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Anti-Odyssey

In *Circumambulation* (2007), the French artist Eric Baudelaire grouped a set of works under the concept of a movement, that of walking around a space or an event. Baudelaire's recent work is organized by another type of movement: his *Anabases* (2008–2012) borrow their name and form from the Greek term for a journey of ascent or going-up. The term is probably best known from Xenophon's classical war epic *The Anabasis of Cyrus*, which tells the story of ten thousand Greek mercenary soldiers who journey deep into Asia Minor during the 5th century BCE. Cyrus has assembled the company in a bid to reclaim the Persian throne from his brother Artaxerxes II, who has assumed the role of emperor upon their father's death. But after traveling eastward across vast stretches of terrain with this massive army, Cyrus is unexpectedly killed in battle. The soldiers find themselves stranded in foreign territory, surrounded by hostile forces. Being mercenaries, they have no reason to continue the invasion without their leader, so after collectively weighing their options, they decide to make an about-face, proceeding on a long journey in the reverse direction. They loot, pillage, and, on a few occasions, peacefully make their way across the land, traversing thousands of miles of territory populated by satrapy subjects and "barbarians."

While less known than *The Odyssey*, *The Anabasis* is a foundational journey narrative, having inspired permutations and offshoots of mythic proportions, among them poems by Saint-John Perse and Paul Celan and the contemporary artworks of Eric Baudelaire that I will be discussing in this essay. Before turning to these works, though, it is important to note that Xenophon's *Anabasis* differs from its Homeric counterpart in a few ways that have special significance for the present moment. Stylistically, Xenophon's writing has more in common with the nineteenth-century realist novel than the classical epic poem: thickly studded with evocative details, the text seems almost to anticipate photography and film in its all-inclusive attitude toward visual minutiae.¹ Structurally, Xenophon's *Anabasis* is less a heroic legend

1. Italo Calvino, writing in 1978, suggests that reading Xenophon's *Anabasis* "is the nearest thing to watching an old war documentary." Italo Calvino, *Why Read the Classics?*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (New York: Pantheon, 1999), p. 19.

than a meandering chronicle of failed imperialism, one that implicitly deconstructs many fundamental elements of the journey narrative. “Anabasis” normally names a one-way journey in an upward direction, but for Xenophon’s ten thousand, the anticipated arc of triumphant ascent spirals into a *katabasis*, a descent or retreat. The movement is thus not straightforwardly migratory, colonial, or questive; it involves a deterritorialization. The place that one returns to is not exactly the same as that which one left, nor are the ones who do the returning, and the reverse leg of the journey must be understood as the after-effect of an aimless wandering that is itself the after-effect of a colossal military failure.

In his book *The Century*—a meditation on the twentieth century on the occasion of its closure—Alain Badiou comments upon this unusual temporal structure, suggesting that anabasis unfolds in the future anterior. He calls anabasis “the free invention of a wandering that *will have been* a return, a return that did not exist as a return-route prior to the wandering.”² Xenophon’s *Anabasis* gears up for a tale of heroism with a grand telos in which an empire will fall and become a destination point of conquest. Faced with the loss of a leader, though, the headless company finds itself suddenly without telos; their journey is refashioned as a return to a homeland from which they will have been in exile. Badiou also notes that this form of movement vacillates between agency and passivity; it constitutes “a disjunctive synthesis of will and wandering.”³ The verb *anabanein*, he adds, can mean both to embark and to return, which raises the question of whether it is an end or a beginning.⁴ Anabasis, it would seem, is uncertain whether it is a greeting or a farewell. This form of movement has an unsettling quality: it is associated with a crisis of action, purpose, and direction. But for Badiou, Baudelaire, and others who have taken up the anabasis theme, the uncertainty and complex temporality with which it is associated are illuminating and rife with possibility. This is because the movement of anabasis renders the difference between here and there, self and other, and the familiar and the foreign momentarily indeterminate, such that they are no longer locked in a purely antagonistic relationship with one another.

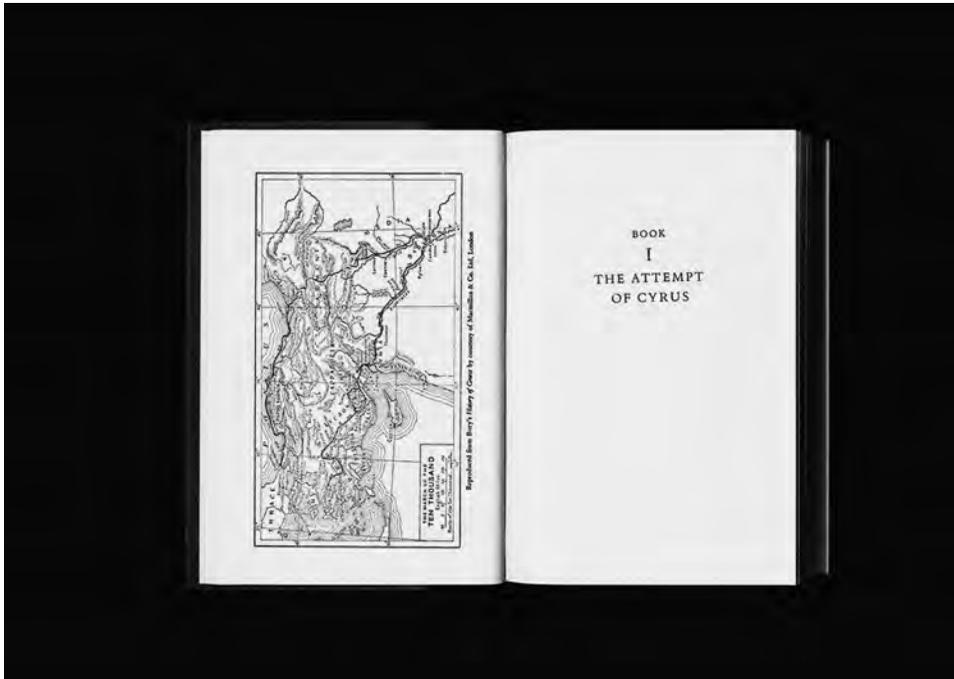
Virtual Cinema

I begin my discussion of Baudelaire’s *Anabases* with a video called *The Makes* (2009), a forged documentary. The subject of the video’s interviews is the real-life film critic Phillippe Azoury, and the topic of conversation is a series of films that Michelangelo Antonioni produced during his nonexistent “Japanese period.” The interview with Azoury is staged as an oral history about these films and this phase of Antonioni’s career. He appears at a table upon which lie vintage actor head shots, film stills, and Japanese film publicity materials—ephemera that are suppos-

2. Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 82.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

4. *Ibid.*



Spread from Xenophon's Anabasis, as published by Penguin Books. 1965.

edly artifacts of these films. In fact, they are found photographs that the artist collected and worked with while in Japan. The camera occasionally departs from Azoury to show these fragments in a closer view, providing enough time for the viewer to invest them with a sense of actuality. Aside from an occasional black screen and a brief interlude in which a simple musical motif is heard, the video does not really depart from the filmic conventions that would be expected for this style of documentary. Close viewing, though, reveals moments in which the fiction is broken—clues that the history being told is a fake, and openly so. At one point, an offscreen voice is heard asking, “Can you start over?” as Azoury appears to fumble a line. The critic speaks earnestly about Antonioni, but his demeanor is at times comical. On occasion, he coyly avoids the camera’s gaze, like a child acknowledging that he knows that we know he is fibbing.

While the history told in this work is a fictive one, the films in question are not fabricated out of thin air. They derive from a book by Antonioni called *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber* in which the director wrote notes, descriptions, and ideas for films that were never made, in some cases because he didn’t have time, in



Eric Baudelaire.
The Makes. 2009.

some cases because they would be unfilmable or go beyond the limits of cinema. *The Makes* is thus an exercise in imagining films that might or might not be. Baudelaire's video is accompanied by a group of mixed-media works of the same title: illuminated glass vitrines containing pages from *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber* alongside the found photographs of Japanese actors that constitute these virtual films' archive. The vitrines, which resemble those that used to house publicity posters in the lobbies of movie theaters, lend materiality to the fiction.

In one sense, *The Makes* involves a quest to find Antonioni. But in another, the film aims to miss the director. Baudelaire does not look for Antonioni in all the right places—Italy, for example, or the locations of his film shoots. He searches for him in a wrong place, Japan. Although Antonioni had indeed intended to film in Japan, the closest he ever came was in 1972, when he traveled to China as the first foreigner permit-



Baudelaire. *The Makes*
(*That Bowling Alley*
on the Tiber). 2009.

ted to make a film there since the country's Communist walling-off. The result was his sprawling documentary *Chung Kuo: Cina*, a film that is as much about the process of encountering an unknown place as it is about China as such.⁵ Interactions with foreign people and places play a small yet crucial role in Antonioni's narrative films as well, and his characters' encounters with alterity often prompt an about-face, a metamorphosis, or the undoing of stagnation.⁶ In keeping with the spirit of Antonioni's work, *The Makes* stages an encounter between Italian texts and Japanese still photographs, and the meeting is transformative on both sides.⁷

In his writings on the powers of the false, Gilles Deleuze suggests that in post-war cinema, imagistic perceptions become clipped loose from their objects in the world. Out of this wreckage climbs a new character, the forger. The forger is different from the liar or traitor, whose activities, like the prewar heroic cowboy or criminal, still aim to have effects in a world dominated by action. The forger's work, by contrast, intervenes exclusively in the world of images. Or rather, the forger simply doesn't accept the absolute incongruity of images and things: as Alain Robbe-Grillet puts it in his discussion of "the false" in the *nouveau roman*, "a new kind of narrator is born: no longer a man who describes the things he sees, but at the same time a man who invents the things around him and who sees the things he invents."⁸ Unlike the classical hero, the forger is not motivated by a quest for personal fame or honor; rather, he achieves his greatest purpose when he vanishes anonymously into the image-systems created by others. Deleuze cites Orson Welles as an exemplary model of this figure: "Since Welles has a strong personality, we tend to forget that his constant theme, precisely as a result of this personality, is to be a person no longer."⁹ Deleuze suggests that *F for Fake*, Welles's essay film about forgers in which he appears as a magician, is the culmination of this theme. Here, Deleuze notes, Welles becomes fully Nietzschean, a forger-as-artist. It is appropriate that Baudelaire would assume the mantle of the forger for this video work, for his approach is to work in good faith with the images supplied by the world—found photographs, preexisting scenarios—and to supply the missing points of connection among them.

5. For a longer analysis of this film, see Homay King, *Lost in Translation: Orientalism, Cinema, and the Enigmatic Signifier* (Durham: Duke University, 2010), pp. 103–111.

6. For example, the central character in *The Night* (1961) reaches a turning point after visiting a burlesque show featuring an African contortionist. Daria, the heroine of *Zabriskie Point* (1970), decides to abandon her work for a corporate land developer after an encounter with a Mexican servant; the images that follow show her boss's house exploding over and over. In *The Passenger* (1975), David Locke's failed attempts to document a political uprising in Chad seem to prompt him to exchange his identity for that of another man.

7. The works in Baudelaire's *Anabases* also invoke the interchanges between Japanese and French cinema during the 1960s. The connections are vast, but the most relevant are those between the films of Alain Resnais and Nagisa Oshima, both of whom are mentioned in the *Anabases*.

8. Alain Robbe-Grillet, "From Realism to Reality," in *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 162–163.

9. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 145.



Michelangelo Antonioni.
Story of a Love Affair. 1950.

Close viewing of *The Makes* reveals that these points of connection extend in many directions. The images do not merely illustrate the script fragments; the relationship is more complex. The video begins with a close-up of hands placing black-and-white images of Japanese actors in a pile, one by one. This image resembles the opening shot of Antonioni's *Story of a Love Affair* (1950), in which a wealthy husband hires a private investigator to probe his wife's past and shows the detective a series of photos of her. As in *Blow-Up* (1966), though, the detective-story frame is only an excuse for Antonioni to tell a different kind of story. *The Makes* seems to promise a similarly investigative frame, that of archival film research. But this premise is a ruse for Baudelaire as well: no new facts about Antonioni's career will be unearthed, only unrealized possibilities and speculative scenes.

In some cases, the found images closely match the scenarios and can plausibly be imagined as frame enlargements from the films. Azoury begins by describing a lost film called *Four Sailors*; accordingly, he shows us photos of four



Baudelaire.
The Makes.
2009.

sailorish actors and a ship. As the video continues, though, the photo fragments begin to grate against the films from which they are supposedly torn. This gap is widest in the segment on *The Silence*, a story of a husband and wife who have nothing more to say to each other, whose silence Antonioni proposes to film. In the prelude to the segment, Azoury places some still photographs in a pile, one at a time: a modern, disaffected-looking couple, a couple in traditional Japanese dress, and a series of alienated couples with creases in the photographs that emphasize their separation. One photo shows a couple who look as though they might have come over from a samurai film. Still, it's possible that this could be their story: by this point in the video, the fictions begin to smooth each other's edges, and we have been primed to accept a great deal of dissonance into the frame.

