

# 'I am a rhinoceros': memory and the ethics and aesthetics of materiality in film

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## Abstract

In his book *Vision and Painting* Norman Bryson writes 'the image that suppresses deixis [i.e. the act of pointing or designating] has no interest in its own genesis or past, except to bury it in a palimpsest of which only the final version shows through' (Bryson 1983: 92). Bryson's remark brings a set of questions and problems to the fore regarding memory and film; that the technique and material used for remembering and the making of memory intersects with what will be constituted as memory, and that a trace of the act of making memory should be present in the material. Consequently we cannot avoid considering both an ethics and poetics when approaching memory. The arguments are exemplified by a comprehensive discussion and analysis of two films that belong to the experimental film tradition: Malcolm Le Grice's *Little Dog for Roger* (1967) and Gunvor Nelson's *Red Shift* (1984).

## Keywords

memory and film  
deixis  
experimental film  
Malcolm Le Grice  
Gunvor Nelson

Norman Bryson writes in his well-known book *Vision and Painting* that 'the image that suppresses deixis [that is, categories which encode the person, place, time or social context of utterance] has no interest in its own genesis or past, except to bury it in a palimpsest of which only the final version shows through' (Bryson 1983: 92).<sup>1</sup> The context for Bryson's claim is his critique of 'Western painting [that] is predicated on the disavowal of deictic reference' and he therefore sees the photograph as different from painting since the former is 'the product of a chemical process occurring in the same spatial and temporal vicinity as the event it records' (Bryson 1983: 89, original emphasis). This so-called indexicality of the photographic image (it is a trace of something actual and material that has been in the front of the photographic apparatus) is even sometimes equated with deixis as such.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, what Bryson really wants to criticize in *Vision and Painting* is the technical tradition in western painting of concealing the actual activity of the artist so it becomes undetectable from the painterly surface. He therefore looks for an aesthetic (which he discovers in traditional Chinese painting) where:

The work of production is constantly displayed in the wake of its traces; in this tradition the body of labour is on constant display, just as it is judged in terms which, in the West, would apply only to a *performing* art.

(Bryson 1983: 92, original emphasis)

- 1 Mieke Bal's definition of deixis reads as follows: 'Expressions are deictic, not referential, only when they have meaning in relation to the utterance. Deictic words are *I*, *you*, but not *she*; *yesterday*, *today*, but not *some day*; *here*, *there*, but not *in Rome* [original emphasis]. Deixis presupposes and emphasizes the presence of the speaking subject and her addressee, her "second person"' (Bal 1999: 98).
- 2 For example, John Lyons, *Semantics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. Mieke Bal suggests that one of Bryson's truly innovative ideas in *Vision and Painting* (a

book that she otherwise considers to be problematic) is the suggestion to see deixis as a specific form of indexicality in order to make a distinction between the first and third person in painting. See Bal (1991: 406–07).

- 3 The reason why I have chosen Bryson's approach instead of Bal's is that Bal has a much more specified notion of deixis (derived from the linguist Emil Benveniste) and uses it as a way of realizing mostly psycho-social readings of images where the key interest is how an image addresses the subject. See Bal (1999) and especially her review of Kaja Silverman's book *The Threshold of the Visible World* (1996); Bal: 'Looking at Love: An Ethics of Vision', *Diacritics*, 27: 1 (1997). Bal's use of deixis is in turn heavily influenced by Silverman's classic *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- 4 Of course deixis as a linguistic notion is not translatable into film as such, but that does not mean that it is not useful at all. Part of my argument is to show that we may understand certain devices in the experimental film tradition as deictic devices, though film form (film language) does not have inherent formal markers designating deixis. Robert Rauschenberg's photograph (from a series of photographs shot in Fort Myers, Florida

Or as Mieke Bal, another semiotician who has used deixis for a cultural analysis of the visual describes Bryson's objective: 'Bryson uses the linguistic concept of deixis to depart from realism [...] the idea of deixis leads to a plea for a kind of materialism' (Bal 1991: 33). In fact Bal has criticized Bryson for a far too polemic approach in his book *Vision and Painting*, establishing the act of hiding the trace of the utterance in painting (and the lack of deixis) as something that is common for western painting altogether.<sup>3</sup>

