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THE AMBIVALENCE OF VISUAL DOCUMENTATION: THE FACE IN JOHAN VAN DER KEUKEN

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Abstract: In its dual function as both documentation/representation of actual "social events" and the creation/presentation of an "aesthetic event," documentary film, at an early stage, started posing questions that have become central to the emergent field of visual culture. Rather than merely raising questions about meaning and being in the organization of the social field, documentary film foregrounds the (inherent) ambivalence in any form of visual culture, i.e., its function as at once the inscription of some form of external (social, cultural) reality, and its immanent reality as an aesthetic event. Focusing on the function of the face in the work of the prolific Dutch documentary filmmaker & photographer, Johan van der Keuken, this essay, drawing on Jacques Rancière's notion of the "distribution of the sensible," and Gilles Deleuze's concept of the cinematic face in and as close-up, explores this ambivalence at the heart of the documentary image, and argues that an approach of van der Keuken's work from an explicitly aesthetic, rather than a hermeneutic or semantic perspective is necessary to grasp the operation of his film *Face Value* (1991) as, first and foremost, affective in nature, and hence, an aesthetic, rather than a semiotic event.



For a minute or two she stood looking at the house, and wondering what to do next, when suddenly a footman in livery came running out of the wood—(she considered him to be a footman because he was in livery: otherwise, judging by his face only, she would have called him a fish)—and rapped loudly at the door with his knuckles. It was opened by another footman in livery, with a round face, and large eyes like a frog; and both footmen, Alice noticed, had powdered hair that curled all over their heads. She felt very curious to know what it was all about, and crept a little way out of the wood to listen.

Lewis Carroll,
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

In her encounter with the liveried footmen in the chapter “Pig and Pepper,” Alice, with her usual yet uncanny perspicacity, points us to the paradox of visual reality, of the actuality of a world that is at once perceptible and, albeit it not necessarily, intelligible as well. Defying St. Thomas’ claim that seeing is believing, Alice raises the question of meaning and being as it plays out in her contradictory desires for both spectacle and knowledge, poised between what she sees and what she is trying to read, or understand. Alice’s desire to know is both aroused by and deflected from the spectacle of the two animal figures, for rather than trusting her eyes, her immediate perception of their faces, she allows her attention to be redirected towards their attire, and, furthermore, to the sealed envelope, the letter at the center of the transaction taking place between them. In the play of sense and nonsense that is Alice’s Wonderland—in what Gilles Deleuze calls the “chaos-cosmos” of Lewis Carroll’s work (Deleuze 1990: xiii)—that which arouses Alice’s curiosity is both con-sealed in and eludes the letter, the event of language.

Language, Deleuze maintains, “fixes the limits, (the moment, for example, at which the excess begins), but it is language as well which transcends the limits and restores them to

the infinite equivalence of an unlimited becoming” (1990: 3). Carroll plays havoc with the everyday coordinates of language by placing the articulation of Alice’s perceptual reality in parentheses. He therewith draws our attention to the capacity of written language to externalize what in actual experience remains inaccessible, both to others, and also largely to ourselves, i.e., a human being’s (un/conscious) thoughts. Alice, in her turn, literally reverses the terms of reference of Platonic dualism, between appearance and reality, by disregarding the immediacy of her perceptual reality, the surface of the footmen’s animal faces, in favor of the overlay of the underlying social meanings of their liveried bodies. Central, then, as language, or the “great letter, nearly as large as [the fish-footman] himself,” appears to be in this scene of curious desire, it is nonetheless Alice’s act of reading, of her reading against the grain of the fish-footman’s and the frog-footman’s bodies-cum-faces, which points up the centrality of the visual, of the image, or, indeed, of the imaginary, in the fixing of meaning, and, simultaneously, its function as the “moment at which the excess begins,” which restores the signifying operations of language to the “infinite equivalent of becoming”—which, in the context of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, is also the site of unbecoming.

In its irreducibility to either the perceptual or the intelligible, the scene of Alice’s encounter with the Fish-footman and the Frog-footman succinctly articulates the central question I wish to explore in this essay, i.e., the paradox of visibility and visualization in the context of documentary film. My concern with documentary film focuses on its ambivalence as at once representation and presentation, an extraction and organization of the real, and hence something that is subject to procedures of understanding, and an artistic creation, the site for a perceptual encounter, i.e., what I call an “aesthetic event.” The paradox of technical visualization, of the production of a visual reality in film, I propose, finds its culmination in the imaging, the cinematic (re)presentation of the human face, especially the face in close-up. Like the animal faces in *Alice in Wonderland*, the cinematic face presents itself as the site of meaning and identity, while simultaneously eluding, effacing its limits, and dissolving its signifying functions. Theoretically, I will work through this proposition with reference to the Deleuzian distinction between the actual and the virtual, as well as his and Guattari’s notion of

faciality, and the face in cinema. The essay as such is inspired by the work of Dutch filmmaker/photographer Johan van der Keuken (1938-2001), in particular his award-winning film, *Face Value* (1991).

