The influence of cinema on painting

The Journal of Contemporary Painting invited painters to reflect on how cinema influences their practice. Nine statements are collated here from the artists Mario Rossi, Lydia Dona, Denise Green, David Salle, Jeremy Sharma, Matt Saunders, Dan Hays, Olivier Gourvil and Kaye Donachie. Each offer their own reflections on how film, as both a medium and cultural phenomenon, can be situated with regards to their own practice as well as with respect to how we understand the medium of paint more broadly. The commentaries offer personal, even frank remarks attuned to the specificities of both mediums. The commentaries are introduced with an overview by Sunil Manghani, which includes an account of the film-maker Martin Scorsese remarking on the revered painter, Caravaggio, as a means to turn the lens around to look at how a film-maker regards painting.

A number of years ago, when teaching elective modules open to all students across an arts faculty, I would often have a high number of film and television students in my class. During discussions I frequently imagined these students were sat clutching their favourite DVDs. They wanted to make films like the ones they had been watching. These films apparently contained everything they needed to know. Perhaps unlike the art student, the film student can be given a false sense of
Figure 1: Caravaggio (b.1573–d.1610), The Conversion of Saint Paul (c.1600–01). Oil on panel, 189cm (74.4in) × 237cm (93.3in). Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.
security: in order to pursue the art of film-making it is necessary simply to watch film. In part, I would argue that such a myth derives from the fact that film is a relatively young art form. In order to secure film as a subject and discipline there can be a certain degree of overcompensation.

Of course, inevitably, high-quality graduate work will nearly always have its roots in a deeper engagement with visual culture. Thus, in an appeal to the film contingency in my classes, vying to distract them from their prized DVDs, I would play a brief video clip salvaged from television. It was one of those inanely short interviews you come across on fidgety, MTV-style culture and entertainment round-ups. In this case, *The Culture Show* (BBC, 2005), with Andrew Graham-Dixon conversing with the eminent film director Martin Scorsese on the topic of the latter’s love of the late-sixteenth-century Italian painter, Caravaggio.1

*Andrew Graham-Dixon:* You have an amazing visual memory. You remember scenes like you’re playing them in your head. And do you have that with Caravaggio? Are there particular images of his that you can almost see in your mind’s eye? Are there pictures of favourites of yours?

*Martin Scorsese:* The favourite one I had is of *The Conversion of Paul*, and the sense of being under the horse. His arms reaching out. It seems undignified. You automatically would see other traditional paintings of a conversion of Saint Paul on his knees looking up, a beam of light hitting him or something. He’s under the horse practically, and the horse becomes the image in a sense, the composition. But it makes him so vulnerable and it makes it so moving, and so, I must say, realistic.

Scorsese’s reference to the paintings as being ‘realistic’ is an important bridge between Caravaggio’s dramatic use of subject and lighting and the heightened atmospheres of Scorsese’s work. Bolter and Grusin’s *Remediation* (2000) is a useful study of how media frequently define themselves by paying homage to, rivalling and/or refashioning earlier media. Obvious examples would be how ‘digital photorealism defines reality as perfected photography, and virtual reality defines it as first-person point-of-view cinema’ (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 55). In the case of Scorsese on Caravaggio, it is evident he has been deeply influenced by the artist. Of course, for many of the students I was faced with, this was an eye-opening moment. To hear the auteur Scorsese give credence to a richer field of vision was to give license to make more visually enriched films.

Unlike Walter Benjamin’s thesis of how the artwork as ‘aura’ is diminished through reproduction, Bolter and Grusin argue that aura is not destroyed but refashioned through remediation. The concept pivots around two ‘logics’, which push in different directions. On the one hand remediation is hypermediacy, which represents our desire to foreground the act of mediation. In terms of digital media, Bolter and Grusin suggest ‘the practice of hypermediacy is most evident in the heterogeneous
“windowed style” of World Wide Web pages, the desktop interface, multimedia programs, and video games’ (2000: 31). However, in paintings (and frequently in films), remediation typically reveals itself through the opposite desire or logic to seek for a medium to offer transparent immediacy (which dates back at least to the Renaissance and the invention of linear perspective). In seeking immediacy we wish for the apparatus of a medium to disappear from view, leaving us only with the message it delivers. For Scorsese, what is ‘realistic’ about Caravaggio is a certain transparent immediacy identified, in the remainder of the interview, as a presentation of physicality. It is a form of presentation which leaves Scorsese in no doubt that Caravaggio would have made a great film-maker:

