DOUBLE-DELEUZE:
"INTELLIGENT MATERIALISM" GOES TO THE MOVIES

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INTRO

1995 was an important year for Film and Media Studies in at least two respects. The year when "the cinema" celebrated its 100th Anniversary, Sony, Philips, Toshiba and Time Warner agreed on a standard for a data carrier formerly known as Digital *Video* Disk — the DVD [Digital Versatile Disk] that on the one hand declared war on "the cinema as we know it," but on the other hand promised salvation: the medium film, having since its early beginnings sworn to "capture" movement and the dynamics of life, had to struggle against its transience more than any other medium. In the year of its 100th Anniversary, the cinema was not only "old," an "old-fashioned-next-to-outdated" medium — the films themselves, the collected and archived reliquaries of film history, were in danger of rotting, decaying, and disappearing forever. Judging from the password of film conservationists — "From the conservation of the medium to the preservation of the content"[1] — the DVD [or, in general: digital media] in fact seemed to be the redeemer that "film" had longed for. This force field of the hope of "making the moment stay forever" and the dread of decay, this oscillation of materiality and immateriality, of the animation of the static and the re-animation of *le temps perdu* re-enacts 100 years later the relation of film, time, life, and death that already had marked the first steps of the medium film — history repeats.

1995 also was the year in which the *Journal of Material Culture* was conceptualized, in order to give a public and interdisciplinary face to a field of research that had already begun to take hold in various disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, geography, etc. During the last 13 years, Material Culture Studies advanced to a new, exciting and highly influential field of Cultural Studies.[2]

Material Culture is based on the premise that the *materiality* of objects are an integrative part and parcel of culture, that the material dimension is as fundamentally important in the understanding of a culture as language or social relations — Material Culture thus adds a

welcomed counterweight and addition to the domination of Cultural Studies by social | linguistic constructivism. Materiality has significance independent of human action or intervention — it is as important to ask how things *do* things [and what kind of things things do], as it is how to do things with words. Objects have a life of their own, a temporality of their own, "objects change over time, in both their physical composition and their cultural salience."[3]

Since Material Culture Studies mainly focuses on the materiality of everyday objects and their *representation* in the media [literature, film, arts, etc.], a further and important step would be to re-direct such an analysis to the materiality of the media *itself*, to put the probing finger not only at the thing *in* representation, but the thing *of* representation. The medium "film" seems to me most fitting to test such an interface of Material Culture and Media Studies, since film has entertained a most complex relation to *time* from its early beginnings onward: film promised to [re]present temporal dynamics — and the temporality of things — *directly*, un*media*ted, a paradox that gives rise to the different "strategies" of what Deleuze calls the *movement-image* and the *time-image* respectively. Such a representation, however, is not only an effect of a perceptive illusion, but also of the *repression* of the very materiality of film itself, the film stock, an immensely fragile medium that in the course of its "projection-life" is subjected to scratches, burns, etc. — to signs of the times. I will situate this crossbreed of Material Culture and Media Studies in the larger framework of Deleuze's *Cinema* books mixed with his "intelligent materialism"[4] — a hybrid that stays in the family, so to speak, in order, as Régis Debray put it, "[t]o proceed as if mediology could become in relation to semiology what ecology is to the biosphere. Cannot a "mediasphere" be treated like an ecosystem, formed on the one hand by populations of signs and on the other by a network of vectors and material bases for the signs?"[5]

The following essay focuses on this nexus of film, time, and materiality. I will begin by introducing film's constitutive | constituting move as the attempt to *represent* time *in* film which was already being discussed at the birth of the medium. Taking my cue from Bazin's influential article on "Ontology of the Photographic Image"[6] [a kind of inspiration for Deleuze's own work on film as well], which also tries to answer the question *What is Cinema?*, I will shift my focus to the *materiality* of film: time leaves much more direct traces *on* film than any representation of time *in* film could ever achieve. Taking Bill Morrison's film *Decasia* (2002) as example, I will then self-reflexively direct the Material Culture approach to the filmic *material*. If such an interest in the "possibilities" of the celluloid had already driven

much of the 60s "avant-garde" [Brakhage, Jacobs, etc.], *Decasia* in addition does not only focus on film's "thingness," but also its own, particular "temporality." Put together from *found footage* and archive material in various states of decay, this film reveals the "collaboration" of time and matter as *in itself* "creative," and ultimately produces a category that I will call the *matter-image* and that, I argue, neither Deleuze's *movement-image*, nor his *time-image* completely grasp: here, *time and matter produce their own filmic image*.

FILM:
TIME | MOVEMENT

Projection

Since its birth, the cinema has entertained a complex relation with time. First of all, film was seen as a medium of *representing* time. Marey's chronophotography here clearly can be seen as one of the "midwives" of film. By creating ever smaller temporal equi-distances in the measuring, fragmentation and representation of time, Marey wanted to lift the veil of the mystery of "living machines." According to him, chronophotography proved once and for all that "motion was only the relation of time to space."[7] This puts Marey in direct opposition to Henri Bergson's philosophy of time — Bergson explicitly understood time *not* in its reduction to movement in space. It thus comes as no surprise that Bergson entertained a skeptical or at least ambivalent attitude towards the cinema. In his 1907 study *Creative Evolution*, Bergson reveals what he calls the mechanistic "contrivance of the cinematograph"[8] — it "calculates" movement out of "immobility set beside immobility, even endlessly."[9] If, as Marey had claimed, movement is only "the relation of time to space," then, Bergson argues, "time is made up of distinct parts immediately adjacent to one another. No doubt we still say that they follow one another, but in that case succession is similar to that of the images on a cinematographic film"[10] and this completely misunderstands the fundamental difference between time as becoming, as continuous production of newness in the dynamics of an endless differentiation of life, and time as a "mechanic" succession of moments "cut out" of that very continuum. Bergson's *durée* has to be understood as a heterogeneous, qualitative duration which is completely at odds with Marey's quantitative, numeric, and linear conception of

time as *temps* [t] — an opposition that finds its filmic equivalent in the tension between the single image and the projected film.