My interest in Bryson's polemic, however, is not to make a factual argument about strands in visual arts as such or to pin down the notion 'deixis', but instead to point out how the idea of deixis as a certain aesthetic attitude and practice implies and contains an important ethical move that has consequences for studies of memory in the visual domain (be it painting, photography, film, and so forth). I therefore find Bryson's argument about the nature of an image that suppresses deixis worth paying attention to.<sup>4</sup> I will both pursue that task and argue for it by focusing on three important features regarding memory and film that I present and explore in this article:

1. The image and especially the photographic image (and thereby film also, although we should always remember the fact that film includes sound as well and has a different temporality than photography) is often inscribed in a discourse that tends to ignore the material traces of the image, its character as a material construction as well as a specific material utterance from and in the past.
2. Therefore, what I will name, 'the aesthetics of materiality', is an important ethical move and ideal because it is a way of retaining deixis; a trace of the past event as an intervention and specific relation, a material fact that a simple referential relation to the image tends to ignore.
3. Memory consequently implies a poetics - the practice of putting the bits and pieces into meaningful constellations and therefore creating discourses that will foster images and stories about the past triggered by the present. Such a poetics is dependant on both the material in the sense of technique and in the sense of object or thing, that is; the material that is used as a technique for remembering (in my case, film and its aesthetic means), and the very material that is depicted as objects filled with memories.

As so often is claimed, the image is placed in a peculiar situation as a historical discourse. On the one hand the image, and especially if we think of photography, cannot avoid being indexically historical. The photographic portrait for example, with the task to only document a face, displays almost irretrievably because of its physical nature (a 'historical unconscious' to paraphrase what Walter Benjamin used to call the 'optical unconscious' of photography), material historical markers such as hair style, clothing, design, etc. They are thus turned into 'historical indexes', to use a characterization by Christina Scherer, because the photographic apparatus has been specifically situated in time and place and therefore registered something out

of its physical and factual position (Scherer 1999: 51). On the other hand, an image does not usually signal by its aesthetic means and techniques that it is a result of a specific act that has taken place in the past. It shows an origin in the past, but that past is usually without spatial, temporal or personal (that is deictic) markers; lacking pointing words such as 'I', 'here', 'now' or different tenses. It thus leaves neither discursive traces from the past, nor points to the filmic and photographic act that has taken place on the other side of the camera. The image has therefore in general no obvious tense and nor has film that is actualized in the present; although film on the other hand does show the passage of time and not time that has passed, as in the photograph, or 'photogram' if we talk of a still image in film.<sup>5</sup>

Film does not present itself as language in an obviously outdated style and form, something that strengthens the mimetic force of the film image and thus enables film to overcome what could be considered as unfashionable film language. Therefore, what are obviously outdated, when it comes to stylistics, are the characters, the acting, the dialogue and the setting, as well as the purely material regarding film: film stock, format, colour process and so forth. Of course, there are exceptions regarding film language's fixation in the present: Chris Marker's famous French 'photo roman' *La Jetée* (1962) is a story told in the past tense by a voice-over accompanied by a series of stills (that is, pictures which are not alternating according to the projection speed of 24 pictures per second).<sup>6</sup> The past tense is suddenly broken (and the feeling of experiencing the photo-novel in the present) when the pictures for a very brief moment are synchronized with the projection speed and we can see a woman lying in bed blinking her eyes. Another exception is the Finnish film *Juha* (1998), made by the Finnish director and auteur Aki Kaurismäki. *Juha* is a silent movie that simulates perfectly the outdated and historical film language of the silent-film era and thus leaves a historical trace on the film that is brought over to the present state of the cinematic institution.

