The Postmortem Image: Peter Greenaway’s Documentary Death in the Seine and Writing the History of a Corpse

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Abstract

This paper explores Peter Greenaway’s film, Death in the Seine, as a relationship between the act of documentation, the document in-itself, and the implicit conflict between reality, memories, and records. The film documents events during post-revolution France through the observations by two mortuary attendants named Bouille and Daude whose notes list those who drowned in the Seine. The facts that comprise the film come from the work of the historian Richard Cobb who painstakingly researched the contents of the eighteenth century French mortuary log. Death in the Seine relies on actual facts, but simultaneously questions the viability of their truth-claims. The truth-claims reflect an emerging conflict between history and the fragile objective technologies used to document and organize events. I demonstrate how the film directly challenges truth-claims through the medium of remembering-writing, filming, and recollection— and to understand their implications I will examine them through the lens of Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Lacan, and Gilles Deleuze. I will situate what I call the ‘post-mortem image’ (the image of the immediate dead) within the broader context of the social-symbolic network of documentation.

Give me a body then’, this is the formula of philosophical reversal. The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life

(Deleuze 1989a: 182).

Peter Greenaway’s film, Death in the Seine, presents the relationship between the act of documentation, the document in-itself, and the implicit conflict between reality, memories, and records. The film is set in post-revolution France explores these relationships through the observations by two mortuary attendants named Bouille and Daude using their notes from their log of those who drowned in the Seine. The facts that comprise the film come from the work of the historian Richard Cobb who painstakingly researched the contents of an eighteenth century French mortuary log. In this sense, Death in the Seine is a documentary1 where Greenaway bridges the line between the actual recorded facts from the 1790s and their fictionalized (re)presentation in the present, asking ‘how does it matter if a documentary

1. Although Greenaway is not renowned for his documentary work he is certainly not a novice. In 1983, he directed four documentaries collected under the title of American Composers. Each film explored the work of Robert Ashley, John Cage, Philip Glass, and Meredith Monk.
film is actual or fictionalized’ (Eitzen 1995: 81)? Death in the Seine relies on actual facts, but simultaneously questions the viability of their truth-claims. The truth-claims reflect an emerging conflict between history and the fragile objective technologies used to document and organize events. Greenaway engages three crucial aspects shared by many documentary films, which are certainty of truth, the validity of the artifice, and the role of subjugation. Although a documentary is assumed to be about the truth, Eitzen explains that any,

every representation of reality is no more than a fiction in the sense that it is an artificial construct, a highly contrived and selective view of the world, produced for some purpose and therefore unavoidably reflecting a given subjectivity or point of view.

(Eitzen 1995: 82)

Eitzen is critical of the meta-position that documentary film typically occupies which is their sovereignty over truth. Carl Plantinga asserts, contrary to Eitzen, that nonfiction films, such as documentaries, are a particular kind of film that can employ propositions or facts that one assumes to be true. Plantinga believes in a distinction between a document making truth claims (say a mortuary record), and a film (that dramatizes the events behind the record) because either can be analyzed as a document (Plantinga 1996: 94–95). In short, Eitzen asserts that documentaries afford the viewer a vehicle to find personal significance and entertainment while Plantinga claims that most documentaries are asserted truth statements (Eitzen 1996: 97). Eitzen and Plantinga’s disagreement can be characterized as a conflict between encountering the ‘thing’ as represented and understanding ‘the thing’ in its vulgar reality. The ‘thing itself’ and our relationship to it appears to structure both the documentary form and in Death in the Seine the viewer’s relationship to reality through their encounter with the image of a corpse and the image’s (re)inscription back into the social network. As a documentary the film directly challenges truth claims through the medium of remembering–writing, filming, and recollection—and to understand their implications I will examine it through the lens of Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Lacan, and Gilles Deleuze. I will situate what I call the ‘post-mortem image’ (the image of the immediate dead) within the broader context of the social-symbolic network through film. In an interview Greenaway explains that Death in the Seine is based on the actual events lurking behind the list of the dead that were recorded in mortuary logs in Paris, France. The film represents and explains the contents; the victims who drowned. Greenaway recalls how he stumbled on this project when he came,

across Richard Cobb’s book Death in Paris. He’d discovered a mortuary archive in the Bibliothèque Nationale supplied by two morgue assistants Bouille and Daude who, in the years just after the French Revolution had very carefully if naively written up accounts of corpses they’d been responsible for between 1790 and 1801. Years that would include the Terror, the Directoire, and the Consulate.

