Chapter 4A of Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, 1998, includes a specific episode entitled “Introduction à la méthode d’Alfred Hitchcock”. There are three reasons for examining this sequence closely. First, it sounds like a manifesto. It at once enunciates and illustrates an idea concerning the nature of the cinematographic image which is not only the idea of a specific—and somehow maverick—author but sums up what I would call the standard avant-gardist view of the artistic nature of cinema. Second, the credit for the demonstration is granted to a director, Alfred Hitchcock, who is highly emblematic. But what does he emblematise exactly? In this sequence he epitomises the power of cinematographic form as a lost power. This sequence, in fact, is a kind of obituary that appears to be overseen by the funeral mask of the master. In Godard’s view, this obituary is a mourning song dedicated to cinema as well, but it is also a descent into Hell, a descent into that realm of pure images from which cinema draws its power. In Deleuze’s *Movement-Image* Hitchcock is simply emblematic, but he epitomises not so much the power of cinema as the breaking point between the two regimes of cinematographic image: the “movement-image” and the “time-image”. That is to say, he epitomises both the perfection of the first regime and its limit, the point at which the “sensori-motor scheme” is struck by paralysis. Hitchcockian practice seems capable of epitomising at once the lost power of cinema now lying in its grave (Godard’s thesis) and the power of an old cinema that for decades has been substituted for a new one (Deleuze). How and why can Hitchcock’s cinematographic practice sustain both statements, and what is the relation of that practice to an essence of the cinematographic image?

There is a third reason to focus on this short sequence. In the background, partly covered over by Godard’s voice, we hear Hitchcock’s voice, and what
he says suggests that he may not be in agreement with the ideas of cinema and modernity preferred by Godard and Deleuze. I am not interested in establishing who is right or who is wrong here. Rather, I wish to enter this debate to question further what we call the “image” in general and the “cinematographic image” in particular.

Let us start with Godard’s statements in this sequence. He appears to make a very simple point: we never remember the plots of Hitchcock’s films, for example, the reason why the American government hires Ingrid Bergman in Notorious or Joel McCrea in Foreign Correspondent, or why Joan Fontaine leans from a cliff in Suspicion, or why Janet Leigh stops at Bates Motel in Psycho. What we remember are merely images. More precisely, we remember shots focusing on some key objects: a shattering bottle of wine in Notorious, a glass of milk in Suspicion, the hand of Robert Walker trying to catch a key through the iron grate in Strangers on a Train, Marnie’s bag, the hairbrush that Vera Miles brandishes against Henry Fonda in The Wrong Man, etc.. This privileging of visual presence over narration seems in line with the avant-gardist tradition. It echoes the statements already made in the 1920s by film pioneers such as Jean Epstein: “There are no stories. There never have been stories. There are only situations that have neither head nor tail; without beginning, middle or end, no right side or wrong side; they can be looked at from all directions; right becomes left; without limit in the past or the future they are the present.” This also reminds us of the opposition made by Robert Bresson in Notes sur le cinématographe between true cinematographic art based on fragmentation, and the old theatre-like tradition of narrative and expressive cinema. But the avant-gardist tradition seems to be taken up again here as a swan’s song, a testimony to what cinema truly was or would have been if it had not been
defeated by its enemy, the power of the text and narration which embody the deadly power of Commerce and Industry. Godard’s introduction to Hitchcock’s method in Histoire(s) also includes statements Godard made earlier in which he equated Hitchcock’s death with the triumph of the Text, or Death, over the Image, Life.²

In order to substantiate his statement, Godard uses an apparently simple device. He divorces some of Hitchcock’s images from their narrative embedding: the glass of milk, the shattering bottle of Pommard, the grate, the wings of the mill in Foreign Correspondent, the hairbrush in The Wrong Man.... Isolating them, he also makes new visual connections between them. For instance, the musical stave of The Man Who Knew Too Much loses its function of heralding the shooting and becomes instead merely a graphic grid paralleled thus with another grid—the grate through which Bruno seeks the lighter that he intends to use as a clue against Guy in Strangers on a Train. Dismissing the textual and commercial rationality of the plot, the power of cinema would lie in the power of these images, akin to that of Cézanne’s apples or Renoir’s flowers.

