variables, but of placing the variables themselves in a state of continuous variation" (Didi-Huberman, 56-57). It is, in a sense, a form of montage where the essence of the con•temporary resides in the dynamic impulse of the cinema to relate and revitalise images from disparate origins or temporalities. In Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, for example, these assemblages include, but are not limited to, maps, advertisements, newspapers clippings, avant-garde objects and travelling photographs; or in Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema,* as quoted in a text by Pierre Reverdy called "*L'Image,*" the filmmaker suggests that "an image is strong not because it is brutal or fantastic – but because the association of ideas is distant and right." This text appears a few times in *Passion, Grandeur et décadence, King Lear, On s'est tous défilés (an advertisement for Girbaud), JLG/JLG, Histoire(s) du cinema 4B: Les Signes parmi nous*; all as sub-titles that work in the film as both a signature of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and the con•temporary in cinema.

There are, however, other ways of rearranging dissimilar temporalities and images that resonate with Warburg's undertaking. For example, we could follow the intriguing pictorial appearance of Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* in Buñuel's filmography, at various intervals of his career, but most noticeably as Ramona Fotiade remarks, "in his first and last film" (156). This is seen when the female protagonist in *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) looks at Vermeer's painting in a magazine, and then this replica re-appears in *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977) when we glimpse the lacemaker in person behind a shop window in Spain. [2] Similarly, one could suggest that the sadistic man with the razor at the beginning of *Un chien andalou* (played by Buñuel himself) bears direct resemblance to David (Colin Farrell) in *The Lobster* (2015), the male protagonist who in the dying moments of the film is about to cut his eyes with a knife. Or to offer one last example, one could also take that

[2] *That Obscure Object of Desire* was released in France in the same year of Claude Goretta's *The Lacemaker* (1977), the latter being awarded at Cannes Film Festival with the Prize of the Jury.

deadly self-propelled coffin in Buñuel's *Simon of the Desert* (1965) – originally appearing in Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) – and place it next to Lucrecia Martel's *Zama* (2017) in the form of an uncanny moving box with a kid, or a ghost, in it.

Figure 2: A replica of Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* in *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977).

Such a speculative atlas consisting entirely of fragments of films could well be reorganized in a different manner every time we bring heterogeneous elements together under a common order of themes. This is what Warburg did not only with his *Mnemosyne Atlas* – by juxtaposing art figures from Antiquity (the Apollonian) with those of Renaissance art (the Dionysian) – but also with the books of his library that he repeatedly rearranged in a system he called "the law of the good neighbour" (de la Durantaye xviii) – namely, a principle by which each book answers, or poses a specific question, to the book next to it. Like Warburg's method, which is capable of infinite divisions and temporal relations, the con•temporary in cinema also neighbours past and present images into one inclusive historicity that does not separate but in fact amalgamates "the classical-old" with "the modern-new" in film. This notion of contemporariness, echoing Elisabeth Grosz, becomes "a careful consideration of the ways in which the past, present and future are entwined" (231), hence an image-in-becoming that produces the new by precisely conversing with the old, so that cinema's orientation towards the future is always and already present in the potentialities and divergences of its past.

Connecting Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* with the Stoic time of *Aiôn*, which in Deleuze's reading becomes an all-encompassing time that goes beyond the historical (that is, a time of becoming rather than the ages of the world), the image theorist Georges Didi-Huberman also describes this form of temporality as an indivisible line that allows for "the presence of new relations between things [or images] that nothing seemed to have brought together before" (6). This is a spiraling image that upsets borders and taxonomies, one that, following Warburg's comments in his speech of 1912, may be said to "range freely, with no fear of border guards, and can treat the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds as one coherent historical unity [als zusammenhängende Epoche]" (Didi-Huberman 328). So, if Warburg's method is at all needed in my discussion of the con•temporary, it is because his *Mnemosyne Atlas* portrays a similar "way of visually unfolding the discontinuities of time throughout all of history" (Didi-Huberman 311): an image that breaks with a way of thinking about the cinematic past instead of making a break with such a past.