(Woods 1996: 255–6)
Richard Cobb’s book is an historical analysis of the log showing the social patterns, predominant groups who died, and the interrelationships of clothing and objects to French society. Cobb’s remarkable observations reveal a rich, unique, and tragic social order from the static lines documenting the dead. Greenaway identifies in Cobb’s work an antagonism between the individuality of the dead and two real-life morgue attendants named Bouille and Daude who struggle to merge the corpses back into the public order.

In *Death in the Seine* an entry from the mortuary log is comprised of two types of shots. The first shot is a short narrative sequence consisting of medium shots showing Bouille and Daude removing a body from the river, cleaning the corpse, or interacting with the witnesses who come to claim the body. This sequence is fairly straightforward, with the exception of the line drawings and writing that are mapped over the film frames [see figure 1]. The second shot is an overhead tracking shot that looks down at a nude corpse laying on the mortuary table [see figure 2]. This shot is rather unique and disconcerting. I am calling the first shot the *artifice* sequence (or *die Sache*) as it depends on classical film techniques, such as cutting to continuity and parallel editing. These film-vignettes are intended to portray the actual conditions of the victim’s death and the mortuary attendant’s reactions. I am calling this second shot the *residue* (the *das Ding*) or document because the frame is filled with the nude corpse as the camera moves from the feet to the head that exposes the excess of the human body that cannot be accounted for in words. A voice-over accompanies the tracking-shot and describes the mortuary attendant’s notes and speculates on possible reasons why this person drowned. In short, *Death in the Seine* is a combination of disparate images, writing, and a dissonant sound track.
that expose the gap between the heterogeneous-corpse (*das Ding*) and its image the homogeneous-subject (*die Sache*). The film, as documentary, is ‘aware of its own artifice’ and ‘remains sensitive to the flow between fact and fiction’ (Minh-ha 1993: 99).

The post-mortem image purports an affectation similar to the two types of a thing that Slavoj Žižek explores in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*; the *das Ding* and the *die Sache*. According to Žižek, Lacan expanded upon Freud’s original explanation of the terms *das Ding* and *die Sache* in *The Ethic of Psychoanalysis*. For Lacan, *Die Sache* is the representation of the thing within the symbolic, as the ‘product of industry and of human action [...] always on the surface, always within the range of an explanation’ (Lacan 1986: 45). *Das Ding*, on the other hand, is the thing in the Real, that which is beyond all meaning: ‘the Thing is characterized by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine’ (Lacan 1986: 125). In *Death in the Seine* the corpse’s image penetrates the cohesive totality of the symbolic world or, in Hegelian terms, life unfolding toward absolute spirit, with a violent unimaginable thing. Žižek explains the, symbolic order is striving for a homeostatic balance, but there is in its kernel, at its very core, some strange, traumatic element which cannot be symbolized, [or] integrated into the symbolic order.

(Žižek 1989: 132)

The traumatic element is the ‘Thing’ or *das Ding*, which can be anything that cannot be brought into the linguistic structure (language) that determines reality. A perfect example is Lacan’s theory of *between two deaths*. The first death is the actual event of death within the symbolic order, here someone dies. The second death is the ‘radical annihilation of the symbolic
texture through which the so-called reality is constituted’ (Žižek 1989: 132). For example, in Death in the Seine when a corpse is pulled from the river it receives its true meaning après coup. While the body is floating in the river its particular disturbing presence is just that, a dead body. But as a corpse it becomes a severe, vulgar, and disgusting thing that is severed from the symbolic world of meaning. Initially it is unexplainable. But rather quickly it is articulated back into the social-symbolic network by description: we confer on the corpse a ‘role’ as a subject that is once again similar to ourselves–having a purpose, not being limited by contingent and random acts, and belonging to a knowable and enduring reality.

