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# Transcendental Reelism

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## ABSTRACT

Theories surrounding the spiritual aspects of cinema often utilise a concept of the transcendental, exploring film's ability to transcend its worldly material. However, this equation of the transcendental and the transcendent evades an important moment in the history of philosophical idealism that sought to distinguish such terms. Immanuel Kant interjected into the tradition of dogmatic idealism with his own "transcendental idealism": a move away from a metaphysics of things-in-themselves towards the transcendental schema that makes thinking possible in the first place. It is then Gilles Deleuze that takes the transcendental to bare on a taxonomy of cinema, utilising a reorientation of Kant's critical project in the form of transcendental empiricism, an immanent and material positing of the schema of real experience. This article will expound further upon what the immanent transcendental can mean for an understanding of film by comparing the cinematic mechanism with the machinery of the transcendental, first by modelling the two against each other, seeing Kant's transcendental framework as *proto-cinematic*, and then by thinking materially across the two domains through their historicity and technicity.

## KEYWORDS

Transcendental, Kant, Deleuze, Simondon, Technics.

## Introduction

The concept of the transcendental haunts conceptions of the cinema. Despite the profoundly materialist, Marxist, semiotic, (post)structural and psychoanalytic frameworks that define much of the history of film theory, a groping for some kind of transcendent experience, aesthetic and form so often rears its idealist head from such worldly concerns. This can be seen, for instance, in Paul Schrader's idea of "transcendental style" from his book of that name from 1971. Looking to the films of Ozu, Dreyer, and Bresson, Schrader, reflecting later on this project, states that he "sought to understand how the distancing devices used by these directors could create an alternate film reality – a transcendent one" (3). The filmmakers Schrader focuses on are now seen as a precursor for the "slow cinema" movement, and his concept of transcendental style has been posited as having a "close affinity" with this set of films (Çağlayan 189).

However, Schrader's evocation of the transcendental as synonymous with transcendence evades an important moment in the history of philosophical idealism that sought to distinguish such terms. It was Immanuel Kant who interjected into the tradition of dogmatic idealism with his own "transcendental idealism". Instead of perusing the "illusory knowledge" that attempts to get at things-in-themselves, a reason that transcends its limits, Kant's critique of this pure reason "demands that reason should take on anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions" (101). Kant devised a schema for this self-knowledge of reason by asking what structures and schema must be in place within ordinary experience for this experience to be possible in the first place.

It is Gilles Deleuze who takes the transcendental to the cinema anew, emphasising that Schrader's use of the term is not in the Kantian sense. Deleuze then reads the insights of Schrader from an immanent perspective, stating that "there is no need at all to call on a transcendence" (17). The time-image, as Deleuze later describes, is transcendental in the sense that Kant used the term as it "presents [time] in its pure state" (271). This form of cinematic presentation produces a new relation between the spectator and the transcendental, such that, as Valentine Moulard-Leonard argues, "pure perception is no longer a mere speculative methodological artifice . . . , it becomes an actual experience" (118). Thus, Deleuze's evocation of a Kantian transcendental in cinema is also a revaluation of the Kantian project; this article interrogates the nature of the transcendental experience in cinema and its philosophical ramifications.

In order to understand Deleuze's cinematic transformation of the Kantian transcendental, I will begin by reversing this methodological trajectory and exploring Kant's invention of the transcendental as being *proto-cinematic*. Deleuze describes Kant's transcendental as a "tremendous machine" as it is precisely this transcendental plane torn from empirical determinations that becomes the realm of abstract and productive syntheses (*Synthesis and Time*). Looking for what is already cinematic in this Kantian machine will then

enable an elaboration of what the invention of actually existing cinema develops in this transcendental trajectory.