Andrew Graham-Dixon: The other painting in that little chapel is amazing as well, the crucifixion of Peter upside down, and you feel …

Martin Scorsese: … the visceral quality of it, the physicality to crucify a man. You know, the trouble that one goes to. I mean really, to do such pain and suffering to another human being creates this pain, the determination to do that is so disturbing. But so powerful.

Andrew Graham-Dixon: But that pullulates through Goodfellas. I mean the sheer hard work of killing a guy …

Martin Scorsese: … oh yes, exactly …

Andrew Graham-Dixon: … and he’s in the boot and he’s still alive …

Martin Scorsese: He’s still alive, and they get annoyed with him that he’s still alive. They have to go through more work to kill him.

Andrew Graham-Dixon: So, you admire him for casting, you admire him for lighting, do you think …

Martin Scorsese: Staging! Staging and seeing, he was a master!

Andrew Graham-Dixon: So, if he were alive today, you’d have wanted to work with him?

Martin Scorsese: Oh, he’d have been a great film-maker, there’s no doubt about it.

Arguably, what great painters and film-makers have in common is an ‘amazing visual memory’, and/or visual alertness and sensitivity. Yet, it is interesting to pose Scorsese’s remark the other way round. Caravaggio may indeed have proved a great film-maker, but can we suppose great film-makers be great painters? David Lynch is one prominent director we might think of in responding to this question. But his example does not necessarily prove a rule. Having originally trained as a painter, it
Figure 2: Martin Scorsese (1990), Goodfellas [film still].
might be that Lynch is simply adept to be both film-maker and painter. The deeper question is whether film-making in itself leads towards a visual adroitness befitting the painter and vice versa.

The nine artists responding to the question of how cinema has influenced their work might be said – collectively – to evoke a certain distance between cinema and paint. Of course cinema is not film, as the gallery is not painting, which might account for a propensity to step back from the apparatus of film. Taking a cue from Roland Barthes’s essay on the movie theatre, Mario Rossi takes his leave of the cinema to allow for a ‘managed ambivalence’ that in turn marks a ‘distinction between the moving image and the apparatus’. Rossi’s account is suggestive of painting as hinterland to the cinematic. Yet, this gets turned around in Lydia Dona’s account, in which she considers painting post film. These two accounts preface an inevitable oscillation: do we look at film with painterly eyes, or painting with cinematic acuity? The answer will no doubt be both, and deliberately so; there is no origin, no authentic vision.

A more general ability – or at least a desire – to move about and within the image is a common reading stemming from these commentaries. Echoing Victor Burgin’s (2004: 7–28) interest in what he calls ‘sequence-images’, neither strictly ‘image’ nor ‘image sequence’, but an element of remembered film of such brevity they might almost be stills, the nine commentaries collected here tend to evoke film more than directly situate themselves regards to the cinematic. David Salle, for example, acknowledging a movie’s ‘sequencing of information’, considers painting as ‘both fast and slow – it tells its story all at once. Its parts demand to be seen in no particular sequence’. Similarly, Lydia Dona describes how the ‘filmic moment’ as ‘broken and reformulated into a “painting act” brings us all back into the beginning of the blank screen’. There is, in many cases, an act of looking past film narrative – its drama, characters and plot – to spy upon film’s details, temporalities and techniques. For Denise Green, unlike the emotion of cinema driven by actors, painting’s emotion is conveyed through its mark-making; similarly Jeremy Sharma admits to being ‘plot averse’, more interested in Tarkovsky’s ‘sculpting in time’ – a spatializing of time. Sharma notes, for example, his interest in ‘corridors, spaces, light, and structures’.