Bouille and Daude’s log is a catalog of a corpse’s hair color, sex, approximate age, location and types of wounds, along with any clothing removed from the body. And wherever possible a description of the contents of the pockets is provided. Additional information provided by witnesses, such as name, occupation, address, and the time and place last seen alive is added to the entry. Their meticulous notes force us to ask ourselves if it is ‘possible to build an identity and speculate about one’s life’ (Greenaway 1988)? The difficulty posed by this question lies in the gap between the artifice sequence and the residue sequence, which is the stratifying process of socialization that creates identity. In this sense the symbolic is not be allowed to separate from the body, thus the vulgar materiality of flesh and decay is evident by the corpse’s inability to speak for itself. It is incumbent upon Bouille and Daude to speak for the corpse and establish its identity.

According to Bouille and Daude the dead cannot see us. The surplus-enjoyment that death offers those viewing the dead is the pleasure of seeing without being seen. The image of the dead has the pretense of having symbolic value, but ironically its only meaning is the disguise that hides the incomprehensibility of reality itself. The representation of the dead or of the death-event in most films is typically the result of a cause and its effect or affectations, such as sorrow, pity, or displeasure. But in addition to the ‘picture’ of the dead there is something uncanny about the percept, in particular, the moment immediately after death occurs. It is not the positive confirmation of the ‘state of things’ that is disturbing, but rather how the death percept presents, momentarily, the corpse as a sign of the contingent determinations of life. It is the apperception of life in all of its finitude and meaninglessness. In response to this insidious image we subjugate the corpse that is producing the image to a singular symbolic mediation to reestablish its symbolic meaning. We reconstitute the corpse in ‘the act [of] defining the very emergence of man, [which] is the funeral ritual’ (Žižek 1989: 218). The funeral ritual takes the body and (re)places it into the atemporal social-symbolic network. In other words, according to Kant, an apperception is first compared to the transcendental categories where it is matched by our reason to its ‘proper’ name and then re-presented as a determinate representation. This excess (before being subsumed by reasons) momentarily resists symbolization. But what is the cause of our blindness to this resistance? On the one hand, it is the shock caused by the terrifying experience of the inert meaningless thing (the dead) that splits the image in two. On the other hand, it is a sign of the indeterminate flux of pure subjectivity (what Lacan called the Real and Deleuze calls the plane of immanence, or the Body without Organs) that is indescribable. The indeterminate flux
lingers beneath the social-symbolic network and is only revealed by the failure of the Lacanian big Other—the symbolic. This image has no signified. It is an intolerable notion, what Žižek describes as ‘the shock of the totally contingent encounter of the Real,’ that manifests the separation of the once inseparable—the cohesive totality of the social guaranteed by the symbolic and the raw, animalistic corporeality. On one side is the actual image (our desire) of the dead safely contained within the symbolic, while the other is the virtual indeterminate thing in-itself calling attention to the dissimulation of reality. We might then ask, is there ‘no such thing as documentary’ (Minh-ha 1993: 90)?

Death as a Sign of Reality

Death in the Seine begins with the narrator claiming the film ‘is a homage to Hippolyte Bayard’s self-portrait as a drowned man’ [see figure 3]. Bayard was a founding member and secretary of the Société Française de Photographie and was ‘one of the most sophisticated and adventurous of photography’s earlier practitioners’ (Woods 1996: 157). Bayard claimed that he was never given adequate credit as the inventor of photography. His claim is supported by evidence from his early notebooks, that clearly show a ‘unique process of making camera-induced direct positives (l’effet positif)’ that predated Daguerre’s work (Woods 1996: 157). Although Bayard was awarded a small sum of money for new equipment, it was a small acknowledgement in comparison to the honors and awards bestowed upon Daguerre and Talbot (Woods 1996: 158). In response to the official recognition of Daguerre as the inventor of photography and after two unsuccessful appeals to the government, Bayard produced three photographs titled, Le Noié (Self-portrait as a drowned man) in 1840. These three portraits are almost identical, each showing a partially nude Bayard.
propped up in a chair with his eyes closed. The most dramatic aspect of all three photographs is the dark stain that covers his face and hands giving the impression that they are decaying. On the back of this image Bayard dramatically protests:

>The corpse which you see here is that of M. Bayard, inventor of the process that you have seen, or the marvelous results of which you are soon going to see. To my knowledge, this ingenious and indefatigable researcher has been working for about three years to perfect his invention.

...The government, having given too much to M. Daguerre, said it could do nothing for M. Bayard, and the unhappy man drowned himself. Oh the fickleness of human affairs! Ladies and Gentleman, you'd better pass along for fear of offending your sense of smell, for as you can see, the face and hands of the gentleman are beginning to decay. H.B. 19 October 1840.

(Woods 1996: 167–71)

Bayard’s photographic protest relies on the gap opened between the artifice (which is a man who killed himself to protest an injustice and the residue) and the thing in-itself (which is H.B.’s corpse). Geoffrey Batchen points out that Bayard is asking that we see ‘him as someone who does not see,’ thus Bayard ‘becomes an object - a corpse / sculpture / painting / still life - in order to become a subject worthy of our (and the state’s) attention and recognition’ (Woods 1996: 172). Bayard’s image is both a knowable image of a troubled man and the unknowable decay that asks one to ‘pass along for fear of offending your sense of smell.’ This early photograph is a crude precursor to the post-mortem image and illuminates the conflicts endemic to documentary films, which is the struggle between das Ding and die Sache. It is only because we know the truth, that Bayard is not dead, that we can today interpret his act as ironic remonstration. Žižek pinpoints the problem accurately, ‘the act of concealing deceives us precisely by pretending to conceal something (Žižek 1989: 196). Three things can be extrapolated from Bayard’s protest. All of which ground Greenaway’s film. The first is a real person imitating a corpse, second, a narrative that attempts to re-inscribes the corpse into the symbolic, and finally the uncanny thing or das Ding-the meaninglessness of death.

The Relationship between Reality and Image

In Cinema 2, The Time-Image, and in Cinema 1, The Movement-Image, Gilles Deleuze explains the danger and potential endemic to the stratifying forces acting on one’s body and its manifestation in film. He explains that the typical concept of movement (as the expression of cause and effect) appears to us on film because of the ‘persistence of memory.’ This is a phenomenon that welds distinct images into a seamless linear progression unfolding over time that we misrecognize as real movement. This is a sign that, Deleuze calls, the ‘movement-image.’ Movement is evident in film, because, Deleuze claims, unlike dance which requires a body or painting that requires a mind (to imagine movement), is unique and functions as an independent technological process (Deleuze 1989b: 156–62). Thus, movement appears independent of thought and creates an ‘automatic-movement [that] gives rise to spiritual automation’ or thinking without
thought (Deleuze 1989b: 157). This kind of a thought process is not derived from ‘deducing thoughts from each other’ (like philosophy) but instead obtains thoughts from a ‘circuit … [of] shared power’ that causes one to assume the thoughts of the other as if they were one’s own (Deleuze 1989b: 157). Bayard’s photo of a drowned man works under this very principle, which is to connect his photographic death to its cause, which is drowning. But there is also another sign that Deleuze calls the ‘time-image.’ Although Deleuze does not privilege one image over the other he does believe that the movement-image has intrinsic qualities, specifically its sensory-motor connection that induces ‘subjective and collective automation’ that the time-image evades (Deleuze 1989b: 157).