A blunt response to such a mighty statement might be that the opposition is pure sophistry. If the bottle of Pommard impresses us, it is because it has nothing to do with its plastic qualities but entirely with the logic of the plot. We are interested in the bottle precisely because it is filled with uranium. We are frightened by its collapse because Ingrid Bergman’s husband, a Nazi spy (Claude Rains), is going down to the cellar to find champagne and soon will hear the noise, then notice that his wife stole the key from his bunch. In the same way, the glass of milk holds our attention because we know that Cary Grant needs to kill his wife in order to obtain her life insurance.

Godard opposes the old representational power of the text to the new supremacy of the image. But the plain opposition between text and image, representation and presence, might be a little too simplistic. What opposes the modern aesthetic regime of art to the regime of representation is, in fact, the way in which the two elements are linked together. Indeed, what characterises representational logic is a precise function of the images, an “expressive” function, subordinated to the causal rationality of the plot. In representational logic, the images are aimed at a surplus of visibility and expressivity. They must present visible effects inviting us to understand their causes and set in motion specific affects, thereby enhancing the perception of the cause-effect connection. Godard’s statement is that cinematic images gain their independence from that expressive function. They become pure, autonomous blocks of sensibility that enter autonomously into a new connection, pushing to the background the narrative concatenation of events that constitute the “story”.

Is this actually the case, though? By asking this question, I am not concerned whether Godard is right or wrong about Hitchcock’s images. It is crucial instead to analyse fully the confrontation in order to understand a little better the exact nature of the cinematographic image. Let us look from this point of view at the sequence in Suspicion from which Godard extracted the glass of milk which he then reinserted between the torn wings of the mill in Foreign Correspondent and the key that Marnie’s foot pushes into another grate. If Godard’s fragment is juxtaposed with the whole Hitchcockian sequence, one is tempted to answer that the glass of milk functions as a perfect representational image. It merely puts under our eyes the object of Joan Fontaine’s fear, who knows about both the interest of her husband in poison and his interest in her insurance policy. The glass of milk embodies her fear insofar as it embodies the possible object of Cary Grant’s calculations; by materialising her fear it also enforces ours. Supporting an affect, the image thus consolidates the causal rationality of the plot. This has nothing to do, it
seems, with the mere pictorial power of a white square on a white or black square or even of Cézanne’s apples or Renoir’s flowers. Hitchcock boasts of never having looked through a camera lens. The shot, he says, is in his mind and its effect must be in the mind of the viewer. This seems to be directly in keeping with the Aristotelian tradition whereby the plot is the primary concern and the “opsis” the last one. And in this very episode, Hitchcock seems to provide some evidence against Godard. Indeed, the voice of Alfred Hitchcock itself appears to deny that this is “his” method. Godard isolates the autonomous power of the grate, the bottle, the glass of milk, the key, and so on; he emphasises their nature as pure sensory blocks according to the tradition first outlined in the 1920s by pioneers like Jean Epstein, taken up again in the 1950s by artists or critics such as Robert Bresson and André Bazin, before being theoretically reformulated by Deleuze in the 1980s. Hitchcock, meanwhile, tells us that nothing is autonomous, that the visual elements are above all triggers that provoke identification, expectation, fear, etc.. Moreover, he tells us that all this goes so quickly that the viewer does not even notice the artifice of the montage through which he or she is propelled in motion.

So Hitchcock would seem to bolster the commonsensical idea that his images are in keeping with the tradition of representation, and that they have nothing to do with those icons Godard makes of them. However, this is not the whole story. Evidently, there is something else at work, for in spite of Hitchcock’s insistence on the production of narrative pathos, his concern with issues of pictorialism remains clear. This point has recently been well documented by the exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, *Hitchcock et l’art: coincidences fatales*. But the main point is not to counter- oppose the pictorial dimension of his work with its apparent privileging of narration and pathos. Narration and pathos cannot be reduced to the plain Aristotelian pattern, and visuality and narrativity constitute a more complex relation. To take another glance at the glass of milk sequence: certainly, there is something counter-effectual here. After all, Joan Fontaine will not drink the milk and we shall never know whether there was poison in it or not. So the causal connection binding together events and affects seems to arrive at a counter-effect. How can we conceive of this counter-effect? How can we subsume it under the concept of “image”? That is to say, how can we assume a “modernity” of cinema in the use of that kind of the “image”?