Matt Saunders offers a broader account of the cinema, describing it as a ‘thoroughfare to meaning’, reflecting both the ubiquity of film in contemporary culture and a more ‘textual’ reading of its image. In turn, this prompts greater fluidity between film and paint: one surface speaks to another, with Saunders suggesting ‘film proves a model for unbroken surfaces […] that likewise support cracks and reversals’. Dan Hays develops a similar reading. He refers to how Edward Hopper depicts the ‘visual incongruities’ of painting and cinema; and later with the shift of attention towards the small screen, remarks on his interest to ‘inhabit’ television’s ‘technological workings with paint’ – which in the context of the 1970s is to include the ‘ghosting due to a dodgy aerial’. Again, here, interest in small details and in technological-aesthetic considerations override any interest in plot and drama. Olivier Gourvil similarly refers to an interest in ‘non-narrative process’ and a ‘repertoire
of signs’, suggesting how ‘spaces and shapes and bodies’, rather than perhaps actual places and people, ‘are filtered by the screen today’. As a further means to ‘entertain’ this textual confluence of screen and canvas, we can turn to Kaye Donachie’s evocation of Marguerite Duras’s surreal film script, emblematic of poetic form – ‘painting, film, image, voice’ – to re-orientate temporal relationships. ‘From camera to canvas,’ Donachie writes, ‘we access unknown worlds, not bodily bound by the tyranny of time’. Indeed, perhaps underlying each of the views presented in the nine artist commentaries is something akin to Donachie’s closing line concerning the ‘materiality of light’, wherein, she suggests, ‘we are enabled to experience seeing as a kind of performing, where in turn, art can illuminate us’. We return, then, to those visceral qualities Scorsese remarks upon, and the inherent ‘physicality to crucify’, or at least signify.

Nine Painters on the Influence of Cinema

Mario Rossi, London

Roland Barthes wasn’t big on cinema, at least he pretended not to be. In his short essay ‘Leaving the movie theatre’ (The Rustle of Language [1989]) he suggests that the best thing about going to the cinema is leaving it again. I can relate to that sentiment and the thrill of the altered state. I operate a kind of managed ambivalence to the cinema myself, and early on I made a distinction between the moving image and the apparatus. Studying in the late 1970s the phenomenological aspects of the cinema got to me, way before its content, or its status as spectacle within the hegemonic and technologically expanding world of representation. Retrospectively, what might seem like a systematic approach was at the time far from it. Initially I became fascinated by the components of the cinematic event, the film, the projection, the screen, and the interplay between the still and the moving image. I made a correspondence between the screen and the canvas. This led to a series of painting projects including The End/untitled (1990–2000), The Parallax View (1994), Thief of Baghdad (2010). It’s simple and it’s complicated. Cinematic vision predates the invention of cinema. Painting invented cinema’s landscape, and developed a pictorial form in relation to many of the devices that are now more recognizably and mechanically aligned with photographic and cinematic production. Cinema, having colonized the ‘now’, cut painting some slack. Once I figured that out, I began a sustained exploration of the radiation of the cinematic on the collective, its elision with personal experience, and the space this opened up. Being pre-digital this raid on the archive involved considerable meditation and process streaming. The work developed from and through a variety of forms of the reprographic towards the autographic, because that was, and still is for me, the only way to realize the surface. I continue to make work that correlates with these ideas and expands on the projected image as a site of continual transformation and indeterminateness: ‘larval’ as Barthes perceptively observed.
Figure 3: Mario Rossi (2005), Wild Track. Acrylic on canvas, 240cm × 335cm. Courtesy of the artist.
Figure 4: Lydia Dona (2008), From Heat to Sub-Zero. Oil, acrylic, copper and metallic silver paint and enamel on canvas, 84in × 192in. Courtesy of the artist.
**Lydia Dona, New York City**