Before I say more about van der Keuken, let me try to approach the paradox of the ambivalence of documentary film by introducing Jacques Rancière's notion of the "*partage du sensible*." In French, the word *partage* has two, almost opposite meanings: to share, or to have in common, and to divide, to portion out, respectively. This duality gets lost in English translation, where *partage* usually appears as "distribution." In the opening chapter of *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière uses the original French phrase to define the "distribution of the sensible" as the "system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (2004: 12). It is nonetheless important to note that the *partage du sensible* is not just the way images, bodies, objects, and places are distributed across the field of sense perception, but that it is also the division of the sensible into that which is speakable, thinkable, visible, audible, and that which is not, that which is "portioned out." Hence Rancière's insistence that there is an "'aesthetics' at the core of politics" that should not be understood in Benjaminian terms, i.e., as the "'aestheticization of politics,'" but rather in a (post)-Kantian sense, as the "system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience" (2004: 13).

Elizabeth Cowie links Rancière's notion of the sensible with Deleuze's distinction between the actual and the virtual. She suggests that we "must apprehend the actual as a 'sensible,'" and, furthermore, "engage in a movement between a living and dwelling as the affectual, and a becoming a subject of knowledge that is constructed virtually in a transforming of the real into reality" (2012: 3). On this view, the notion of the *partage du sensible* would seem to capture, if not quite yet explain, the dual function of documentary film, as at once an extraction and organization of the real (representation/distribution) and an artistic creation (presentation/division), and thus complicate a function that is more commonly defined in terms of the ostensibly straightforward distinction between nonfiction

and fiction. Deleuze's actual/virtual distinction confuses such apparent straightforwardness.

Deleuze sets up the distinction between the actual and the virtual in opposition to that between the possible and the real, to conceptualize "two mutually exclusive, yet jointly sufficient, characterisations of the real" (Boundas 2005: 296). The importance of the distinction in Deleuze's ontology is clear from the fact that it runs throughout his work, up to and including his last writings, "Immanence: A Life" (1995), and "The Actual and the Virtual" (2007). These two short essays testify to Deleuze's significance for the study of the (moving) image, for it is in relation to cinema that the distinction actual/virtual, as Cowie also suggests, has proven to be particularly valuable.

Philosophy, Deleuze posits, is the "theory of multiplicities," each of which is "composed of actual and virtual elements" (2007: 148). The virtual is not an image of the transcendental in a (post)Kantian sense, but a purely differential field, or multiplicity, that cannot resemble the image of empirical experience, a ground that cannot appear as the figure of form to which it gives rise. Yet, since there is no such thing as a "purely actual" object, every actual, Deleuze insists, "surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual images" that constantly renew themselves, that produce other virtual images by which they are in turn surrounded, and that are both emitted and absorbed by actual images (2007: 148). Still, virtual images equally react upon the actual: as a consequence of their "mutual inextricability," virtual images are not "unreal," but a temporally distinct dimension of the real, so that "virtual images are able to react upon actual objects" (2007: 149). The actual/virtual distinction thus replaces both the traditional divide between the true and the false, and that between the real and the unreal.

In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (2010), Deleuze shows that in certain kinds of images, i.e., the "crystal-image," the distinction between actual and virtual becomes indiscernible. In the formation of such an image with two sides, it is impossible to attribute actuality and virtuality as distinct aspects, in that each side can be seen to be "taking the other's role in a

relation we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility.” The fact that there are images that are “by nature double,” leads Deleuze to the conclusion that there is “no virtual which does not become actual in relation to the actual, the latter becoming virtual through the same relation” (2010: 69).