A similar gesture is enacted by Bernard Stiegler, who looks to Kant's Transcendental Deduction in order to flesh out "this transcendental moment as *cinematic consciousness* constituting an archi-cinema" (6). This leads to an understanding that "consciousness is *already cinematographi*" (17). My point here diverges from such a position by emphasising the rupture to perception that the invention of the cinema produces, and positing cinema as a speculatively alien thought within Kant's system. This is literalized in Kant's explicit ruminations on the possibility of different schema of thought from species living on other worlds, but also the cinema can also be seen as the underside of Kant's attempts to shore up the boundaries of transcendental schemas within human thinking. Deleuze's introduction of contingency into transcendental structures, the possibility of them being otherwise, is itself a *cinematic thought* whereby the ideality of Kant's apperceptive schema is made real and material. The cinema as a *model* for the transcendental in Kant's philosophy thus takes on these material stakes with the shift from Kant's transcendental idealism to a Deleuzian form of transcendental empiricism. I will place cinema's transcendental experience in contact with Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of technics in order to explore how cinema is part of a material transcendental that defines the co-formation of human and technological individuation. It is precisely because cinema is such an important model for transcendental structures that it is a particularly useful technology for gaining insight into the material structures that condition the experience of space-time at any given moment. It is by expanding a notion of transcendental experience beyond Deleuze's remit in the *Cinema* books that its properly historical stakes can be reckoned with.

### Deleuze's Cinematic Kantianism

Deleuze argues, regarding the transcendental structures that Kant developed in his critical enterprise, that "when things don't work, he invents something which doesn't exist" (*Synthesis and Time*). The contention of this section is that Kant, unwittingly, invented a mode of thought that contains the future development of film in virtual, larval form. From this, I am thus positing that Deleuze's post-Kantian metaphysics takes the potentials of the transcendental in Kant but reevaluates them. The cinematographic mechanism, as a model of thinking, can be utilised to view Kant's transcendental as proto-cinematic, and Deleuze's philosophy, in a sense, brings this to its truly cinematic conclusions.

By setting out what philosophy had the right to think – what the jurisdiction of thought was in the court of reason – Kant intended to limit pre-critical speculations that ignored barriers of epistemological justification. In doing so, he discovered an artificial structure inside of thought, a splitting of the self between the empirical coordinates of everyday life and the transcendental structures that must exist in order for the coherent experience of self to be possible. Kant made thought productive, in that objects, in very specific ways, bent to the strictures of consciousness. The schemas that Kant

developed are machine-like in the way they produce specific sets of appearances, and the critical method aimed at understanding the conditions of possibility for these appearances; Kant the mechanic takes over from the juridical philosopher of reason's property disputes.

It is the Transcendental Aesthetic section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that presents the most *cinematic* moment in Kant's thought. The purpose of the transcendental aesthetic is to understand the *a priori* determinations of the experience of empirical reality. Kant explores how representations of the world are created through the faculty of sensibility. Sensibility provides us with intuitions, steered by the faculty of the understanding from which arise concepts. The objects of this empirical intuition are appearances but are structured according to rules that do not appear within the empirical. To try to understand these forms of appearance, Kant strips the form of intuition of sensibility and understanding: "if we separate from the representation of a body what the understanding thinks in regard to it, such as substance, force, divisibility, etc., and likewise what belongs to sensation, such as impenetrability, hardness, colour, etc., there still remains something of this empirical intuition" (60). What is left is *pure* intuition, the glimpse of the formal frame of the empirical itself: space and time.

This defines the pure forms of space and time as pre-conceptual forms of intuition. Indeed, space and time are outer and inner sense respectively and come before possible experience; in order for experience to be possible, these schemas of spatio-temporal determination need to be in place. It is this that explains Kant's famous concept of the *synthetic a priori* as determinations that are found through empirical intuition – and are thus synthetic – but that require the *a priori* necessity of spatio-temporal schema in intuition. The forms of space and time are not things that we find *out there* but are, in a sense, *nothing*: pure and empty forms of intuition. Space and time are of course real, but their reality is empirical and this is where their effects are felt. The pure forms of space-time are transcendently *ideal* for Kant.

For space-time to exist on screen, the cinematic experience implies to the spectator the sense of a coherent I – a machinic eye – that produces these space-times. This is a parallel to how Kant's own argument develops from the Transcendental Aesthetic to the Transcendental Analytic. That these forms do exist in general experience provides Kant with the grounds to put forward the intellectual and sensible aspects of representation. The logical deduction of a transcendental self is demarcated by Kant as apperception. When the manifold of sense data in intuition is shown to be subject to the formal conditions of space and time, what follows from the combination of senses, for Kant, is the necessity of a singular consciousness that enacts this synthesising. The self-consciousness that accompanies spatio-temporal determination is the presence of an "I think," which is the Kantian notion of apperception:

The first pure knowledge of the understanding, therefore, on which all the rest of its use is founded, and which at the same time is entirely independent of all conditions of sensible intuition, is this very principle of the original synthetic unity of apperception. (131)

We thus find in the transcendental a sense of unity, a pure knowledge of self-hood as that which coheres manifold sense information. However, this is not merely a subjective unity of consciousness, an empirical sense of self, but an objective coherence to self-consciousness. There is a *thing* that is synthesising the empirical intuitions that we encounter.