The sensory-motor schema of the movement-image is dangerous because it exploits our desire to construct logical narratives to explain actions. Hence, this process has at its core a method which unscrupulous religious, political, or philosophical forces employed to organize individuals (Deleuze 1989b: 12–56). This type of filmmaking dominates mainstream cinema today in diverse films, such as *Thin Blue Line, Brokeback Mountain,* and *Good night and Good Luck.* Each of these films creates suspense, interest, and overwhelming agreement by securing an outcome of good over evil or finding one’s true love as a result of logical steps. Each of these films replicates a single dominant social position of proper actions and reactions that are repeated to make correct rules appear transparent to one’s personality.

The movement-image, according to Deleuze, replicates the totality that we imagine is our social praxis in narrative and internal monologue form. The movement-image, along with the classic filmmaking techniques of cutting to continuity, parallel editing, and a three-part narrative structure are the basis of the *artifice* sequence. However, according to Deleuze, the movement-image has given way to the time-image because we have encountered situations to which one can no longer react, of environments with which there are now only chance relations, of empty space or disconnected any space wherever replacing qualified extended space.

(Deleuze 1989b: 273)

The time-image unlinks or breaks the sensory-motor link to become a free-floating, or rather, negotiable expression of social events. Deleuze asserts that the time-image works because a film perpetually reorganizes reality where a ‘new image can arise from any point [within] the preceding image,’ while simultaneously the internal monologue (that which makes sense) is removed and replaced by ‘free indirect discourse’ (Deleuze 1989b: 183–265). This is accomplished by depth of field, camera movement, and the comparison of disjunctive spaces created by images between irrational cuts and the lack of action (Deleuze 1989b: 176–80).

**Two Methods of Documenting Reality**

In *Death in the Seine* Greenaway uses 23 corpses (out of the 319 cases listed in the mortuary log) as representative of the various types of people encountered by Bouille and Daude. Greenaway uses the repetitive nature of drowning, recovery, and documentation to illustrate how the *artifice*...
sequence is synonymous with the mechanics documenting bodies. The artifice sequence situates the characters and events into a constructed and scripted space. This space is congested with elements of classical architecture, tableware, and portraits to evoke the presence of authority. It begins with a deafening explosion-like sound over water-like images. The film quickly cuts to Bouille and Daude who wade into the shallow water to retrieve a corpse. In mid-action, the shot cuts to the interior of the morgue that appears like stage-set [see figure 4]. In these scenes we see Bouille and Daude interacting with the corpse that is now residing prominently on a table. Their actions oscillate between being serious and comical. The viewer is left to conclude that,

the suicides must also be accorded the place d’honneur for the simple, but convincing, administrative reason that they formed the principal client(s) of the two bizarrely named concierges of the Basse-Geô de la Seine, Daude (or Baude) and Bouille. [...] a duo in fact that might have been better employed in some comic rôle à deux on stage.

(Cobb 1978: 16)

The real outcomes of their rôle à deux are their skills of closely-reading or interpreting the dead. They become specialists in the mundane signs of ‘seams and laundry-marks, darns, leather patches, moles, warts’ and other ‘marks’ of humanity (Cobb 1978: 16). The narrator iterates the list of the corpse’s clothes and possessions meticulously recorded by Bouille and Daude. Greenaway disrupts the realistic sequence by inserting images of each item into the frame. By shifting our focus from the action to objects posits the idea that they offer some indicator of the person’s identity. Bouille
and Daude were adamant in providing ‘detailed information on the subject of clothing’ because clothing in the ‘case of the drowned, would generally offer the only clue to identification’ by initials, insignias, or laundry marks (Cobb 1978: 21). Yet the combination of realistic action with insets of static objects leads one to doubt that Bouille and Daude’s observations could really account for one’s real identity.

