Cinematic Assemblies

Latour and Film Studies

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WHAT IS THE RELEVANCE and promise of Bruno Latour's philosophy for film (or cinema) studies?[1] Exploratory answers to this question have been coming in more slowly than in literary studies on the one hand, and the larger, in part social science-inflected field of media studies, on the other hand.[2] Of course, as Latour himself might put it, the borders between these domains indicate "less a dividing line between two homogenous sets than an intensification of crossborder traffic" in the contemporary processes of trans/disciplinary recomposition that form the occasion for this volume. The emerging body of Latourian scholarship specifically on cinema certainly reflects such traffic, even where it intends "to remain within the traditions of film studies."[3] While it is fascinating to trace—and for the purpose of scholarly diplomacy crucial to respect—relatively distinct disciplinary trajectories, this chapter situates itself against the broader backdrop of Latour's reception across disciplinary domains, to specifically outline his relevance for film studies at the intersections of such domains. That is, I hope to show that Latour's philosophy gains its promise for this field not least by how it speaks to, and allows us to productively remap, the complex position of film studies in the ongoing process of de- and recomposing the humanities. Some of these complexities reflect familiar external pressures: like other humanities disciplines, film studies has been targeted by neoliberal administrative efforts to confine scholarly inquiry within professional degree programs focused on media advertising or management.[4] At the same time, and with more interesting implications, the field has been internally de- and recomposed by heterogeneous disciplinary trajectories,

as inquiries into cinematic form and aesthetic response have long coexisted and been amalgamated not only with cultural studies approaches but also with interests in the material technologies and institutions of production, distribution, and exhibition in a shifting landscape of old and new media. In 2018, the domain border between *film* or *cinema* and *media studies* has arguably become anachronistic.[5]

In reviewing existing scholarship and proposing further developments for Latour reception in film studies, the following responds to this situation with a twofold—but I claim, consistent—move. On the one hand, I emphatically affirm the significance of film studies in and for the humanities. My Latourian account of the creative processes of filmmaking and film viewing underlines the aesthetic and cultural productivity of cinematic worldmaking: its forceful contributions to ethically and politically urgent concerns about living together, or (in Latour's own words) to the task of reassembling more inclusive (part-human) collectives.[6] On the other hand, I develop this argument precisely by taking seriously the challenge of Latour's transdisciplinary provocation, as I connect my own interests in film aesthetics to a more comprehensive account of the material-semiotic networks of production, circulation, and reception that facilitate cinematic composition and reading. In other words, this chapter joins other contributors to this volume by arguing that Latour's philosophy facilitates a "defense" of the humanities not against the sciences (or for that matter by plainly allying with traditional scientific method), but within a transdisciplinary continuum of perception and knowledge practices that imbricate epistemological realism and reflexivity, empiricism and (critical, imaginative, formalist) techniques of reading.

Latour himself has referenced the world building processes of film and engaged in film and multimedia projects, inviting the adoptions, and adaptations, through which film scholars have begun to deploy his philosophy.[7] I propose a somewhat more encompassing translation of Actor-Network-Theory (and its modifications in the *AIME* project) into film studies, one that bridges the gap between competing disciplinary approaches focused on film technology, production, exhibition, and aesthetics respectively. I will develop this proposal by connecting the

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emerging reception of Latour in film studies to longer-standing discussions in the field, ranging from a whole legacy of interest in nonhuman agency to early explorations of postcritical reading techniques.[8] From my own angle, re-reading Latour for film studies provides an opportunity to link many of the field's heterogeneous methodologies into a layered, multi-faceted approach to cinematic worldmaking. The two main sections of this piece unfold such a layered approach starting from the major thematic clusters of Latour reception in film studies to date: (1) nonhuman and distributed agency and (2) documentary and other realist genres. As I proceed, I will introduce Valeska Grisebach's film *Western* (Germany, Bulgaria, Austria 2017) as an example that substantiates my claims to theoretical productivity.

Nonhuman (and Non-Sovereign Human) Agency: Film's Actor-Networks

An early essay linking Latour's philosophy to cinema highlights how film studies have long overlapped with media studies, itself a heterogeneous field that can be characterized as part transdisciplinary cultural studies endeavor, part "harder" history of technology. In a 2008 German media studies anthology on distributed agency and collectivity, media philosopher Lorenz Engell investigated cinema's multiple actors, with a focus on technology. His chapter collected representational and aesthetic evidence for how historical and contemporary films have dramatized the agency of collectives, things, apparatuses, and light, and linked these observations to media-theoretical reflections on the nature of the film image itself as an animated "thing"; film's foundation in mechanical recording; its historical lineage in scientific measurement techniques; and its indexical qua photographic quality.[9] Through this lens of history of technology, cinema presents itself as the medium par excellence for concretizing Latour's claims about nonhuman agency. Classical film theory, Engell reminds us, preempted the call to accept nonhumans as "full-blown actors": early and mid-century theorists regularly emphasized "the instrumentality of a nonliving agent" (in André Bazin's classical formulation) and cast film as showing "the world from the perspective of a thing among things."[10]

This return to an earlier moment of medium theory is a delicate move in twenty-first-century scholarship. Arguably, the theoretical controversy around the strong version of Bazin's classical notion has been stabilized: contemporary film theory no longer encourages us to foreground film's automatic, "objective"—or object lens-driven—image-making to the point of ignoring either the human actors assembled with the camera or the cultural scripts shaping their framing activity.[11] Engell's own preoccupation with the agencies of technology makes him forego an explicit critique of the classical trope; however, he does indicate a fuller account of, in fact, *distributed* cinematic agency. This account links to contemporary film studies positions, which have, in some respects, reflexively renewed the earlier interests in cinema's "thing"-like look(s), in response to the sovereignty presumptions that characterized dominant mid- and later twentieth-century film theory. These sovereignty presumptions had taken different forms: auteurist conceptions of cinema deployed them in foregrounding the more or less sovereign human agency of the artist, whereas the psychoanalytic, ideology-critical apparatus theories of the 1970s (and beyond) postulated the film's similarly powerful, "disembodied and godlike vision."[12] In the early 1990s, Vivian Sobchack was influential in critiquing this notion of "tyrannical technology," and conceptualizing the spectator, along with the film itself, as a non-sovereign "*viewing* subject."[13] Sobchack's phenomenological account resonates with Engell's evocation of the film image as an animated thing endowed with active looking power, as it gives weight to the "film's body" as both "*instrumental mediation*" and "situated, finite" embodiment of "perception and expression."[14]

It seems that Sobchack's film, as a material "node" of mediation to be taken seriously as a full-fledged actor, could find a place in Latour's "actor-network." As he has it, this network is populated by "*overtaken*" or "*other-taken*" participants; Latour's rethinking of action in general as a "conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies" displaces fantasies of human along with nonhuman sovereignty (*RS* 44–45; Latour's emphasis). To be sure, both Engell and Latour himself might object to the anthropomorphizing undertones of Sobchack's rapprochement of nonhuman and human actors. As the "mediation of camera