In *The Makes*, the obvious anabasis is the one that Antonioni fictively undertakes from Italy to Japan and back. But as in the other works in Baudelaire's group, there are additional anabases to unearth. For Plato, the word "anabasis" had a different meaning from the one Xenophon gave it. The word appears three times in the *Republic*, in the section on the allegory of the cave, where Plato uses it to describe the enfeathered prisoners' ascent from the cave of shadows to the sunlit external world.¹⁰ This journey is a topographical one, from the murky cave to the bright light above. It also indicates a metaphorical ascent from an inferior world populated by material, transient objects to the superior realm of philosophical truth populated by abstract, eternal ideals. In the more literal use of the term, anabasis as a "going-up," Plato's prisoners are meant to ascend away from the lure of the local and specific, toward the bright truth of the general and universal, without an accompanying descent. The journey is meant to be one-way. Baudelaire, however, inverts the Platonic hierarchy of the abstract ideal over and against its worldly manifestation—or, more accurately, he makes a more complex anabasis out of it. Antonioni is not to be found on the printed pages of his notebooks with their unmade projects, forever ideal in their way because they exist only in theory. But neither is he to be found solely in the images that Baudelaire supplies from the world of found objects. Rather, Antonioni appears along the course of the round-trip voyage between these two poles, in the interstice between the abstract and the concrete, between the airy nothing and the local habitation and name supplied to it.

The Makes, in other words, does not simply declare the superiority of the immanent over the transcendent. Clues that this is the case are scattered throughout the video, for example in a segment on a film fragment called *Don't Try to Find Me*. Antonioni writes in *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber* that this title is also meant as a caveat to his reader: don't play hide and seek with Michelangelo Antonioni; don't try to find him. In his fictive oral history, Azoury recounts that during this film's production, Antonioni struggled with direction, reverting to a more theatri-

10. See Wayne Ambler, glossary to Xenophon's *The Anabasis of Cyrus*, p. 245. See also Plato, *Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1961), pp. 748–752.

Baudelaire.
The Makes.
 2009.



cal, Italian style of acting even though he had recently found a restrained Japanese style that was more appropriate to the types of films that he had always made. Azoury notes, though, that one scene stands out as quintessential Antonioni: a husband has spoiled his happy family by distancing himself from them, when suddenly, a fog intercedes, like the fog in Antonioni's native Ferrara.¹¹ Here, finally, Azoury remarks, we sense Antonioni's presence as a director. That finding, though, is propped upon the image of a lost man—a man who is disappearing into a fog. An anabasis: it is only when Antonioni gets lost that he is found, that is, that his cinema can be rediscovered in a new way. This seems to be, in part, the project of *The Makes*, to discover new images by looking for them where they are not.



Antonioni. *The Eclipse.* 1962.

In a sequence that occurs toward the end of the video, Azoury selects one photograph from the pile: a Japanese couple standing under a tree, with the man in a modern, Western suit and the woman in a traditional, Japanese kimono. Azoury says that the photo is taken from the scene in *The Silence* in which Alain Delon and Monica Vitti, having met at the Tokyo stock exchange, wander flirtatiously through the streets of Tokyo, with Vitti pausing to float an

11. On fog in Antonioni's cinema, see Raymond Bellour, "D'un autre cinéma," *Trafic* 34 (June 2000), p. 5.

origami boat in a rain barrel at the side of the road. Minus Tokyo and the origami, Azoury seems to be describing the memorable scene between Delon and Vitti near the conclusion of Antonioni's *The Eclipse* (1962)—but this is not what we see in the photo. The thick layers of superimposition require unfolding: *The Eclipse* appears as *The Silence*; Japanese actors appear as Vitti (as her character Vittoria) and Delon (as his character Piero). In addition, the scene in question from *The Eclipse* already involves several superimpositions. Piero's image is eclipsing that of Vittoria's former lover, whom she has just left, and their initial playful meeting will soon be eclipsed by a repetition of the scene—another date that Vittoria and Piero plan, at the same street corner, at eight o'clock the next evening, to which neither of them shows up.

Antonioni's camera shows up, though, and films the empty street corner. In Antonioni's films, this gesture is a kind of ethical principle: to go to the places where "the people are missing."¹² We see him do this immediately after *The Eclipse*, in *Red Desert*, where he uses wandering panning shots to reveal empty and anonymous spaces, places the characters can't or won't go. In *The Makes*, Baudelaire's gesture is similar to Antonioni's: the artist goes to Japan, a place where Antonioni is not, and forges a collaboration among the director's writing fragments, found Japanese images, Antonioni's actual films, and other texts that they reference. The result is, in a way, the opposite of an eclipse: it draws open a curtain, revealing a portal onto a virtual film history that is simultaneously a fictive invention and the illumination of a possibility that, in retrospect, was already there within cinema.

Only the Hand that Erases Can Write

The Makes tells the story of a fictive round-trip journey. Other works in Baudelaire's *Anabases* have been sent on actual round-trip journeys, and their travels have impacted their aesthetic forms. *Of Signs and Senses*, a series of heliogravures on rag paper, is one such work. These images have the pixelated, second-generation appearance of mass-produced photographic images that have been enlarged and reproduced by photocopier. Their titles indicate their source materials. Some of them, like *Paradis Magazine #3 p.71 [sic], Yokohama 2008*, feature semi-identifiable parts of the human body. Others, like *Artforum XLVI #10 p.74 [sic], Yokohama 2008* (2009), are heavily abstracted, and blown up to such a

12. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. 216. The film that makes up the final work in Baudelaire's *Anabases* group—*The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 Years without Images* (2011)—has an image track that consists primarily of landscapes filmed in Tokyo and Beirut with a mobile Super-8 camera. While expressly indebted to Masao Adachi's theory of *jūkeiron*, a practice of filming space to reveal the structures of power embedded therein, these images also recall the less hierarchical way that Antonioni's camera responds to and moves across the surfaces of architectural elements and land forms.

degree that they reveal the underlying off-set printing pattern in the original picture.¹³ All of the images display areas of white that have been scratched out. These markings, Baudelaire indicates, were present in the source pictures: they are *bokashi*, the result of a Japanese practice of censorship in which human genitalia in photographs are erased by delicately scratching the image with a fine blade. The artist found these images in shops in Japan that sell foreign publications and sampled them, reframing and enlarging them beyond recognition, except for the clearly visible *bokashi* where the ink has been removed.

