The mythopoesis -- mythmaking-- of cinema is the mythology of the contemporary world, a corner-store mythology whose deities are human and whose morals are purely imaginary, economic. Always already subjects under this mythology we socialize ourselves through film, and through it we assume immortality. The screen performs a pantheon of civilization's ancient desires and fears (love, hope, terror, disaster) so perfectly as to pray for them; our very own pool of Narcissus, playing out history's fantasies with budget's unconscionable, rule's ungovernable, power incalculable. And it has become invisible, and therefore incontestable. The culture industry, as Adorno and Horkheimer defined it in their eponymous essay, The Persona is personality. Catastrophe is cinematic. "Life is just two quarters in the machine." Orson Welles (magician, painter, actor, filmmaker) might say that movies are the only real thing in the world, and he'd be the one to believe on this matter, if not one case. Stumbling his way onto the stage while traveling through Ireland in search of a painting career, Welles bought his way into the Golden Age of Hollywood with nothing but the most concentrated mixture of privilege and deceit--in other words, a mythology. Claiming to be a major Broadway actor, Welles made his stage debut as Duke Karl Alexander of Wurttemburg in the play *Jew Suss*, an adaptation of the eponymous novel. This is hard to imagine being an American and not at the same time being utterly mythological. It is equally difficult to imagine (from an artist specifically of the kind young Welles was hoping to be) as anything other than a bundle of cultural codes and arbitrarily derived values, shaping themselves into a person we recognize as deserving of such attributes.

It is hard to imagine being an American and not at the same time being utterly mythological.

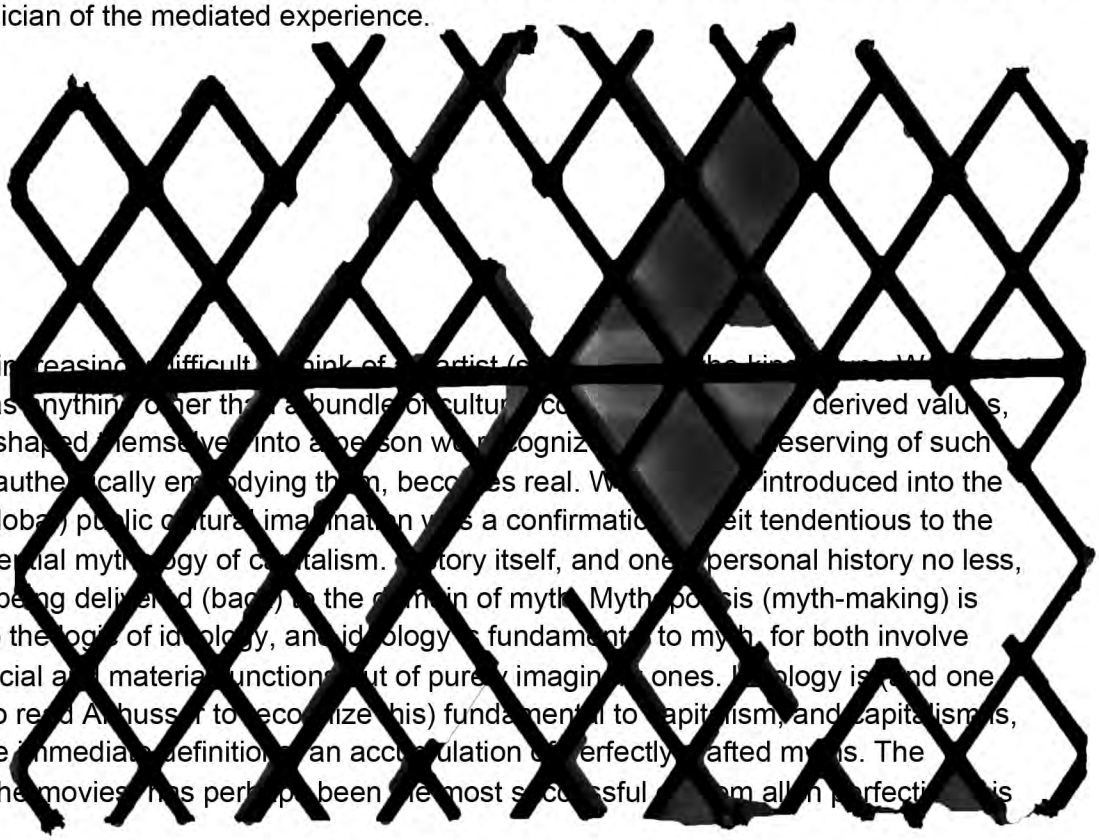
The mythopoesis of cinema is the literal narration of the mythology of the contemporary world, a corner-store mythology whose deities are human and whose morals are purely imaginary, economic.