Deleuze’s replacement of the true/false and the real/unreal oppositions with the distinction actual/ virtual complicates the traditional terms in which documentary film has been defined and distinguished from feature or fiction film. Indeed, what his insistence on the actual and the virtual as reversible characterizations of the real entails is, first, that it becomes impossible to distinguish between real and unreal images (an urgent question in the age of digitization), and second, that, since the virtual is real insofar as it affects us, the evaluation of any image requires us to examine its intrinsic qualities, its actuals affecting us, from the perspective of the multiple forces it virtually contains. The latter inference explains why Cowie associates Rancière’s notion of the “sensible” with Deleuze’s “actual.” It furthermore encourages us to take up Rancière’s description of the “politics of aesthetics” as the “system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience,” in order to consider the idea of the *partage du sensible* in relation to his writing about film.

While not the same, the similarities between Rancière’s concept of the *partage du sensible*, and Deleuze’s actual/virtual distinction are nonetheless remarkable. It is therefore surprising to find Rancière, with specific reference to film, maintain a clear difference between the fictional and the documentary function. To be sure, he admits, this distinction does not reside in any given text, but, instead, arises from differentiated forms of authorization in specific historical contexts. Fiction, Rancière argues, designates the practice of “using the means of art to construct a ‘system’ of represented actions, assembled forms, and internally coherent designs.” Hence, we “cannot think of ‘documentary’ film as the polar opposite of ‘fiction’ film simply because the former works with images from daily life and archive documents about events that obviously happened, and the latter with actors who act out an invented story.” As a fabrication, a creation of a new reality—the reality of the film—the documentary is as fictional as any product of creative practice. The real difference between

fiction and documentary film, Rancière therefore submits, is that “instead of treating the real as an effect to be produced,” documentary film “treats it as a fact to be understood” (2006: 158).

In our increasingly digital cultural context, the understanding of seeing as believing cannot possibly hold the purchase it traditionally may have held. Rancière’s characterization of documentary film indicates that the notion of vision as a site of understanding nonetheless remains compelling. Still, even Alice’s response to the sight of the fish-footman and the frog-footman critically challenges the distinction between the cinematic presentation of the real as either an effect to be produced or as a fact to be understood; a challenge that at once points up the centrality of the visual in the fixing—and, as the case may be, the unfixing—of meaning. This directs us to the other Deleuzian concept I consider to be of great significance to Johan van der Keuken’s film practice: the notion of the face, or, more accurately, “faciality.” In order adequately to address the operations of van der Keuken’s *Face Value*, I must first try to bring these two concerns, the documentary treatment of the real and the signification of the face, together.

The face, for Deleuze and Guattari, stands at the intersection of two semiotic systems, signification and subjectivation. Faciality is not the same thing as the face itself, but a function that operates in the form of what they call a “white wall/black hole system” (1987: 167). In this system, the “black hole” or unknown zone of the face, i.e. the zone in which affective energies may be invested, is correlated with subjectivation, while the “white wall,” the surface upon which signs are projected and from which they are reflected, corresponds with signification. The face is “not an envelope exterior to the person who speaks, thinks, feels,” they write, for without guidance from the face, the listener would not be able to make her/his choices about meaning. Furthermore, the face is not “basically” individual, but rather “constructs the walls that the signifier needs in order to bounce off of,” while simultaneously “dig[ging] the hole that subjectification needs in order to break through.” The face is thus not something that simply exists, that comes “ready-made,” but rather comes into being as the effect of an “abstract machine of faciality” (1987: 168). This “abstract machine” engenders the

face as surface: “Facial traits, lines, wrinkles; long face, square face, triangular face; the face is a map” (1987: 170).

From the understanding of the face as “map” or “surface,” Deleuze and Guattari infer that the head is included in the body, but the face is not. The face needs to be produced, is the product of a process, of *facialization*, the effect of an operation that is both “horrible and magnificent”:

The head, even the human head, is not necessarily a face. The face is produced only when the head ceases to be part of the body, when it ceases to be coded by the body, when it ceases to have a multidimensional, polyvocal corporeal code—when the body, head included, has been decoded and has to be *overcoded* by something that we shall call the Face. (1987: 170)

The face is a production “in humanity,” but the necessity by which it is produced “does not apply to human beings ‘in general,’” nor is the face “animal.” Rather, there is something inhuman about the face: “The inhuman in human beings: that is what the face is from the start” (1987: 171).