Cinematic spectation has always been the total fixation of my gaze: mutated and transplanted from sequence to character, to its break down of time, and in its various articulated possibilities. Light, frame, motion, cutting, colour, black and white, control of montage editing, filters, through which a cinematographer can move lenses and change the entity of a scene, made me desire in my practice, that type of packed experientiality into the pictorial. Painting post film, ‘traumatized’ by its static, one-canvas-arrested trauma, gave me this reflexive challenge. Therefore, the shift in my mental space towards the viewer meant that it will be ‘directed’ by me through the outside. The pictorial enters into the spectator’s spatiality having a film screen effect, and receding back into painting, which absorbs like a skin an event and recreates a pictorial plot. In my work, the aspect of urban breakdown, technologies shifting and biologies mutating into the elasticity of abstraction, suggest urgent and potent global environmental shifts. Requiring a mutated gaze, angular machinery in shadow, chopped-up abstract moments in which the ‘abstract scenery’ is plotted and created. Carnal or crisp, blades of intersection of street or shadows, the film noir moments and their borderline personas have influenced the infrastructure of my pictorial mentality. Lighting my painting while I work half in darkness and in light, dimming and intensifying, utilizes the ‘sequence’ for the unknown spectator, the communal experience transported into light and shadow. The filmic moment, broken and reformulated into a ‘painting act’, brings us all back to the beginning of the blank screen, painting from slowness into emergency and back and forth.

**Matt Saunders, Berlin**

At this point, the moving image might as well be the air we breathe. It’s a thoroughfare to meaning; a shared and mobile visual ‘text’ of endless variety. In my work it serves as both literal source of images and ideas and as a challenge for thinking of form. Movies wed perverse labour with immersive directness, careful construction with immediate urgency. You must recognize this from the museums. It is something akin to the best paintings, the ones that move us. Now in its second century, with its own richness and own crises (the death of analogue film and splintering of formats) cinema might serve not only as subject, but also as model.

I’d be remiss not to mention two early examples that I’ve returned to, time in and time out. In Svend Gade’s *Hamlet* (1921), Asta Nielsen breaks the surface of the drama with a performance entirely unlike the rest of the cast – a nervous, sinuous and electrified figure against a frumpy background of costumed character actors. She even dares embellish the text, writing her gender into the script (*Hamlet* as a princess forced to play a prince). These are gestures of multivalence, preserving the story while in the same moment recasting every relationship through a simple change of terms. Her screen presence participates in the costume drama while fizzing with a modern self. Similarly, Slatan Dudow’s *Kuhle*
Figure 5: Matt Saunders (2013), Blow Up (Double Exposure). Unique silver gelatin print on fibre-based paper, 58in × 40in. Courtesy of the artist, Blum & Poe and Marian Goodman Gallery.
Wampe (Who own's the world?) (1932), authored by Brecht, is a progressive hijacking of form. After an opening of aesthetic bombast, with bicyclists racing en masse through the streets of Berlin, we land into a small bourgeois melodrama of unemployment, eviction and unwanted pregnancy; then, slowly that all evaporates, not ‘solved’ in a conventional sense, but replaced with political argument and group activity. The story unspools into discourse. In examples like this, film proves a model for unbroken surfaces – beginnings, middles and ends – that likewise support cracks and reversals. If these are simply personal loves, they still admonish for an embrace of medium, both with and against the grain.

David Salle, New York City

Everyone goes to the movies. What does one see there? After decades of watching movies, I can imagine that certain things fundamental to film have spilled over to my sense of what makes a great or memorable image: a sense of scale – the size of a head in the frame; left-to-right reading of an image; the importance of light and shadow; and a kind of defiled glamour, to name just a few. More abstractly, movies have affected my idea of the sequencing of information – of narrative. Filmed dramas are an accumulation of scenes arranged in a specific sequence. It takes on average roughly two hours for a movie to tell its story. A good film will resonate long after the plot has been digested; a bad one won’t be remembered past the time it takes to exit the theatre. Some films leave you with a devastating experience of drama; others create a mood or a feeling – a bath of imagistic poetry. Whatever effect a movie achieves, it does so with discrete bits of dramatic or imagistic material arranged sequentially.