A logical place to begin an interpretation of these works is with a discussion about the way they expose the problem of defining the obscene. The images suggest that any systematic method for determining which photographs are gratuitous is difficult to justify, because such determinations can only be grounded in subjective impressions that implicate the subject making the classification in the very obscenity he or she seeks to condemn. They expose a paradox in the practice of censoring sexual imagery: if desire is fueled by dynamics of revealing and concealment, availability and prohibition, then the act of censorship cannot help but perpetuate an erotic relationship to the image. The title *Of Signs and Senses* references Nagisa Oshima's film *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) and the elaborate censorship controversy it prompted. The fact that erotic drawings, but not photographs, circulate freely in Japan points to the arbitrariness and cultural specificity of obscenity designations, whether in Japan or elsewhere.

The way Baudelaire's images engage with questions of censorship is only part of the story they tell. The pictures have been sent around the world, from warehouses in the United States and Europe to Japanese bookstores, and back again to galleries in New York, Brussels, and elsewhere. Their aesthetic features have been determined in part by the procedures of security and boundary maintenance that are the price of entry for international travel, of which censorship policies form a part. Like stamped passports, the images are imprinted with official souvenirs of their trips. Baudelaire's notes on the piece identify a conceptual journey that the images undertake, parallel to the spatial one: "The gravures don't simply reproduce the forms, they pursue their transformation . . . prolonging their journey from art to pornography back to art."¹⁴ The transformation to the surface of the image is a prerequisite for entry into the country; these images' formal journey is thus inseparable from their geographical and political one.

The word *bokashi* can refer not only to the practice of censorship by scratching with a fine blade, but more generally to a shading, gradation, or fogging. As a mark created by cutting, the *bokashi* is also a kind of engraving. The helio-gravure—an historical method of photographic registration using a sensitized

13. This issue includes an essay on Hito Steyerl, an artist who anabased from Germany to film school in Japan and back to Munich. J. T. Demos, "Traveling Images: The Art of Hito Steyerl," *Artforum* 46, no. 10 (Summer 2008), pp. 408–413, 473.

14. Eric Baudelaire, *Anabases* (2008–2011), Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York (October 31–December 19, 2009).

metal plate and a varnish—is likewise a type of engraving, one that harks back to the early days of photography, in particular the long struggle of experiments aimed at discovering a receptive surface and chemical process that would produce a durable image. The term heliograph can also refer to a signaling device made of a mirror set up to reflect sunlight across distances—a communication system employing a code of light flashes to send a message. This type of heliography constitutes another, yet more



Baudelaire. Artforum
XLVI #10 p.74 [sic],
Yokohama 2008. 2009.

ephemeral way of writing with light: a kind of photography without any receptive surface at all. There is yet a third meaning of the term heliograph, a telescopic apparatus for photographing the sun. Heliography, broadly construed, evokes an Icarus-like quest: the pursuit of an elusive solar light that resists being captured in a static form, be it on a silver plate, in a mirror reflection, or in a photo of a blinding star. The fogged look of the *bokashi* mark and its abstraction in Baudelaire's enlargements suggest something of this etymology.

Baudelaire's video [*sic*] (2009) is a companion piece to *Of Signs and Senses*. The video opens with images of Japanese city street scenes shot with a fixed camera. People walk past a bowling alley. A character and a story gradually emerge: a young woman is riding a bicycle to a bookstore, Media Shop. She is going to work. Soon, a package is delivered to the shop. The woman carefully slices open the brown cardboard box, revealing a shipment of art books with glossy photographic illustrations and color plates. Another woman arrives and, stacking the books before her on a desk, assembles

the tools of *bokashi* and sets to work scratching the images. Her first acts of censorship seem to follow something like the expected procedure: the photographs, by Nobuyoshi Araki, depict female nudes in bondage. As she progresses through the pile, though, the assortment of images on the chopping block grows absurd: flowers, Tokyo cityscapes, a portrait of a man who may or may not be dead, a black-and-white image depicting a crowd of figures in helmets. The collection of images, all of which are by Japanese artists, also includes seascapes by Hiroshi Sugimoto and examples from the *Today* series by On Kawara.

Not only is the assortment of images perplexing; the parts of them that the scratcher selects for erasure do not seem to follow any particular logic, at least not at first glance. From the picture of the Tokyo circular highway, she scrapes away some words on black pavement, leaving behind small empty squares. From an image of a Tokyo skyline, she carefully rubs out the Tokyo Tower, a replica of the Eiffel Tower, leaving in its place, absurdly, a perfectly identifiable silhouette of it. In another cityscape, she etches the kanji characters off the side of a bridge. In what seems to be the culmination of the landscape category of pictures, the *bokashi* practitioner turns her stylus to a Sugimoto seascape and etches away the horizon. Her act, though, does not really erase the line; it only leaves in its place a fuzzier, more Rothko-like band. Some of the seascapes in the book already feature blurred horizons; tellingly, the scratcher leaves these alone.

A pattern begins to emerge. The parts of the images that the scratcher puts *sous rature* all seem to be the pictorial equivalent of deictics or indexicals—words like “here,” “you,” and “that” whose meanings depend on the context in which they are used. The signs in the road are indicators of direction addressed to motorists whose meaning depends on where they are and where they want to go. The Tokyo Tower and its original model are visual landmarks by which a lost tourist might orient herself. Things that might give a sense of direction—things that say, effectively, “You are here”—are what get scratched out in [*sic*]. The horizon is perhaps the quintessential “You are here” sign, insofar as it is in relation to



Baudelaire. [*sic*]. 2009.

this line and its vanishing point that a spectator's viewing position is established. The widened bands deemphasize the separations between air and water and between viewer and world. Some of the cityscapes, the artist notes, come from a book called *Tokyo Nobody*; these images are strikingly depopulated. In order to capture them, the photographer Masataka Nakano ventured out at odd hours and waited patiently for the people to vacate the frame. The erasure of the landmarks within these photographs complements this gesture, in that it also attempts to create a clearing in an overly



Baudelaire. [sic]. 2009.

populated, semiotically burdened space. In keeping with the anabastic form, Baudelaire employs a practice of inscription that normally operates to fix an image, ascribing a single meaning to it, in an opposite manner, using the *bokashi* to make room for the eye to wander. Other elements that are scratched out in this video, it soon becomes clear, have been selected according to similar principles. The erasure of genitalia from the nudes removes the most widely agreed-upon signifiers of gender, suggesting that this mode of censorship—even in its traditional form—has the probably unintended effect of destabilizing the opposition between male and female. The image of the figures in helmets shows protesters from the 1968 Zengakuren student demonstrations in Japan in which political factions were identified by the color and label of their helmets. These labels are also markers that differentiate allies from foes. The woman accordingly rubs them out. The erasure of these differentiating markers, though, is not pure revisionism. Rather, it imagines other possible histories, other paths these factions might have taken. The artist's gesture reveals potentials that are already latent within the photograph.