That this logically-deduced self is not reducible to the experiential self, but depicts a kind of artificial structure within thought, creates an analogue with the machinic camera eye as a unity of cinematic perception. Whatever one sees on screen is unified by some sense of a coherent cinematic eye or, indeed, a machinic consciousness of the apparatus. Just as Dziga Vertov understood the camera via a machinic eye and Jean Epstein depicted the cinematograph as a kind of intelligence, the cinema also provides a different perspective on the transcendental structures of Kantian philosophy. This enables a way of seeing how a properly cinematic philosophy can use cinema as a model to reevaluate the Kantian system. Deleuze writes that “we can say of the shot that it acts like a consciousness” but that the “sole cinematographic consciousness is not us, the spectator, nor the hero; it is the camera – sometimes human, sometimes inhuman or superhuman” (*Cinema 1* 20). In this sense, the artificiality of cinematic perception can provoke the thought of the aspects of artificiality always-already in thinking, what we will later understand through a philosophy of technics.

The next level in the transcendental process of sense making is the productive imagination, which is the motor of thought as guided by the understanding; Kant defines the synthesis of a productive imagination as “an effect of the understanding on our sensibility, and is its application to objects of the intuition that is possible for us” (150). What makes Kant’s use of “imagination” so pertinent here is that it differs to the common use of the term, which usually refers instead to the *reproductive* imagination. This colloquial sense depicts the representation of a not-present object in the mind of the imaginer. Kant’s productive definition of the imagination is instead that which allows the presentation of reality as an effect of the understanding; as Deleuze explicates, “it is the faculty by which we determine a space and a time that conforms to a concept” (*Synthesis and Time*). This is, of course, implicated in the above description of pure understanding that is apperception, but the distinction serves to relate the imagination to a sense of action. Kant writes that “we cannot think a line without drawing it in thought” and this act is precisely the form of the productive imagination (153). Bergson develops a similar account of perception when he argues that it is action that shapes our perception of the world, determining how data is synthesised in a process of sensibility conforming to the concept: “the objects which surround my body reflect its possible action upon them” (20). The productive imagination demarcates the possible ways of drawing action across space and time, showing how the concepts of intention and reaction as forms of the understanding play a part in cohering manifold sense data. This arises in cinema as the “whole” of the image, its conceptual coherence as that which shapes the movements within moving sets in the frame, as well as being an effect of the combination of moving sets. According to Deleuze, this organic whole of montage was determined by action in the work of Griffith and the dialectical concept of intellectual montage in Eisenstein’s

films. This whole – that is, in a sense, the productive imagination of the cinematographic mechanism itself – is presented differently in the pre-war French school and German Expressionism, where the experience becomes sublime by pushing the sense of a whole to its limits; the Gothic line – for example, in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Wiene, 1920) – is a line that cannot be drawn in thought, leading imagination to destitution. The time-image probed at the limits of the productive imagination by turning the whole of the movement-image, with its sense of action and reaction cohering as reality, into an outside of the image that it was powerless to think. It is thus the sensory-motor schema of the movement-image that acts as a model for the Kantian productive imagination, and which is then disrupted in the time-image.

### Aliens and Explosive Contingency

It is the ideality of perceptual forms that is made complicated in Deleuze's vitalist reorientation of the transcendental. Deleuze writes in *What is Philosophy?* that "Vitalism has always had two possible interpretations: that of an Idea that acts, but is not – that acts therefore only from the point of view of an external cerebral knowledge (from Kant to Claude Bernard); or that of a force that is but does not act – that is therefore a pure internal Awareness (from Leibniz to Ruyer)" (212). This is the tension between the transcendental in the ideal sense of something *that is not*, but that acts on the world as an Idea, and the opposing position wherein Deleuze asserts the pure form of space-time as a passive force *that is*, in a real sense, but only subsists within matter and does not act; this opens up the possibility of the forms of space-time being *transcendentally real*. It is cinema that allows an *experience* of these forms of space-time, an experience at the limits of the empirical that bears witness to the forms of space and time that subsist in perception. Cinema develops its own spatio-temporal dynamism, its own pure forms of time and space, which it then presents to the spectator as limit-experiences of the normal perception of space-time.