During the *artifice* sequence we see Daude and Bouille entertain witnesses who come to the morgue to be interrogated or to claim the body. Authority becomes the paramount aspect that is mapped onto the corpse, as if the social-symbolic structure was transferred from the eye-witness who claims the body. In a medium shot the witnesses assemble behind the body that is laid out on a table. Many times Daude and Bouille struggle to maintain order. This is important because it reinforces that authority does not reside in the agents of the law. During this shot the narrator explains the relationship noted by Daude and Bouille between the corpse and the witness. Sometimes a witness is a relative who has come in response to a loved one’s absence. In other cases they may have been the last person to see the victim alive, or perhaps they actually saw them fall into the river. In all cases the narrator states each witness’s occupation and relation to the corpse. Sometimes a witness is a relative who has come in response to a loved one’s absence. In other cases they may have been the last person to see the victim alive, or perhaps they actually saw them fall into the river. In all cases the narrator states each witness’s occupation and relation to the corpse. Simultaneously, a close-up image of their faces is inserted into the main frame. They gaze directly into camera which signifies both their ideological importance and their credibility as warranted by law. Greenaway changes the color of these insets and slowly adjusts the camera’s focus to return the topic to the social structure of urban life as we,

...turn our attention beyond the corpses to those who come to vouch for them, to answer for them, comparants and répondants, those too who hint at the existence of a closely observed society.

(Cobb 1978: 39)

The problem of a closely observed society is addressed by the narrator who sarcastically incriminates the witness’s testimony. For example, in procès-verbal 215, en du Nivôse an VII (11 June 1799), the body of Jeanne Geneviéve Valitor is pulled from the river [figure 5]. The narrator states that she died on Christmas day. He explains that the Revolutionary calendar did not recognize Christmas because Christianity was legally ‘out of favor’ and was replaced by ‘more abstract faiths like liberty, equality, and fraternity.’ Daude and Bouille record that Jeanne was a spinster of 35 years old and was dressed suitably for January. In her pockets were two keys, a knife and two religious objects (a bronze cross and an emblem of the Holy Spirit) [figure 6]. After fifteen days three witnesses finally come to identify Jeanne: her uncle (described as a man of means) and two checkerboard makers, one of whom was a woman. Having a women come to claim the body, the narrator says, is ‘strange but even more strange was the fact that she signed the mortuary papers.’ When the female witness’s inset appears we see a nervous and sad woman, while the narrator wonders if Jeanne’s accident on Christmas day was a suicide protesting the Republic’s new social order [figure 7]. Asking if ‘the words liberty, equality, and fraternity include sisterly love, too’ (Greenaway 1988)? Interestingly, Daude and Bouillé’s documentation captures the facts concerning Jeanne, but they
also express the undocumented possibility that she was unable to fulfill her true desire. Jeanne, like many others, was unable to conform to the dominant social typology or role mandated, thus her disenfranchisement from society or misidentification takes on the dimension of suicide.

The most daring part of *Death in the Seine* is the residue sequence which interrupts the artifice sequence. The scene begins with a tight shot of the corpse’s feet and the camera slowly scans over the nude dead body moving toward the head. The camera shows the body bathed in an eerie water-reflected light filling the entire frame [see figure 8]. The standard interpretation of this shot is that the corpse in all of its vulgarity is re-assimilated into the symbolic by Daude and Bouille’s speculations. But this assumption is fallacious because the ‘notes’ are unable to contain, let alone describe, the unmediated decaying flesh. The narrative is arrested while the camera scans the body. The most striking aspect of the residue sequence occurs when one detects movement in the corpse’s eyes or hands. The corporeality is excessive when we see an eye flutter or a hand flinch.

After the first perception of movement by a corpse a viewer anticipates its reoccurrence, knowing full well that it ruins the documentary illusion structuring the film. This action inserts the primary dilemma of documentary filmmaking, which is the paradox of reality versus representation.
where the ‘technically flawed depiction of purported reality no longer suffices as visual guarantee of authenticity’ (Renov 1993: 23). However, undermining the basic premise of the documentary is the actualization of the tenants of the time-image which occurs when the, ‘sensory-motor break makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable
in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought’ (Deleuze 1989b: 169).