Nevertheless the general characteristics are that the photographic image as a signifying practice is by necessity historical in the sense that the traces from a past are there in the image even if unintended. The paradox is that because of the inherent historical nature of the image it is also as a discourse (as an utterance), timeless; without a tense, without a trace of who spoke and when - a characteristic that made Bertolt Brecht claim at the time that 'photography is the possibility of a reproduction where the context is erased'.<sup>7</sup> The temporal now and the lack of inherent tense is even accentuated in film that is ever present, due to the external and objective time that rules the duration of the projection. Thus, in the same way as film is in-between past and present (the past actualized through the projection) it is in-between the material and the immaterial; as Garrett Stewart puts it in his book *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis*: '[film is] the material base that must be dematerialized in projection' (Stewart 1999: 3). Stewart's claim echoes that of Gilberto Perez in his book *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium*, where Perez treats the documentary strand as 'historical' or 'factual' and the fictitious as 'present':

in 1979–80) of an old and empty billboard is a good example of how the lack of inherent deixis in photography has to be transformed into the object depicted. The photograph is a picture of an old billboard that has fallen apart, only the frame and the framework of the sign are left, including an arrow that is pointing at the presence of the empty billboard, which has evidently contained both an image and a text; thus it is as if the photograph is mediating a billboard saying 'I am a billboard'. See, for example, *Rauschenberg photographe*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou/Éditions Herscher 1981, fig. 39.

- 5 For example, Sarah Cardwell has claimed that the tense of film is not the present, but that film is without tense which on the other hand does not mean that film is unable to express different temporalities. See Sarah Cardwell, 'Present(ing) Tense: Temporality and Tense in Comparative Theories of Literature-Film Adaptation', *Scope* 1: 2 (2000), <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/articles/presenting-tense.htm>.
- 6 In fact, the problem with film theory and film semiotics is that it is mostly founded on a 'grammar' derived from mainstream narrative film.
- 7 In German: 'Die Fotografie ist die Möglichkeit einer

Wiedergabe, die den Zusammenhang wegschminkt', Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften I*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. I am indebted to Pelle Snickars and his Ph.D. on Swedish visual mass culture for the Brecht citation. Pelle Snickars, *Svensk film och visuellt masskultur 1900*, Stockholm: Aura förlag, 2001. The principle of editing, and the montage in particular is a good example of the lack of actual context: the shots that are connected do not need to have been in any factual connection to each other whatsoever (for example, the shot of a face and the shot of a cat that later on are connected by the editing). Indexically they can be from different places and from different moments; in the presence of the film, however, they become inherently connected to each other. Accordingly, the aesthetics and dynamics of film are based on the lack of context that on the other hand forces the viewer to make the connections.

- 8 This in turn makes memory into a contested issue. As Susan Stewart writes in her book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993): 'It is not the materiality of signs which makes them subject to ideological formations [...]; it is their immateriality, their capacity to serve the interests of those

What a photograph depicts has been; what a painting depicts comes into being in the picture. What a movie depicts can, in each of its details, be said to have been [...]. But the movie as a whole, the world of the movie, comes into being on the screen. What has been is documentary, what comes into being is fiction; a movie is a fiction made up of documentary details.

(Perez 1998: 34)

Hence, what is peculiar for film is its ambiguous characteristic as the 'The Material Ghost' or dematerialized matter.

The similarity with memory is obvious; memory is also placed in a peculiar position between history (the factual, external, past) and subjectivity (the personal, internal, present).<sup>8</sup> I would argue that the boom in memory studies during the last decades reflects partly the reaction against traditional historical studies, perhaps the last field in humanities where unambiguous facts were the aim for research, or in semiotic terms; where the iconic and the indexical were the key figures for truth claims.<sup>9</sup> Thus, memory was a way of both questioning such a naïve mimetic epistemology and of foregrounding the subject and its experience. Hence, the study of memory became a way of studying history in action, embodied and lived; like a film projected so it comes into being on the screen. It is, however, important to stress that the opposition between history and memory should not be taken as opposed, as antagonistic, but rather as opposing aspects that are present in every historical event that is actualized in the present. Memory is history in the present, a presence where both history and memory are coexisting. As Michael Chanan has pointed out regarding documentary film, there is no reason in juxtaposing the documentary with the fictitious because both are inherent in the filmic discourse (and in the material itself, as Perez has it).<sup>10</sup>