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and projector" perceptually aligns "filmmaker and spectator . . . with each other" as well as "a world that is their *mutual intentional object*," Sobchack's emphatically materialist account of cinema's loop of distributed agency remains inflected by classical phenomenology's emphases on consciousness and intention, and perhaps closer to (non-distributive) auteurist theories than she intends.[15] In contrast, Engell underlines how intention is "*overtaken*" in Latour's sense as he more fully dissembles cinematic agency: what he wants taken into account are not only the empirical plurality of humans involved in making a film (as producers, actors, cinematographers, editors, and so forth) and the "varied and complicated instruments" foregrounded by his own approach, but also—with a nod to cultural studies approaches—filmmaking "conventions, rules, and styles," along with the "expectations, viewing habits, iconographies and ideologies" that shape reception processes.[16]

In more comprehensive theoretical terms, a Latourian model of collective cinematic agency is developed in Ilana Gershon and Joshua Malitsky's 2010 "Actor-network theory and documentary studies," a key contribution to the project of bringing Latour to film studies.[17] Introducing ANT as "fundamentally a theory of relationality," Gershon and Malitsky detail "four major conceptual consequences": "First, everyone and everything contributes" to the cinematic network—which, as Gershon and Malitsky stress, encompasses processes from preproduction to reception—including the "strength and directionality of the sun's light" or the variously cooperative or resistant microphones of the Fidel Castro documentaries they introduce as examples.[18] Second, however, "not all actants are the same": "each actant's physicality," such as "the materiality of the pro-filmic space and the cinematic apparatus," matters along with the "different social and historical trajectories" of objects and people in the network, trajectories constituted by power asymmetries, norms of gender, or genre (67, see 68). Third, relations in the cinematic network are "performative": "instability" is the given condition, while any orientation to the "classical" cinematic norms of "consistency and coherence" always requires labor.[19] Fourth (as perhaps implied by the first three principles, but worth underlining), "all" human and nonhuman "actants" are "network effects"; their mediating

agency always remains contingent on the forces with which they are entangled (68).

In my own work, I have developed these principles into a syncretic framework that conceptualizes cinematic worldmaking as a collective process of assembling heterogeneous but entangled elements—including affects, associations, bodies, gestures, matter, memories, perceptions, sensations, things, topoi and tropes—via images, words and sounds in the communicative networks of composition, production, and spectatorship.[20] My accent on (networked) communication processes aims to balance prevalent film and media studies emphases on technology (as evident in Engell's contribution and to a lesser degree in Gershon and Malitsky's examples) by foregrounding the constitutively entangled, *non-sovereign human, humanlike and part-human actors* in film's networks. In my definition, human-like and part-human actors include, for example, characters on the diegetic level and camera-cinematographer assemblages on the level of narration.[21] This proposal goes against the grain of radically post-humanist interpretations of Latour. Hoping to mediate between competing humanist and post-humanist approaches in the larger contemporary humanities landscape, it aims to answer concerns about ethical and political orientations in the network.[22] In particular, I explore unexpected resonances between Latour's methodological ethos of deploying "the actors' own world-making abilities" and a postclassical phenomenology no longer focused on intentionality. A key principle here is that the networked, or (in Deleuzian language) "*divisible,*" nature of individuals does not preclude us from "respecting . . . what is 'given into' their 'experience.'"[23] At the intersection with affect studies, I underline how Latour's network creatures are moved and (re-) constituted by their attachments [ATT] to nonhumans along with other humans (see *AIME,* 423, 425): by sensations, affectations, memories, and fantasies that are variously mediated by technology and history but are not therefore necessarily any less intense. The ethos of carefully tracing this non-sovereign, often nonconscious activity of human, humanlike, and part-human participants facilitates a forcefully egalitarian conceptualization of cinematic network operations. Thus, the empirical voices of extras, costume designers, and regular audience members

are, in principle, as worthy of attention as the interpretations of directors and professional critics, even where access asymmetries tilt the scholarly collection of voices in the direction of the most privileged actors. Respectfully listening to the director's self-interpretation in yet another interview, I don't have to conclude that I have "been dispatched thanks to the flesh-and-blood author" (Latour, *AIME* 247). After all, she sometimes "doesn't know very well what she has done" and is, again, herself as much a product of the cinematic communication loop as her "admirers" (Latour, *AIME,* 247)—potentially no less powerfully seduced or repulsed by the characters and objects populating the collectively assembled cinematic worlds for which she gets credit.

This proposed framework connects to other domains, including literary studies as shaped by debates on postcritical reading techniques over the course of the past fifteen years. Simultaneously, the framework resonates with earlier discussions on (multisensory) spectatorship within film studies, such as Sobchack's call to overcome 1970s film theory's "paranoia," Steven Shaviro's challenge to embrace "film viewing" as "pleasure and more than pleasure," and cognitive scholars' calls to displace modernist *distanciation* mandates with reconsiderations of empathy and sympathy.[24] Integrating this range of heterogeneous impulses with Latour's methodology of following the actors, I argue, facilitates a multifaceted, flexible approach to cinematic composition, production, distribution and reception processes.[25] In my iteration, this approach does not entail a full-fledged displacement of critique but foregrounds an ethos of "[c]ritical proximity" and practices of reconfigurative rather than iconoclastic critique.[26] With a layer of patient phenomenological description, this kind of reconfigurative critique modulates distance and approximation as it cautiously assembles diverging "local," first-person perspectives into collective accounts that afford a degree of contextualization and historicization.[27] In different corners of cinema's communicative loop, I can, for example, trace the circulation of (any combination of) passionate feeling, conditional empathy, intellectual curiosity, quiet reflection or loud anger in the relations between diegetic beings, the relations of editors to the worlds emerging from their image and sound material (mediated by the performance of actors and the light

technician's semiconscious orientations towards classical or avant-garde norms), and the engagement of audiences with any of these circulations. Of course, audience engagements are further shaped by genre templates, deeply personal (but, therefore, no less political) experiences and cranked-up Cineplex loudspeakers or miniscule smartphone screens. In line with Gershon and Malitsky's reminder that instability is the given condition, I underline that these relations rarely add up to the "aesthetically unified feeling" and narrative coherence (rewarding audience empathy with the hero vis-à-vis the villain) that have been conceptually privileged by scholars in philosophical aesthetics and cognitive theory.[28] Instead, I emphasize the productivity, for example, of unexpected bursts of audience affect in relation to characters whose identity we may despise, and more generally of diverging or layered affective vectors in the distributed assembly of cinematic worlds.