It is important to acknowledge properly here that an image is never a pure visual presence. An image is an operation that binds together the demonstration of something visible and a mode of signification. What opposes a modern aesthetic art to a classical or representational art is the form of that linkage. The representational form shows the signification through the expression. This supposes—and this is what constitutes the order of representation—a whole system of correspondences between modes of expression and tenors of signification. In the classical order, the human face, voice and attitude are the agents of that correlation, for instance, the agents that equate their distorted expression with the signification “fear”. Fear is a feeling conveyed by people who feel it.

Joan Fontaine—I mean Lina—is certainly scared. But you could hardly fear her fear by simply looking at her face or hearing her voice. Fear is actually conveyed by a glass of milk. Such a shift seems natural. Nevertheless, it supposes an overturning of the representational order that occurred first in the nineteenth century novel before fostering cinematographic narrative. In the new aesthetic regime of linkage between visibility and signification, not only has every hierarchy been overturned so that vulgar objects assume as much importance as the actions and feelings of the heroes, but, even more so
Où est le cinéma à Orly?
Above: Double page from Godard and Macha Méril's *Journal d'une femme mariée*, 1965.
now, it seems that those best qualified to convey intense feelings are those inanimate objects which feel nothing. This law, first elaborated by the realist novelists, had been spelled out provocatively by an anti-realist stage director, Edward Gordon Craig, before it became a standard of cinema.

Mute objects convey feelings better than expressive faces. But they do it for opposing reasons. First, because they speak better. Signification is better embodied in their reality than in expressive faces, voice and attitudes. They don’t think, they feel nothing, and they are unable to lie. Meanings are written directly on their body. This means that they fulfill the representative function—the matching of demonstration and signification—better than any discourse and gesture displaying the signs of fear. Second, they don’t speak at all; they mean nothing. They are not signs, only things. As a consequence, they add to their function as reliable clues a contrary function, that of suspending any kind of decision, action or interpretation. There is no relationship between a glass of milk and a need for money or the fear of a crime. The glass of milk both enforces and suspends the causal plot.

But that is not all. There are two forms of suspension: one founded in representation and a properly aesthetic one. The representational form has long been summarised in the Aristotelian idea of catharsis, namely the purification of affect put into play. The glass of milk is a perfect case of catharsis. It first appears as a little white point, slowly growing as Cary Grant/Johnny climbs up the stairs. On the one hand, it is the vehicle of fear, but, on the other, it purifies that fear. Dapper as always, Cary Grant carries it while the orchestra ironically plays a Strauss waltz at a low tempo. This moving and expanding white spot is turned into an ironic question: do you think that this is poison? What’s your guess? This means that the link made between the viewer’s feeling and that of the lady is loosened slightly. The viewer moves to another position, that of a gambler for whom this terrible story is “only a story”, a game promising either the satisfaction of having made the right guess about the riddle or the pleasure of having been fooled by the author in the right way. The muteness of the glass of milk makes it akin to the words possessing a double meaning in Greek tragedy. That form of suspension, the suspension of pathos by action, is still part of the logic of representation.