What I want to stress is that the supposed antagonistic opposites have mostly been included and reflected upon in those film practices that have been characterized as the essay film, the personal documentary and the experimental film tradition respectively, or in a more general sense as the tradition of non-narrative cinema. Certainly, I do not want to claim that these different modes and the experimental film tradition in particular, reflect memory more sincerely than other film genres and traditions. Rather, that the reflective tradition of experimental film-making and its adherence to the blending of documentary and fiction, history and memory, makes it more fruitful for approaching a poetics and a politics of memory, that is, how memories are constructed and how they are used. In fact, I would claim that experimental film practice differs from what is usually called the essay film (for example, the work of Chris Marker or Jean-Luc Godard), while the latter focuses more on the subjective experience than on the cultural and collective memories that are mediated through the material that is used. For example, Christina Scherer juxtaposes in her book on the essay film, the two German notions *Erinnerung* (recollection) and *Gedächtnis* (memory); recollection being a question of personal and subjective construction in contrast to memory that has an intersubjective and social function (Scherer 1999: 11–17).

Scherer claims moreover that the essay film is also often staged in opposition to the 'collective' or 'cultural memory', and thus is not only seen establishing a reverse between experiencing subject and history (Scherer 1999: 51). Consequently it could be said that memory as a mode is closer to the genre of the experimental while memory as *Gedächtnis* is linked to notions of culture and the collective as in 'cultural memory' or 'collective memory'; in contrast to the more subjective recollection, or *Erinnerung*, the mode of the essay film.<sup>11</sup>

I want, however, to emphasize the experimental tradition and its awareness of the materiality of the mediating process, which neither privileges the content or history, nor the form or memory. Instead it keeps the tension between the two alive so what is being mediated through the filmic apparatus is a referent that is both present (in the iconic/indexical image) and absent (it is not here now, and becomes thus an actualized memory). This is something that is stressed in the British experimental veteran Malcolm Le Grice's film *Little Dog for Roger* (1967). The film is composed out of what originally was a home movie shot on 9.5mm film by Malcolm Le Grice's father and it portrays Malcolm, his younger brother, his mother and their dog. Le Grice uses the found footage in order to construct a film where he repeats, doubles and manipulates parts of the original film. Accordingly *Little Dog for Roger* contains all the features common to experimental film practice from the 1960s; looping film and sound, showing how film is a product of different printing and processing devices, and how film comes alive when the projection is synchronized according to standard speed. But the interaction between material used and material mediated makes the film unique; the repetition of slowing down, speeding up and stopping both picture and music do not only stress the material used but also the object that is displayed. For example, the looping of the shot of the dog running and the freezing of an image from the same shot, simulates memory at work where one image or memory collapses in time and becomes a condensed figure which has two temporalities; the present (the projection of the moving image) and the past (the still image, or photogram) and we may thus be brought both back and forward between the past and the actualized presence of the projected movement. Such a condensed figure of parallelism and various temporal layers is also remarkable because it points directly to Freud's concept of 'condensation' (and the initial meaning he gave to the concept): the fusion of different elements from various contexts and time layers as in a photograph that has been exposed several times.<sup>12</sup>

Malcolm Le Grice's technique of looping and repeating; of positing two strips of film parallel to each other; of showing the sprocket holes and so forth, also strips the historical and personal material of its potentially nostalgic content. But that does not rule out the sense of a loss of what is shown, as for example with the image of the dog that is represented both as an object that has been lost and that is revived when the projection of the film is fully synchronized.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, *Little Dog for Roger* does not subordinate itself to a simple logic of iconicity and indexicality, of a 'whether or not'. Neither does the film establish a fictive and coherent time and space that would simply make the past present. Instead it is as if Le Grice himself

formations regardless of their physical form' (Stewart 1993: 32).

- 9 For an excellent and comprehensive overview and bibliography of memory studies in the humanities see Peter Fritzsche, 'The Case of Modern Memory', *Journal of Modern History* 73: 1 (2001). In this context I would like to thank Julia Creet for introducing Fritzsche's essay to me.
- 10 Michael Chanan, 'On Documentary: The Zapruder Quotient', *Filmwaves* 4 (1998). Accessed from <http://www.mchanan.dial.pipex.com/zapruder.htm>.
- 11 Scherer also makes a useful distinction between cultural memory and collective memory by pointing out that the collective memory is an issue of that part of a cultural memory which lasts through time, while cultural memory is an issue of the memory of a community (Scherer 1999: 51). Hence, it could be said that cultural memory is rather about place, and collective memory about time.
- 12 For Freud see his lecture 'The Dream-Work', *Standard Edition*, vol. 15: *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, London, Hogarth Press 1963, pp. 170–83. I have argued for the usefulness of the concept of condensation for studies on memory and film in various essays, see, for example 'Condensed History:

The Poetics of Memory in Film', in Nancy Pedri (ed.), *Travelling Concepts III: Memory, Narrative, Image*, Amsterdam, ASCA Press, 2003.