In one bizarre moment a female corpse actually sits up during the night to take a drink from a nearby cup. Not only does this break the film’s ability to cohere with reality, but it also disrupts its temporality by making the subject of the film about us. Suddenly, this film is about now, the present. Greenaway illuminates the fact that the bodies constitute, in unmarked form, the problem of our relationship to documentation. This is the full realization of life at the moment of death, whereby we see the temporality of life masquerading as the atemporality of culture.

The shot is a time-image that disconnects it from the multiple congruent images that comprise the narrative sequences to open a gap between the social expectations of the corpse and reality. Greenaway asserts that the human body is a malleable mass and a beautiful form but the viewer encounters it with a ‘disinterested aesthetic pleasure, [or] as an object of sexual desire’ (Žižek 2005: 186–87) which makes it difficult to fully accept the world of Bouille and Daude’s symbolic interpretations. Do we not recall Bayard’s photograph of imitating the dead? At this moment we realize that...
this is now, real time, and that the eyes of the corpse are the eyes of an actor who is moving, which shows the artifice to be an illusion.

We Must Ask How and not Who: The Alternative to Documenting

The dead cannot speak for themselves and it remains unclear how we move from their silence as das Ding to the voice of die Sache. In other words in what manner are they (or we) organized? Deleuze and Guattari assert that it is better to ask how rather than who we are. Asking how exposes the connections we make to partial or not fully considered things based on one’s focused attention or desire. These connections are sequential and respond to the forces and flows acting upon us, such as the inability to love whomever we choose, poverty, or radical changes instigated by the French Revolution. Deleuze and Guattari use the word ‘machines’ to literally foreground the non-reasoning aspects (these are passive rather than active assertions). As desiring-machines we are central to a productive process that produces our subjectivity and individuality rather than being matched to a preexisting social determination.

Deleuze and Guattari dismiss the belief in free subjectivity as an illusion or an effect. Subjectivity is the by-product of what they call desiring-machines, and the passive processes that make connections to material needs and then to the (re)production of their original attainment as desire (by repetition). For example, the wind blows sand around; a breast touches a mouth; a hand moves a pen, or someone drowns. These examples describe stimuli that produce a unique result. However, these responses are only partially formed while expressing a myriad of fully developed potentialities. A subject, as a fully formed being, only appears when power, which Deleuze and Guattari define as consciously domesticated force, is applied for a particular purpose. This entire process is divided into three distinct syntheses they call the connective synthesis, the disjunctive synthesis, and the conjunctive synthesis. Deleuze and Guattari say subjectivity appears as ‘a mere residuum alongside the desiring-machines,’ after meaning and signs have become written (or rather encoded) upon one’s body (Deleuze & Guattari 1977: 17–18). Is this not a description of documentary films?

The connective synthesis is the process of instinct and drive (in a Freudian sense) that invests objects with value or erotic charge. At this stage there are no identification just anonymous connections. For Deleuze and Guattari these connections, which are multiple, heterogeneous, and perpetual, are the expressions of the forces acting on a body. The disjunctive synthesis records those connections that produce pleasure, memory, and signs within the psyche. This process is also anti-production because it evades power that might control it. These processes make,

an organism; but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized this way. From not having some other sort of organization, or no organization at all. ‘An incomprehensible, absolutely rigid stasis’ in the very midst of process, as a third stage ... The automata stop dead and set free the unorganized mass they once served to articulate.

(Deleuze, et al. 1977: 8)
The interruption or anti-production is crucial because it stops the process for one reason, so that we can make new connections. The repetition of starting and stopping various connections is the distinction between instinct and the human notion of temporality and memory. In other words, the connections are recorded on (or recalled from) what, Deleuze and Guattari call the 'body without organs' (Deleuze, et al., 1977, p. 9). The recording process makes the purely machine-process into signs that are experienced within time. As signs the chain of connective and disjunctive synthesis are a never-ending process of 'and … and …'. This leads into the **conjunctive synthesis** of consumption-consummation. As desiring-machines we experience things that are repeated and remembered which establishes a subject. The subject begins to take shape as a result of previous desires and interruptions that consume the previous set of remembered attributes. This process of identification (of becoming finite) forms the subject, which are ‘the first things to be distributed on the body without organs are races, cultures and their gods’ (Deleuze, et al. 1977: 85). An individual ‘consumes and consummates each of the states through which it passes, and is born of each of them new’ (Deleuze, et al. 1977: 41). Is there not a better explanation of Greenaway’s film *Death in the Seine* is the presentation of the process of the coded (life), the decoding (death) and the re-coding (postmortem documentation) that occurs in response to life and death.