A look at Valeska Grisebach's *Western* allows me to concretize some of these ideas of re-thinking cinematic agency through actor-network-theory, including the accent on following non-sovereign human, human-like and part-human actors. The German director's work became known as part of the so-called Berlin School of the 2000s, a loose network of filmmakers interested in renewing experimental takes and, specifically, forms of a phenomenological realism privileging everyday spaces and movements over tight plots.[29] More recently, however, several of these filmmakers have turned to creative explorations of genre, such as the Western reflexively featured (*as* a genre) in the title of Grisebach's 2017 film. In line with the expectations thereby stirred, *Western* sets up a classical scenario of human agency embedded in—and in tension with—nonhuman agency, along with that of other humans. A team of German construction workers with the job of building a hydro-electric power station with large machinery moves into the rural landscape close to Bulgaria's Southern border with Greece. Again and again, the film's camera (a powerful new generation Arri Alexa, held mostly by Bernhard Keller) makes time for—and thus gives weight to—the impact of the mountainous landscape, often in the morning or evening light. The film's relatively classical cinematography and editing notwithstanding, most of these takes emphasize less the cognitive orientation functions

of establishing shots than the affective ones of grounding the action (and the prospective film audience) in a world not exclusively centered in human presence.[30] Unlike other recent returns to the Western, to be sure, Grisebach's film foregoes the widescreen format that invites minimizing this human presence altogether. Instead, the director emphasizes her joint attempt, with the editor Bettina Böhler, to balance the weight of the landscape with the forces of technologically-fortified human interference.[31]

On the diegetic level, the water of the river floods and temporarily silences the power shovel's motor when the construction crew decides to change the course of the river because it is in the way of their design. However, the protagonist Meinhard, who operates the shovel, is less flustered by this incident than his supervisor (and prospective antagonist) Vincent; the film seems to assert Meinhard's (networked) agency in showing how he calmly steps into the water and succeeds in restarting the shovel. Meanwhile, the absence of a shared language initially allows the German workers to ignore the locals' reminders that their undertaking does not happen on "virgin" territory, but within a complex local network of human and nonhuman actors. Thanks to subtitles for both the German and the Bulgarian dialogue, the film audience knows more and understands, for example, that the white horse befriended—or ambiguously "domesticated"—by Meinhard does have an owner. Interhuman conflict interrupts more fully over Vincent's disrespectful flirtation (bordering on assault) with a local woman. Later, he sneaks out of the camp with the horse to manipulate the water network designed to alternate supply under the prevailing conditions of scarcity; in turning the lever, Vincent organizes water for the construction project at the expense of the local tobacco harvest. During the ride back across steep terrain he has a fall, caused by both his incompetence and carelessness. He abandons the badly injured horse, which is found only days later and has to be shot. (The end credits reassure the film audience that no animals were hurt during production.)

The diegetic parable of human actors exploiting nonhuman along with less powerful human actors in the unequal competition for limited resources is hard to miss, and certainly intended by the director. (Empha-

sizing the non-sovereignty of agency does not necessarily imply disregarding intentional dimensions of art making altogether.) In interviews, Grisebach discusses her interest in quasi-neocolonial power asymmetries in contemporary Europe, including those facilitated by complicated application procedures for European Union infrastructure funding that put experienced and liquid West European companies at an advantage. The "Western" (or rather "Eastern") film setting dramatizing these institutional conditions, Grisebach comments further, allowed her to tackle questions of "diffuse xenophobia" without tapping into a neo-Nazi genre, as a German setting would have made her do.[32] A German reviewer underlines this connection between cinematic genre and contemporary political context by praising Grisebach's "masterful" play with the prejudices of the Western, the "elementary values" of which have "a comeback" in today's "populism."[33] I agree that the film presents a highly intriguing artistic accomplishment; the notion of (playful) mastery, however, is a very misleading characterization of its collective worldmaking project. If the explicit recourse to a classical genre combined with critical directorial intent makes us expect a biting parody or similar distance format, *Western* thoroughly fails to deliver. Pointers towards its different mode of engagement are, perhaps, in the director's admissions of her own affectability: her "big longing for the Western genre," the "genre of her childhood," and her fascination for the construction workers' "old-fashioned form of masculinity."[34] Instead of an iconoclastic critique, *Western* diegetically and extra diegetically probes *engagement* with the culture of xenophobic masculinity it explores.

On the level of composition and production, this different mode of engagement is enabled—or perhaps demanded—by the director's collaborative ethos. Grisebach describes not only the extensive exchanges with her editor and camera man as a form of "surrendering control" resulting in a "joint transformation" of the ideas at hand, but also talks about creating a "shared world of experience" in a "long joint process" with the lay actors, most of them real-life construction workers, whose tenderness for each other and humorous, imaginative language use she admired.[35] In the film they made together, the camera follows the protagonist Meinhard most of the time. In line with the Berlin School's

stylistic signature, it operates mostly unobtrusively, at enough of a distance to anchor him in the landscape and to facilitate imagined audience co-presence rather than penetrating analysis, including many shots from behind. At the same time, the (non-parodic) exploration of genre facilitates a higher degree of character relatability than many early Berlin School films; close-ups and medium close-ups on Meinhard's expressive, wrinkled face let us gather his emotions at key moments of the action. The actor's mature, slender yet strong physique and his—and/or the character's—quiet, sometimes shy, but usually competent demeanor are suited to facilitate more spontaneous sympathy than the film audience's initial encounters with some of the Bulgarian locals. While the store owner refuses to sell Meinhard cigarettes in the wake of Vincent's improper behavior, her boycott is quickly undercut by the male bystanders admiring the Germans who occupied the country before. This does not mean that the film downplays the racism of the German crew (who, in turn, joke about returning after seventy years), or for that matter offloads it on the unpleasant antagonist. While Meinhard is characteristically silent or soft-spoken rather than loudly inappropriate, it is he who (with another colleague) mounts a German flag on the deck of the worker's camp early on, prompting a third colleague to ask, in line with their usual rough banter, whether they have gone nuts: "ever thought of the locals?"[36]

This reply is crucial for how critique works in *Western*: approaching "the experience" of the actors, the film invites us to "*modify* the account" by deploying a different voice on the same level, with principally analogous authority both within the diegesis and in the process of narration (Latour, *AIME* 8; Latour's emphasis). Later in the film, when Meinhard increasingly spends time with the locals in response to the escalating conflict with Vincent, his Bulgarian friend Adrian will correct his behavior. Making room for the affective complexities unfolded in these exchanges, the film makes high demands of its audiences also, as it deploys its seemingly straightforward Western tropes towards a layered engagement.[37] Rather than merely deciphering clear-cut political allegories, we are invited to forego easy resolutions by respectfully, at moments tenderly, attending to the clashing worldmaking orientations

of highly flawed actors. With its ethos of respectfully collaborative worldmaking, *Western* programmatically underlines the processes of distributed agency, which, as I suggested in this section, characterize cinematic worldmaking more generally. Latour's conceptualization of networked, "overtaken" action offers a nuanced framework that allows us to integrate competing theoretical emphases in film studies into a layered account: it makes room for the role of technology, production teams and viewers, for interests in the details of aesthetic composition and audience engagement; and it invites us to unfold the complexity of these processes co-shaped by the forces of affect and discourse, fantasy and genre, materiality and performance. Grisebach's reflexive interest in all of these forces activates the egalitarian bent of Latour's proposal: film is exemplarily tasked with "following the actors" here.