In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (2009), Deleuze describes the function of the (human) face as follows:

Ordinarily, three roles of the face are recognizable: it is individuating (it distinguishes or characterizes each person); it is socialising (it manifests a social role); it is relational or communicating (it ensures not only communications between people, but also in a single person, the internal agreement between his character and his role). (2009: 99)

The puzzling appearance of the footmen’s animal faces, perceptually recognizable to Alice yet displaced by the operations of the meanings of their socially legible bodies, throws this communicational model into confusion. The apparent readability, the facialization of the

liveried bodies, and the “quite special becomings-animal” of the footmen’s heads, their escape from the “inhuman in human beings,” equally conjures up Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion of the face as the “very special mechanism” at the intersection of signifiante and subjectivation (1987: 171;167), in its resonance with and distinction from Emmanuel Levinas’ concept of the human face as the “source from which all meaning appears” (1969: 297).

Levinas’ reflections on the ambivalence of the human face allow me to do two things. First, to return to the question of the functioning of documentary film, i.e., in its simultaneous framing and un-framing operations, to challenge Rancière’s understanding of its organization of the real as a fact to be understood, rather than as an actualization in/of the virtual to produce its reality as an actual effect. Second, Levinas’ thought enables me to link up the distinction actual/virtual with Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theorization of faciality in tandem with Deleuze’s subsequent application of these ideas to the operation of the face in cinema, especially to the face in close-up. Both the question of the organization of the real, and the cinematic operation of the face are central to van der Keuken’s oeuvre.

Born in Amsterdam in 1938, van der Keuken was trained as a photographer and published his first book of photo-portraits while still in high school. His second book of portraits appeared while he was studying filmmaking in France, where other young Dutch filmmakers such as Joris Ivens, Louis van Gasteren, and Bert Haanstra were already enjoying growing critical acclaim. Though primarily known today as one of the most illustrious and innovative independent filmmakers of the twentieth century, most of van der Keuken’s work reveals his origins in photography. In one of the few scholarly studies devoted to the photographer-filmmaker’s work, Thomas Elsaesser contends that there is really no question of competition between the two media for van der Keuken: “He knew how to catch the instant (the gift of the photographer), while making us feel how this instant belonged in a continuum, a movement, a process” (2005: 197).

Most critics agree that van der Keuken is, in the first instance, an image-maker, even if it is not always clear what they mean by this. Bérénice Reynaud, for example, begins her

reflections on the filmmaker's work by describing a range of "evocative, often disturbing images," which come to (her) mind when she thinks about his films. "Powerful" and "often disturbing" as they may be, these images do not, for Reynaud, call forth memories of the films *qua* films: "Yet, only images. Images from which *something is missing*" (1990: 11). Reynaud associates the lack she perceives in these images with van der Keuken's "dialectical, playful and rigorous approach," which, she suggests, works against the grain of "memory-hoarding, nostalgia, hagiography." Despite her emphasis on the centrality of the image in van der Keuken's films, Reynaud somewhat unaccountably explains this approach by singling out cinema as a medium that is "*not* the image, it is the recording of a moment" (1990: 11). Even apart from its contradictions, I find this argument quite unpersuasive. Although Elsaesser's use of the word "image" is similarly undertheorized, his claim that what is "central" to van der Keuken's films is not so much their politics, themes, or topics, but "the 'image' (which, of course, for him included sound, words and movement)" (2005: 200), is closer to my own experience. For in my repeated encounters with van der Keuken's films, I do not perceive moments, or the recordings of moments, but, on the contrary (as Reynaud herself initially appears to suggest) images, images in the dual sense, i.e., as potentially significant, but in the first place as pictorial surfaces, as aesthetic objects.

What I am proposing, then, is that the function of the (moving) image has not so much, or at least not primarily, to do with representation, with the construction and distribution of knowledge, with treating reality as a fact to be understood. Any image, like everything else, can, of course, function as a sign, as a carrier of meaning, but it need not do so. Images present themselves in our actual encounter with them: they first and foremost affect us—in a powerful and potentially "disturbing" manner—in our embodied being, prior to any act of interpretation and/or comprehension. Moreover, in its ineluctable depthlessness as surface structure, the image may be argued actively to engage in the *partage du sensible* in the sense suggested by Rancière, i.e. in the way bodies, objects, and places are distributed across the field of sense perception, and thus in the division of the sensible into that which is speakable, thinkable, visible, and audible, and, at the same time, that which is not, that which is "portioned out," or excluded. Yet, as the word *partage* indicates, such distribution does not constitute a

differentiation between the possible and the real, or the real and the imaginary, but rather defines the reversible relation between mutually exclusive, yet inextricable characterizations of the real, the actual and the virtual. Images arising from the purely differential field, the multiplicity of the virtual, affect us, in the first instance largely unconsciously, precisely by presenting themselves in their actualization in the sensible, that is to say, aesthetically.