- 13 According to Richard Terdiman, 'Loss is what makes our memory of the past possible at all', Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- 14 The soundtrack consists of two old songs, 'Keep Your Sunny Side Up' and 'Pedro The Fisherman', which both used to be sung by Malcolm Le Grice's mother and played by his father when they were in a small theatre group in the 1940s.
- 15 See, for example, Deke Dusinberre in David Curtis and Deke Dusinberre (eds.), *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film*, London: Arts Council of Great Britain and the British Council, 1978.

displays how he found a home movie and by twisting and turning it (that is running, stopping and manipulating the speed and the placing of the film strip) shows how his memories come alive; like the accompanying music score which is heard as if it is played on an old gramophone, always starting anew when a memory is brought to life and stopping when it fades away.<sup>14</sup>

There is no fixed vantage point or perspective in *Little Dog for Roger* that would privilege a specific discourse; the personal, the objective, or the abstract - instead the film follows the complexity of both material and object, which includes all the various aspects of the film material and what it depicts. Hence, Le Grice's film does not place history and memory as irreconcilable opposites or privilege one of the two; the indexical over the iconic, for example. Instead both aspects and different sign functions, or codes, are included in the film that not only come into being on the screen and sometimes even disappear completely; we are also, every now and then, shown what has been. The film stages, therefore, a complete play between presence and absence where neither opposite become a fixed viewpoint (a fact that I think it is important to stress while *Little Dog for Roger*, and the film-making of Le Grice in general, is usually too keenly seen as dealing merely with the process of decoding film and thus criticizing the iconic/indexical sign functions and the narrative tradition).<sup>15</sup>

My second example, a film by the renowned Swedish-American filmmaker Gunvor Nelson, *Red Shift* (1984), is a film that also retains ideals of deixis in its structure. But in *Red Shift*, in contrast to *Little Dog for Roger*, the deictic designation is not rendered by renouncing a narrative flow, a diegesis or story-world as such, and thus making us aware of the material process of making an utterance or of the act of pointing. Instead Nelson uses repetition, a mixing of discourses (literary, visual and a narrating voice-over) and cinematography where filmic space is narrowed so it almost becomes that of the space of the still image (and a way of reflecting on the past of the objects that are shown in the present tense of the film).

*Red Shift* tells the story about a family. It features Nelson's own family and her 'playing' different roles, but not according to any named characters. They are simply representing the roles in a family: mother, daughter, grandmother, father and grandfather. The film has two diegetic times, it is staged both in the present and in the past, a fact which is actually only displayed by the opening titles that tell who is acting the different parts in the present and in the past. The film does not present a coherent story with a beginning and an end, and the diegesis shifts between the two different time-settings without any distinct announcements. Thus Nelson manages to stage a film where certain constellations in a family are played out, and especially those between mother and daughter, in a manner where history is both repeating itself and creating a situation anew. Such constellations are further 'doubled' by the two-fold relations of the mother (as both mother and daughter) and the two time-settings. In order to complicate the story further Nelson has included three different levels of oral narration: dialogue, a voice-over that reads different proverbs and a voice reading excerpts from the book *Calamity Jane: Letters to her Daughter*. The blending of the different discourses and