Documentary Matters, Or, Transformations Across Genre

The focus on non-sovereign agency is only part of what actor-network-theory (and AIME) have to offer to film studies. After first viewing *Western* (on the big screen at the *Film Society of Lincoln Center*) and reading a couple of reviews that briefly referenced its production conditions, I was haunted by the question: how much of a documentary is this film exactly? The urgent desire to know more about the modes, and limits, of *Western*'s grounding in contemporary life worlds opens onto larger epistemological and aesthetic questions that have formed a second focus of Latour's reception in film studies to date. In their co-authored article quoted above, Gershon and Malitsky initially turn to Latour for help with the dilemma posed by postmodern critiques of representation: "documentary scholars have been struggling to retain the political purchase of claiming the real while acknowledging the postmodern recognition that truth is socially constructed" ("ANT" 65). Latour himself might be inclined to raise an eyebrow at their use of the notion of "social" construction, but he, of course, annuls the problem at stake. Distinguishing his philosophy from the deconstructive project for which ANT's initial approach to the sciences was often mistaken, Latour

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positions his own onto-epistemological "constructivism" as an "*increase in realism* (*RS* 92; Latour's emphasis)." More specifically, he advocates a non-positivist "realism dealing with . . . *matters of concern, not matters of fact.*"[38] While "highly uncertain and loudly disputed," Latour explains, matters of concern are nonetheless "real" and "objective"; they should be taken as "*gatherings*" rather than "objects" by a "more talkative, active, pluralistic, and more mediated" empiricism.[39]

In embracing the process of construction, Latour's more mediated realism challenges the critical habit of grounding claims to the real in notions of immediacy and direct contact, in the tradition of Bazin's above-quoted comments on the "essentially objective character of photography," which, Bazin adds, forces us "to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced."[40] Even while few film scholars or critics would unconditionally subscribe to this argument today, motifs of immediacy and contact have continued to shape contemporary documentary norms as well as their critique.[41] They also keep resurfacing in film-theoretical debates on the indexical sign, which seems to have attained new promise as a media-specific anchor for those yearning for referentiality in today's "post-medium" condition.[42] Whether critical or affirmative, the emphasis on immediacy and contact has fueled the dilemma diagnosed by Gershon and Malitsky, inhibiting a non-naïve but positive conceptualization of how documentary "claims the real"—or gathers matters of concern. As Gershon and Malitsky emphasize, a Latourian perspective instead demands from documentary scholars a "reflexive engagement with the labor involved in producing effective documentary facts" ("ANT" 69). In other words, it draws our attention to the technological and compositional choices that ground documentary practices: ANT helps "scholars to re-figure how documentary films function as a genre—as well as to distinguish among different documentary subgenres" ("ANT" 75–76). Thus, Malitsky's work on post-revolutionary Russian cinema amends the dominant historical narrative of how montage theorists retracted their avant-garde affiliations under Stalinist pressure through a nuanced comparative account of their differently modernist practices. This grounding of documentary forms in aesthetic process (broadly understood) does not assimilate them to fiction in the

tradition of postmodern critique. Drawing on Latour's discussion of scientific indexicality in *Pandora's Hope*, Malitsky argues that the "realist" turns beyond "rapid juxtapositions and complex narrative" and towards a "descriptive" aesthetics of "accumulation" achieved higher "indexical stability" in Latour's sense of making things increasingly real.[43]

Malitsky's argument builds on the ways in which Latour complexifies concepts of indexicality, as he—again—acknowledges the transformative impact of both Bazin's instrumental actor and the human hand holding the camera, along with the many other agencies involved. In my own work, I develop these forays into a Latourian aesthetics of realism by more fully disentangling the controversial promise of indexicality from its associations with the specific ontology of film as a historically photographic medium. I integrate indexicality's operations of physical contact into a broader spectrum of material-semiotic processes that are principally—although differently—in effect across disciplines, media, and genres. The argument engages Latour's more recent work: whereas *Pandora's Hope* foregrounds indexicality as the paradigm establishing scientific reference, *Reassembling the Social* turns our attention to transdisciplinary processes of composition (including scholarly writing) and emphasizes the productive role of discontinuity and change, or "mediation," "displacement," "transformation," and "translation" in all network processes (*RS* 45, 64, see 106–109). In returning to the question of institutionalized domains, and specifying different modes of existence and veridiction, *AIME* continues to break down the "barrier between questions of ontology and questions of language," embedding indexicality in a spectrum of "articulation" processes that constitute both "words" and "the world" (144). In [REF], the mode of scientific reference, the general procedure of achieving "a certain *continuity* of action" through a "series of small *discontinuities*" is concretized as that of maintaining "constants" across material discontinuity by breaking "at every step with the temptation of resemblance"; etymologically, Latour underlines, "to refer" is "to *report, to bring back*" (*AIME* 33, 78–9; Latour's emphasis). [FIC] is the mode of existence through which Latour approaches the language side of the dominant disciplinary bifurcation—although he underlines that [FIC] is more than an ensemble of genres.

[FIC]'s constitutive "alteration" is in a particular "way of folding exis-tents so as to make them the blueprint for a kind of expression," that is, in how "raw materials" produce "FORMS, or better, FIGURES."[44] Given these resonant operations, fiction can certainly not be opposed to real-ity. But *AIME* further foregrounds the "commerce, crossings, misunder-standings, amalgams, hybrids, compromises" between modes, and, in particular, the "very fertile" crossing "[FIC • REF]": "no chain of refer-ence . . . without *narrative,*" no discussion of "DNA" without "*charac-ters*" (146, 250; Latour's emphases).

Cinematic documentary inhabits this intersection of fictive formation and productive referentiality in complex ways. On the level of medial affordances, its power "of returning to reality" through mediation (*AIME* 141) is not only in the indexical quality of some of its images, but in the full spectrum of its layered—visual, aural and linguistic—material-semiotic operations, including techniques notoriously faulted by documentary scholars for flagrantly violating presumptions to imme-diacy, such as voice-over and montage. Of course, not every use of voice-over or montage contributes equally to such a return to reality: once we admit that different types of signs, materials and operations contribute to the making of scientific accounts as well as cinematic doc-umentaries, the key question at stake is whether something "is *well* constructed" (155; Latour's emphasis). In *Reassembling the Social*, La-tour defines a "good account" as one that "*traces a network,*" that is, treats each participant "as a full-blown mediator" in tracing matters of concern from different angles: "objectivity, or rather '*objectfullness*'" is achieved through an ethics of carefully assembling complexity in mul-tiplying associations and perspectives (128, 133; Latour's emphasis). In *AIME*, this ethics is layered with the qualified return to differences of domain, including genre. "Factual narratives," Latour spells out, "do not differ from fictional ones as objectivity differs from imagination. They are made of the same material, the same figures" (251). What differs is "the treatment to which we subject" these figures and materials: while we "authorize beings of fiction to . . . 'carry us away' . . . into another world," those of documentary are "domesticated" and "disciplined by chains of reference" (251).