Becoming someone depends on how you look at it.

Theater is so natural to capitalism that even shipping crates can make a stage.

At 16, Orson Welles embarked on a trip through Ireland by donkey cart in search of a painting career, only to find himself performing on stage in a Dublin theater after claiming he was a Broadway star. Enjoying his serendipitous success, Welles eventually abandoned painting for

the more lucrative art of moving pictures and went onto become one of Hollywood's most famous and celebrated figures. Fashioning his career out of stories and lies, and using a new technology at the peak of its power, he successfully assimilated the story of his life and the story he made for himself. Rather than aspire to Baudelaire's "painter of modern life", Welles chose to become a magician of the mediated experience.



It is becoming increasingly difficult to think of an artist (such as the kind of man W hoping to be) as anything other than a bundle of cultural commodity derived values, which, having shaped themselves into a person worthy recognition and deserving of such attributes, but authentically embodying them, becomes real. W introduced into the (increasingly global) public cultural imagination was a confirmation of it tendentious to the last, of the essential mythology of capitalism. History itself, and one's personal history no less, was gradually being delivered (back) to the domain of myth. Mythopoiesis (myth-making) is fundamental to the logic of ideology, and ideology is fundamental to myth, for both involve crafting real social and material functions out of purely imaginary ones. Ideology is (and one doesn't need to read Althusser to recognize this) fundamental to capitalism, and capitalism is, among its more immediate definitions, an accumulation of perfectly crafted myths. The apparatus of "the movies" has perhaps been the most successful system all in perfecting its craft.

It is not a coincidence that classical theater, along with the rest of the arts as we know them today, were developed in Ancient Greece, a period chiefly characterized by and infinitely popular for its mythology. Nor is it a coincidence that the idea of civilization itself originated at this crucial historical juncture. Its myths we know by heart without actively learning them, just as the figures of pop culture we can identify before we can speak (an echo is Echo, a mouse is Mickey). Its morals we've inherited as if genetically, its philosophy we can't help but elaborate on. "Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology. Receiving all its subject matter from myths, in order to destroy them, it falls as judge under the spell of myth". All of this has had serious consequences for politics. It is hard to imagine being an American and not at the same time being utterly mythological. The

It is becoming increasingly difficult to think of an artist (specifically of the kind young Welles was hoping to be) as anything other than a bundle of cultural codes and arbitrarily derived values, which, having shaped themselves into a person we recognize as not only deserving of such attributes, but authentically embodying them, becomes real. What Welles introduced into the (increasingly global) public cultural imagination was a confirmation, albeit tendentious to the last, of the essential mythology of capitalism. History itself, and one's personal history no less, was gradually being delivered (back) to the domain of myth. Mythopoesis (myth-making) is fundamental to the logic of ideology, and ideology is fundamental to myth, for both involve crafting real social and material functions out of purely imaginary ones. Ideology is (

s) fundamental to capitalism, and capitalism is, among its more immediate definitions, an accumulation of perfectly crafted myths. The apparatus of "the movies" has perhaps been the most successful of them all in perfecting this craft.

the apparent displacement of an object caused by the actual movement of the observer...this figure underscores both that our framings of the past depend on our positions in the present and that these positions are defined through such framings

situation of politics in recent decades is marked chiefly by an inability to activate bodies *in* space and an overwhelming, imposed ability to activate the mind *outside of* space. This is a basic formation of mythology. If the imaginary world, the simulated one in the shadows of Plato's cave, can suffice for the true one, then nothing need be done to ameliorate it. "I am happy at home."