It is thus important to understand how Deleuze and the implications of this cinematic experience reorients the metaphysics underlying the dimensions of a cinematic Kantianism in order to build the framework of a transcendental *reelism*. To do this is to probe the moment of tension inherent in a virtual Kantian cinema, or, rather, to explore the way in which cinema can be retroactively projected as a thought of horror that haunts Kant's critique as the monstrous underbelly of reason. Kant attempts to keep thought *inside the head* but does leave open the possibility for alien modes of thinking that we can flesh out as a cinematic thought. Indeed, the depiction of cinema as a *contingent* transcendental implies exactly the opposite from Kant's demands for reason. Instead of shoring up the domain of thought and providing contingent empirical reality with its *a priori* structures of necessity, the cinematic transcendental presents an ungrounding of transcendental structures. The contingency of the transcendental is precisely what Kant is railing against as he distances himself from the empiricism of Hume and its inability to explain the possibility of coherent experience beyond ascribing it to "habit" or "custom." Kant needed more stable grounds.

However, there is a moment in Kant's philosophy wherein this ground is undermined. This is what Deleuze calls "a furtive and explosive moment," where sense and rationality become artificial constructs, and "for a brief moment we enter into that schizophrenia in principle that characterises the highest power of thought" (*Difference and Repetition* 58). This thought of the contingency of thinking, of its immanent criteria not being determined from *up on high*, is opened by Kant but is swiftly crushed. It is in Kant's depiction of the understanding that the notion of a purely abstract and machinic notion of apperception is tied down to cognitive structures. As Mick Bowles suggests, in Kant there is "an acceptance that cognition is the ground that all explanations must be taken back to" (87). Instead of attempting a genetic account of these structures that might allow an escape from the purely cognitive, Kant has to bulwark his immutable transcendental structures by restoring "the integrity of the self, of the world and of God" (*Difference and Repetition* 58).

This momentary lapse into the possibility of a contingent transcendental is broached when Kant depicts transcendental structures as a human phenomenon, and he thus literally opens up the space for alien transcendental schema. Kant posits that "we know nothing but our manner of perceiving [objects], a manner which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared by every being, even though it must be shared by every human being" (75). This possibility of aliens is a recurrent feature of Kant's thought, especially in his later excursions into anthropology, and is explored by David L. Clark as providing a "spectral figure" for the "transcendental investigation Kant's anthropological project would otherwise wholly exclude" (209). Thus, when trying to get out of a focus on the cognitive in his anthropology, Kant utilises the idea of alien rationality to posit a definition of the transcendental that remains futural. For example, in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, written near the end of his life in 1798, Kant opines in the final pages:

The highest species concept may be that of a terrestrial rational being; however, we shall not be able to name its character because we have no knowledge of non-terrestrial rational beings that would enable us to indicate their characteristic property and so to characterize this terrestrial being among rational beings in general. It seems, therefore, that the problem of indicating the character of the human species is absolutely insoluble, because the solution would have to be made through experience by means of the comparison of two species of rational being, but experience does not offer us this. (225)

Perhaps cinema is this possibility of another being and a comparative form of the transcendental with which we can prove the problem of understanding the human to be soluble.

The thought that the cinema thus makes palpable is of a contingent transcendental, precisely by separating it from the human and materialising it in the machinery of the cinematographic mechanism, presenting a genesis of