The *moving* image, perhaps more so than the still or photographic image, imposes its distributing operations in the sensible surreptitiously, and thus, I would argue, more violently, by appearing to offer us fluidity, sequentiality, continuity, and ostensible wholeness. Van der Keuken's background in photography made him fully aware of the singular operations of the moving image. As Reynaud points out, he turned to filmmaking "with the full acceptance of his new medium's double challenge: the passage of time—in which each image is 'annihilated' (his word) by the one just after it—and the constant necessity/desire/temptation to *reframe*" (1987: 12). Hence Alain Bergala's characterization of his work as the "art of anxiety" (2001: n.p.). I will turn to the question of re/framing in a moment. For now, let me suggest that van der Keuken's keen awareness of the moving image's paradoxical capacity to simultaneously enact a certain sensual plenitude, to present an overabundance of visuality, and to annihilate the image, to portion out, to exclude things from the field of vision, is acutely palpable in his films. While, on one hand, accounting for the fact that it is hard to remember these films as films, rather than as images, it is, on the other, this "anxiety" over the medium's un/framing operations that explains the filmmaker's abiding fascination with the human face.

On the sales website of Arte.TV, the main distribution center of European documentary films, *Face Value* is described as "an epic on humanity and cultural diversity in Europe through a multitude of appearances, a cartography of faces, the reflection of an imaginary Europe made up of London, Marseille, Prague and the Netherlands." Such a description situates the film in the context of a politically engaged, if experimental, tradition of specifically *documentary* filmmaking. Van der Keuken himself objected to the classification of documentary filmmaker because to him and his work, the distinction

between fiction and documentary made no sense. Consequently, his films, socially engaged, and, most of the time, politically dissident as they are, do not necessarily invite us to infer their underlying social meanings or ulterior, referential realities; they do not, as Rancière would have it, treat the real as a fact to be understood.

Indeed, van der Keuken's insight into the "filming process itself, and its physical aspects, the editing, the rhythm, etc." makes him reject any notion of film as a symbolic or symbolizing medium. In "Film Is Not a Language," he dismisses any attempts to "read" his (or any other) films in signficatory terms:

Film is not, as is often assumed, a language in which certain combinations of signs refer to certain concepts and in which series of combinations of signs can be arranged into a syntaxis [sic]. Film has no sign and no significance ... People who refer to film as a language are essentially referring to a limited number of signals to which there are a limited number of conditional responses ... These signals have nothing to do with film itself ... The film is an instrument for the registration, reinforcement and distribution of the signal. All it can do is show, but it can show anything, in any way. (Van der Keuken 2001: n.p.)

Such insistence on the non-signficatory operations of the film-image marks film as the site of excess, a site where things can happen—film can show, express anything, in any way—but whatever happens in film cannot be reduced to concepts, be brought under the order of the signifier. Film as such, in other words, does not organize the real as an object of understanding.

Furthermore, the very notion of the real is subject to van der Keuken's profound creative doubt. In an interview with Reynaud, he gives particularly clear expression to such doubt:

For me, the doubt about the Real of one's film has two causes. First, a belief that the Real is not a given, that it has to be suggested between the images; images are nothing but fragments, traces, bits of evidence, of something that has remained

elsewhere. Second, a process takes place in the spectator's mind, that consists of de-realizing these images from the Real to, paradoxically, prove their reality, or to the contrary, their artificiality. (Reynaud 1990: 12)

The first half of this passage recalls Deleuze's distinction between the actual and the virtual, as it plays out in terms of one of his founding concepts, (the plane of) immanence. Deleuze suggests that there may be "two planes," or "two ways of conceptualizing the plane":

The plane can be a hidden principle, which makes visible what is seen and audible what is heard, etc., which at every instance causes the given to be given, in this state or that state, at this or that moment. But the plane itself is not given. It is by nature hidden. It can only be inferred, induced, concluded from that to which it gives rise (simultaneously or successively, synchronically or diachronically). (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 265)

What van der Keuken designates the Real is a hidden or organizational principle that cannot be perceived, is not given, and that can be described as "ungiven," as something that has "remained elsewhere," but which can be inferred from that to which it gives rise: the images, or rather the images' in-between. The Real of his film(s) is a compositional principle that is not itself visible, but that which serves to render visible, to bring into appearance the "fragments, traces, bits of evidence" from which it stands aside and through which it can only be "suggested": the plane as the "development of forms" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 265). The actual images that make up van der Keuken's films, the Real as the necessarily "ungiven," are the actuals in their inextricability from the "cloud of virtual images" that surrounds them and that are absorbed into them. In Deleuze's formulation:

The plane of immanence includes both the virtual and its actualization simultaneously, without there being any assignable limit between the two. The actual is the complement or the product, the object of actualization, which has nothing but the virtual as its subject. Actualization belongs to the virtual. The actualization of the

virtual is singularity whereas the actual is individuality constituted. (2007: 149/50)

By displacing the distinction between the real and the imaginary, the actual and the virtual, the “evocative, often disturbing images” of van der Keuken’s films defy any clear-cut distinction between fiction and documentary film. The second aspect of his reflections upon the Real of his films compounds such defiance on the level at which Rancière addresses this distinction, the level of the viewer or spectator. Van der Keuken’s insistence on the role of the viewer, as an active *subiectum* in the process of aesthetic co-creation, additionally confirms that such images can only work, react upon the actual, if they are subject to a process of derealization. These joint emphases, on the necessity for the de-realization of images in order to prove their “reality,” or, indeed, their “artificiality,” and the non- or a-symbolic operation of film are nowhere more pronounced (and disturbing) than in van der Keuken’s treatment of the face.

For Levinas, the face is a “living presence; it is expression” (1969: 66). In its unspeakable expressiveness, the face constitutes its own signification, but also, and this is what essentially defines it, escapes the power of the signifier: the face “resists possession” and is “present in its refusal to be contained” (1969: 197; 194). Deleuze, too, describes the face as “expression, expression of affectivity or the emotional quality of a situation, a virtual disposition to act, potency waiting to become act” (Buzzi 2007: n.p.). The critical difference between Levinas’ and Deleuze’s characterizations of the face is that the former addresses actual human faces, whereas the latter directs his (and thus our) our attention to the face in cinema, the face framed, the face in close-up.

In *Cinema-One*, Deleuze assumes the image of the cinema generally to be “‘automatic’ and presented primarily as movement-image.” He differentiates three types of movement-images: the perception-image, the affection-image, and the action-image. It is the second of these image types that Deleuze correlates with the close-up and the face: “*The affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face....*” (2009: ix). Just as Levinas, he suggests that the face in/as close-up does not function within the terms of traditional forms of representation. The face/close-up does not hide some underlying meaning, nor does it function as a part for the whole: we cannot infer the entire person, or the meaning of the person, or even of the face itself from the image. The face/close-up expresses, but what

it expresses is not something other than itself: the close-up of the face abstracts something from all spatiotemporal coordinates, and that something is affect: “The affect is the entity, that is Power or Quality. It is something expressed.” In the face/close-up, powers and qualities are not actualized, “embodied in states of things”—in which case we would be dealing with the action-image—but “considered for themselves, as expressed” (2009: 97).

In explaining the difference between these two opposed modalities of powers and qualities, Deleuze draws on C.S. Peirce’s distinction between “firstness” and “secondness.” The latter refers to what is in relation to something or someone else: it is the realm of the Real, of individuation, of actuality, and existence—the domain “where the action-image is born.” Firstness, in contrast, is a “totally different category, which refers to another type of image with other signs.” Firstness is hard to define, because it primarily exists as something that is felt, not conceived, and it “concerns what is new in experience, what is fresh, fleeting and nevertheless eternal.” Firstness is not, or not yet, a feeling or sensation, but the “quality of a possible sensation, feeling, or idea.” As the category of the possible, firstness “expresses the possible without actualising it,” and this, for Deleuze, is “exactly what the affection-image is: it is quality or power, it is potentiality considered for itself as expressed” (2009: 98). To be sure, any set of images is made up of “firstnesses, secondnesses and many other things besides,” but it is the face/close-up—i.e. the affection-image “in the strict sense”—that “only refers to firstness” (Deleuze 2009: 98).

At this point, the difference between Levinas’ focus on the human face, and Deleuze’s concern with the cinematic face in and as close-up, becomes particularly relevant. As we have seen, Deleuze ascribes to the human face the three functions of individuation, socialization, and communication. In the case of the close-up, however, the face loses all three of these ordinary roles. The “primary originality and the distinctive quality of the cinema,” in the words of director Ingmar Bergman, the master of close-ups whom Deleuze quotes approvingly, is the “possibility of drawing near to the human face,” to the extent that the functions of the face in their secondness, their significance in the Real disappear; those

aspects of the face that achieve actualization, and hence get caught up in the system of signification, and that “presuppose a state of things where people act and perceive,” dissolve, evaporate in the affection image (Deleuze 2009: 99).