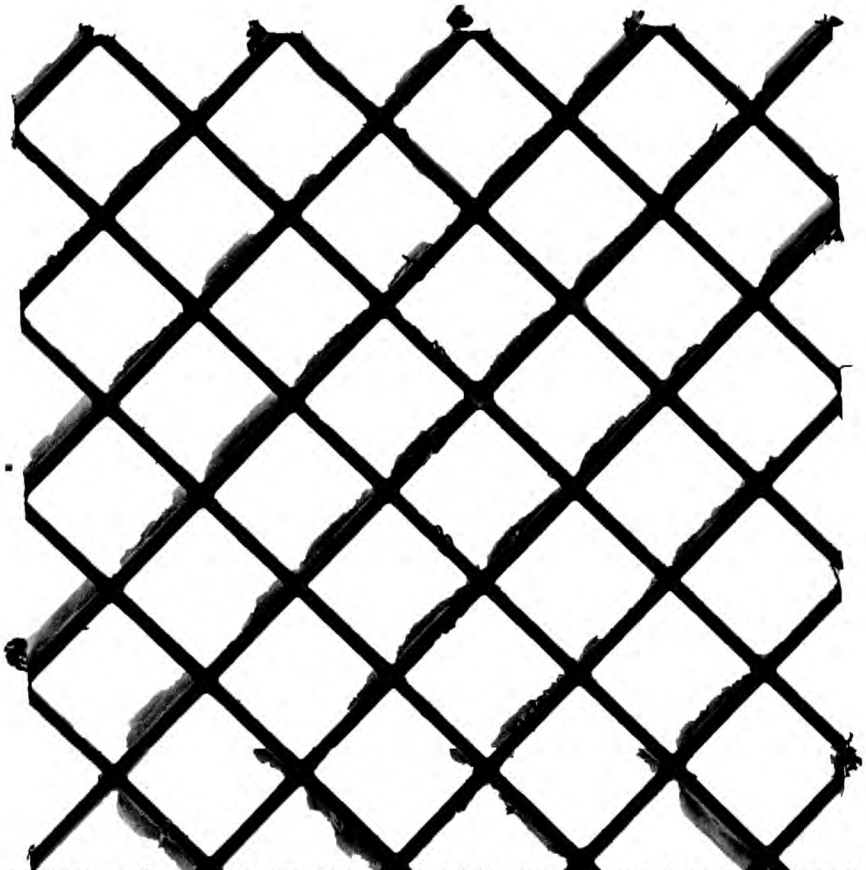
of the subject of that action. The substance of the various arts will therefore be of little importance; certainly, theatre and cinema are direct expressions of geometry (unless, as rarely, they carry out some research on the voice, on stereophony), but classic (readable) literary discourse, which has for such a long time now abandoned prosody, music, is also a representational, geometrical discourse in that it cuts out segments in order to depict them: to discourse (the classics would have said) is simply 'to depict the tableau one has in one's mind'. The scene, the picture, the shot, the cut-out rectangle, here we have the very *condition* that allows us to conceive theatre, painting, cinema, literature, all those arts, that is, other than music and which could be called *dioptric arts*. (Counter-proof: nothing permits us to

When bodies *are* activated in space, motivated either by fervent ideological misguidedness (as in the impotent "insurrection" at the Capitol) or by an inestimable anger that has festered for generations, perpetually undervalued, misunderstood, and systematically suppressed (as in the Black Lives Matter movement), the individual causes are inevitably exploited as so much surplus value in the cultural factory and immediately transformed into spectacle. Whereas the Trump rally at the Capitol was always already spectacular, predetermined in the manufactured beliefs and convictions of its members, the true political action latent in the BLM protests was programmatically reformatted by the all-encompassing logic of digital media and almost immediately rendered useless. (This isn't to say that the various organizations who have been and continue to be vital to this movement are at fault, but rather that the conversation is deliberately kept among us, and real political efficacy is precluded because politics itself is a privilege no longer available to us for participation). To participate in politics today is to participate in its mythologization. For the so-called "insurrectionists", this mythologization simply came first.

Digital media, it goes without saying, originated in photography (drawing with light). The penultimate iteration of photography's revolutionizing mission was the moving picture, believed to be the final arrival of life's perfect mimesis. In other words, it accomplished the long sought-after *ideal*. The same ideal aspired to by Plato and his students, and the same ideal perpetually reimagined and attempted at by photography's original practitioners (examples include Alphonse Bertillon, innovator of photography's application in criminology, and Francis Gaston, father of eugenics, that other infamous pseudoscience). Intoxicated by its mimetic power, the chief operators of the burgeoning modernity noticed in film an opportunity to merge (what they believed to be) the universalism of photography with the edifying social and cultural values of democracy and freedom (freedom on their terms, to be sure). In the same way Welles, in 1938, could generate widespread panic with a fictive broadcast about a martian invasion based on H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*, so could the culture industry that Welles helped to create, with Hollywood as its headquarters, generate an inconceivable wealth of films possessing the same, simple power to convince.