Painting is both fast and slow – it tells its story all at once. Its parts demand to be seen in no particular sequence; it isn’t necessary to see one part before going on the next. This ‘all over-ness’ is something fundamental to painting – and only to painting. It would be nuts to want to give up the immediacy of which painting is capable. Without abandoning painting’s continual present-tense-ness, I want to make something which supports a prolonged viewing time, with paths or circuits through pictorial space along which the eye can travel, accumulating experience in the process. I don’t want to make narrative paintings in a literal sense; I’m interested in complexity and the layering of information dosed at controlled intervals that is more often the province of drama.

Jeremy Sharma, Singapore

Cinema has a very latent and indirect influence on my paintings, which veer towards sculpture, things and objects in themselves. They possess their own time and space, which is very different in cinema, which is mostly rooted in the chronology of sequences and narratives. What I take most is the sensorial and perceptual qualities of watching films that has something to do with iconic memory and looking.
The influence of cinema on painting

Figure 6: David Salle (1990–91), Ugolino’s Room, to be reproduced in black and white. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 87in × 114in © David Salle, VAGA, New York.
I love Tarkovsky’s concept of ‘sculpting in time’ and how it comes across beautifully in his films. I try to do that in my work whether in an instant or a passage of time during the process of making. I like how he creates spatial-temporal effects with his ‘one takes’ and maneuvering angles, like that strange interior-like sand-dunes scene in Stalker (1979). That’s how I want the viewer to experience my work; not look at it but towards, around, into and out of it. I am also interested in the obsessions of film-makers and what goes on behind the scenes of films like Rashomon (Akira Kurosawa, 1950). One example would be how Kurosawa poured ink into the rain machine so it would contrast better against the sky or how Stanley Kubrick used a model to suggest such a masterful scene with that gush of tidal blood from the elevator scene in The Shining (1980).

In relationship to my work, I appreciate slow films where nothing ever happens or that are plot-averse, like the passing of light in the kitchen in a Terrence Davies film, similar approaches that can be found in films by Tsai Ming Liang, or Michael Snow’s Wavelength (1967). I like watching corridors, spaces, light and structures. Sometimes the materiality in film can be more powerful than its content. Two good examples are Singaporean artist Lynn Loo, and her piece End Rolls (2009) where she exposes raw colour film to different levels of light such as candle, stove, fire and room light. The idea is to experience the few seconds of colour fluctuations before arriving at the real images in conjunction with live sound extracted from the light of the projectors. The other is Decasia (2002) by Bill Morrison, which is a series of found footages of decaying silent films.

Dan Hays, London

Part 1

Edward Hopper colours in the black-and-white decades of the 1920s and 1930s. The visual incongruities between painting and cinema are depicted in his painting New York Movie (1939). The viewer is positioned as if seated in the audience with a couple of people in front, gazing up at the silver screen. The cropped section suggests a female figure, rendered in pastel tones of grey rather than black and white. This perceptual anomaly is caused by the lack of opacity of the film medium of his day, and the effect of incidental light in the auditorium. This astounding technological shortfall is not experienced by the audience, where the mesmeric effects of moving pictures has them enthralled, frozen in their seats. The attention of the viewer of the painting, however, is free to wander across to the usherette standing in the aisle, lost in her own thoughts – her own moving pictures.

New York Movie affirms painting as a motion-picture medium, as the viewer’s attention, although also seated in the audience, switches between the distanced, abstracted screen drama and the more elusive and mobile one closer at hand. In all painting, this shifting focus is augmented by the viewer’s mobile physical relationship to the canvas, between distance and proximity, between the overall picture and its tangible surface of marks made over time.
Figure 7: Jeremy Sharma (2012), Kurosawa. Enamel and polyurethane paint on aluminium composite panels, 420cm × 650cm. Courtesy of the artist.
Figure 8: Dan Hays (2009), American Night. Oil on canvas, 122cm × 163cm. Courtesy of the artist.
The camera pans, cross-fades and zooms across Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow* (1565) in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* (1972), as if being viewed by the seated Hari, the 'visitor' wife of Kris. This imaginatively projected – cinematic – encounter with the painting triggers a profound existential questioning, forming a prelude to the closing scene of the film – a bleak metaphor for the human condition: sanctuary or entrapment within a situation, an idea, an image – between motion and stasis, life and death.