The video's final sequence shows the young woman applying her blade to reproductions of On Kawara's *Today* series. Among these black, rectangular paintings of dates, the woman turns to the image "MAR. 16, 1994" and carefully scrapes away the three letters. The resulting picture might refer to the 16th day of any month in that year. As this marred—or un-marred, de-marred?—painting is cut loose from its date stamp, the viewer is unfastened from calendrical time. As Jeff

Wall notes, Kawara's *Today* paintings already involve an act of negation, since the addition of a date disfigures the underlying monochrome: "Kawara disfigures his monochromes to make an elemental, lucid gesture. . . . This gesture renounces the figurative or form-creating capacities of his art. The moment of now must pass unpainted but nevertheless must be acknowledged."¹⁵ In Baudelaire's complementary gesture, the serial, ritual, and slightly melancholic aspects of Kawara's project are interrupted, leaving behind a monochrome marred not by the addition of an anchor to a now that will soon be past, but by the invocation of an indeterminate historical bracket, a kind of any-time-whatever, to paraphrase Deleuze. One thinks again of the modified Sugimoto seascapes: the removal of the horizon line unmoors the viewer from her usual spatial coordinates, and it also prompts her to reimagine her relationship to time, insofar as the sun's position relative to the horizon correlates to the hour of the day. The beacons are being removed: we no longer know precisely where, or when, we are in relation to what we see.

In [*sic*], the parts of the images that the scratcher puts under erasure are the things that provide too-clear indicators of one's orientation in relation to what one sees. The censorship is directed toward signs that dictate in advance a limiting relationship to it. Things that provide a ready-made identification or give too-clear directions are put under erasure. This is an anti-censorship, in a way: rather than provide directives about how one is to interact with the image, it says, Erase the instructions and remove the guardrails, Allow us to roam uncoordinatedly around the image for a while. While for some the gesture might call to mind Rauschenberg's erasure of de Kooning, the result is somewhat different. The modification serves not to negate the underlying picture, but rather to propose a detour for it, revealing that other possibilities exist virtually in the image, and that there are other directions it might go.

Pure Receptivity (Detour)

The title of the video that I have just been discussing, [*sic*], is itself a deictic, meaning "thus" or "so" in Latin. This term is familiar from its use to indicate a passage in a text that has been quoted verbatim, including any errors that were present in the source material. It says, in effect, "This was already there." Roland Barthes' *Empire of Signs*—a book that is likewise the product of a Frenchman's sojourn in Japan—contains a writing fragment called "So" (*Tel*). In the "So" fragment, Barthes writes about the haiku form of poetry and the way that it conveys "thusness" or "suchness," thwarting investigative analysis in favor of simple designation. Barthes writes, "*It's that, it's thus, says the haiku, it's so. . . . Here meaning is only a flash, a slash of light.*"¹⁶ Barthes' metaphor of the flash of light recalls the

15. Jeff Wall, "Monochrome and Photojournalism in On Kawara's Today Paintings," in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), p. 142.

16. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 83.

second meaning of the heliograph, a signaling device that communicates using flashes of light that leave no trace. He describes the way that the haiku's simple "thus" frustrates the search for a fixed, reductive meaning: it involves "a touch so instantaneous and so brief (without vibration or recurrence), [without] remorse for a forbidden, permanently alienated definition."¹⁷ In this same passage, Barthes explicitly invokes the idea of photography without film: "*When the light of sense goes out, but with a flash that has revealed the invisible world*, Shakespeare wrote; but the haiku's flash illuminates, reveals nothing; it is the flash of a photograph one takes very carefully (in the Japanese manner) but having neglected to load the camera with film."¹⁸ Like the signaling heliograph, this would be a form of image creation with no storage, no receptive surface plate except that provided in the memories of the individuals perceiving the images.

In his 1925 essay "A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad," Freud offers a metaphor for the human psyche that is in many ways the opposite of the empty camera Barthes describes. Freud begins his essay with a description of the *Wunderblock*, a novelty wax writing pad covered by a thin, transparent sheet of cellophane. Lifting the sheet superficially erases the marks on the surface of the *Wunderblock*; however, faint traces remain permanently engraved on the wax tablet underneath. The human psyche, Freud suggests, is like this writing pad: it is a palimpsest that records all perceptual traces on top of one another with the most recent ones clearly visible, and the older ones faintly but permanently embedded underneath. His metaphor suggests a theory of memory in which impressions once gleaned are difficult or impossible to erase. Freud writes that the psyche is essentially "a receptive surface which retains its receptive capacity for an unlimited time. . . . It has an unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions and nevertheless lays down permanent—even though not unalterable—memory-traces of them."¹⁹ The human memory, when functional, is an instrument of pure receptivity. It is always loaded with film, as it were, and this film accumulates countless exposures over a lifetime. It is difficult to separate out the layers of images, and there is no way to refresh the receptive plate.²⁰

The *Wunderblock* has an antecedent in the 4th-century BCE *grammateion*, a writing tablet covered with a thin layer of wax designed to be inscribed with a stylus. Like Freud, Aristotle saw in this tablet a metaphor for the mind. Giorgio

17. Barthes, p. 83.

18. Barthes, p. 83. The line is actually from Wordsworth, not Shakespeare. See William Wordsworth, "The Prelude" (Book 6, Cambridge and the Alps).

19. Sigmund Freud, "A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad," trans. James Strachey, in *General Psychological Theory* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 208.

20. Jacques Derrida, Mary Ann Doane, and Thomas Elsaesser emphasize the act of inscription in Freud's *Wunderblock* metaphor rather than the quality of receptivity. See Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998); Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, and the Archive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2002); and Elsaesser, "Freud and the Technical Media: The Enduring Magic of the *Wunderblock*," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California, 2011), pp. 95–115.