Representation

The classic narrative film *represents* time *in* film with well-known narrative strategies such as organic montage, rational cuts, continuity editing, flashbacks, hence, with the action-reaction model. Even in its connection with more complex *plots* [see *Back to the Future*, or *Memento*], narrative film is ultimately based on the concept of an abstract and linear time — exactly what Marey had in mind.

Films based on the action-reaction schema are films that in the Deleuzian taxonomy belong to the *movement-image*. Deleuze argues that when the reality of World War II and its aftermath exceeded our capacity for understanding, traditional forms of cinematic "cause-and-effect" strategies became irritatingly inappropriate, resulting in the "crisis of the action-image"[11] and the breakdown of its corresponding "realist fundament," the "sensory-motor schema."[12] Here, continuity was basically the effect of the filmic characters' movement through space — rational intervals ensure continuity, and the actors function as differentials to translate dramatic action into movement, propelling a cohesive narrative forward.

Through this pragmatic arrangement of space, the organic regime of classic cinema established a spatial continuity based on the movement of its protagonists. Action extends through rational intervals established by continuity editing so that the actor's translation of dramatic action into movement provides the primary vehicle by which a cohesive narrative space unfolds. Since the war, as Deleuze points out, dramatically "increased the situations which we no longer knew how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe," the "action-image of the old cinema" fell into crisis.[13]

As a result, the rational cuts and the continuity of the sensory motor linkage loosen and collapse — the emerging interval marks the convergence of discontinuous durations and gives way to "false continuity and irrational cuts." In post-war's "any spaces whatever" (xi), the deserted *Trümmer*-wastelands of e.g. Italian neo-realism, movement comes to take on "*false*" forms, which de-link and uncouple continuity, allowing "'time in its pure state' [to rise] up to the surface of the screen."[14] The resulting time-image emerges as something *beyond* movement,[15] an image not defined as a succession of spatial segments, subverting the sensory-motor schema and not treating time as a simple derivative of space. According to D. N. Rodowick "the founding question" of this second regime is, "how to distinguish move-

ment in time from movement in space."[16] No longer a measure of objects changing their positions *in space*, movement becomes a dynamics of relations *within time*.

Preservation

A further, no less important relation between film and time lies in film's attempt to *preserve* time, in its promise to not only *represent* time, but to actually *capture* and *freeze* it in its fleeting dynamics. After the first screening of Lumière's *actualities* at the Salon Indien in Paris, 28 December 1895, the daily newspapers celebrated the "fact" that this new medium, with its possibility to record people "in life," made death lose its sting: "We already can collect and reproduce words; now we can collect and reproduce life. We might even, for instance, see those as if living again long after they have been gone"[17] — "When apparatuses like this are available to the public, when everyone can photograph those that are dear to them, not only their posed forms, but their movements, their actions, their familiar gestures, with words at the tips of their tongues, death will cease to be absolute."[18] Death is also the central term in André Bazin's discussion of photography and film in his influential essay "Ontology of the Photographic Image." Bazin here claims an anthropological cause for the arts in general which he calls a "mummy complex." Like the "practice of embalming the dead" which aimed at the "continued existence of the corporeal body," the image was to provide an almost magical *and* material "defense against the passage of time," with the aim of "the preservation of life by a representation of life." For Bazin, "death is but the victory of time."[19] Similarly, as follows from Bazin's "integral realism,"[20] photography and film are the victory over time, over forgetting, the "second spiritual death," conserving time "by means of the form that endures."[21] Art as a means to immortalize man — Bazin is catching up with a traditional *topos* here. But in contrast to traditional painting's "obsession with likeness"[22] — C. S. Peirce would call this "iconological character" — photography rather is a "molding, the taking of an impression, by the manipulation of light,"[23] an index, a "tracing"[24] of a human being or an object. Thus, photography mummifies *the moment* in its "transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction,"[25] but this mummification, due to its very instantaneity, is compelled to "capture time only piecemeal."[26] Still — photography shares with film the "indexical character" — film, like photography, is "the art of the index; it is an attempt to make art out of a footprint."[27] However, film is marked by a surplus advantage — "[i]t makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object."[28] The mummy *of* film [like the mummies *in*

film] lives [as every film-lover knows, and Bazin knew as well]!! Bazin's mummy has a twofold function — it conserves the recorded image, and it dynamizes the otherwise static image. By means of the filmic mummy, as Bazin famously put it, "the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified, as it were."[29] In the only illustration to Bazin's "Ontology," we get an image of the Holy Shroud of Turin, which is defined by Bazin as a synthesis of "relic and photograph."[30]