But there is another form of representation. In this second form, it is not a matter of “purifying” the affect in order to trace better the thread of the plot. Rather, it is a matter of not determining it, of rendering indefinite the relationship between visibility and signification and thus paralysing the logic of action. Such is the aesthetic form of suspension, the suspension of action by pathos. Let us take a further look at the same episode from this point of view. We have left Lina in her elegant bedroom, the perfect setting for a domestic tragedy. According to the causal plot, we should now expect the cause of the anxiety; the poison brought by her husband. But this is not exactly what happens. We see first a white arrow on a grey circle, a kind of suprematist painting, which visually derives from nothing. Its abstract, two-dimensional space apparently bears no relation with Lina’s bedroom. Slowly, of course, the abstract surface will be reset within the imaginary of the third dimension and the narrative connection. We are in the hall of the house. The light comes from the kitchen which Cary Grant is leaving while bearing the glass of milk. Nevertheless, a logic of disjunction has been set in motion and, as Grant climbs up the stairs, it is still at work in the play of light and darkness and the shading of the bars. A second logic has been induced by the cut between two shots, the white arrow on the grey circle. The white spot engenders a blank spot in representational logic. The logic of that “blank spot” spawns alongside the narrative thread, disconnecting the glass of milk from Lina’s fear and
Johnny’s will and reconnecting it with the white sheet that Lina draws upon herself as if to exit from the story. It suspends the action and paralyses the affect. The glass of milk will stay on the table untouched by Lina, only looked at, without this being related to any reflex action of self-protection or other debate in her mind. She withdraws from the causal connection and enters a form of passivity which is not that of the “victim” or the mere reflection of the “white” passivity of the glass, the sheet, etc..<br />

This means that the glass of milk is an “image” in two opposed yet interconnected ways. First, it is an agent of condensation. It condenses in one single figure a set of representational relations of causes and effects, knowledge and ignorance, fear and the purification of fear. Second, it is the agent of dispersion. It sets in motion a secondary logic that both sustains and contradicts the first. According to this secondary logic, the passage from one shot to another redistributes the representational relations to another surface, a surface of disconnection. An image is, in fact, a combination of two image-functions. This is not specific to the cinematographic medium. It is a more general feature of what I would call aesthetic narration, a mode of narration that was first elaborated in the nineteenth century novel. The logic of the frame as both connection and disconnection might be documented, for example, through Flaubert’s novels. The difference is that cinema is deprived of the subtracting power of literature, namely, the ability not to show what it “shows”. Cinema still shows what it shows. As a consequence, it must enforce its capacity to withdraw the obviousness of what it shows.<br />

There are no “pure” images, no pure “presence”, to be opposed to the logic of representation. Nor is there a logic of the time-image that can be isolated in contrast with that of the movement-image. Cutting between the two shots always means binding and unbinding. But there are various ways of tying together the binding and unbinding function. What defines Hitchcock and, more generally, “classicism” within the aesthetic regime of art, is the capacity to have two functions matched so well that they become indiscernible. This is what makes Flaubert exemplary in literature. Each sentence of his novels both weaves the narrative thread and undoes it. And this is what makes Hitchcock exemplary in film: his shots are the materialising of mental representations calculated to maximise the affects linked to the causal plot. At the same time, they weave another thread made of “blank spots”. But while a “modern” filmmaker would make the distance visible, both threads are rendered indiscernible in the same continuum of space-time.<br />

Let us compare, for instance, Hitchcock’s episode with a parallel sequence in a “modern” film, Pedro Costa’s Ossos, 1997. The aristocratic glass of milk becomes here the gas cylinder found in a lumpen tenement and which is dragged in by the wretched young mother to enable the suicide of the whole family. We leave the mother, father and child lying apathetically next to the cylinder. But, as in Suspicion, when morning comes, nothing has happened and no explanation is offered about this non-event. Now Costa’s mise en scène of the “same” episode moves exactly in the opposite direction. By using very long shots and playing on the distension of time and the absorbing power of the colour blue, it conveys a clear sense of disconnection between cause and effect: between a situation and any means of rationalising its causes and effects.<br />

What happens when Godard divorces Hitchcock’s fragments from their narrative continuum and binds them together in another? It could be answered that he makes them appear as he wants us to see them, that is to say, as icons of pure presence. He first isolates them with dark spots then connects them in various ways: formal comparisons parallel, for example, two grids or spirals, one made by blood spreading (Psycho), another by a hair bun (Vertigo). Superimpositions make the mask of Hitchcock, rather than the figure of James
Stewart, appear in the sequoia wood of Vertigo. Or Godard makes them flash on and off as if to make them in-between beings that come from the realm of shadows and shimmer for a brief moment in front of us, like a priest testifying to God’s real presence.