Agamben notes that in a passage from *De Anima*, Aristotle “likens the potential intellect to a writing tablet on which nothing is written.”²¹ Unlike Freud’s writing tablet, Aristotle’s is empty, perpetually refreshed. Agamben suggests that Aristotle’s *grammateion* offers a metaphor of the intellect as pure potentiality, a mode of thought that is open to possibility precisely because it is nothing until grazed by the writer’s stylus. He attributes to this tablet the property of pure receptivity: this intellect, Agamben writes, “is not a known object but simply a pure knowability and receptivity (*pura receptibilitas*).”²²

When Barthes writes in *Empire of Signs* of “a touch so instantaneous and brief, without vibration or recurrence,” he seems to be imagining a kind of visual encounter liberated from the permanence of the psyche as mystic writing pad—an encounter more like one with Aristotle’s empty *grammateion*, free of the cluttered engravings on the underlying tablet. Significantly, though, Barthes seems to want to retain the receptive component of the perceptual encounter. The photograph will still be taken, even though the camera is not loaded with film. This metaphorical empty camera would have something like the “unlimited capacity” of Freud’s writing tablet and the “pure receptivity” of Aristotle’s for new impressions. But unlike that of the *Wunderblock*, its stylus would remain unguided by prior inscriptions. There would be no pre-imprinted grooves or channels on its surface to steer the path of the marker.²³

Throughout *Empire of Signs*, Barthes attempts to remain receptive to Japan. He attempts to be like the tablet on which nothing is written, without recourse to preexisting impressions and narratives. Whether successfully or not, he actively resists imposing worn-out stereotypes and clichés onto that country. He insists that the Japan he writes about is fictive, not real, and he makes concerted efforts to avoid viewing Japan as the mysterious other who harbors a secret, invisible world of authenticity. Such a world would be one that Barthes could never truly access because of his status as outsider. His refusal to treat Japan as a forever mysterious and closed-off truth is an admirable one, in that it undoes the dynamic of paranoid probing and withholding that often structures encounters with the foreign and with alterity in general.²⁴ The “flash that illuminates nothing” that he

21. Giorgio Agamben, “*Pardes: The Writing of Potentiality*,” *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University, 1999), p. 215. The original passage is found in Book III, Chapter 4 of Aristotle’s *De Anima*.

22. Agamben, “Bartleby, or On Contingency,” p. 251.

23. As Deleuze notes, “Modern painting is invaded and besieged by photographs and clichés that are already lodged on the canvas before the painter even begins to work. In fact, it would be a mistake to think that the painter works on a white and virgin surface. The entire surface is already invested virtually with all kinds of clichés. . . . It is not dangerous simply because it is figurative, but because it claims to *reign over vision*.” Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003), p. 12.

24. Jean Laplanche explains this dynamic in his writings about the enigmatic signifier. See, for example, the Kent Seminar, May 1, 1990, in *Seduction, Translation, and the Drives*, ed. John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, trans. Martin Stanton (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), pp. 21–40.

describes in *Empire of Signs* is related to this position. It is a way to decline the invitation to expose and probe the other, to poke at his or her image with the sharp instruments of inquiry (or, in the case of Xenophon's army, to poke at the barbarian other with the sharp spear of the warrior). Instead, this flash apprehends the other with the light touch of a glancing ray. Rather than sit around nursing remorse for "a permanently alienated definition" or secret, hidden meaning, Barthes stages an encounter with the unknown in which the act of saying "it's so" is sufficient by itself.

Barthes' solution to the problem of how to write about Japan raises a question, namely that in declaring that his Japan is a fictive entity—a mere empire of signs—he deemphasizes his real interaction with that country, and thereby renders possible a reading in which the Japan he writes about is merely a figment of his imagination. This is the logical outcome of an approach that leaves too intact the binary opposition between fiction and fact, imaginary and real, appearance and reality, falsehood and truth.²⁵ But there is another way to understand the relationship between Barthes' Japan and the real Japan: through the notion of the virtual. I use the term "virtual" here not in the sense of falsehood or mere seeming, but rather in a sense that has been described by Leo Bersani of a "reservoir of possibility, of all that *might be*."²⁶ Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit offer another version of this concept in their reading of Alain Resnais' *Provence* (1977) when they write that Resnais "goes out of his way to discourage us from structuring the film as a contrast between fiction and presumed reality . . . [the images] just seem to be part of *another scenario*."²⁷ According to this way of thinking, the virtual and the actual, fiction and reality, fantasy and fact, are not diametrically opposed to one another. The virtual is closer to the possible than to the false: it does not exclude the true, the actual, or the real, but nor does it confirm them. It exists on a continuum with these terms, in which each is contained in and may give rise to the other. It is a sea of potential, of things that might or might not be, that require an attitude of receptivity in order to be able to perceive them. It is a collection of images, ideas, and stories that ask to be taken seriously, whether or not they have been granted the official imprint of facticity.

The Interstice

This ancient philosophical sense of the virtual, in my view, is at play in Baudelaire's work, both in the *Anabases* and elsewhere. In *The Makes*, Baudelaire

25. Nietzsche undid this binary in 1873, in "On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1954). Kaja Silverman undoes the binary opposition between appearance and Being in *World Spectators* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2000), a book that informs my thinking on this topic.

26. Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), p. 25, italics mine.

27. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, "Sadism and Film: Freud and Resnais," *Qui Parle* 6, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1992), p. 26.

imagines a film history that might or might not be, and through the technique of forgery the film illuminates new aspects of a very real exchange between Eastern and Western cinema in the 1960s. In *[sic]*, Baudelaire opens up spaces of possibility in Japanese photographs through a technique that was originally designed to close those possibilities down. A version of this way of thinking is also active in Baudelaire's *Anabasis X-Rayograms*, the final works that I will be discussing in this essay. The *Anabasis X-Rayograms* are c-prints and silver gelatin prints made from negatives of unused rolls of photographic film. One of these, *Anabasis X-Rayogram (Tokyo Beirut New York Paris) I* (2009), is a red color field banded by ghostly horizontals and diagonals. The composition recalls abstract painting, but one can almost imagine the bands as a distorted image of painted lines on pavement: perhaps a crosswalk in the street, captured by accident by a photographer who happened to be walking around an intersection with a camera loaded with expired film. *Anabasis X-Rayogram (Kyoto Paris New York) I* (2009) is similarly enigmatic with its speckling of gray and black, slightly resembling granite or dirty pavement. Again, the image is plainly non-figural, but in straining to identify a referent, one might turn to images of travel and movement. It is as if the camera were trying to see a road by the hazy illumination of car headlights refracted in a deep mist.