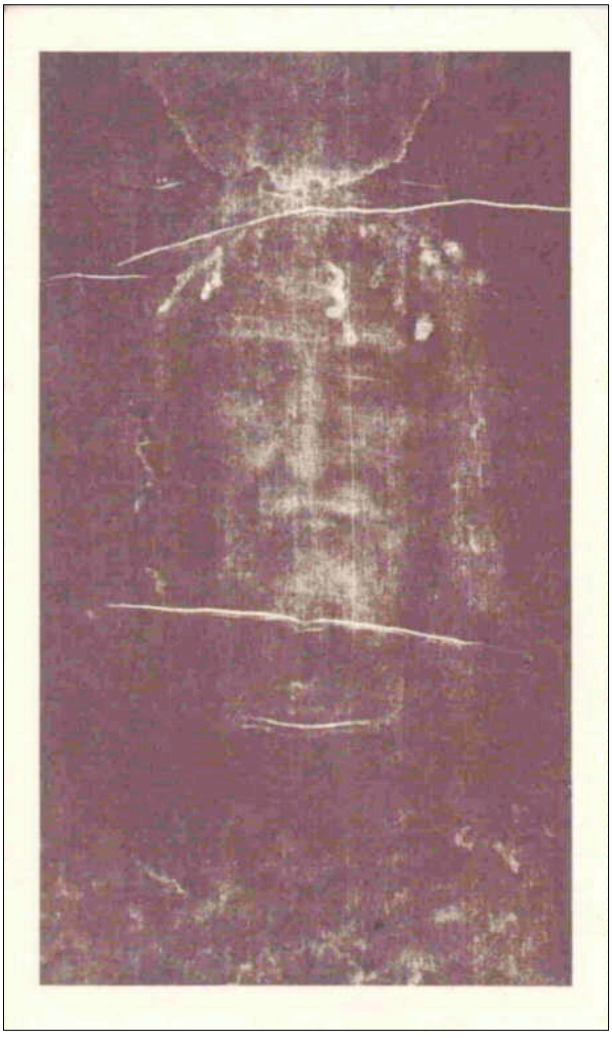


Fig. 1: The Holy Shroud of Turin — a synthesis of "relic and photograph."

This allows us, I argue, to deduce that Bazin in analogy sees the filmic material, the actual celluloid carrier, as the mummy's shroud or bandage, and the balm or preserving natron as a kind of emulsion that makes possible a direct "fingerprint" of the real, so that precisely photography's | film's "automatism" devoid of an intervening subject [which coincides with

Bazin's idea of realism] makes "the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real […] disappear."[31] As already mentioned, film "embalms" time, "rescuing it simply from its proper corruption."[32] But what if the corruption and entropy proper to time also eat at the mummy's bandages? What if these die and decay, which also means – what if these have *a proper life of their own*?

Manifestation

This Film is Dangerous![33] I am not referring to the contents of movies that supposedly are corrupting our youths, films containing "scenes of nudity and extreme violence" — I want to focus on the *material* level of film, neither on the level of narration, nor of technology and techniques, but on the fundamental level of the film's *thingness* — the film strip, a.k.a. "celluloid." Until approx. 1950, all movies were shot on nitrate film, on nitro-cellulose [commonly referred to as "celluloid"], a highly inflammable material — just remember the scene in Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* [or Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds*, with its "Operation Kino"], where the cinema gets up in flames. Developed in 1899 by George Eastman, the immense advantage of nitrate film was its high quality — no other material provided such brilliance and high amount of shades of gray. But nitro-cellulose consists of cotton, camphor and acid and is based on the same formula as the so-called "gun cotton" – nitrate film carries loads of oxygen in its own pockets to fend the flames, so that it even burns under water.

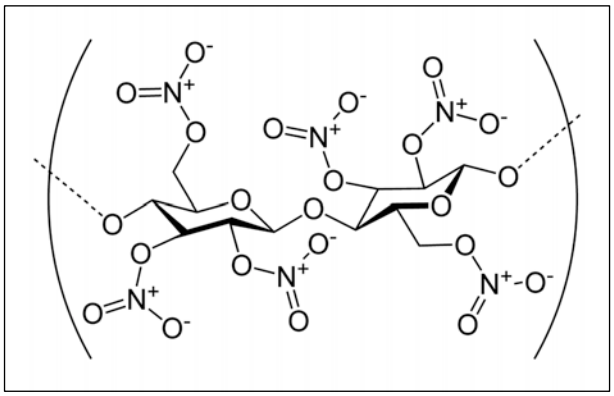
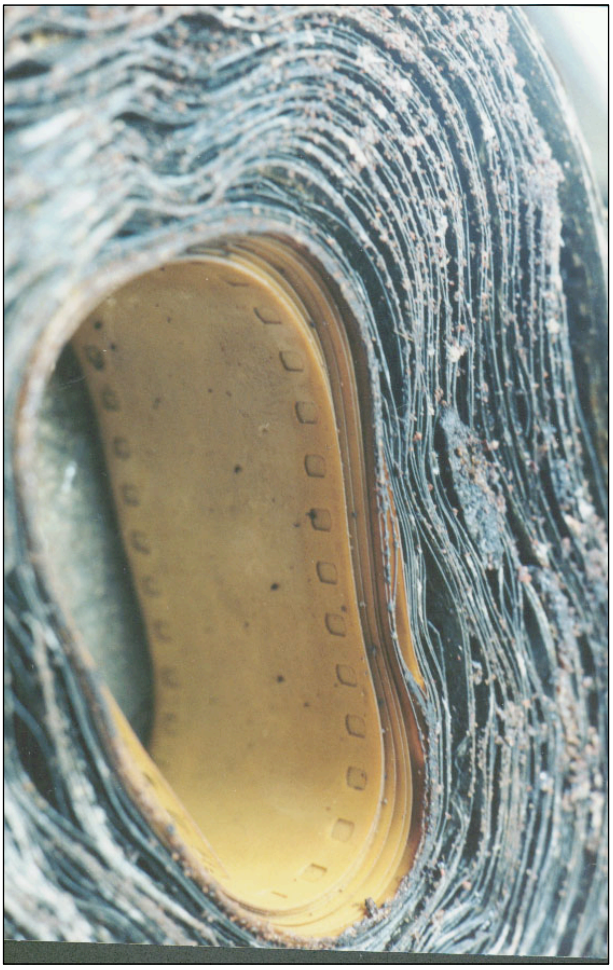


Fig. 2: Nitro-Cellulose Formula.