Eventually it transpires that Hitchcock’s images existed as if before his films, living their own life in a realm of pure images from which they could be borrowed and bound together in his work. Godard’s introduction to Alfred Hitchcock’s method performs a sort of ontological function aimed at disclosing what images truly are when freed from the constraints of narration. Once more, this attempt is not a matter of personal ideology. What Godard sets up here is nothing else than the aesthetic dream: the dream of “free” presence stripped of the links of discourse, narration, resemblance; stripped, indeed, of any relation to anything else except the pure sensory power that calls it to presence.

But images are never free and sensory power still remains a construct. Being an image still means being a link. The problem cannot be resolved through reference to the virtue of fragmentation. This has often been taken for granted as a hallmark of modernity, yet it has no subversive virtue in and of itself and can assume antithetical meanings. Bresson made it the key concept of anti-representational cinema and Godard often refers to Bresson’s statements about the power of montage which allows one image to be connected with all other images. But in Bresson’s films this means withdrawing power from the singular shot in order further to empower the overall connection of the shots within the film. This idea is still in keeping with the representational model of the work as an organic totality. In Histoire(s), Godard’s approach is the exact opposite, making each shot independent and giving it the power to enter into an indefinite number of relations with all sorts of fragments of other films, paintings, photographs, texts, sounds, etc.

We should not be led astray by Godard’s emphasis on the purity of the image and by his statements that make it a kind of Veronica and which oppose the event of Godard’s real presence to the dead power of the text. Montage remains the core of his theory and practice. His emphasis on the icon does not stand in contradiction to his practice of connecting anything with everything. It is the reverse side of the same coin. Freeing Hitchcock’s images means tying them together by virtue of new links. Images must be turned into icons, torn apart from the representational story in order to deliver their true meaning, the testimony of “children” about their “parents”. They must be sent back from stories to History. This idea of the purity of images is still an idea of their linking power, and conveys a sense of History. Fragmenting thus means unbinding and rebinding.

There are two main ways of effecting this rebinding: the dialectical way and the symbolist one. What I call here “symbolist” and what I call “dialectical” should be taken in a conceptual sense that crosses the boundaries of a particular doctrine. The dialectical way stresses the homogeneity of the elements that are placed together to reveal the connection of things hidden behind everyday reality. This “hidden” order may be the absolute reality of the dream and desire when undermining the routine of rational and bourgeois reality and which are embodied in the surrealist encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine. It may be the power of the commodity hidden behind great ideals, or the violence of capitalism underlying the smooth course of everyday life, as embodied in Brechtian stories of cabbages or John Heartfield’s X-ray images of capitalist gold in the throat of Adolf Hitler. The dialectical way sets up a clash, staging a strangeness of the familiar and testifying to a reality marked by antagonisms. Its politics consists of revealing the secrets of power.
The symbolist way also brings together distant realities but it does so in order to produce an analogy, a familiarity of the strange and a witness to a common world where heterogeneous realities are woven in the same fabric and can still be related to one another by the linking of metaphor. Its politics consists of staging the "mystery" of co-presence. Mystery is the key concept of symbolism, just as the secret is the central concept of dialectics. Mystery does not mean enigma, nor does it mean religious mysticism. Since Mallarmé, mystery means the space of analogical practice: the possibility of recognising the thought of the poet in the feet of a dancer, the unfolding of a fan or the smoke of a cigarette. Cinematographic montage plays on the polarity of these two procedures. In so far as cinema is not merely an "aesthetic" art but a mixture of representational logic and aesthetic procedures, cinematic montage can be described as a negotiation between three logics: first, the representational logic of the causal plot with its grammar of expression and dynamic of emotions; second, the first aesthetic logic, the "dialectical" logic of tension between heterogeneous elements; third, the second aesthetic logic, the symbolist logic of association.

The dismissal of plot does not restore some sort of iconic virginity to images. It opens up the field for a shuttling between the dialectic and the symbolist poles. But this polarity is not established as an alternative. Not only can the two models overlap, but the very difference can become almost indiscernible. The Godardian "flash" might well embody the indiscernibility of the two procedures, since it is at the same time a break and a link. It is a signal of disconnection and the light of another world. Connecting one shot to another, a shot to a phrase, fresco, song, political speech, newsreel image or advertisement, etc., still means both staging a clash and framing a continuum.