time-layers make the inherent tense and diegetic time iterative and eternal, constituting thus what Julia Kristeva has seen as typical for 'women's time', that of motherhood (Kristeva 1986: 188–213). This continuing shifting of diegetic time without announcing it when the narrative unfolds makes the narrative space of the film distant from the viewer and emphasizes the relations between the characters (and not the storyline, nor the individual characters) and the very objects that are shown mostly in close-ups. Hence, both the objects and the characters are denied a coherent time/space in the film. Nelson is in fact very keen on keeping the distance to her diegetic world and, for example, as soon as a linearity is established in the narrative it is interrupted by the voice-over reading the story of Calamity Jane; the voice-over uttering proverbs (that are mostly funny, absurd or even grotesque); or by the use of other sounds. Furthermore, the space of the film oscillates mostly between close-ups, extreme close-ups and long shots. That is, we are hardly ever offered a 'normal' view through a medium shot or a master shot. Thus the space of the film establishes two positions, very close/far away, which are never stitched together as a coherent space. Therefore the time structure and the space in the film correspond exactly to what is expressed in the book read by the voice-over: an extreme closeness (the desperate longing of Calamity Jane for her daughter) and a long distance (being far away from the daughter writing the diary in the form of daily letters). By creating such a complex structure Nelson shows the possibility for film to break both with the tyranny of the present tense and with the simplified iconic and indexical codes where the function of the audio-visual image is merely referring. For example, the extreme close-ups in *Red Shift* not only freeze time but also point to the very texture of both the film material (the graininess and the lightness of the image) and what the material is mediating, its 'objects'. The objects, on the other hand, are mostly things and material from the past or objects which are marked by the passage of time, for example, images of the skin of Nelson's old mother, showing the material traces of a long life.

Nelson's strategy may be seen as a way of only distancing oneself from a story and from the memories conveyed. But the fact that she also adheres to the indexical and iconical language of the image as in the various close-ups of things, materials and surfaces implies that Nelson does not want to decline the viewer; she simply does not renounce the referential quality of the image. Therefore the distancing and dislocating structure does not so much alienate the viewer, but instead, as film-maker and film critic Chloe Stewart expresses it in an interview with Nelson on *Red Shift*, it addresses the viewer:

There is a fragmentation taking place in the film[s] that happens partly through the way you [Nelson] dislocate the sound and the image, and it seems to work in a similar way to the way one remembers; it creates a space where, when you are looking, you go through that fragmented process of remembering, one is watching the film while simultaneously going through that act of remembrance.

(Stewart 2003: 16)

16 Gilberto Perez is highly critical of the idea that the film image is an utterance; instead he claims that a camera sees, and that our view can be directed, hence the camera is a pointer (Perez 1998: 55). The act of pointing and designating is in fact part of the function of deixis (the word is actually derived from the Greek word for pointing/indicating), and I think that Perez's own use of 'pointing' shows that there is a need in film studies for a term that signals an authorial intervention or trace, and a way of addressing the viewer beyond merely observing and representing. Hence there must be space for a deictic intervention in the realm of film poetics despite the fact that the degree of deixis can never be pinned down.

Hence, the film follows a structure where the viewer is encouraged to treat the film as a deictic structure; it points both to the 'speaking subject' (in this case, the film) and therefore addresses a viewing/listening subject as well; but not according to a logic of subjectivity as it is understood and sketched out by Bal or Kaja Silverman: how a subject is addressed and drawn into an image or a story. The way of addressing in *Red Shift* is rather material, and objective in that sense; the viewer/listener is called to observe and reflect on objects and relations, not addressed as another 'I' in the story, but addressed nevertheless.

Accordingly, these two remarkable films show that film as a total audiovisual practice enables a film language which is not only referential, and which does not merely bury its utterance/expression in a form where 'only the final version shows through'. Because *Little Dog for Roger* and *Red Shift* do not establish a coherent time and space where every cut and movement becomes an extension of the diegetic space, they also do not point further into the world of the narrative in order to catch a story and the objects depicted. Instead the two films point to themselves as materially mediated reflections and ways of reflecting on the objects and events that they conjure up; events, stories and images that in both films are personal as well (albeit dislocated and dislocating) because they are reflected through a personal material.<sup>16</sup> Such an aesthetic is important for a poetics and politics of memory, because while history and memory are intertwined, and fact and fiction are blended, we should not try to separate them or juxtapose them, reproducing the unproductive opposition of the subject versus the object. Instead we should pay attention to, and be affirmative to what John Frow has called the 'textuality' of memory; that is, not to consider memory as a repetition of the physical traces of the past but as 'a construction of [memory] under conditions and constraints determined by the present' (Frow 1997: 228). As previously shown, both *Little Dog for Roger* and *Red Shift* follow such a textualized view of the intersection of memory and history, where both films begin in the present with the act of remembering, in order to create an oscillating order by going back and forth in time. Hence, both films show how memory is a configuration and a constellation (because the stories and pictures never end up in seamless totalities; instead they are interrelated parts and pieces). The configurations in turn are formed by the present and the past together; actions, events, and situations in the present that trigger different memory formations, which on the other hand are dependent on techniques of storage (like film in this case) as well as different practices (telling and showing). A textualized view of memory implies therefore that it is enacted in a system where different moments and stories are present at the same time as in *Little Dog for Roger* and *Red Shift*. For such a poetics in film an act like 'deixis', of pointing and designating, is important. It shows that memory involves both a poetics and a politics, because if we assert that memory is textualized, constructed in the present, the implied questions are not only the obvious political ones: By whom? When? Why? But, also the ethical task of showing both the trace of the act that produced the object and the offering of a glimpse of the actual (indexical) relation to the material. Such a way of proceeding constitutes what I would like to call an 'aesthetics of