In addition, once processed, this material is highly sensitive to "environmental factors": in tends to decompose and deteriorate in dependence of time and environment, and it returns to its components — nitro-cellulose, gelatin, and silver emulsion. This process enfolds

in various states; it begins with a sepia/amber "coloration" of the film strip and the fading of filmed images; then the celluloid loses its "shape," softens, and becomes gooey; in a next step, bubbles and blisters emerge on the surface of the film, the emulsion separating from the nitro-cellulose carrier. In the end, the nitro-cellulose base completely depolymerizes and hardens into the notorious "hockey pucks" and "donuts" so dreaded by film archivists, until what is left is just a highly inflammable reddish powder.



Figs. 3-5: Nitrate film in various states of decay.

Bazin saw the medium of film as a bandage, as a protective skin — in French the material film strip is referred to as *pellicule* [skin]. Since the film [and the skin of film][34] is also a *thing*, a material object, it is *itself* subjected to time — and to decay — as well. If an actor | actress reaches an age when s | he loses attraction with the audience, s | he either has a "skin job" or quits acting. Likewise films, if time has left too many marks on their surface, are being restored ["embalmed"] or taken out of distribution. The entropic process can be slowed down, but it cannot be stopped — and it is exactly these decaying film skins that Bill Morrison uses as basic material for his film *Decasia* (2002). *Decasia* takes film's materiality seriously and lends itself to a "materialist approach" to Media Studies — representation of time and things *in* film are complemented by a perspective that takes into consideration the temporality of the medium *itself*.

DECASIA:
THE MATTER-IMAGE

Film is Also a Thing…

Morrison's *Decasia* can be located in the tradition of the American avant-garde or experimental film of the 60s and 70s. A main characteristic of this tradition was its focus on the filmic material and on the structure of film, and not so much on content and narration. Filmmakers such as Bruce Connor, Robert Breer and Tony Conrad worked with the concept of *flicker*-film that undermined classic filmic temporality [and its concomitant continuity-effect] — 24

frames per second — and experimented with various tempi. Andy Warhol re-discovered early cinema's stylistic device of the "static camera" and made *duration* the explicit topic of films such as *Empire*, *Sleep*, and *Eat*. Ken Jacobs, George Landow etc. utilized the concept of *found footage* for the experimental film, while Stan Brakhage produced films completely without a camera, by what Peirce would have called "indexical" procedures — putting objects directly on the film strip to be processed, painting or scratching on its surface, etc.[35] It was Brakhage's self-expressed aim to de-couple the filmic image from its hegemonic relation to memory, to deconstruct the images' representational character, and to create a "sense of constant present-tense"[36] — not a representation of the past, but a presentation of temporalities, of durations. As P. Adams Sitney has put it, American experimental film of the 60s and 70s were facing "the great challenge […] of […] how to orchestrate duration."[37] Common to all these experiments was the desire to make the filmic material *itself* — under "classic circumstances" invisible due to the ideal of the transparency of the medium according to which film is "the material base that must be dematerialized in projection" — visible and fruitful as a fundamental component of the filmic process.[38]

Morrison goes a decisive step further — *Decasia* is a montage made from found footage films in various states of decay. He leaves the sequences basically untreated in order to present a *time-image* created not by a human subject, but by time and matter itself — the *matter-image*. In order to get his material, Morrison had been digging his way through various film archives — like Walter Benjamin's "rag picker" (*Lumpensammler*), Morrison searched the archives of the Library of Congress, and the archive of 20th Century Fox Movietone Newsreels at the University of North Carolina, in particular their collections of *actualitées*, travel reports, industrial and educational films that all dated from the first half of the Century of the Cinema and that all were shot on nitrate film.[39] In a way, I argue, Morrison's strategy enacts a reversal of classic cinema's subordination of time to movement comparable to the Deleuzian taxonomy. *Decasia*'s cannibalization and recontextualization of pre-war "movement-images" according to irrational cuts and false continuities enacts an undermining of the concept of time as the relation of movement and space. Whereas in the classic movement-image, the rational cut served as a "linkage of images,"[40] producing "natural relations (series)"[41] of images, the film of the time-image "disen-chain[s]"[42] the images from these series, opening up and expanding an "irrational interval" by which each image, according to Rodowick,

> becomes what probability physics calls a "bifurcation point," where it is impossible to know or predict in advance which direction change will take. The chronological time of the movement-image fragments into an image of uncertain becoming […] the regime of the time-image replaces this deterministic universe with a probabilistic one.[43]

This is not to suggest that *Decasia* is a random collection of images and sequences — quite the contrary, in an interview Morrison reveals his thorough composition of the film.[44] However, the relation between images and sequences is undetermined, unpredictable, and probabilistic.