these cinematic transcendental structures. Kant did not account for the genesis of the faculties, and it is in the immediate aftermath of his philosophy that these problems of a missing genetic transcendental account become apparent, for example in the work of Salomon Maimon and F.W.J. Schelling, which both influence Deleuze (see Grant 199-206). It is with Deleuze's transcendental empiricism that there is an introduction of contingency into the faculties themselves, a contingency figured as a prior dissonance that encompasses the supposed harmony between our powers of thought. The role of cinema for Deleuze, as Valentine Moulard-Leonard states, is that it "yields an account of the material genesis of conscious experience," which I suggest is the effect of its alien point of view (118). Figuring Deleuze's philosophy as a cinematic Kantianism is thus a way of using the cinema to flesh out what this perspective on the transcendental entails. It is the moment in Deleuze's transcendental empiricism where "the two senses of the aesthetic become one": the transcendental aesthetic meets a cinematic aesthetic when both constitute a "science of the sensible" (*Difference and Repetition* 64, 56). This sensible science concerns the material possibility of transcendental structures, and thus thought's contingency arises from what Ray Brassier calls "a materialist transvaluation of the transcendental", wherein Deleuze – in his sole authored texts as well as his work with Félix Guattari – provides the missing account of the genesis of transcendental structures (Brassier 54). As Levi Bryant suggests, by getting rid of the Kantian categories as immutable, Deleuze forms a "genetic account of intuition" that is "capable of surmounting the externality of concepts and intuitions by accounting for the production of these forms of intuition from within intuition itself" (35). This fundamentally autoproduktive vision of Kant's philosophy is depicted by Deleuze himself as a transcendental empiricism, but more recently espoused, by philosophers such as Bryant, as a *transcendental materialism*.

Essentially, as we have seen with the cinematic model of the transcendental, the structures of thought that Kant deemed rigid in our consciousness are taken *out of the head*. As Bryant describes, transcendental conditions are "not something imposed by the mind upon the world, nor something that belongs to the subject like Kant's forms of intuition and categories of the understanding", but are instead now "material insofar as they are constellations of potentials belonging to the material world and presiding over the genesis of material beings such as mountains, organisms, crystals, weather patterns, galaxies, and whatever else we might wish to include" (47). The transcendental schemas become a transcendental field, an ontological claim for the productive forces of being as that which effectuates the actualisation of the virtual, the differentials of potential inherent in an autoproduktive matter. This is where the seeds of Deleuze's post-Kantian metaphysics can be found, and its progression from a virtual cinema in consciousness in Kant's work is realised as a properly cinematic philosophy of transcendental materialism in Deleuze's writing. A positing of the transcendental's contingency is a knowledge claim that goes beyond Kant's epistemic modesty, which, I claim, is realised in practice by the way cinema provides an alien perspective on human intelligence.



However, more than just a model for thinking the transcendental, this material account of perception opens up a new position for the cinema. If the transcendental is made material, and spread onto matter itself, the cinema and the human exist in relation to the transcendental field, mutually determining each other across time; or, rather, thinking itself is never contained within a single apparatus but is produced through interactions and relations across this plane of immanence. The contingent interactions and relations that populate the transcendental thus define a historical dimension of the nature of perception and its relation to cinema, whereby, as Bryant states, there is “a set of potentials that perpetually shift and change” (47). This history of the transcendental is explicated by Christian Kerslake, who suggests that “cinema has provided a space for the contemplation of a profound restructuring of our temporal structure” (9). The interaction between thought and cinema becomes a historically complex phenomenon as a question of how cinema – an empirical phenomenon within time – also acts as a catalyst for mutations of time itself, becoming a harbinger of movements in the material transcendental. Cinematic experience thus reveals and perhaps moulds the contours of the transcendental through the presentation of the pure forms of space-time.

This approach to history is defined by Anna Greenspan through the concept of *transcendental events*; she writes that “there are certain events in the history of capitalism which have accessed the *a priori* plane of the transcendental” and that these “occurrences break down the distinction between the constant structure of time and the changes which occur inside it” (122, 169). The transcendental is thus a “plane of virtuality whose intensive variation is ultimately responsible for the production of our experience of time,” and it is the nature of these conditions of experience that need to be interrogated (143). Cinema and thinking, as aspects of the material transcendental, interact and determine the experience of space-time. In understanding the nature of a transcendental event, it is a notion of technics that needs to be explored as that which structures experience in society: how the empirical state of affairs interacts in complicated ways with the transcendental plane.