**Part 2**

It’s a constructed situation, a false memory, but one that I can hold in my mind’s eye. It might distil from a childhood spent in front of the screen (as much as in the woods) what it is about the cinema, or more specifically cinema’s manifestation on the TV, that intrigues me about televisual representation and makes me want to inhabit its technological workings with paint.

A gang of cowboys ride across badlands and chaparral to find shelter in the trees at dusk. Majestic location filming abruptly transfers to a studio, where vegetation and rocks are crudely landscaped, as the men sit around an artificially tame campfire, unconvincingly lit by subdued theatrical lighting. One of their horses gets spooked, and they venture into the woods to investigate. We’re back to outdoor filming, yet here the film is underexposed, offering the weird, other-worldly colours of day-for-night cinematography – or *nuit américaine*, as the French have it.

This is the mid-1970s, and our standard-issue TV adds other layers of mediation to the Wild West action. There is ghosting due to a dodgy aerial, and the red channel is on the blink. Approaching the screen, I hit the box, and the colour and reception issues are temporarily corrected. Right up close, the array of red, green and blue dots continue with their relatively sedate modulation, somehow – miraculously – rendering the Technicolor drama in all its domestically attenuated glory. This wonder at the frail evanescence of the image, its electronic tangibility, extends to thoughts about its transmission through the air, the need to set the aerial just so, to divine an image out of the ether.

The cowboys awake to find themselves made up of computer generated fractal geometries and vector paths. The dawn has an unremarkable realism to it, and the horses have bolted.

**Olivier Gourvil, Paris**

In the process of my painting there is a wide repertoire of signs related to the urban, to architecture, to designed shapes and graphics. Moreover the way that spaces, shapes and bodies are filtered by the screen is definitely a relationship to my culture as a viewer and as an artist. In terms of this relationship, between painting and cinema, I have a particular interest in non-narrative process,
Figure 9: Olivier Gourvil (2014), Metropolitan 6. Oil/acrylic on canvas, 140cm × 200cm. Courtesy of the artist.
related to descriptive forms in literature. In a long and impressive sequence at the beginning of the film *Adieu* (2004) by Arnaud des Pallières we can see a production line making a big and beautiful truck in a factory. Pieces of metal, sliding movements of the camera, music and sounds produce a feeling of immersion in a highly technological, robotic and lyrical atmosphere.

More importantly it turns out that the truck is one of the principle motifs of *Adieu*, which we can also compare to the famous Marguerite Duras film, *Le camion* (1977). This ambiguity and hybridity of what we are looking at is one of my principal concerns in the abstract painting process.

**Denise Green, New York City**

I don’t feel that my painting practice has been influenced by Cinema at all but some of my work resonates with film. For instance, if I consider the rose theme in my work, there is a sequential aspect to the repeated motif of the image, and this formal quality resonates with film. In particular, repetition and structure come to mind as similarities. The Indian poet and linguist, A.K. Ramanujan, wrote an essay, ‘Is there an Indian way of thinking?’ (1980), in which he talked about Indian epics and poetry having concentric containments as non-linear and non-sequential ways of structuring narrative in poetry. Each story inside the text illuminates the outside. From this formulation I derived an image that spoke to me as an artist. Concepts and images presented in Indian poetry and ancient texts are based on concentric nests of ideas. Ramanujan’s approach influenced the development of the rose theme in my work. It became for me a more dynamic way of instilling a thought process into an image.

Unlike painting, cinema is involved with drama and characterization. The interaction between different characters, as well as music, is where emotional depth is expressed. Even though a well-written screenplay is the main structure of a film, the emotional power is essentially conveyed through the actors. In my painting and that of other contemporary artists, the expression of subjectivity, by which I mean the artist’s state of mind, emotions, imagination and unconscious images, is conveyed through mark-making, as well as through the medium, colour, form and images.