The time-space of the clash and the time-space of the continuum have, in fact, the same name: History. Disconnecting images from stories, Godard assumes, is connecting them so as to make History. But history precisely means two different things. For some decades history has been plotted out as an open field of division and conflict. The historical connection of a cinematographic shot with a newsreel or an advertising image thus meant the demonstration of a contradiction and the appeal to the spectator as an agent in the process of historical conflict. On the other hand, history means the infinite continuum of co-presence whereby all experiences are held in store and can function as the metaphor for one another. During the 1960s, the Godardian practice of connecting anything to everything was spontaneously interpreted in the first manner. When in Pierrot le fou, 1965, a film without a clear political message, Belmondo played on the word "scandal" and the "freedom" that the Scandal circle supposedly offered women, the context of a Marxist critique of commodification, of popular art derision at consumerism and of a feminist denunciation of women's false "liberation", was enough to foster a dialectical reading of the joke and the whole story.

The same cannot be said of another case of scandal that occurs in the opening chapter of Histoire(s) and which brings together, under the aegis of Giotto's Mary Magdalene, the happiness of Elizabeth Taylor in A Place in the Sun, 1951, with the death of the Nazi concentration camps. Godard explains that this happiness was made possible because some years before, while accompanying the liberating Allied forces, George Stevens had used the first Kodachrome film to record the dead at Ravensbrück. In the 1960s or 1970s, the standard reading of the connection, and the standard sense of history which it carried, would have been the perception of the shameful secret of extermination underlying that American happiness: before having on their hands the blood of a crime on which their happiness depends, the two young lovers would have been soaking in the forgotten blood of the extermination of the Jews.
Anti-American though he is, Godard does not present the issue in this way. Elizabeth Taylor positively deserved her happiness because Stevens filmed the dead of the camps positively, and, by so doing, redeemed the art of cinema, i.e., its guilt at not having been there and documented the images of Nazi extermination. What the disconnecting connection of American romance and Nazi extermination foregrounds is no longer the shame of this egotistical American happiness when related to war time atrocities, as in Martha Rosler's photomontages of the 1970s, *Bringing War Home.* Rather, it is the redeeming power of filming the camps, the redeeming power of the descent into Hell.

This means that the practice of collage since the 1960s and 1970s has been thoroughly overturned. Collage is no longer a means of unveiling secrets; it has become a way of establishing a mystery. Elizabeth Taylor's happiness visible in the art of Stevens the filmmaker and the filming of the camps by Stevens the war reporter are tied together by the chain of mystery. They testify to the "mystery" of co-presence symbolised by the third element, the "Mary Magdalene" which Godard wrenched from the *Noli me tangere* ("Don't touch me") in order to reverse the meaning of the scene and have her symbolise the over-binding power born of fragmentation itself. Releasing "images" from stories thus means increasing their power of infinite interconnection within a space whose aesthetic name is mystery and whose political name is History/history as co-existence and inter-expression. Through contrary procedures, Godard ultimately achieves the same ends as Bresson: he uses fragmentation to further the power of connection, or, in his terms, the power of "redemption".

This point may be reinforced by another episode from *Histoire(s)* where Godard reconfigures the images of another filmmaker. Just after the Elizabeth Taylor episode, Godard reframes the end of Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero*, 1948. We know that this film and its filmmaker have been considered emblematic figures of "modernity". Rossellini is supposed to be the father of the New Wave and, according to André Bazin, the founding father of modern cinema along with Orson Welles. The "year zero" of Germany has been identified by Deleuze with the emergence, amidst the ruins of the Second World War, of a new cinema composed of "op-signs" and "sound-signs" disconnected from the "sensory-motor scheme", a cinema that bears witness to the loss of any capacity to react to such situations. It is debatable how far *Germany Year Zero* and Rossellini's cinema in general match the idea of a "disconnected" cinema. In his own way, Rossellini also plays on the ambiguity of connection and disconnection. On the one hand, he builds a strong causal-ideological plot. At the beginning, we are told that the story will show the awful consequences of ideologies on childish minds. According to this plot, Edmund kills his father because he has been intoxicated with propaganda and commits suicide out of remorse. On the other hand, the *mise en scène* weaves a different thread: Edmund's act of murder is generated, in fact, within a frame of strong physical and affective relationships with his father. It is propelled by the dizzying discovery of the pure power of doing or not doing what is said in the words of others, of transforming the causal ideological plot into his own action, a free act of love and murder unrelated to anything else but his own decision or his own dizziness. But what interests me here is Godard's practice, which unfolds in a different way from the Hitchcock episode. I mean that, in this case, Godard, instead of loosening the bond between the images, strengthens it. Instead of restoring images to their independence, he overlies them in another ideological plot.