Decasia begins [and ends] with the image of a spinning Sufi dancer from Egypt — Bazin's country of mummies. Already at the beginning, *Decasia* accentuates the paradox of what could be called a "static dynamics" — here, movement does not propel a plot by action-reaction, but rather stays "within the frame," and within the confinements of this frame, movement "happens" only locally, as if space does not exist [or matter], whereas the movement itself deconstructs its proper "motor function" and allows a glimpse of what Deleuze calls "a little time in the pure state."[45] Thus, as Rodowick explains, "to the extent that time is no longer the measure of movement as indirect image, movement becomes a perspective on time,"[46] a *direct* time-image, independent of montage strategies.

Fig. 6: Sufi dancer in *Decasia.*

After the Sufi dancer, a sequence shot in a film laboratory and rotating film reels follows — the audience witnesses the birth of a film in film.[47]

The dancer's circular movement is taken up again in this sequence and enacts the constituting paradox of the filmic medium: the "static dynamics" *of* film — movement and stasis

at the same time, the illusion of movement as the effect of static snapshots is complemented by the "static dynamics" *in* film [the Sufi dancer], subverting or at least questioning the sensory-motor schema of the classic movement-image. Images of movement and circulation, of birth, life, and death provide a "red thread" in Morrison's film and are also taken up in the circular structure of *Decasia* itself, opening and concluding with the Sufi dancer. "Repetition" is one of Morrison's stylistic means — he often uses the same "parent movie" [*found footage*] in various films. In *Decasia*, he uses sequences already used in his earlier films, such as *The Film of Her* (1997), *Trinity* (2002), etc. However, re-petition — just like re-memberance — is not a repetition of the same […] this would rather be re-dundancy. Morrison rather "extracts" sequences from their "original" narratives and embeds them in a new context — in the context of time itself. The "return" of certain images returns as difference, and thus has a certain affinity to memory, as Morrison himself points out:

> The frame pauses briefly before the projector's lamp, and then moves on. Our lives are accumulations of ephemeral images and moments that our consciousness constructs into a reality. No sooner have we grasped the present, it is relegated to the past, where it only exists in the subjective history of each individual. [48]

After the two intro-sequences, scenes and images in various states of decomposition and decay follow. *Decasia* does not see the signs of the time as flaws, as material defects — they rather transfer their own aesthetics onto the images. Morrison has deliberately chosen sequences were the representation engages in a direct contact with the material carrier. A boxer is seen fighting against an amorphous blob [once presumably the image of a punching ball] threatening to swallow him. "Flames" are dancing over the close-up face of a woman, "wounding" both celluloid and image. The film's | woman's skin cracks and bubbles and seethes like molten lava — the woman's face gets "out of shape," melts. The subject | title of the film seems to have transferred | inscribed itself into its material. The resulting tensions create a texture "so porous it recalls "a 'pointilliste' texture in the manner of Seurat," [49] and produce cracks that echo old oil paintings, but also of some of Brakhage's works. *Decasia* owns a tactile texture, an almost sculptural depth missing from most contemporary film — this is not the utopia of the digital image, as sharply defined as possible, but the idea of an almost three-dimensional geology of surface. Morrison's approach starts with the materiality of the filmic medium and its own *proper* metamorphosis, rather than its capability to repre-

sent time and things — the temporality and thingness of the material *itself* is the center of his work, not the forms and shapes it *represents*, but the shape and form it *becomes*. The struggle between image and material *ruins* the narration of the "original film," but produces a new "narrative" that *Decasia* does not *illustrate*, but that emerges out of the ruinous image *itself*.

Fig. 7: Boxer in *Decasia.*

The return of film's [repressed] materiality makes itself seen as the destruction of the image which it had produced in the first place — yet, as Joachim Paech has poignantly stated, "the death of images […] is itself an image again, otherwise it would not be representable."[50] In Morrison's matter-image, film is revealed as *image-producing materiality*, not as an illusion of reality, as in classic film. Since, for the audience of *Decasia*, the [re-]entry of the material in the medial form appears as the very destruction of that form, the result is a paradoxical *mise-en-scène* of the simultaneity of appearance and disappearance, of destruction and construction. The filmic material is not [only] a *transparent transmitter* of images and meaning, but rather *instrumental* in its construction — the subject of "time" in *Decasia* is *presented* on the filmic material *directly*, by the material's "treatment" *by time itself*.

Ruinous Film | Filmic Ruin

Morrison's films constitute and partake what might be called a "poetics of the ruin,"[51] a poetics of the historicity of film not in the sense of traditional historiography of film, but with regard of the historicity — even "mortality" — of its thingness. From this perspective, film history becomes the history of film's decay, which, according to Paolo Cherchi Usai, makes a history of film possible in the first place: "Such images [that are immune from decay] can

have no history."[52] Everything "happening" to a film from its "birth" to its "death" constitutes its history — if all films would be unharmed by time and "survive," there would be no history of film — "cinema is the art of destroying moving images."[53] However, *Decasia* does not really fit into the tradition of "images of ruins" of [post] 09/11 cinema — *Decasia* rather presents "ruinous images," is a "ruinous film | filmic ruin" that does not *represent* the decay of *some other object*, but *enacts* the decomposition *of its own material*.

These ruinous images deconstruct the linear time of classic film — they seem to emerge from the fringes of "readability," located between pure indexicality and meaning, between a "re-animated present of the past" and time as a complex mystery. Film's mythical power to "capture time" merges with the tragedy that the medium film *itself* — as materiality — is also subjected to the vicissitudes of time — here, the poetics of the archive[54] is married to the poetics of the ruin, indexicality connects with entropy.