### **From Model to Material with Simondon**

I have thus far probed the relation between cinema and thinking – figured through Kant’s transcendental – as a kind of modelling. The outcome of this perspective is that the transcendental is understood as a material and contingent occurrence, not determined by its anthropogenic status but instead defined as a principle of matter; the transcendental becomes part of Deleuze’s immanent metaphysics as a materialised transcendental field. As it is material, the transcendental thus has a contingent history, and the question becomes how things and events can interact on this transcendental plane, and how the history of the transcendental can be figured through events as they occur across the empirical and the forms that condition the empirical. The transcendental itself mirrors a technological, and specifically cinematic, structure, but it is also historically connected to changes in the status of the human as imbricated in a history of technology. It is the notion of technics taken from the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon that can be instrumental in

fleshing out the relation between the transcendental and the technological. Indeed, in Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*, Simondon is credited with developing a "new concept of the transcendental" – although this transcendental register is unspoken in Simondon's book *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (124n3). Technics moves beyond the isolation of specific technologies or ways of thinking to define stages of development encompassing the interaction between humans and machines as well as between humans and the world itself. The material transcendental thus maintains a specific and vital relation to the field of technology that indexes different stages of technics; this section will develop the importance of technological perspectives as that which determine the conditions of the experience of time and space in society.

Defining the essence of technology is the task Heidegger attempts in his seminal 1954 text, "The Question Concerning Technology". For Heidegger, technology becomes an index for the relationship between humans and the world more generally, a definition that carries over into Simondon's work and beyond. Heidegger argued that "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological" and dismissed the contemporaneous assessment of technology – that is, that of a means to an end – which he defined as merely an "anthropological definition" (305). Instead, Heidegger wanted to get to the essence of technology, to a definition of *techne*. In locating the Greek roots of this word, not only in craftsmanship but also in the arts, Heidegger defined technology's essential function as a "bringing forth": "Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing" (308). Thus, although he did decry the practice of technological development that turned everything into fuel – including humans – Heidegger did not descend into any simplistic technophobia and stressed instead ways of embracing the technological and its essence as revelation. Indeed, the negative effects of modern technology arise through a forgetting of this true essence of *techne* and the subsequent assumption that machines exist as something that humans must master. A new relationship between humans and machines – and the world itself – is possible through the bringing forth that technology can initiate. Technology reveals something essential about our existence in the world.

Simondon, in many ways, shares similar concerns to Heidegger, and critiques a fundamental forgetting of the essence of technology: "Culture has constituted itself as a defence system against technics" (15). Against narratives of machine/human interaction that incorporate notions of dominance and subservience, Simondon, like Heidegger, wishes to define the technical object through how it can reveal new ways of existing in the world; the current and erroneous depiction of the relationship between culture and technics "masks a reality rich in human efforts and natural forces, and which constitutes a world of technical objects as mediators between man and nature" (15). Similar to Heidegger, this definition of the technical implies the possibility of its alienating potential. This goes deeper than the Marxist depiction of the worker separated from the products of their labour; Simondon posits that "beneath this juridical and economic relation exists an even more profound relation, that of the continuity between the human individual and the technical individual, or of the discontinuity between these two beings" (133).

Indeed, alienation for Simondon is a physical and mental affliction arising from this more fundamental rupture in the individual's psychic life: a discontinuity forced between human and machine. As Adrian Mackenzie writes, "Simondon argues that a misapprehension of the way in which technical objects exist prevents us from seeing their part in the constitution of human collectives, or in 'the human'" (121). Technology, however, also has the power to reduce this alienation. It is by understanding the way that technical objects develop, and, in a Heideggerian echo, by revealing specific relations between humans and technology, that Simondon's philosophy of technics depicts the positive effects of technology on society. Simondon writes that, "the realisation of adaptations is but one of life's aspects; homeostases are partial functions; technology, in incorporating them and allowing them not only to be thought, but to be brought into existence rationally, leaves the open processes of social and individual life fully exposed" (121). Thus, the evolution of technical objects provides a cipher for human social evolution, revealing aspects of the human relationship with its surroundings. Studying technology lays open transcendental processes precisely because it is part of the transcendental field. Technology reveals aspects of the relation between humans and the world because it is a mediating force in this relationship.