Baudelaire's source documents inform us that these images are photograms, pictures made without the use of a camera. The artist sent unused rolls of film on open-ended journeys to various international cities, sometimes in checked luggage, sometimes through the postal systems. The rolls of film were X-rayed at security stations along the way and thereby exposed, producing these vaporous images. Baudelaire had originally brought the rolls of film to Kyoto from Paris for use during an artist's residency, but, as the accompanying text puts it, "the artist failed to imagine a photographic project to conduct in Japan." The *X-Rayograms* are the exciting fruit of this failure. The destinations were chosen for their connections to texts that Baudelaire was reading at the time. The *X-Rayograms* embark on geographical anabases: they are sent forth by the artist to a series of world destinations, and like Xenophon's soldiers, they return transformed by their journeys, with the glare of the X-ray security cameras tattooed on their skins. As in *Of Signs and Senses*, movements and their accompanying state protocols leave visible traces on the surface of the receptive traveling material.²⁸

Alongside the geopolitical interpretation and its suggestive critiques, the *X-Rayograms* also invite a reading that has implications for thinking about photography and figuration. Photographic imagery is perhaps the figural medium par excellence of the twentieth century, the one whose invention, along with the cine-

28. The process by which these works are generated resembles that of Walead Beshty's *Travel Pictures* (2006–2008), although the results differ in a few key ways. Beshty's pictures are vivid, sometimes featuring stripes of brightly saturated color or traces of figuration, whereas Baudelaire's reveal the X-ray's tendency to produce degraded, low-definition, overexposed images that verge on the monochromatic. For more on Beshty's photograms, see Jan Tumlir, "Walead Beshty Piece by Piece," *Aperture* 192 (Fall 2008), pp. 32–39.

ma, is said to have freed painting from the constraints of representation and thereby paved the way for abstraction. Whereas Barthes imagines a camera without film, Baudelaire's *X-Rayograms* are made by film without a camera, at least not one enclosing its own celluloid. As in any photogram, the entire camera and lens are *sous rature*; in this case, the referents are as well. The bare rolls of film illustrate a way of seeing without a lens, a type of vision without filters or shapers. In this way, they recall the "pure receptivity" of Aristotle's writing tablet and the "unlimited receptive capacity" of Freud's mystic writing pad. Although in one sense these images are distorted, failing to index any identifiable shapes or subjects, in another sense, they represent a kind of vision that is prior to all distortion, prior to what Henri Bergson calls "canalization": a vision unimpeded by the deformations and separations of field effected by a lens, whether glass or metaphorical.²⁹ This vision is thereby relieved of the "alienated definitions," as Barthes might call them, that such lenses impose on the visible world, and the clichés that lie in wait on empty film and canvas to ensnare new images.

Perhaps the most famous moment in Xenophon's *Anabasis* is when, after much hardship and death, the army arrives at a promontory from which the ocean is visible. With great joy, the soldiers cry out, "The sea! The sea!" Because the Greeks know how to sail, this glimpse of water indicates that they have found a navigable route home. The discovery, of course, is a jubilant one. It is also a moment of canalization, since the improvisatory, wandering phase of the journey is now over. The smooth, open world has been reorganized to fit a familiar map. Baudelaire's *X-Rayograms*, though, could be said to forego canalization in favor of unformed, purely receptive impressions. They seem to glimmer between forms and their dissolution, if not literally then at least in the mind's eye. The city names listed in the title of each piece—Tokyo, New York, Beirut—cannot help but call to mind specific histories, peoples, architectures, landscapes, languages, and other identifying markers. But the *X-Rayograms* do not provide images of these cities. Instead, they register the interstices through which one must pass in order to arrive in them. In these interstitial spaces, the roll of film, a surface of pure receptivity, and the X-ray machine stare at one another in a *mise-en-abyme* of vision. A new type of cityscape is revealed: a landscape picture that undoes the encrusted borders of the twentieth-century metropolis. In the *X-Rayograms*, we have a vision of how space might look if it were momentarily relieved of the traumatic histories and static, wall-like contours through which we cannot help but apprehend cities like Tokyo, New York, and Beirut at the transition from the twentieth century to the twenty-first.

These histories, though, are not precisely being undone or revised. Significantly, the *X-Rayograms* could not have appeared were it not for the airport-security and surveillance instruments through which they were created. These sys-

29. On canalization, see Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998), p. 93.

tems of border maintenance are predicated on pure closure and an antagonism toward alterity, the opposite of receptivity. In an anachronistic meeting of technologies, the outdated analog film negative encounters the security kiosk, laying itself bare to a flash that reveals nothing. But the *Anabasis X-Rayograms* do not exactly redeem or revise the history of the early twenty-first century; they simply precipitate out of it. This gesture opens up a space of clearing in which “home-land” and “security” can be reconfigured. Indeed, they *must* be reconfigured, for home is foreclosed, and securities are anything but secure.³⁰

The movement of anabasis forms a necessary supplement to the bare receptivity of the *X-Rayograms*. This movement allows us to entertain the idea of a relationship to receptivity, a condition that is difficult and potentially maddening insofar as it requires a radical openness to internal alterity. In *The Century*, Badiou suggests that there might be a way of making alterity one’s own that is not predicated on an incorporation or assimilation of the other. He arrives at this idea through a reading of Paul Celan’s poem version of the anabasis, which is included in the source documents for Baudelaire’s work. The poem references the moment in which Xenophon’s soldiers first lay eyes on the sea. Badiou describes this moment in the poem as a “maritime call,” noting that in some ports there are beacons or foghorns that emit a sound when the tide goes out.³¹

Celan invokes these signals from the sea with the portmanteau words *Leuchtglockentöne* (“lightbellsounds”) and *Kummerbojen* (“sorrow-buoys”). In his poem, Celan renders the sounds of the beacons onomatopoeically with the syllables “dum-, dun-, un-.”

Importantly, the maritime call as rendered in Celan’s poem is not one from a familiar, Greek ship. It is an alien voice, more barbarian than Hellenic. Notably, the



Baudelaire. Anabasis X-Rayogram (Tokyo Beirut New York Paris) 1. 2009.

30. Another work in Baudelaire’s *Anabases, Chanson d’Automne* (2008), addresses the economic collapse of September 2008 by manipulating pages from that month’s *Wall Street Journal* to reveal lines from Paul Verlaine’s poem hidden therein.