In Godard's view, neorealism in general, and this film in particular, embody the resistance of Italian cinema against the American and Hollywood invasion of Europe. He explicitly makes this point in another episode Chapter 1A of *Histoire(s).* The shots of *Germany Year Zero* are inserted between two charges of
American horsemen, the first evoking conquest, the second a retreat. But here the emphasis is placed not so much on “resistance” as on “redemption”, although both are related. The only European cinema capable of resisting Hollywood was the only European cinema that achieved its own redemption. The enmeshing of this plot entails a significant restaging of the end of Rossellini’s film. At the end of Germany Year Zero, when the Nazi teacher has absolved himself of any responsibility for Edmund’s murder of his own father, the causal-ideological plot can be definitively dismissed. What remains is simply the second, vertiginous plot. Then comes the long quasi-mute sequence of Edmund’s random wanderings. We see him balancing along the edge of the sidewalk, hopping from strip to strip, giving a passing kick to some other kid’s ball, salvaging a fantasy gun to fire on squares of light, sliding down a chute meant for construction materials and eventually jumping into the void.

How is that redemption staged by Godard? He uses two principal procedures: superimposition and slow-motion. Superimposition in his hands means that Edmund is withdrawn from the loneliness in which Rossellini has him play his children’s game prior to jumping into the void. He is no longer alone, no longer playing randomly, no longer mimicking suicide as a game before committing it. He is only putting his face in his hands before jumping. His figure appears superimposed over another icon of neorealist cinema, Giulietta Masina/Gelsomina, who is a kind of twin sister for Edmund but also a Mary Magdalene. In this context, Edmund’s gesture, unreadable in Rossellini’s film, becomes over-determined. First it appears as the illustration of a little fable, asking us to check our eyes with our hands rather than our hands with our eyes. Second, Edmund seems to ponder not only on his act but also on the meaning of his act: not on suicide but on redemption. When he takes away his hands he looks like a sleeper suddenly awakening. Similarly, we understand that cinema is waking up from the American nightmare.

This point will be confirmed by the end of Chapter I.A. Rossellini’s last shot showed us Edmund’s sister kneeling next to him in silent prostration, an image that did not allow for any interpretation. Godard cuts the end of the sequence and uses the slow-motion to build an entirely new plot. The sister who leant above her brother’s corpse becomes an Angel of Resurrection slowly rising above the dead. Like Mary Magdalene in the preceding sequence, she embodies the redemptive power of the Image which will come at the time of the Resurrection. In this way, Godard has transformed a sequence of disconnection into a powerful historical connection. By stressing this reversal, I do not wish to accuse Godard of misunderstanding or distorting his colleagues’ films. What is important to me is the sense of the distortion. Fragmentation as employed by Godard reveals two things. First, it demonstrates that a cinematographic image is actually a complex thing, a combination of several functions: the image connects and disconnects. It implements a representational function by subjecting the visual elements to the logic of a narrative or symbolic plot, and it engenders an aesthetic logic of suspension and infinitisation. In Deleuzian terms, I would say that each image functions both as movement-image and time-image. Every film is composed not of images but of image-functions that both supplement and contradict each other. This is as true in the case of Hitchcock’s classicism as it is in that of Rossellini’s modernism. There is no shift from an ancien régime of cinema to a modern age. There are simply different ways of putting more or less into play the tension between different image-functions.