It is Simondon's philosophy of technics that can aid an exploration of this field of interacting technical and psychic systems, as well as its development through historical time. The notion of an *associated milieu* is how Simondon describes that which "mediates the relation between technical fabricated elements and natural elements, at the heart of which the technical being functions" (59). It is not, however, a pre-established and immutable setting upon which the evolution of technical and natural objects takes place, and Simondon develops instead a more complicated system of causality. The milieu is produced *alongside* the individuation of technical objects: "it is this associated milieu that is the condition of existence for the invented technical objects", whilst, at the same time, "the technical object is thus its own condition, as a condition of existence of this mixed milieu" (59, 58). This reciprocal causation is what Simondon terms the "phenomenon of self-conditioning", which finds resonances with Deleuze's conception of an immanent and autoproductive transcendental field (58).

The milieu, before being actualised *alongside* the technical objects, "exists virtually" (58). This realm of virtual production, which Simondon terms the pre-individual, is what creates both individuals (technical and biological) and the associated milieu. In a bizarre temporal complexity, Simondon determines this circular causality as "a conditioning of the present by the future, by that which is not yet" (60). The associated milieu arises as a result of the concrete development of technology but then appears to condition the technical object itself. This is how the relationship between humans and machines reaches the transcendental register whilst remaining empirically co-determined, with the associated milieu demarcating the conditions necessary to give sense to these technological individuations. This shows how cinema can screen and thus reveal these processes of technical and psychic individuation, uncovering the transcendental conditions for phases in the development of the technical environment.

To understand Simondon's approach to the distinction between the "natural" and the technological, it is useful to see his writings as reactions against the discourses of cybernetics. Simondon is arguing against what he defines as, "the identity between living beings and self-regulating technical objects" in the work of cyberneticians such as Norbert Wiener (51). He thus rejects a relation in corporeal functioning between humans and technology, arguing that such resemblances "must be rigorously banned: they have no signification and are only misleading" (50). Although cybernetics was influential on Simondon's thinking, it is a conception of *analogy* between organic and machinic processes that enables Simondon to escape any reductionism in such a relation.

This form of analogy is not merely external and representational – which Deleuze posits as the "the essence of judgement" in the dogmatic image of thought – but *operative* and *dynamic* (*Difference and Repetition* 33). It is operative because it relates the two terms involved, according to Muriel Combes, "from the point of view of their operations" (10). Humans and machines are related through their modes of production and individuation, and not by a comparative modelling of their individuality as this would require substantial definitions of both terms. As opposed to cybernetic discourse or a concept of organ projection, Simondon states that the "analogical relation between machine and man is not at the level of corporeal functioning", but is instead concerned with mental processes (151). This is defined by Combes as "a relation between the operations of individuals existing outside of thought and the operations of thought itself" (10). Simondon makes this clear by developing a genetic account of thought from the perspective of the machinic analogy:

The true analogical relation is in fact between the mental functioning of man and the physical functioning of the machine. These two ways of functioning are not parallel within everyday life, but rather within invention. *To invent is to make one's thought function as a machine might function*, neither according to causality, which is too fragmentary, nor according to finality, which is too unitary, but according to the dynamism of lived functioning, grasped because it is produced, accompanied in its genesis. (151 emphasis added)

The analogy Simondon presents here is an example of the operative relation that can be posited between invention and machinic functioning, and thus speaks to the relation between thought and cinema. Importantly, it is at the moment of invention as an event that the analogy between technical and psychic individuation reaches its asymptotic peak, and this peak can help explain the transcendental experience of cinema.

Deleuze famously writes that cinema can present "time itself" defined as the "unchanging form in which the change is produced" (*Cinema* 2 17). This is the moment when the experience of the limits of experience reveals the transcendental structure of experience itself, when one's thought functions as the machinic transcendental does. Following through with the material transcendental and its structuration across historical phases of technicity pushes beyond Deleuze's cinematic philosophy in approaching the historical

change of this supposedly “unchanging” form. Transcendental events encompass shifts in perception and functioning across technologies – such as cinema – and modes of perception. This co-determination, featuring complex forms of causality, relates two forms of individuation, technical and psychic, the connection between which Simondon’s notion of an operative analogy can help articulate. And why is cinema such an important technology in an understanding of technics? As I’ve shown above, it is cinema’s modelling of the transcendental, and its alienating of these structures, which makes it a prime object for a historical revelation of how perception can change.