materiality' and is established, albeit carried into effect somewhat differently, in the two films by Malcolm Le Grice and Gunvor Nelson that I have discussed.

What I call an aesthetics of materiality is also in agreement with the aesthetic and ethic *ethos* of the stubborn German philosopher and modernist Theodor W. Adorno who stipulated the rules for the true artwork in his posthumously published *Ästhetische Theorie/Aesthetic Theory* (1970), which he actually never finished. I am, however, not interested in using Adorno as a test case for checking the 'artfulness' of *Little Dog for Roger* and *Red Shift*. Instead I want, very briefly, to show how his thinking may function as another way of describing why it is necessary when studying memory to approach it as something that is textualized and why the act of pointing is important for a material aesthetic of the image.

A Finnish philosopher of aesthetics, Ilona Reiners, points out in her book *Taitteen muisti/The Memory of Art* (2001) how Adorno argued for the unique possibility for the arts or the aesthetic language to recall history without reifying it (or by using Adorno's words: to avoid identity-thinking). For art, according to Adorno, has the privilege to carry the trace of history into the present without subordinating the images, stories and figures to any rationality that would simplify and distort the actual, factual and historical event. Art enables, therefore, the experience of history anew and constitutes a space for critical reflection as well. However, what characterizes art according to Adorno, and especially the aesthetic and the language of modern art, is that they cannot be pinned down by any concept or categorization and are therefore impossible to subordinate to a simple and stable meaning. Such a unique position for art and the aesthetic language offers, on the other hand, the possibility of showing that which is in-between, in Adorno's case that which is in-between art and philosophy; and from our point of view in this context, that which is in-between past and present: memory. And what actually turns out to be one of the important elements in Adorno's aesthetic theory is the act of pointing, or as I have named it here 'deixis', inspired by Bryson's remark. Adorno also reaches the conclusion that the act of pointing and the trace of such an act are essential for a material aesthetic; an aesthetic and poetics that do not lock history and memory as each other's opposites, privileging either object (what is shown or said/the factual/history) or subject (how it is shown or who says/the fictitious/memory). Instead we have a poetics that show by addressing both material and matter that it is paying respect to the object being mediated and also displays the act of pointing. Adorno, having his own agenda, wants of course to make an argument for what he considers to be true art as such, while my point is to show why a certain aesthetic, deictic or pointing praxis that characterizes the experimental film tradition in general (and adds a certain quality to two films by Malcolm Le Grice and Gunvor Nelson), is productive for addressing memory in particular. I can of course not resist the temptation to end my essay by citing a famous example by Adorno (that Reiners in her book on the memory of art appoints to one of the most beautiful parts in Adorno's posthumous *Ästhetische Theorie*) in which he shows

by referring to the material existence (and thus also to the visual articulation and embodiment) of the rhinoceros that what Adorno calls 'the true language of art' (which is without a language) must still contain the act of designating and pointing despite that the artwork escapes discourse (Reiners 2001: 164–66). Thus, its place in-between subject and object, without refusing and renouncing either of them, is secured; still, the artwork is beyond language and beyond discourse but in spite of that it is something that is articulated. 'In that way the rhinoceros', writes Adorno referring to the sheer fact and existence of the rhinoceros, 'that mute animal seems to be saying: I am a rhinoceros' (Adorno 1973: 171–72).

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