In the close-up, the face is, but it has lost all its signifying functions: the close-up transforms the face into a nothingness, a nakedness, a phantom, an expression of the possible, without actualization. This quality, the *quale* of the face/close-up in cinema is what Deleuze calls “affection,” or affect. And the affect, he maintains, is “impersonal and ... distinct from every individuated state of things: it is nonetheless *singular*.” In its singularity, which, we recall, is the “actualization of the virtual,” but not the actual as “individually constituted” (2007: 150), the face/close-up confronts us with its firstness, with “what is new in experience” (2009: 98). It expresses a power considered for itself, “without reference to anything else,” which is no less than to say that the paradox of the face in and as close-up finds its limit in the “effacement of faces in nothingness” (2009: 101). It is this irreducible ambivalence at the heart of the image of the face, the cinematic production of the face as both the site of individuation (in the domain of the action-image), and of the face/close-up (the affection-image), with its singular power to efface, that van der Keuken, in all of his films, but particularly in *Face Value*, is both haunted by, and relentlessly pursues.

As we have seen, van der Keuken is intensely aware of the “annihilating” operation of the sequential movement of images in film, which to some extent accounts for (and amplifies) his sense of the “necessity/desire/temptation to *reframe*,” and, indeed, why his films qualify, for Bergala, as the “art of anxiety.” Deleuze’s conceptualization of cinema as consisting of both movement-image and time-images, allows me to think through the interconnections between the filmmaker’s preoccupation with the human face, and, simultaneously, the cinematic procedure of framing, deframing, and reframing.

Several critics have commented on van der Keuken’s idiosyncratic framing practice. Bergala suggests that, in his “anxiety” that he will somehow “wrong” the visible world by framing his images, and thus curtailing the infinity of the “body of reality,” the filmmaker

invented his “‘unframed’ pictures, which have since become famous.” According to this view, the deframing technique is a “relativization made visible of the act of framing,” which allows van der Keuken to sidestep the authoritative act of imposing meaning, of impaling visual reality, and, therewith, of “doing violence to the world” (Bergala 2001: 12). In “Cinema Lucida,” Des O’Rawe similarly claims that van der Keuken’s “narrative patterns and deframing techniques, ‘free-form’ camera movement, and abstract colour and sound configurations” are not so much conscious decisions as a “more direct expression of his uncertainties about the possibility of ever framing and representing the world as it is, and was” (O’Rawe 2010: n.p.). Although helpful to the extent that one might try to make “sense” of van der Keuken’s films, these approaches ultimately do not satisfy: partly because they land us back, if not in the world, at least in the domain of representation and symbolization. This is an unaccountably reductive move, for as even O’Rawe submits, the filmmaker’s use of “harsh contrasts of colour and sound ... can unsettle a seemingly realistic representation and disturb the natural flatness of the image, accentuating movement, plasticity, and instability”. In addition, these approaches do not adequately account for the operation of the face in/as close-up, as the affection-image *par excellence*, and the ways in which it is framed, deframed, and reframed, in the reality—or, indeed, the artificiality—of van der Keuken’s films.

To suggest a possible way to think about the “problematic” of the framing of the affection-image, I return to Deleuze’s concept of the time-image, or “crystal-image,” discussed earlier in connection with the actual/virtual distinction, in its relation to the movement-image.

Deleuze associates the movement-image, and its three types (action, perception, affection) primarily with prewar, classical (Hollywood) cinema, as it is realized (following a sensory- motor schema) as montage: a perception is followed by an action. The movement-image functions within a certain (chrono)logical order, according to a clear narrative procession, and with linear references and incisions. Movement-images refer to each other and to the whole of spatial configuration, making a clear distinction between past and present,

situation and response/action. Time-images, in contrast, which Deleuze relates to new forms of postwar cinema (e.g., Italian neo-realism and French *nouvelle vague*), do not proceed by any (chrono)logical order, or by the narratological representation of actions and reactions.