Echoing Borges's "Death and the Compass," we can thus visualise the con•temporary image as one "labyrinthic and everlasting" trajectory, one which Didi-Huberman also connects to Deleuze's temporality of *Aiôn*:

> By adjoining the paradoxes of Borges and the Stoic idea of temporality, Deleuze succeeds in making us understand something essential in the idea of [Warburg's] atlas that I am hoping to construct here: What happens in the paradoxical space of the different "tables of Borges" is possible only because a paradoxical time affects all the events that happen to it. This time is neither linear, nor continuous . . . : Instead, it is "infinitely subdivisible" and is "to be parceled out". This time is the Stoic *Aiôn* placed by Deleuze in opposition to measurable *Chronos*: time "at the surface" – or at the table – of which events are, he says, "gathered as effects." This is how "each present is divided into past and future, *ad infinitum,*" according to a "labyrinth" whose forms Borges would invent. (58-59)

Stoic *Aiôn* – what Deleuze refers to as the contemporaneous or the "untimely" – is defined by the philosopher as an "empty present" (66), which is infinitely subdivisible between "that which has just happened and that which is about to happen, but never that which is happening" (8). [3] Of course, in its mundane usage, contemporaneity comes to represent almost its opposite, namely, the interruption of a present event, something happening today. As mentioned earlier, contemporaneity reads "together with" [*con*] plus "time" [*temporaneous*] which I take to affirm rather than negate Deleuze's conception of *Aiôn* as an empty form of the present (as much as *Aiôn* is understood in terms of that "timeless being" which, according to the Greeks, signals the "vital force" of an "eternal cyclicality"). Here, Deleuze's notion of the untimely *qua* contemporaneity is also what informs those unlimited mutations of Nietzsche's becoming as expressed in the work of art. In fact, it is in his "return to Nietzsche" – a philosophy that is neither dialectical nor historical but creative – where Deleuze discusses contemporariness as a trans-temporal dimension of thought that operates by virtual presence (*Aiôn*) rather than by measurable actual presents (*Chronos*). [4] And this is the reason why, according to the philosopher, the untimely thinker must confront an "always limited present" by means of art (64). As Deleuze explains in an interview conducted in 1967, it is through Nietzsche's resistance to the present that the philosopher-artist reinterprets the world and "announce[s] an exodus from today's desert":

> The masters according to Nietzsche are *the untimely*, those who create, who destroy in order to create, not to preserve. Nietzsche says that under the huge earth-shattering events are tiny silent events, which he links to the creation of new worlds: there once again you see the presence of the poetic under the historical. In France, for instance, there are no earth-shattering events right now. They are far away, and horrible, in Vietnam [as they are today in Gaza]. But we still have tiny imperceptible events, which may announce an exodus from today's desert. Maybe the return to Nietzsche is one of those "tiny events" and already a reinterpretation of the world. (130)

[3] For further discussion on Deleuze's notion of the contemporaneous, see chapter on the "Contemporary" in *Lacan Deleuze Badiou* (Barlett, Clemens, and Roffe, 9-47)

[4] Referring to his Stoic conception of temporality, Deleuze reminds us in his "Tenth Series of the Ideal Game" that: "We have seen that past, present, and future were not at all three parts of a single temporality, but that they rather formed two readings of time, each one of which is complete and excludes the other: on the one hand, the always limited present, which measures the actions of bodies as causes and the states of their mixtures in depth (*Chronos*); on the other, the essentially unlimited past and future, which gather incorporeal events, at the surface, as effects (*Aion*)" (64). For further reading, see *Logic of Sense* (61-68).

To resist the present thus means not only to confront the actual historical time in which we live but all the times of dominant history. This is, in philosophy, the heterotopic discourse of Judith Butler today, or that of Deleuze in the previous century: two untimely archers who send their (Nietzschean) arrows towards the darkness of our feverish world. As Deleuze says, "Nietzsche opposes history not to the eternal but to the sub-historical or super-historical: the Untimely which is another name for haecceity [and] becoming" (*ATP* 296). Or as expressed by Nietzsche himself in the *Untimely Meditations*:

> This meditation is itself untimely, because it seeks to understand as an illness, a disability, and a defect something which this epoch is quite rightly proud of, that is to say, its historical culture, because I believe that we are all consumed by the fever of history, and we should at least realise it. (40)

Such a creative force of the untimely is another term to designate those con•temporary filmmakers who collect and recollect what has been lost, or effaced, to renovate it into something new. It is an image that gathers the classical-old and the modern-new as one *ars combinatoria*, very much in the style of Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* where Antiquity and Renaissance's figures are rearranged in a dismantling and renewing pictorial manner. This is similar in the case of Godard's videographic writing, which is a form of archeological montage that mixes discontinuous images, sounds and texts, and which Jacques Rancière also interprets as a method of rearrangement that traces different sources and artforms to embrace a more disseminated atlas of ideas:

> [Godard] superimposes in the same "audiovisual" unit an image from one film, an image from a second film, the music from a third, a voice from a fourth, and words from a fifth; he complicates this intertwining further by using images from paintings and by punctuating the whole thing with a commentary in the present. Each of his images and conjunctions of images is a treasure hunt: they open onto multiple paths and create a virtual space of indefinite connections and resonances. (167)