Here, film leaps over the threshold separating the "likeness-factor" of representation from direct "embodiment" — C. S. Peirce has theorized this in semiotic terms as the difference between *icon* and *index* and has pointed out that e.g. in photography, the iconic relation of likeness is only a secondary and forced effect of its indexicality:

> Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically *forced* to correspond point by point to nature.[55]

In *Decasia*'s "ruinous images," the indexicality is not only the one underlying the iconicity of the represented figures and objects, but first and foremost an index that is a chemical reaction of the compounds of nitro-cellulose with the environment. And *Decasia*'s represented figures and forms do not deteriorate because of a diegetically motivated decomposition [as in the Horror Film — see e.g. the early films of David Cronenberg, or Philip Brody's *Body Melt* (1993)], but because of the decay of its carrier materiality. This logic of matter's "reclaiming of power" against its forced [in]formation by man is the central topic of Georg Simmel's essay "The Ruin" (1907). The "[a]rtistic formation" enacted by the creative subject [Simmel refers to architecture in particular] here appears as an "act of violence committed by the spirit to which the stone has unwillingly submitted"[56] — there's a similar "physical force" at work like the one underlying the iconic aspect of the index. In a ruin, however, "de-

cay destroys the unity of form,"[57] spirit engages in a dialectical struggle with nature and with the "laws governing the material" ["*Eigengesetzlichkeit des Materials*"][58] — and this material aims at putting a stop to the subject's | the spirit's game. From "the standpoint of […] purpose,"[59] from the perspective of the "unity of form," this *natural* decay appears as "a meaningless incident"[60] — however, the result of this is not the simple "formlessness of mere matter."[61] The fascination of the ruin — and of a ruinous film such as *Decasia* — is precisely the fact that the destruction of an object [or of an image] makes a new object | image emerge, a "new form which, from the standpoint of nature, is entirely meaningful, comprehensible, differentiated."[62] This "new form" is the result of antagonistic forces, of the interplay of entropy and evolution, of past and present, intention and chance. The ruin — like Morrison's *Decasia* — simultaneously struggles *and* plays with its own destruction, and in this very oscillation a "new form" emerges. Thus, in *Decasia*, scenes in which the amorphous mass threatens to swallow the "diegetic life" are on a par with scenes in which the image precisely seems to emerge out of that blob.

Figs. 8-9: Two images from *Decasia*.

All things considered, the ruin lacks nothing — above all it does not lack any "preceding totality": the ruin does not only provide its own aesthetic criteria [as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it: "Even the corpse has its own beauty"[63]]. Strictly speaking, only from a human, "purposive" perspective, one can talk of entropy and decay — the "arrow of time," as Bergson points out, is the necessary condition of the creation of newness:

> [T]he living being essentially has duration; it has duration precisely because it is continuously elaborating what is new and because there is no elaboration without searching, no searching without groping. Time is this very hesitation […]. Suppress the conscious and the living [of the material world] […], you obtain in fact a universe whose successive states are in theory calculable in advance, like the images placed side by side along the cinematographic film, prior to its unrolling […]. Would not the existence of time prove that there is indetermination in things? Would not time be that indetermination itself?[64]

In its continuous folding of past into present and vice versa, with the ruin [as with *Decasia*, with its similar folding of outside [materiality] into inside [image] and vice versa] one cannot simply designate "decay" as the negative, destructive force: like with the Moebius Strip, the outside is simultaneously part of the inside, decay and composition become indiscernible, being destructive and creative *at the same time*. If in the abstract *temps* of Marey [and of Classic Physics and of Classic Film], as Bergson maintains, there can be no creation, and if this statement remains true for the "narrative level" of film, on the level of the materiality of the medium, *newness emerges*.

The Aura of the Thing

When Simmel describes the patina on metal, wood, ivory and marble, it almost seems as if he was talking about the images in *Decasia* und the "mysterious harmony" that "the product becomes more beautiful by chemical and physical means; that what has been willed becomes, without intention of force, something obviously new, often more beautiful,"[65] resulting in a "special something" which "no new fabric can imitate."[66] This singularity comes close to what Walter Benjamin has famously designated as *aura*, the work of art's "presence in time and space, its unique existence"[67] which has declined in the age of mechanical

reproduction.[68] "Aura" comes close to being the historicity of materiality. According to Benjamin, aura's "analogue in the case of a utilitarian object is the experience that precipitates on this object"[69] — the aura of a work of art is a direct effect of its "contact" with time and space. Morrison points out the importance of this "direct contact" as well:

> older archival footage [...] [has] this quality of having been touched [...] by time, by a non-human intervention that is organic [...] there are many things happening between the first time they were registered on the 35 mm negative and transferred to a paper intermediary, to being stored, rained on, or being nibbled by rats; the hairs in the specs, the grain and what would have to happen for that to be brought out and to be rephotographed some 60 years later. So each picture has its own dimension of time, its own history. Whether or not you are conscious of this while watching, you are still watching these tiny histories go by [...].[70]

With Morrison "staging" the film as a singular, material object, and with the continuous oscillation of materiality, filmed objects, and time, *Decasia* succeeds, I argue, in the "re-auratization" of film precisely in the age of mechanical reproduction. When Bazin claims that photography [and implicitly: film] "affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty,"[71] we can specify with *Decasia*, that film can affect us as a "natural" phenomenon, because in an important aspect it *is* a natural phenomenon.