However, more than revelation and access, a question arises around the political use of cinema as an active agent or weapon in the structuration of perception. Importantly, this could be the propagandistic enforcement of ways of seeing the world one might find in mainstream Hollywood cinema or the radical opening up of perception envisioned within utopian filmmaking, from Dziga Vertov to Elia Suleiman. Such a demarcation of a transcendental politics rhymes with Matthew Holtmeier’s definition of a contemporary political cinema as “the proliferation of identities, subjects, and ways of being in the world that are not immediately compatible with a particular faction or ideology, and which may be united by something they find intolerable” (25). The alien modes of seeing the world garnered by the cinema can push beyond a present to appeal instead to a “people to come” as Deleuze put forward; this is where the transcendental alienation of cinema paradoxically might act as remedy for empirical and political forms of alienation, such as that explored by Heidegger and Simondon. It is precisely by understanding the historical nature of cinema’s embroilment with the transcendental that an opening up to the future becomes palpable.

## Conclusion

In this paper I’ve attempted to forge a vision of cinema that takes account of its properly transcendental dimension, a *transcendental reelism*. This allows for a novel framework for understanding cinema’s relationship to thought as well as its historicity and technicity, how cinematic experience reveals the contours of a historically contingent transcendental structure and might work towards future shifts in perception. I want to conclude by looking briefly to a contemporary theorist of cinema that utilises similar Simondonian concepts to understand post-cinematic media.

Shane Denson posits the idea of “discorrelated images” in a book of the same name to explore the shift away from traditional cinematic forms and relations in digital and new media. He writes that, “the emergence of this new relation occurs in a space-time that is outside the phenomenological window of individual perception,” positing “novel sensory ratios or faculties that distinguish the viewing subjects to whom they are addressed” (22). The way that the underlying structures of space-time are shifted through micro-temporal processes that form digital images produce new structures of experience, despite these processes not being contained within experience. Although Denson does not use the term here, this can be understood using

the language of this article as a transcendental event. Denson is putting forward a kind of transcendental reelism, which of course moves away from the physicality of reels suggested in the pun of my neologism. Instead of the language of the transcendental, Denson utilises that of the metabolic: “Metabolism is a process that is neither in my subjective control nor even confined to my body (as object) but which articulates organism and environment together from the perspective of a preindividuated agency” (40). It is in Denson’s book before this, *Frankenstein, Film, and The Anthropotechnical Interface*, that the move away from transcendental arguments and towards metabolism is explicitly articulated. It is the “infra-empirical” (259) space of metabolic processes that avoids any implications of transcendence in the transcendental. However, due to Denson’s own connection of metabolism to the “molecular stratum of reality” that Deleuze conjures, I claim that there is not a world of difference between Denson’s approach and that of transcendental reelism (259).

It is in Denson’s more recent book, *Post-Cinematic Bodies*, the third in a trilogy that includes the two works mentioned above, that this transcendental framework is broached again: “to take up the question of mediality is to refuse from the outset a strictly *empirical* approach to media, along with all the particularities (of content, context, and consequence) that characterize the empirical realm, and instead to open up what might be called a *transcendental* space of interrogation” (86). As Deleuze looked to moments of sublimity in the movement-image and irrational cuts in the time-image to expose the limits of cinematic perception in an experience of the transcendental, Denson looks, for example, to “glitches that can be marshalled in an artwork to reveal the underlying *sensible*-transcendental space of aesthetic mediality” (87 emphasis changed). The event of post-cinema is transcendental, but in the sense that Deleuze has reoriented the Kantian framework towards a transcendental register that is immanent to the empirical, and decidedly *sensible*; Denson is importantly calling attention to how embodiment shifts according to changes in the media landscape.

Kant’s transcendental idealism thus still haunts contemporary approaches to digital media and post-cinematic forms as they are read through histories of the philosophy of technology and (post)continental thought. Although the idealist proclivities of Kant’s framework have been reworked, stood on their head to produce variants of empiricist, materialist, and realist philosophies, returning to Kant’s insights is still important. Kant accidentally invented a form of cinema, but an *ideal* one, and it is the actual invention of cinema that propels such transvaluations of the structures he posited as purely cognitive into the material realm. Just as Kant saw the transcendental faculties as determining possible experience, we find in the theorists and positions discussed above a reckoning with the way that it is media that participates in a *co*-determination of psychic and technic individuation. As we enter a period of rapid change within our media ecology, it is this imbrication with technics that will define the shifts in the structures of thought, embodiment and space-time itself. We do not know what transcendental events await us in the future.

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