* * *

To summarise what has been argued so far, which combines Deleuze's notion of the untimely with Lacan's return to (an original idea in) Freud, contemporariness paves its way not so much in direct relationship or at ease with an actual cinematic present, or in mere belonging to a specific historical past, but in proximity or immediacy with a gigantic cinematic atlas which moves, and is formed, by the virtual coexistence of all its parts: the old – archaic – parts that allow for the new in the image, and the new – modern – parts that repeat and subvert the original act contained in the previous sequence.
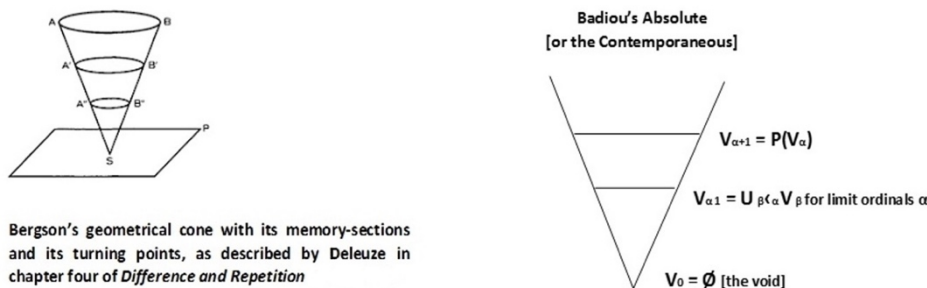
In set theory, this is also the type of ideal continuity that Alain Badiou establishes in *L'immanence des vérités*, the latest volume of his *Being and Event*

trilogy. The aim of Badiou's book is to connect the "constructable universes" of a present moment into the eternity or contemporariness of a larger "non-constructible infinite" – one that stands for the class of all sets of his mathematical diagram as seen in figure 3. Here, what Badiou does is to re-work his cumulative hierarchy of axioms-truths under the notion of *Vérités,* or the V of set theory, to suggest that each of the sets within this figure (i.e. the constructable universes of the present) touch on a certain notion of infinity, thus allowing us to re-index the different sets or ages of the world according to a principle of absoluteness, eternity, or contemporariness.

In this capacity, like the movement of an image that differentiates itself from the early film period to the present, Badiou's V also gathers force from the smallest (local) infinity at the bottom of his V0 to the largest (generic) infinity at the top of the V, thus making up the whole structure of his notion of the "Absolute." His V, as in Henri Bergson's notion of time in *Creative Evolution*, represents another inverted cone that connects all of the sets or points in the curve under a whole that changes and never stops changing. According to Deleuze, this "gigantic memory" that makes up the entire schema of Bergson's thesis on time is equally defined as a "geometrical cone" where each of its sections – all virtual parts – incarnates the singular "divergent lines" that make possible the actualisation of the different sections of the cone (276). So, whether we look at Badiou's mathematical V with its multiple axiomatic *vérités* or Bergson's inverted cone with its various *virtual* sections, what both models suggest is a metamorphic moving image that preserves and prolongs the past into a present moment that is bounded by the order of the infinite.

Figure 3: Bergson's inverted cone and Badiou's axiomatic V.

Bergson's geometrical cone with its memory-sections and its turning points, as described by Deleuze in chapter four of *Difference and Repetition*

Badiou's Absolute [or the Contemporaneous]

$V_{\alpha+1} = P(V_\alpha)$

$V_{\alpha1} = U_{\beta\langle\alpha}V_\beta$ for limit ordinals α

$V_0 = \emptyset$ [the void]

In a sort of audiovisual counter-part to this spiraling continuity, we could also trace the virtual points outlined by Bergson in Jean-Luc Godard's last two film periods: the militant period, at the moment when he gets involved with the Marxist collective group (the Dziga Vertov group, formed around 1969), and the more essayistic period, which commences, roughly speaking, in the mid-1980s, a few years before the publication of his book and video essay *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98). In the former, as Deleuze mentions, Godard's practice is mainly concerned with the political transformations of his post-war age. On the topic of *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (Godard 1967)*,* which is a dramatised *vérité* film that mediates on the Vietnam war and the turbulent situations in the streets of Paris during the 1960s, Deleuze claims that Godard intends "to observe [political] mutations" and further adds that his cinema "become[s] completely political, but in another way" (20). Deleuze's approach to the "politics of the modern image" is well

known. His interest relies on transforming the truthful world of Platonic representation into the falsifying functions of a Nietzschean philosophy – that is, a cinema of purely optical and sound situations devoid of any sensory-motor associations. And these are, in Deleuze's words, the "huge [political] forces of disintegration" released by the French filmmaker (19). In fact, as Godard himself mentions in relation to his characters in *Band of Outsiders* (1964), "These are people who are real and it's the world that is a breakaway group. It is the world that is making cinema for itself. It is the world that is out of synch" (qtd. in Deleuze 177).