**Kaye Donachie, London**

‘So the script was complete …?’

‘Yes, we already had one. I wrote it before we started filming.’

_They don’t look at each other. Their discomfort becomes visible. He murnurs:_

‘The film would begin here, now, at this moment … when the light fades.’

‘No. The film already began here, with your question about the shooting.’

_Pause. Their discomfort increases._
Figure 10: Denise Green (2014), Evidence of Intimacy. Acrylic and pencil on canvas, 122cm × 172cm © Denise Green.
Figure 11: Kaye Donachie (2013), Untitled 5m. Flashe and charcoal on paper, framed: 65cm × 89.5cm. Courtesy of the artist and Maureen Paley.
'How’s that?’

‘With just your question about the shooting, here, a moment ago, the old film disappeared from my life.’


A vermillion sun sets hazily shifting in and out of focus on a distant and abstract horizon. A girl laconically sings and laughs hysterically. She speaks quietly of encounters, night-time encounters and secret wandering. Wandering, walking and drifting – occupying time, bodies and a history of visions and visioning. The procession of images and stilted voices, speaking over the visual, are fragments of a call and response, a questioning that forms an oneiric poetic narrative – ‘That light?... That dust?’

The opening scene of Marguerite Duras’s *India Song* (1972) folds subjects, objects and scenes through the act of looking – as expression of imagination, identification and subjectivity. Mirrored figures are framed within the image that is multiplied by the slow moving camera. It seeks to capture the internalized monologue of the subjects, partially shared through the dialogue in which nobody’s lips move. The muteness of the subjects is enhanced as we meet them first via their reflection before entering our field of vision. Each protagonist has a spectral presence made visible as reflection before revealing the original body and reminding us that we are nothing other than a reflection of other people – someone or something that we cannot know beyond surface and appearance. Duras’s films are principally an attempt to study (deconstruct) the female subject through many mirrors, identifying with the images to the point that we no longer know what is eroticism, history and fiction.

Central to the poetic form – painting, film, image, voice – is the narrative agent, that manipulates the linearity of time. We are given access to a universe of events that run through time in different directions and coalesce where time thickens. From camera to canvas, we access unknown worlds, not bodily bound by the tyranny of time, but the unlimited worlds of fiction where visibility loses its self-evidence. Here, light becomes the primary interlocutor. The materiality of light – a tenuous volatile materiality – liberates us from the heavier kind that inheres in bodies and objects. It is in this imaging within Duras’s films, plays and novels where light becomes tangible and where we are enabled to experience seeing as a kind of performing, where in turn, art can illuminate us.

**References**


Suggested citation

Contributor details
Sunil Manghani is Reader in Critical and Cultural Theory and Deputy Director of Doctoral Research at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton (UK). He teaches and writes on various aspects of critical theory, visual arts and image studies. He is author of Image Studies: Theory and Practice (Routledge, 2013) and Image Critique and the Fall of the Berlin Wall (Intellect, 2008), and editor of Images: A Reader (Sage, 2006) and Images: Critical and Primary Sources (Bloomsbury, 2013).

Contact: Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, Park Avenue, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 8DL, UK.
E-mail: s.manghani@soton.ac.uk

Artist details
Lydia Dona is an artist who lives and works in New York City.
Kaye Donachie is an artist who lives and works in London.
Olivier Gourvil is an artist and Professor of Fine Art, Ecole Supérieure d’Art et Design, Grenoble Valence
Denise Green is an artist and writer who lives and works in New York City.
Dan Hays is an artist who lives and works in London.
Mario Rossi is an artist and Senior Lecturer at Central St Martins, University of the Arts London.
David Salle is an artist who lives and works in New York City.
Matt Saunders is an artist and Assistant Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University.
Jeremy Sharma is an artist and Lecturer in the Faculty of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore.

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Figure 12: Mario Rossi, 'The End/ untitled' (studio photograph by Peter Anderson 1993). Courtesy of the artist.