In other words, the discussion of documentary standards is not rendered moot by the acceptance of an underlying condition of construction, but re-activated in a nuanced way. For example, some film critics and scholars have reservations about accepting the use of reenactments as documentary, such as in the 2007 film about the Tarde-Durkheim debate in which Latour starred in the role of Gabriel Tarde.[45] If "physical portrayal," to many, attains a higher degree of authenticity than such "nominal" representation, *Western* offers a strong documentary feel with its lay actors, many of whom are introduced by their real-life names.[46] But while the film provides a forceful impression of these lay actors' physicality, of bodily gestures, voices, dialects and linguistic quirks, we are not necessarily seeing their "natural" movements and speech: Grisebach spells out in interviews that she did extensive acting exercises with the cast before the actual shoot, and encouraged them to develop their characters.[47] She also came to them with a script. To be sure, this script was not handed out as a straightforward template, and would be modified in the collaborative process, but it did present a fictional framework that had itself grown out of a combination of interview research with construction workers and Grisebach's above-mentioned genre fascinations (see "AT," "WAM"). Appropriately labeled a "drama," the film certainly does not qualify as a documentary in the sense that its materials and figures referentially "bring back" a full-fledged scenario that actually unfolded as such on Bulgaria's mountainous border with Greece. This "negative" answer does not, however, settle my question about the film's documentary dimensions in all respects. A positive answer can be attained by approaching the intersection [FIC • REF] from the other side.

In my own work, I first turned to Latour's reconceptualization of realism because it enables a different approach to realist fiction (here in the sense of genre), specifically the ways in which the emphasis on "objectfull" assembly facilitates less suspicious readings of filmic constructions that aim to investigate historical actualities via fictional scenarios.[48] Other cinema scholars have undertaken comparable inquiries in the last few years by bringing Latour to a broader range of cinematic genres. Jerome Schaefer's *An Edgy Realism* tackles the film-theoretical difficulties

of developing a positive, non-naïve conceptualization of realism in the context of contemporary "shaky cam" horror films such as *The Blair Witch Project*. Schaefer argues that the existing descriptions of these films in the negative language of "mockumentary" or "simulated realism" are inadequate to describe the extraordinary "experiences" of "immersion" facilitated by the genre with its lack of "ontological segregation between the images and the story world" (*ER* 3–4, 8). While Schaefer locates the shaky cam aesthetics of edgy realism as a specific product of contemporary new media culture, he also deploys it as a case study towards a broader film-theoretical intervention. Schaefer's key concept is that of *transformation:* a Latourian "film theory of transformations," he argues, allows us to overcome the "false dichotomy between the textual and the material" in understanding film images as "material-semiotic phenomena in the making" and products "of the networks they are embedded in" (*ER* 12–13, 15). Schaefer's own study focuses on "the intricate network made up of looks and gazes, viewfinders and images, invisible observers and visual narrators, cameras and operators" in his genre (*ER* 18). Meanwhile, Eric Herhuth approaches a different genre and section of the cinematic network—animation— through an analogous conceptual focus on transformation. Starting from how Latour develops many of his arguments about modernity, agency and politics through "figures of puppetry," Herhuth deploys the apparently "minor aesthetic form" of animation to correct film theory's historical focus "on photo-indexicality rather than movement."[49] If "more direct forms of animation" do "align with notions of indexicality," a broader focus on the "real transformations" animation can facilitate allows one to resituate its practices as forms of "realism (or materialism)" in mediation: not just a minor modernist aesthetics, but "philosophical expression of the world" in a "longer view."[50]

I want to expand these arguments: understanding cinematic world-making across genres in terms of transformation allows us to conceptualize how both fiction and nonfiction engage (with) surrounding worlds as aesthetic practices folding heterogeneous materials into forms. The outlined critiques of traditional concepts of realism have shaped debates around fiction as well. Outmoded notions of fiction as (imme-

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diately) mirroring or indexing the world have prompted the poststructuralist ban on *all* discussion of its real-world referentiality as theoretically (quasi-)inappropriate, often resulting in unacknowledged tensions for cultural studies scholarship with an interest, for example, in cinematic gender roles, legacies of racism or practices of queer intervention.[51] Latour's model of material-semiotic transformations, however, allows us to conceptualize how the composition and reception of fiction—"made," again, "of the same material, the same figures" as nonfiction—imaginatively draws on the life worlds surrounding it, tackling matters of concern through rich folds of mediation.[52] As an ensemble of "styles and trajectories" rather than a "domain" opposed to reality, fiction makes not just worlds, but, I would stress, ontologically remakes "the world."[53] As fiction films creatively suspend physical laws, political probabilities, or simply documentary standards of reassembling events, they present not "falsehood" but the imaginative "exploration of traces."[54] Reference in fictional genres, as I have proposed in extending Latour's account, is less disciplined than in factual genres. Never absent, it operates in piecemeal—in the sense of both unsystematic and fragmentary—ways. If there is no chain of reference without narrative (as Latour highlights from the science angle), there is also no narrative without links, however fragile or wildly transformative, to bits and pieces of the real worlds surrounding it (in an encompassing sense): affects, associations, fantasies, objects or mountain settings, discourse scraps, historical counterparts, and more.[55]

In evaluating "what is well constructed" in fiction (*AIME* 453), many of us will want to negotiate criteria that underline its transformative license rather than disciplining it by recourse to some established standard of realism: the "most powerful fictions," Patrice Maniglier suggests in his contribution to this volume, "are those that 'send' us the furthest" from the world as is.[56] I would like to qualify this by saying *sometimes* and *in some respects*, arguing for a plurality of criteria for a plurality of fictional genres and unique works of art in different life world contexts. Without curtailing fiction's imaginative license, we can allow some criteria that evaluate how (forcefully, thoughtfully, shockingly, playfully, empathetically, convincingly, outrageously, sensitively, complexly, clearly,

ethically . . .) a film engages matters of concern through the audiovisual medium's powers of "mobilizing" our "affects" and minds, and the myriad different aesthetic techniques accomplishing these transformations.[57]

Thus conceptualizing the genres of fiction in terms of material-semiotic transformation furnishes a positive answer to the question of how *Western* documents contemporary life world realities: in a piecemeal fashion, and through the imaginative lens of a particular genre. The bodies, gestures, voices, dialects and world views of the construction workers acting in the film become mediants in a process of cinematic worldmaking in which, as indicated above, "fictional idea[s]" and "reality," "research," "casting," "fantasy," and "life experiences and biographies" were complexly entangled from the start (Grisebach, "AT"). During the shooting, the director reports, she sometimes let the Arri Alexa (a camera model that has facilitated some of the most striking long-take experiments in contemporary cinema)[58] run while she took a break to later "reconnect again and intervene in the scene as it was already playing out," transforming the interactions that had developed in her absence ("WAM"). The cinematic effect of these procedures is not smoothly realist by "classical" standards of unobtrusiveness: a reviewer comments on how the film's loose assembly of "deliberately offhand detail"—"snatches of landscape and sunshine; snatches of conversation . . . and group dynamics"—is "rendered unstable by the occasional, obviously pre-written lines of dialogue Grisebach surreptitiously places in her characters' mouths" (Lattimer, "AF").