Second, fragmentation is by no means a “liberation” of images, restoring to them some pure essence. It is an operation of montage, or rather a combination of operations. As used by Godard, fragmentation and collage are ways of bringing to the fore disconnections that are usually erased in the construction.
of a specific space-time. But these procedures can be implemented in antithetical ways. *Histoire(s)* bears witness to a radical shift in this regard. In Godard’s recent films, collage may at first sight appear to be in line with the Surrealist, Brechtian or pop traditions, but it slowly shifted to the exact opposite. Another film, *Prénom Carmen*, 1983, already witnessed that shift in exemplary fashion. The fact of isolating Carmen’s flower, in its plastic wrapping, from Bizet’s aria and Mérimée’s plot might look like a practice of derision in keeping with a Surrealist or Situationist strategy of dialectical détournement. But the break away from Bizet and Mérimée through a cock-and-bull narrative of terrorism allows Godard to encapsulate the relationship of two loving bodies within a stronger sensory interconnection, in such a way that Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* echoes Beethoven quartets through Impressionist pictures of deserted beaches, a sunrise at sea and foaming waves breaking on to the sand. Cinema has turned out to be a new form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, staging an analogy between music, painting and literature as expressions of the same originary rhythm.

*Histoire(s) du cinéma* is another kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, one that is more complicated and sophisticated and where collage does not aim to make the close and distant clash but rather to make them merge together. That is why there is no contradiction between the practice of disconnection that isolates Hitchcock’s glass of milk or shattering bottle and the practice of connection that transforms Edmund’s death or Elizabeth Taylor’s happiness into symbols of the resurrection of Cinema. Contradictory as they may seem, the transformation of functional Hitchcockian images into pure icons, and the transformation of Edmund’s wanderings into a process of Redemption, are part of the same story and produce the same result.
Hence, Godard’s narrative of a lost battle of the cinematographic image against the power of text and plot—that is, the power of Industry and Capital—is not what matters, any more than his dream of iconic virginity. What is at stake is the idea and practice of linkage entailed in the very idea of purity, and the way in which Godard actually reframes the history of cinema by reconnecting his images, binding anew the connecting and disconnecting power of cinematographic images. The real battle is the one opposing the dialectical and symbolist ways of making this linkage. In this respect, we can say that the symbolist way has overcome the dialectical.

This shift should not be related merely to the melancholic mood of an individual, nor simply to a French ideological trend, i.e. mourning the death of the Image, Art, Thought, History, Politics, etc. What I call the “symbolist shift” can be observed more widely in contemporary art. Sometimes it takes explicit and spectacular form, for instance when Matthew Barney creates the Cremaster Cycle, 1995-2002, as a contemporary Gesamtkunstwerk, symbolising the life of the embryo and “the potential of creative force” through narrative videos that revive Greek, Celtic or Masonic mythology and analogical plastic sculptures, photographs and music. But even when exhibitions of video art and photography, as well as video installations, still claim allegiance to the critical tradition of the 1960s, they now tend, rather than to disclose the relations of power hidden between things and images, to present us with sets of images and items that bear witness to the mystery of co-presence or to frame symbolic representations of the human condition. This shift was well documented by the recent Moving Images exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. For instance, Vanessa Beecroft’s video showing nude women moving in the space of the museum was still supposed to “question” feminine stereotypes in art. But those mute figures gave stronger evidence of their inaptitude for any signification and for any conflict of significations. Their strangeness was put into a context of familiarity with the strange, documented by Sam Taylor Wood’s polyptycs, Gregory Crewdson’s photographs of ordinary/strange suburbs, Rineke Dijkstra’s photographs of ambiguous teenagers on popular beaches, etc. All these representations of the familiar strangeness of everyday life and common people seemed in turn to be symbolically summed up in Bill Viola’s video-installation Going Forth By Day, 2002, which stages on the live walls of a dark room the course of human and cosmic destiny, the cycle of birth, life, death and resurrection, along with the cycle of the four elements. Viola refers in his work to the model of Giotto’s frescoes, but it is much more in keeping with the great Symbolist and Expressionist cycles of the human condition.

Godard may well have thought of himself as the last of the Mohicans mourning the death of cinema and predicting the reign of darkness. Paradoxically, he might have foreshadowed something quite different: a new trend of symbolist art, this art of testimony that purports to reframe a sense of human community. How far this new trend is attuned to a situation where concerns with “humanity” and the “inhuman” are increasingly prevailing over political concerns goes beyond the scope of this chapter.