Now, what exactly happens with Godard's more reflective second period if we claim that his previous (New Wave) phase had already established this kind of Nietzschean cinema under his political forces of disintegration? What happens to his (or Deleuze's) "method of between"? Here I suggest that it is in the image-gaps of Godard's latter phase that his cinema becomes intensified in a more essayistic method, one that develops from *Histoire(s) du cinéma* onwards, including *Film Socialisme* (2010), *Goodbye to Language* (2014), and *The Image Book* (2018). This is what Badiou, in similar terms, calls "the cinema's second wave of modernity": "Mention Godard first. He was also part of our historical frame of reference: the New Wave. The line of demarcation, the difference between the New Wave and what we are attempting to call cinema's second modernity [today], passes through him" (58). Godard's essayistic approach, which according to Badiou marks the beginning of a post-New Wave period, is achieved by means of an archaeological montage-technique that combines old and new media as well as the cinema's intrinsic relationship to the other arts. [5] The "seventh art", as we call it, would thus be the one fusing with the previous six – a total mobilization of the different types of visual (architecture, sculpture, painting) and scenic (theatre, literature and music) representations. And in revealing such a composite structure of the moving image, as Badiou suggests, what Godard does is to take a bundle of statements and conventions from the previous arts (in the sense that he orchestrates and makes explicit references to the world of poetry, painting, photography, dance, etc.) to create a trans-historical mediation on the status of art and the filmic image: "a retrospective and prospective mediation on what cinema is and what the image is" (Badiou 167). [6]

[5] In the words of Gilberto Perez: "From the beginning critics would describe Godard as more of an essayist than a storyteller, but it was near the end of his New Wave period that he really began to make cinematic essays, inquiries into a situation, explorations of a scene" (171).

[6] Badiou would probably agree here that in Godard, Deleuze's division between artificial time and real *durée* reaches a creative synthesis combining the two different conceptions of time and the image, for as Badiou would say in in relation to Murnau's films, especially *Sunrise* (1927): "In the greatest films you can absolutely show how moments of pure duration are inscribed within the 'assembled' construction of time . . . In the final analysis, what cinema offers, and I think it is the only art that does so, is the possibility of the presence of pure duration within temporal construction, which can really be termed a new synthesis" (213).

Figure 4: Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma.*

Such intertextuality of Godard's method bears direct resemblance to Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* – a similar cinematic arrangement that brings anew classical and modern images by way of their combinatorial potential. Commenting on Warburg's approach to Antiquity and the Renaissance period, Dimitros Latsis suggests that Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* portrays a comparable overall vision of the history of cinema in connection to the previous arts:

> [*Histoire(s) du cinéma*] is laid out in episodic format and in it Godard compiles clips of old films and newsreel, photographs, stills, reproductions of paintings, new footage, music, narration and commentary, primarily by him (we also see him at his typewriter "orchestrating" the whole enterprise) and superimposed titles, all manipulated and edited with wipes, superimpositions, crosscuts and every other technique imaginable. The historian-artist deals with a wide variety of subjects from film and politics to globalization, memory, genocide, art and God. Treating the screen like a page or a canvas Godard creates an end-product that is both dazzling and bewildering and which aims, according to Raymond Bellour, to incorporate in a singular articulation "the creation of film, the creation of the world, [and] the history of the creation of cinema" (778).

Such an archeological montage-technique put forward by Godard's (and Warburg's) visualisations of history through the work of art shares the same trans-temporal connections of the con•temporary in cinema. By creating a temporal line based on the links, juxtapositions and superimpositions of the image, the historian-artist creates a cinematic reflection that mounts the dissimilar into a combinatorial "series of series." It is a reading of our present that not only looks at its history, but, as Rancière suggests, mediates on the history of our century "by looking at the *stories*, or some of the *stories*, of the cinema, since cinema is not only contemporaneous with the century, but an integral part of its very idea" (167).

This is the con•temporary in cinema: an image or a series of images invested *with* temporality that bring together the old and the new by drawing a singular continuity along its path, bending and stretching through time. Here, as in Warburg's and Godard's atlantes, the con•temporary has been said to portray a virtual coexistence of images that undergo endless revivifications in the history of art, preserving the archaic in the most recent and modern, and incorporating the modern in the old or the archaic – that is, origin *qua* originality: an image without beginning or end, a "labyrinth made of a single straight line which is invisible and everlasting". Thus, as this article has suggested, the concept of the con•temporary presupposes a theory of the image that treats past and present sequences in terms of a crystalline structure, one in which the relations between images are capable of dynamic permutations and alliances with other arts, media, visual motifs, and temporalities. As an ahistorical concept, the con·temporary in cinema enacts a time that essentially resist periodization.

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