Arguably, the film title indexes this grafting activity, announcing the two-way transformative encounter between the actualities of twenty-first-century life worlds and the topoi of a historical genre that, in turn, "tells so much about the construction of society" (Grisebach, "WAM"). The film audience probes these narrative possibilities in the associative space opened up by *Western*'s noticeable acts of linking contexts: as Meinhard begins to prefer the locals over his crew, we map the action via the well-known Western topoi of "going native" and intergroup "brotherhood." The fictional building blocks serve as a means for exploring a process of connection and change in Grisebach's twenty-first-century European contemporary scenario that is, perhaps, realist inso-

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far as the change is neither radical, nor definite, nor free of affective tensions and contradictions. Thus, the main actor (as/or character) describes the world as a place ruled by force and aggression ("Fressen and Gefressenwerden," literally "feed and being eaten") while he shares food, drink, work and personal vulnerabilities with his new Bulgarian buddy Adrian. With his inconsistent gestures throughout the film, Meinhard's character elicits less full-fledged empathy or sympathy than a combination of irritation and affective curiosity about his backstory (which is never revealed). He begins a slow, tender romance with a local of his own age before seizing the opportunity to make out with a younger Bulgarian woman who is also unsuccessfully pursued by Vincent; and he claims that violence is not his "thing" right before preparing to use his knife, which he later tries to gift to the young local boy he has befriended, against the explicit instructions of the boy's relatives. The film's undramatic, open ending preserves these affective incongruities. Except for the horse, no one dies; Meinhard does get the beating he arguably deserves from some locals but, as far as we can see, continues to hang out with them—as do the other Germans at this point. In the concluding scene, Adrian corrects Meinhard's inappropriate attempt to rid himself of the knife by returning it, displacing the promise of closure with the prospect of ongoing violent as well as friendly negotiations.

It is precisely this lack of closure, however, that underscores how cinematic transformations engage larger life worlds at the porous borders of their fictional, documentary or, in the case of *Western*, docufictional cosmoi. In terms of ethos, the film's realist project of giving a "good" account of the world through "objectfull" assembly (Latour, as quoted above) thus dovetails with the project of respectfully "following the actors" spelled out in the previous section. As any preconceptions about racist working-class (East) German men are broken down into complex relations with the complicated protagonist and the real-life actor embodying him, the film's reconfigurative critique invites an ongoing engagement that may encompass interest, feeling for, anger, disconcertment and more, without excusing the documented attitudes of cultural superiority. In conclusion, let me underline that the proposed Latourian account of cinematic worldmaking in general—as an onto-epistemological

process of aesthetic transformation undertaken in a network of non-sovereign actors—does not commit us to embracing this ethos of cautious reconfiguration as the only valid or regularly preferred way of making cinematic and other worlds. In fact, cautious reconfiguration has its limits. *Western* stops short of imagining a radical dissolving of either the nationalist and racist attitudes, or the structures of inequality it depicts: the film's (both aesthetically and politically) realist gesture of respecting the complexity of people's orientations along with the unlikelihood of rapid change fails to imagine full-fledged alternatives to the status quo or alignments "around new ideas and causes."[59] Encouraged by Latour's own admission that political "rages, too, have to be respected" (*RS* 249), our plural criteria for successful cinematic fiction might include some that valorize forms of loud defiance not offered by Grisebach's cautious take.

More generally, I hope to have shown that reading (and potentially making) films with Latour, positions their media, institutions, and communicative circuits in the lively center of the contemporary landscape of a recomposed humanities, whose curious investigations, urgent concerns and layered methodologies are no longer tied down by old critical habits or stand-offish self-enclosures in the ivory towers of art and criticism. (As materialized conditions of asymmetrically distributed research, teaching, and learning opportunities, to be sure, these towers are very real parts of our networks.) The recomposed humanities I am prepared to defend are egalitarian in their orientation. They respect the nonhuman actors we are entangled with along with less powerful, vulnerable, utterly non-sovereign human actors; they are fueled by ongoing revisions of our democratic standards about who, and what, can be more fully included in a future planetary collective. While I know that such inclusiveness will never be complete, the stubborn clinging to it as a normative horizon contributes to my reluctance to let go of the old and politically compromised terminology of the human(ist) in the humanities. After all, this terminology's history overlaps not *only* with the ruthless exploitation of less powerful humans and nonhumans, but also with efforts to push back against the nationalist, religious, and racist enclosures that are, in 2020, once more threatening to take over our

contemporary life-worlds. In this spirit, I locate the contributions of film and film reading to the recomposed humanities as a "[p]ractical ontology" and "[c]osmopolitics" (*AIME* 481), or a worldmaking practice of "philosophy" that has the distinct advantage of being far less abstract and elitist in its audiovisual, imaginative explorations than the old discipline associated with this name, and also more evidently connected to a mesh of modes of existence.[60] At the intersections of [FIC • REF], for example, with [MET]amorphosis, [HAB]it, [POL]itics, [ATT]achment, [MOR]ality, and others, film is a powerful actor in our collective efforts to reassemble a (more) "common world" (*RS* 250).

Notes

1. The methodological alignments indicated by a scholar's preference for either of these two terms can include foci on aesthetics-vs.-networks of production and reception; or the medium-vs.-the institution (see below for detail). If "cinema" long resonated as the more inclusive term, the discussion on the contemporary "post-cinematic" condition has complicated matters. See, e.g., Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Washington: O-Books, 2010). In line with the syncretic proposal developed in this piece, I use the notion of "film" in an encompassing sense, including production and reception networks, and both analog and digital technologies.

2. On the popularity of ANT in media as compared to film studies, see Jerome P. Schaefer, *An Edgy Realism: Film Theoretical Encounters with Dogma 95, New French Extremity, and the Shaky-Cam Horror Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 21 (hereafter cited as *ER*). To be sure, this popularity also reflects a relatively recent trend, as indicated by Nick Couldry's skeptical "Actor Network Theory and Media: Do They Connect and on What Terms?" in *Connectivity, Networks and Flows: Conceptualizing Contemporary Communications,* ed. A. Hepp, F. Krotz, S. Moores, and C. Winter (Cresskill: Hampton, 2008), 93–110. See also Tristan Thielmann's comments on how Latour reception in German media studies was slowed by the dominance of technological determinism. "Der ETAK Navigator. Tour de Latour durch die Mediengeschichte der Autonavigationssysteme," in *Bruno Latour's Kollektive*, ed. Georg Kneer, Marcus Schroer, and Erhard Schüttpelz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), 180–218.

3. Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2013), 30 (hereafter cited as *AIME*); Schaefer, *ER* 21.

4. Perhaps this footnote can serve as a gesture of mourning for the vibrant intellectual environment of the interdisciplinary "Communication and Culture" department sacrificed to the new "Media School" at my previous institution, Indiana University, Bloomington.

5. The members of SCMS (the *Society of Cinema and Media Studies*, thus renamed in the 1990s) recently voted to change the name of the organization's *Cinema Journal,* the leading U.S. venue in the field, to *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies (JCMS),* effective fall 2018.

6. On the ethical orientation at a new collective, see *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005, hereafter cited as *RS*). The proposal for cinema I detail resonates with the twofold methodological goal Rita Felski outlines for the field of literature: to balance broader network descriptions with traditional foci on "advanced techniques of reading." See *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2015), 184 (hereafter cited as *LC*).

7. See, for example, *RS* 55, 89; and for detail on Latour's own work with film and filmmakers, David D. [no full last name given], "Bruno Latour's Artistic Practices: Writing, Products, and Influence." *Toronto Film Review* 5 February 2016. On Latour's aesthetic affinities and writing practices more generally see Francis Halsall, "Actor-Network Aesthetics," this volume.

8. Seminal early texts for the film studies discussion on postcritical viewing include Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992, hereafter cited as *AE*) and Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993).

9. Lorenz Engell, "Eyes Wide Shut. Die Agentur des Lichts—Szenen kinematographischer verteilter Handlungsmacht." *Unmenge—Wie verteilt sich Handlungsmacht?,* eds., Ilka Becker, Michael Kuntz, and Astrid Kusser (Munich: Fink, 2008), 75–92, here 75, see 77.

10. Latour, *RS* 69; Bazin, André, *What is Cinema? Vol 1.* Essays selected and trans. Hugh Gray (New edition Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2005), 13; Engell, "Eyes Wide Shut" 80 ("die Welt aus der Perspektive eines Dings unter Dingen"; all translations are my own) with reference also to Bela Balász, Gilles Deleuze, and Siegfried Kracauer.

11. Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* 13. After decades of embarrassment, recent scholarly reappraisals of Bazin have emphasized that his theory cannot be reduced to the quoted filmontological claims. See *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory & its Afterlife*, eds., D.A. with H. J.-L. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

12. Sobchack, *AE* 263. See Engell, "Eyes Wide Shut," 84 on auteurist theories.

13. Sobchack, *AE* 265 (quoting Baudry), 22; her emphasis.

14. Sobchack, *AE* 167–8; her emphases; see Engell "Eyes Wide Shut," 75.

15. Sobchack, *AE* 173; her emphasis. Latour has distanced himself from phenomenology for these classical foci. See *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), 9. As I underline below, however, there is nonetheless significant resonance between Latour and (postclassical) phenomenology. From a contemporary auteurist perspective, see Daniel Yacavone on Merleau-Ponty and Sobchack's reception of

Merleau-Ponty: "Film and the Phenomenology of Art: Reppraising Merleau-Ponty on Cinema as Form, Medium, and Expression." *New Literary History* 47 (2016): 159–186. For the medium of literature, Felski develops a more fully and explicitly Latourian sketch of distributed agency with an analogous accent on the agency of the artwork itself (*LC*).

16. Latour, *RS* 45 (his emphasis); Engell, "Eyes Wide Shut," 84–85: "vielge-staltige und komplizierte Gerätschaften," "Konventionen, Regeln, and Stile[n]," "Erwartungen, Sehgewohnheiten, Ikonographien und Ideologien" (85).

17. Ilana Gershon, and Joshua Malitsky, "Actor-Network-Theory and Documentary Studies," *Studies in Documentary Film* 4.1 (2010): 65–78, here 66, see 72–73 (hereafter cited as "ANT").

18. Gershon and Malitsky, "ANT," 66, see 69. More recent contributions have begun to explore the agency of things and other nonhuman actors in other films. See, for example, Lars Kristensen, "Bicycle Cinema: Machine Identity and the Moving Image," *Thesis Eleven* 138.I (2017): 65–80; Catherine Lord. "Only Connect: ecology between 'late' Latour and Werner Herzog's Cave of Forgotten Dreams," *Global Discourse* 6:1–2 (119–132), and Brad Prager's response in the same volume, "How Herzog remembers images past: a response to Catherine Lord" (133–5).

19. Gershon and Malitsky, "ANT," 68. Although highly precarious even in the historical practice of mid-century Hollywood cinema, these norms remain the focal point of contemporary cognitive film theories. See, for example, Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008).

20. See Breger, *Making Worlds: Affect and Collectivity in Contemporary European Cinema (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2020).*

21. Felski's discussion of literature includes characters and narrators as nonhuman actors (*LC* 163–5). According to the principle that not all actors are alike, I opt for increased specificity here. Fictional beings are certainly not reducible to human experience, as Stephen Muecke cautions ("An Ecology of Institutions," this volume), but many of them, including some on-screen aliens and unreliable thing narrators, invite engagements based on partial recognition.

22. Whereas cognitive along with classical phenomenological perspectives have privileged the conscious and intentional layers of character, author and audience activity (see, e.g., Carroll, *Philosophy* 157), Latour has been placed in the opposite (Deleuzian and new materialist) camp, where subjective human experiences and actions tend to be discarded altogether (see, e.g., Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* [Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2002]). For the resulting concerns about "ethics, accountability, normativity, and political critique" see Arjun Appadurai, "Mediants, Materiality, Normativity," *Public Culture* 27:2 (2015): 221–37, here 221. My proposal presents a less categorical (and, I hope, more fully Latourian) variation on Appadurai's solution to conceptually foreground "mediants," that is, in a nutshell, human-as-networked actors (222).

23. Latour, *RS* 161, 236; *AIME* 401; Latour's emphasis. For contemporary perspectives inspired by postclassical phenomenology see, for example, Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2000); Eve K. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2004); Felski, *The Uses of Literature* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

24. Sobchack, *The Address* 263, xviii; Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* 10; see Murray Smith, "Altered States: Character and Emotional Response in the Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 33.4 (1994): 34–56; Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009).

25. Operations on both sides of this loop are analogous insofar as we understand "*interpretation*" as a "*co-production*" (Felski, *LC* 174; her emphasis) and composition as a creative activity of world reading (see below on the latter point).

26. Latour, *RS* 253 (modifying his critique of critique). While my insistence on less suspicious modes of critique departs from Felski's terminology, I substantially draw on her intervention, including the Latourian emphasis on (re-)configuration over deconstruction (Felski, *LC* 17).