31. Badiou, p. 95.

32. The Oxford English Dictionary notes that “the actual relations (if any) of the Arabic and Greek words cannot be settled; but in European languages *Barbaria, Barbarie, Barbary*, have from the first been treated as identical with Latin *barbaria*, Byzantine Greek.”

word “barbarian” is said to originate from the Greek and Latin via the Arabic word *barbara*, meaning “to talk noisily and confusedly.”³² Like Celan’s syllables, it is onomatopoeic, a string of meaningless syllables, “bar, bar,” that also designates incoherent speech. A word meaning “unintelligible foreigner” in Arabic travels into the Greek language, where it comes to refer not to the unintelligibility of the Greeks but to that of the Arabs. Although this word’s precise origins remain unsettled, the story



*Baudelaire. Anabasis X-
Rayogram (Kyoto Beirut
New York Paris) I. 2009.*

of the word “barbarian” provides a compelling linguistic anabasis: a word that makes a journey from one language to another, and a word that refers to a foreign speech that was, once upon a time, one’s own speech. It is according to this paradoxical sort of logic that we must understand the “lightbellsounds” of the maritime beacons in Celan’s poem—not as the familiar tinkling sounds of home but as a call that already contains the possibility that both sender and receiver are simultaneously foreign and familiar to one another and to themselves.³³

Badiou calls the moment of encounter with the sounds emitted from the sea “a moment of peril and beauty.”³⁴ He reads in this encounter an unusual way of making alterity one’s own, a way that forms a parallel anabasis to the movement of barbarian words into Greek. Badiou writes that “anabasis requires the other, the voice of the other. . . . Celan breaks with the theme of an empty and self-sufficient wandering.” This break is, for Badiou, Celan’s major interven-

tion into the group of texts inspired by Xenophon’s *Anabasis*. As Badiou puts it, “The maritime images function as indices of alterity. . . . How are we to make alterity ours? That is Celan’s question.” But for Celan, Badiou notes, this “making ours” has nothing to do with a colonial, imperialistic, or possessive movement: “There is neither internalization nor appropriation. There is no substantialization of the ‘we’ into an ‘I.’ There is pure call, an almost imperceptible difference that must be made our own, simply because we have encountered it.”

We are now finally prepared to understand the return curve of the anabasis,

33. Celan’s poem quotes a line, “*unde suspirat cor*,” from the text of Mozart’s *Exsultate, Jubilate* (K. 165), a solo motet composed in 1772 during Mozart’s first visit to Milan at the age of sixteen, for the castrato Venanzio Rauzzini. The enfolding of Mozart’s anabasis (and that of the *Exsultate* text) within Celan’s text provides another example of internal alterity within the poem.

34. Badiou, p. 95. The other quotations in this paragraph are found here as well.

at least in its most promising form, in its full significance. It is not simply that the anabastic voyager proceeds from a state of willful mission to one of itinerant way-faring, later to return merrily home, for all three of these states are still predicated on self-sufficiency, and on self-sameness in relation to alien others and places. If they involve a “we,” it is one that, as Badiou puts it, is still “subject to the ideal of the ‘I.’”³⁵ The moment of seeing the sea and hearing its beacons is not a recognition, precisely speaking: it is a moment of *receptivity*, of impressionability and wide-openness. In this moment, the soldiers find themselves addressed by an alien voice, the enigmatic call of the foghorn, and decide to interpret that call as something that is addressed to them; they receive it as something that is meant for them to hear and respond to. The “we” that is established in this moment is, miraculously, no longer predicated on rigid self-sufficiency. As Badiou writes, this we “enjoys an aleatory dependence on an anabasis that reascends—outside of any pre-existing path—towards this ‘together’ that still harbors alterity.”³⁶ This “together,” which is the last line of Celan’s poem (*Mitsammen*), involves neither incorporation nor eradication of difference; it is not about possession or assimilation. Rather, the sense of unity is predicated on a touch of undecidability that subtends the distinction between the I and the you, the known and the alien, and the homeland and the foreign, and that makes each a potential harbor for the other.

* * *

In Baudelaire’s *The Makes*, Azoury reads from a letter to Antonioni written by Roland Barthes. This precious letter was included in a 1980 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* that was dedicated to Barthes on the occasion of his death. In this letter, Barthes speaks of the struggle to capture a certain type of rare moment, a moment in which “an object’s full identity suddenly chooses a new space, that of the interstice.”³⁷ This moment is like that of the glimmering shift in Baudelaire’s *X-Rayograms*, on the cusp between fog and form, abstraction and figuration. As Antonioni put it in an essay published shortly after he made *The Eclipse*, “The problem is to catch a reality which is never static, is always moving toward or away from a moment of crystallization, and to present this movement, this arriving and moving on, as a new perception.”³⁸ In claiming this movement as exemplary, though, it is crucial not to celebrate itinerancy for its own sake, nor to idealize involuntary or unlivable conditions of rootlessness, nomadism, or self-eradication. In addition, Badiou warns that the undoing of the self and the self’s openness to difference can quickly congeal into another stagnant identity position, such that one “ends up nearly weeping with tenderness over the things [one] tolerated.”³⁹ This condition, Badiou writes, is indicative of an “*other passivity*, of

35. Badiou, p. 96.

36. Ibid.

37. Roland Barthes, “Cher Antonioni,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* 311 (May 1980), p. 11.

38. “The Event and the Image” (1963), in *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema* (New York: Marsilo Publishers, 1996), p. 51.

39. Badiou, p. 127.

resignation and tolerance.”⁴⁰ This resigned type of passivity remains in the service of the status quo.

The kind of receptivity that leads to togetherness—Celan’s *Mitsammen*—is predicated on the interstice. Antonioni has said that our lives take place “in the rift”: in the space between the film frames, and in the unnavigated deserts and seas through which we must pass in order to reach any specifiable destination. Like the rustling of the wind that is occasionally heard in his films, the fog that obscures them is a metaphor for this rift. Fog is also a motif in Baudelaire’s *Anabases*, and it is associated with abstraction and formlessness. But this is not the same kind of abstraction as the one that correlates with Platonic ideals. Antonioni’s fog is the fog of Ferrara and of his own past; it is immanent and resoundingly of the present, physical world. For both Antonioni and Baudelaire, this fog forms a virtual space of possibility out of which other sites and shapes emerge, and into which they will eventually disappear, as if they were beams of light shining out from the sea.

40. Ibid.