It would be imprudent to let the unique role of the Internet in this schema go unacknowledged. However, the Internet and social media are simply the latest articulations of a century and a half of developments in mediating technologies whose respective logics derive primarily from the logic of the cinema. Telling a story is a powerful thing; telling it *well* is even greater. In the modern film, not only do we witness our own stories magnificently played out on the big screen, but *through* this we subsequently come to understand every new story (current event or "discovered" masterpiece) according to its representation on that screen. The pool in the myth of Narcissus, in which the eponymous character becomes so transfixed by his reflection that he gradually withers away, has now been replaced by the ubiquitous screen whose origin lies in cinema. History itself, as a necessary accomplice in the development and advancement of ideology, is governed according to the same representational logic (not incidentally, one invented by white men in white coats in laboratories remote). This precession of simulacra, as Jean Baudrillard termed it in the early 80s, is the primary mode in which we encounter the world today.

> taking the lead in the history of the arts – the relationship between geometry and theatre. The theatre is precisely that practice which calculates the place of things *as they are observed*: if I set the spectacle here, the spectator will see this; if I put it elsewhere, he will not, and I can avail myself of this masking effect and play on the illusion it



The fraught tradition of painting, having enjoyed its perennial return at the start of the same decade, is inexorably bound up with issues of film. In 1981, Benjamin Buchloh observed with art historical eruditio the contradictions and implications of this regression back to expressionistic, virile, male-centered painting strategies in Europe at the time, noticing with a particular wit this move's necessary relationship to the contemporary socio-economic situation. What was it that allowed painting, a medium pronounced dead multiple times over since the dawn of Conceptual art to reemerge as a viable critical practice? To what extent was this return an authentic reflection of a sincere creative and symbolic urgency, and to what extent was it simply an extension of the dominant ideology or, more cynically, a strategically directed one? Buchloh stages these questions within specific art historical moments, namely the shift made by the early modernist avant garde (Malevich, Rodchenko, Picasso, Picabia, etc.) from their radical origins to a suspicious return to figuration, and this move's reiteration in German painting of the early 80s. "The construction of artistic movements with great potential for the critical dismantling of the dominant ideology", as in Dada or Conceptual art, Bucloh suggests, are perennially abandoned and exchanged for "traditional" artistic practices, chief among them the tradition of painting, which, by now, is less of a zombie continually resurrected and more of a ghost, haunting not only artistic production, but the whole of the art apparatus itself.

The world of cinema has an intrinsic relationship to painting. In the past, painting was regarded among the supreme representational modes, relied upon to provide a particular culture with its allegories, its myths, its history, its morals, i.e., its *art*. The strategies of realism were employed to illustrate a particular moral or ethical notion, to transcend the banality of the ordinary, or to

offer a sufficient image of national/communal history. The advent of photography presented this world, the orthodox world of classical pictorial representation, with a challenge so austere, so dramatic, that the faith previously accorded to painting's power was almost immediately exchanged with an even more fervent faith in the incontestable truth of the photographic image. Painting, meanwhile, swiftly turned to the non-pictorial to supplant its possession of the "truth", searching within abstraction instead for the transcendent and the sublime. The early modernist avant-garde, to which Buchloh refers, quickly embraced the revolutionary potential of both photography and painting together, dismantling the notion and proclaiming the impossibility of "truth" in either-- challenges which ultimately sought to eschew altogether the conventional artistic principles whose absorption by advanced industrial society and fascism these artists had already been witness to since the turn of the century.

Narcissus watching himself.

NARCISSUS WATCHING HIMSELF

Ideology has less to do with inherited beliefs than it does imaginary content.

There are no accidents under capitalism.

> form, aesthetic, rhetoric can be socially responsible if they are handled with deliberation. Representation (since that is what we are concerned with) has inescapably to reckon with the social gest; as soon as one 'represents' (cuts out, marks off the tableau and so discontinues the overall totality), it must be decided whether the gesture is social or not (when it refers not to a particular society but to Man).
>
> What does the actor do in the tableau (the scene, the shot)? Since the tableau is the presentation of an ideal meaning, the actor must present the very knowledge of the meaning, for the latter would not be ideal if it did not bring with it its own machination. This knowledge which the

The situation of politics in recent decades is marked chiefly by an inability to activate bodies *in* space and an overwhelming, imposed ability to activate the mind *outside of* space.

We are perpetually being imaged.

“The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera”