Breaking with the sensory-motor linkage of the movement-image, the time-image makes the distinction between the present and the past, between the actual and the virtual, indiscernible. Various levels of duration coincide in the time-image, which thus dissolves the homogeneous structure of the movement-image, and its linear spatiotemporal configuration, to open onto the imaginary. Most films contain both general types of images, even if one of them may overdetermine the film as whole. What distinguishes the movement-image from the time-image, is their respective spatial renderings of time. Yet, whatever the nature of the image, and irrespective of its specific effects, every image is constituted by an in-between, an interval: in the movement-image, the interval is occupied by affection, “surg[ing] in the centre of indetermination” (Deleuze 2009: 65), between perception and action. In the time-image, it is something that comes from outside of the narrational, linear set, a “coexistence of distinct durations, or of levels of duration” (Deleuze 2009: xi) that are juxtaposed between images to form a non-representable multiplicity, levels of duration that cannot be reconciled, and that render the distinction between the actual and the virtual indiscernible.

Van der Keuken’s *Face Value* presents us—or confronts us—with the disruptive force of the interval, with the two types of interval specific to these two types of images. In their primary function as affection-images, in-between the “two limit-facets, perceptive and active,” of the movement-image, the face/close-ups occupy the interval, “without filling it in or filling it up” (Deleuze 2009: 65). Defying traditional frameworks of intelligibility, and collapsing the Platonic dualisms of surface and depth, of appearances and reality, the face in/as close-up is present only as expression in itself. The multiplicity of faces in *Face Value* are hence not to be “read,” or, indeed, *understood*, but, as *images* in the broad sense suggested by Elsaesser (i.e. including words, sound, and movement), they demand to be approached, or experienced, as pure quality or affect, as the expression of potentiality without actualization.

In its function as a kind of zero degree of signification *per se*, it is the face/close-up, in the interval that is the affection-image, which “surges in the centre of indetermination,” the effacement of faces in nothingness, that possesses the quality of “firstness,” whose substance is what Deleuze calls the “compound affect of desire and astonishment” (2009: 65). This “compound affect,” equally evoked by the frog- and fish-faced footmen in *Alice*, and by van der Keuken’s face/close-ups in us, renders Rancière’s distinction between fiction and documentary, based on their respective treatment of the real, unhelpful for an appreciation of van der Keuken’s films. The faces populating the filmmaker’s un/framed images, in their ultimate *indifférence*—which, paradoxically, gives them their life and their singularity—are not representations of something else. While extracted from and organizing reality, they are images, presenting things as exclusively visible: “All they can do is show.” But what they can never show, what necessarily remains hidden, is the plane of immanence, what the filmmaker himself calls the Real, the “hidden principle, which makes visible what is seen and audible what is heard,” but which can only be “inferred, induced, concluded” from their in-betweens (Deleuze 2007: 149).

The other type of interval, the interval of the time-image, which occasionally converges with the interval constituted by the affection-image in *Face Value*, is equally crucial for the ways in which van der Keuken’s films at once warn us at taking what we see on the screen at face value, and force us to feel, rather than conceive, the *dévisage*, the “effacement of faces in nothingness” (Deleuze 2009: 101). Defying the conventions of linear, narrative storytelling, juxtaposing sequences that “disrupt the texture of the film with sudden discontinuities, distractions, and detours” (O’Rawe 2010: n.p.) and adopting a self-conscious method of framing, pacing, and editing the faces of his subjects in their unspeakable expressiveness, *Face Value* equally deploys “false continuity and irrational cuts” that define the interval of the time-image (Deleuze 2010: xi).

In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze states: “What is specific to the image, as soon as it is creative, is to make perceptible, to make visible, relationships of time which cannot be seen in the

represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present” (2010: xii). This is, I think, what is essential to van der Keuken’s idiosyncratic cinematic practice, as much as it explains, and validates, his rejection of the distinction between documentary and fiction film. Stripped of their three ordinary functions (i.e. individuation, socialization, communication) the face-images in *Face Value* show rather than tell us something about the possibility of meaning and being—or, indeed, about non-meaning and nonbeing. In their inherent ambivalence, their presentness as aesthetic events, as intervals, these face/close-ups do not so much document anything at all, but rather constitute a critique of that founding distinction between appearance and reality, between surface and depth, between animal-face and liveried body, between creation and understanding, between the real and the artificial: distinctions they at once inscribe and dissolve. As such, they simultaneously fix and transcend the limits of perceptible reality, and restore that which has been “portioned out” in the *partage de sensible* to the “infinite equivalence of becoming.” Opening onto the imaginative, van der Keuken enables the emergence of the “new,” and exposes us to what is “fresh, fleeting, and nevertheless eternal,” and can only do so in the event of our viewing experience, in the process of “de-realization” that proves the image’s reality—or, indeed, its artificiality.

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