Decasia follows a conception of "cinematic time" different from that which Bergson saw as the biggest drawback of the cinema — its fundamental linearity and abstractness. *Decasia*'s time is neither the duration of the projected film, nor the one of the film's narrative, neither narration time, nor narrated time, but the time of its material. *Decasia* contradicts Bergson's claim that cinema can only endlessly repeat "the same" — *Decasia* rather is the cinematic proof for Bergson's observation that *"[w]herever anything lives, there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed* […] *duration*, acting and irreversible."[72] We are presented a film that merges the "non-subjective" perception of the camera-eye with the "non-human perception" of matter itself — in its focus on the "perceptiveness of matter," *Decasia* shows that film is not only a signifying machine, and | or an image-and-sound machine, but because of its chemical composition it is also something like "a chlorophyll — or a

photosynthesis-machine."[73] The amorphous shapes of | in *Decasia* result from the oscillation of the formation | representation of objects, and the natural and organic processes of the object | matter "film" itself — representation and materiality, image and thing are being folded into each other. In a commentary on *Decasia*, Morrison puts this in terms reminiscent of the terminology of "Embodied Mind Philosophy": "The images can be thought of as desires or memories: actions that take place in the mind. The filmstock can be thought of as their body, that which enables these events to be seen. Like our own bodies this celluloid is a fragile and ephemeral medium that can deteriorate in countless ways."[74] In a similar manner, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue in *Philosophy in the Flesh* that "[w]hat is important is not just that we have bodies and that thought is somehow embodied. What is important is that the very peculiar nature of our bodies shapes our very possibilities for conceptualization and categorization,"[75] and it is exactly this, I argue, what *Decasia* shows with regard to the filmic *body*, the *materiality* of the medium "film." *Decasia* is on every level a more complex "history of film," with concepts of "history" and "memory" that goes far beyond the film archivists' idea of the "preservation of contents." Morrison comments —

> I've shown *Decasia* in archival symposiums, and archivists rushed up to me afterwards and were saying: "But you must document what all these are." But […] that would defeat the purpose. And it would make it seem a plea for preservation which I'm not actually doing. Certainly none of this work would exist without preservation. I am greatly indebted to them but I'm not saying it is necessarily tragic that time erodes these things because, hey, that's what happens […] the magic of cinema is also its fleeting nature, not only its objectual nature.[76]

As Deleuze, in his reading of Bergson, states — "the past which is preserved takes on all the virtues of beginning and beginning again. It is what holds in its depth or its sides the surge of the new reality, the bursting forth of life."[77]

Decasia takes into consideration that, as Bergson wrote, "memory […] is just the intersection of mind and matter."[78] It is this folding of perception into memory and vice versa that defines Deleuze's "crystal of time"[79] — and in Morrison's *Decasia*, I argue, the "crystallization of time" allows for a very materialist reading.

As Deleuze has beautifully put it: "the brain is the screen," cinema is cerebral, but this screen, this brain, this "[c]inema isn't theater; rather, it makes bodies out of grains"[80] — Bill Morrison's *matter-image* does exactly that.

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1. Dietrich Schüller, "Von der Bewahrung des Trägers zur Bewahrung des Inhalts," *Medium* 4 (1994): 28-32.

2. See e.g. Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

3. Dinah Eastop, "Conservation as Material Culture." in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. C. Tilley et. al. (London: SAGE, 2006), 516.

4. "Intelligent materialism" not because it is more intelligent than other "materialisms," but because it grants intelligence and agency to matter itself.

5. Régis Debray, *Media Manifestos* (London: Verso, 1996), 108. Debray further proposes — "We speak about Earth Day. Why not tomorrow, no pleasantry intended, a day devoted to celebrating celluloid, vellum paper, or vinyl records?" (114).

6. André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005), 9-16.

7. Etienne-Jules Marey, *La méthode graphique dans les sciences expérimentales* (Paris: Masson, 1885), xi.

8. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), 332.

9. Ibid., 331.

10. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Citadel Press, 1992), 18.

11. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 197.

12. Ibid., 155.

13. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and R. Galeta (London: Athlone 2000 Press, 1986), xi.

14. Ibid., xi.

15. See ibid., 1-24.

16. D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 79.

17. *Le Radical*, 30 December 1895.

18. *Le Radical* 30 December 1895: "On recueillait déjà et on reproduisait la parole, on recueille maintenant et on reproduit la vie. On pourra, par exemple, revoir agir les siens longtemps après qu'on les aura perdus." *La Poste* 30 December 1895: "Lorsque ces appareils seront livrés au public, lorsque tous pourront photographier les êtres qui leur sont chers non plus dans leur forme immobile mais dans leur mouvement, dans leur action, dans leurs gestes familiers, avec la parole au bout des lèvres, la mort cessera d'être absolue."

19. Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 9-10.

20. " [T]he history of the plastic arts […] [is] […] essentially the story of resemblance, or, if you will, of realism" (ibid., 10).

21. Ibid., 10.

22. Ibid., 12.

23. Ibid., 12*n*†.

24. Ibid., 96.

25. Ibid., 14.

26. Ibid., 96.

27. Lev Manovich "What is Digital Cinema?" http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital-cinema.html (accessed 14 April 2008).

28. Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 97; see also Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 24.

29. Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 15.

30. Ibid., 14*n**.

31. Ibid., 15.

32. Ibid., 14.

33. See Roger Smither, ed., *This Film is Dangerous: A Celebration of Nitrate Film* (Bruxelles: FIAF, 2002).

34. See also Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

35. See e.g. Deleuze, *Cinema 1,* 84-85.

36. Stan Brakhage, *Essential Brakhage. Selected Writings on Filmmaking by Stan Brakhage*, ed. Bruce R. McPherson (New York: McPherson & Company, 2005), 210.

37. P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 351-352. Deleuze also refers to Sitney's analysis in *Cinema 1 (*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 86; 230*n*22 and 24.

38. Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3.