The narrator explains that ‘not all of the people drowning in the river do so by accident’, and in procès-verbal 224 en du Prairial an VI (11 Juillet 1799), he says, ‘being naked does not always mean a voluntary relationship with it [the water]’ (Greenaway 1988). The majority of victims taken from the river were either suicides or murders. Although each respond to the water in similar ways (connective synthesis), they drown for radically different reasons (disjunctive synthesis). This leads to an important conclusion, which is that each process has different legal ramifications (conjunctive synthesis). One reason blames the victim while other reasons exonerate them. Ironically, the result, the record of their death is both the same and different. Typically we are only used to seeing the similarities. In *Death in the Seine* death is the same only in ‘a society in which every gesture has its assigned place, in which every invitation has its significance’ (Cobb 1978: 41). But in reality death is pure difference itself. A fact that can only be seen through death when a person experiences the uncanny thing is the power to reorganize or rewrite one’s own life.

Burdened as it is, subjectivity is a crisis of human representation. Deleuze and Guattari warn us that believing in a human essence assumes the hidden dangers of an already dominant oppressor (society). This crisis of identity presented in *Death in the Seine* has a correlation to the schism between universal and particular truth. The cultural inconsistencies are symptoms of the psychological, political, and philosophical agendas that create transparent stereotypes of good citizens. The danger comes when the stratifying social forces begin to exist as a means to an end because there is, no self-sufficient agency that can qualify as intentional. There are varying degrees of choice at successive threshold states. The ‘will’ to change or stay the same is not an act of determination on the part of a unified subject in the
simple response to self-reflection or internal impulse. It is a state of self-
organized indeterminacy in response to complex causal constraints. It
constitutes a real degree of freedom, but the choice belongs to the overall
dissipative system with its plurality of selves, and not to the person; it is
objectivity co-caused at the crossroads of chance and determinacy. It is an
objective illusion of molar person to perceive the physical reality of free-action
as a metaphysical freedom or ‘human right’ exercised by a unified, self-
directing, full causal agent.

(Massumi 1999: 81)

In other words, one must always see the distinction between the produc-
tive relationships of just being in the world and the limitations of social
effects. We must understand that, although they are related, they are not
essential. One must ask what is the minimal moral and legal form of
being? Greenaway resists a static form of social order. In the final shot of
the film the camera slowly pans across the actor’s feet while the narrator
asks, ‘perhaps theses bodies [actors imitating the dead] might have relatives
still living in Paris today.’ Fearfully, he reminds us that six generations
have passed since the Reign of Terror and it only takes three generations to
forget a line of kinship, asking, ‘who will remember these people who,
while attempting to remain still, try to deny their bodies the semblance
of life to impersonate the dead’ (Greenaway 1988)? The answer is that by
denyng our bodies, the semblance of life, we engage the dis Sache, which is
to imagine ourselves independent of the social-symbolic order; however, to
impersonate the dead is to imagine ourselves as the das Ding, the uncanny
thing in the Real. In other words, try to imagine that which is impossible
for us to imagine, which is to become something new. Thus, it is not who,
but how will you be remembered? The point of Death in the Seine is to fore-
ground the social-political processes that form us. The postmortem image
exposes these by showing the materiality, corporeality, and temporality
demic to the corpse’s inability to speak for itself which is its lack of
movement and its expression of das Ding. The paramount exegesis is that
you cannot be reduced to the essence of the words that describe you,
words told by someone else speculating on the contents of your pockets,
the clothes on your back, and the marks on your body.

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