27. On phenomenological description see also Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 371–91. On the intertwined moves of "Localizing the Global" and "Redistributing the Local" see Latour, *RS* 173, 191; on "[c]are and [c]aution" *Pandora's Hope,* 288. While Latour problematizes contextualization as a mode of large-scale reductive social explanation (e.g., *RS* 173; see Felski, *LC* 152), Love defends the category with Donna Haraway: "The Temptations: Donna Haraway, Feminist Objectivity, and the Problem of Critique," *Critique and Postcritique*, eds., Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2017), 50–72, here 56–57.

28. Daniel Yacavone. *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2015) 196; see, again, Carroll, *The Philosophy*.

29. On the overall "school," see Marco Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School* (Rochester: Camden House, 2013); on their phenomenological aesthetics, see chapter six of Claudia Berger's *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance: Transnational Theater, Literature and Film in Contemporary Germany* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2012).

30. On reading for affect beyond character and plot see Robert Sinnerbrink, "*Stimmung*: Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood," *Screen* 53, no. 2 (2012): 148–163.

31. Böhler's work with several Berlin School directors has made her into a major name in the contemporary German cinema scene. See Grisebach in James

Lattimer, "At the Frontier: Valeska Grisebach on Western," *Cinema Scope* (n.d.) (hereafter cited as "AF"), available at http://cinema-scope.com/spotlight/at-the-frontier-valeska-grisebach-on-western/.

32. Grisebach in Cumming, Jesse: "'Where Are the Men I Can Imagine on a Horse?': Valeska Grisebach on *Western*," *Filmmaker Magazine*, March 12, 2018 (hereafter cited as "WAM").

33. ". . . spielt Grisebach meisterhaft mit jenen Vorurteilen, ohne die kaum ein Western auskäme. Und deren elementare Werte heute im Populismus ein Comeback erleben" (Daniel Kothenschulte, "'Western.' Der Westen im Osten," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, August 23, 2017).

34. "Ich hatte eine große Sehnsucht nach dem Western-Genre, da es das Genre meiner Kindheit ist" (interview with Toby Ashraf, "Wessen Recht gilt bei diesen Typen?" *die tageszeitung* 24 August 2017); "WAM."

35. "AF"; "ein langer gemeinsamer Prozess"; "eine . . . gemeinsame Erfahrungswelt" (interview with Ashraf, "Wessen Recht").

36. "Schon mal an die Einheimischen gedacht?"

37. The only *amazon.de* audience review of the DVD so far concludes that "der Film bedarf geduldiger, aufgeschlossener Betrachter" ("requires patient, open-minded viewers"), attesting perhaps to the limitations of my example: with all its genre inflections, it remains an art film unlikely to reach mass audiences. However, the audience score on *Rotten Tomatoes* is very respectable (if lower than the critical score at 84% vs. 95%, based on 242 audience ratings), and the—few but strong—audience reviews on *IMDB* highlight the ways in which the film invites affective engagement with its characters.

38. "Why Has Critique," 231 (Latour's emphasis); see *RS* 114.

39. *RS* 114–5. Latour quotes Heidegger's notion of "gathering" here.

40. Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* 13.

41. See, for example, Pooja Rangan, *Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2017).

42. Mary Anne Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 1–6, here 2; see her "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity" in the same volume, 128–52. In addition to Bazin, these discussions reference Roland Barthes's theory of photography and Charles Sander Peirce's semiotics, where the index is the type of sign that works through a direct physical connection with its object (*Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina P, 1991), 239–40).

43. Joshua Malitsky, "A Certain Explicitness: Objectivity, History, and the Documentary Self," *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 3 (2011): 26–44, here 28–29, 41; "Ideologies in Fact: Still and Moving-Image Documentary in the Soviet Union, 1927–1932," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2010): 352–71, here 358.

44. *AIME* 243; Latour's emphases. See also the definition of [FIC] in the online AIME portal: it "designates not the field of art, culture, works of art, but the particular mode awkwardly designated by the adverb 'fictionally,' which indicates that we require that [*fic*] beings be grasped according to a particular relationship between materials and figures which cannot be detached." The argument in the [FIC] chapter in the *AIME* book does shift back and forth between the general mode of figuration (as associated with the symbolic), the domain of art and genres of fiction. However, all of these categories are relevant, as long as we specify usage at any given moment. See Maniglier, "Art as Fiction," this volume, for a proposal that distinguishes art within in the more general category of fiction.

45. See David D., "Bruno Latour's Artistic Practices."

46. On nominal versus physical portrayal see Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 240–2.

47. See "AT"; and in Ashraf, "Wessen Recht."

48. Breger, "Cruel Attachments, Tender Counterpoints: Configuring the Collective in Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon*," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 38.2 (2016): 142–172.

49. Eric Herhuth, "The Politics of Animation and the Animation of Politics," *Animation: an interdisciplinary journal* 11.1 (2016): 4–22, here 6–7.

50. Herhuth, "The Politics of Animation," 10–11.

51. In narrative theory, otherwise diverging contemporary conceptualizations of fiction(ality) dovetail by asserting that "fictional texts do not share their reference worlds with other texts" (Marie-Laure Ryan, "Postmodernism and the Doctrine of Panfictionality," *Narrative* 5.2 (1997): 165–87, here 167), or that reading a statement as fictive implies assuming "that it is not making referential claims" (Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan, and Richard Walsh, "Ten Theses about Fictionality," *Narrative* 23:1 (2015): 61–73, here 68).

52. Latour, *AIME* 251, see also 254; and in this book on hermeneutics moving "to the world" (see Afterword, "Life Among Conceptual Characters").

53. The quotes are from Latour, "three versions of the crossing [fic • ref]." *AIME* online 14 August 2014 (http://modesofexistence.org/crossings/#/en/fic -ref). Despite the singular wording here, I would underline with Muecke that Latour overall facilitates refusing "the conceptual singularity of 'the world'" (see chapter 1, "An Ecology of Institutions").

54. Latour, "The Denier's Process," *AIME* online, August 14, 2014 (http:// modesofexistence.org/crossings/#/en/fic-ref).

55. See Latour, *AIME* 249, on the "fragility" of the beings of fiction. For detail on the argument (for the domain of literature) see Claudia Breger, "Affects in Configuration: A New Approach to Narrative Worldmaking." *Narrative* 25.2 (May 2017): 227–51. See also Maniglier on how artistic fiction "organizes relations with the worlds from which it is detached" (see Chapter 16, "Art as Fiction").

56. See chapter 16, "Art as Fiction."

57. I quote Citton here (see chapter 8, "Fictional Attachments"), who makes the argument about literary fiction. My cinematic twist to the idea is not to engage in a competition of media but to flesh out the point: the affective powers of art are in the imaginative powers of fiction (across media) as layered with the differently affective capacities of its specific material-semiotic pathways via images, sounds and words.

58. For example, Alejandro G. Iňárritu's 2014 *Birdman* was shot on Ari Alexas, too.

59. Herfurth, *Politics of Animation* 17 (with reference to Galloway).

60. See Afterword, "Life Among Conceptual Characters."