39. *Decasia* is a collaboration with the American Composer Michael Gordon (one of the founders of the Bang On a Can collective) in association with The Ridge Theater, New York — I won't go into the intricacies of that very peculiar image | sound cooperation, since that would be an essay of its own. *Decasia* was conceptualized as a film (like what you get on the DVD), but as a multimedia event, premiered 2001 in Basel, Switzerland, with the Basel Sinfonietta Orchestra, slide projections, a very special stage architecture, etc. Gordon's symphony ventures into the fringes of sound and works with repetitions, superimpositions etc. — a sonic equivalent to Morrison's visual strategies.

40. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 213.

41. Deleuze, *Cinema 1,* 204.

42. Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 173.

43. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 15.

44. See Barnaby Welch's interview with Morrison for *High Angle Magazine* (2002) on http://www.decasia.com/html/highangle.html (accessed 14 April 2008).

45. Deleuze, *Cinema 2,* xi.

46. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 81.

47. Note the parallel to Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kino-apparatom*, 1922).

48. Bill Morrison, "Retrospective," Cork, 8-15. Oct 2006, http://www.corkfilmfest.org/festival/bill-morrison.html (accessed 14 April 2008).

49. Deleuze, *Cinema 1,* 85. Deleuze talks about this texture in the section on "gaseous perception" (80-86). While Deleuze here comments on e.g. George Landow's and Ken Jacobs' use of decaying found footage, quite similar to Morrison's, and the idea of "an image defined by molecular parameters" (85), and the impression that here "the film itself seems to die" (86, quoting from Sitney), Deleuze, I argue, is more concerned with perception and the *projected* image itself rather than its material "coming into being." See also Donald Totaro, "The Old Made New. The Cinematic Poetry of Bill Morrison." *Horschamp*, November 30, 2004, www.horchamps.qc.ca/new_offscreen/ morrison_rebirthism.html (accessed 14 April 2008).

50. Joachim Paech, *Konfigurationen. Zwischen Kunst und Medien* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1999), 123. My translation of: "das Ende der Bilder […] ist selbst ein Bild, anders wäre es nicht darstellbar."

51. See e.g. the essays by André Habib ("Thinking in Ruins. Around the Films of Bill Morrison." *Horschamp*, November 30, 2004, www.horchamps.qc.ca/new_offscreen/cinematic_ruins.html (accessed 14 April 2008), or the essay by Eduardo Cadava ("Lapsus Imaginis:" The Image in Ruins." *October* 96 (2001): 35-60.)

52. Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age* (London: BFI 2001), 41.

53. Ibid., 7.

54. See e.g. Emily Cohen, "The Orphanista Manifesto: Orphan Films and the Politics of Reproduction," *American Anthropologist* 106:4 (2004): 719–31, and – of course – Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*. (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

55. C. S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings. Volume 2 (1893 – 1913)*. ed. The Peirce Edition Project. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 5-6, emphasis added.

56. Georg Simmel, "The Ruin," in *Georg Simmel, 1858 – 1918. A Collection of Essays, with Translations and a Bibliography*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press), 260.

57. Ibid., 260.

58. Ibid., 259.

59. Ibid., 260.

60. Ibid., 260.

61. Ibid., 261.

62. Ibid., 261-262.

63. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson. Essay and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 14.

64. Bergson, *The Creative Mind,* 93.

65. Simmel, "The Ruin," 262.

66. Nitro-cellulose, just like the "old fabrics" that Simmel describes, is subjected to "dryness and moisture, heat and cold, outer wear and inner disintegration" (Simmel, "The Ruin," 264).

67. Simmel, "The Ruin," 220.

68. However — "[f]or the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs" (Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 224). Benjamin explains this 'persistence' of aura a.o. with the long exposure times of early photography. In the reduction of exposure time — which more than faintly reminds of Bergson's *duration* — from various hours to only seconds, Benjamin sees an important factor of the decay of aura. Correspondingly, long exposure time emerges as a sign of the "technical conditionality of the auratic appearance" ("Small History" 248, my translation of "technisches Bedingtsein der auratischen Erscheinung"), that "strange weave of space and time" (250). Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217-252.

69. Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire," in *Medienästhetische Schriften* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 2002), 188. My translation of "so entspricht die Aura [...] eben der Erfahrung, die sich an einem Gegenstand des Gebrauchs als Übung absetzt." The English translation — "[aura's] analogue in the case of a utilitarian object is the experience which has left traces of the practiced hand" (188), I argue, reduces the object's experience to something done to it by a human hand, whereas Benjamin leaves that open. Also, the German expression "sich absetzen" also alludes to the chemical process of precipitation, which comes quity handy in my context.

70. André Habib, "Cinema from the Ruins of the Archives. Matter and Memory: A Conversation with Bill Morrison." *Horschamp*, November 30, 2004, www.horchamps.qc.ca/new_offscreen/interview_morrison.html (accessed 14 April 2008).

71. Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 13.

72. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), 20. When Simmel speaks of "the present form of the past" (Simmel, "The Ruin," 266) — a concept in which "the ruin" and "the archive" seem to merge, this simultaneity or coexistence of temporalities is of particular relevance to Bergson, who defines memory as "the prolongation of the past into the present" (Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 20).

73. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 2.

74. Morrison, Retrospective.

75. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 19.

76. Morrison, qtd. in Habib "Cinema from the Ruins."

77. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 92.

78. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 13.

79. See Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 68-97.

80. Gilles Deleuze, "The Brain Is the Screen: An Interview with Gilles Deleuze." In *The Brain Is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* ed. Gregory Flaxman. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 366.