Erika Magnusson and Daniel Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

Nonhuman Cinema and the Logistical Sublime*

KYLE STINE

Art has always been entangled in systems of trade and commerce. Its materials both derive from and, in a way that requires reflection, refer to its provenance in social practices of exchange. Renaissance paintings, for instance, indexed the craft exchange of pigments, brush fibers, and oils. Using chemical analysis alongside historical papers and trade inventories, National Gallery of Art conservator Barbara Berrie has exposed in these paintings a world of geological materials in movement, tracing pigments such as cobalt and antimony back to mines, newly opened around the turn of the sixteenth century, in the Erzgebirge, or Ore Mountains, in what is now Germany.[1] Photographs in the mid-nineteenth century evidenced trade in industrial chemicals, such as silver salts, hyposulphite of soda, and various acids, as documented at the time in the detailed proceedings of the Royal Society of Arts in Great Britain.[2] One is reminded of Beaumont Newhall's remarkable essay "60,000 Eggs a Day," which details the workings of a factory in Dresden that produced albumen paper for *cartes de visite*, whose rich sepia tones attested to the geographical convergence of a raw paper supply "sufficiently free from all traces of iron" with a source of farm-fresh eggs.[3]

1. Barbara H. Berrie, "Mining for Color: New Blues, Yellows, and Translucent Paint," *Early Science and Medicine* 20, nos. 4–6 (2015), pp. 308–34, 313.

2. For an especially vivid example, see the account of W. C. Meates in *A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Recent Specimens of Photography Exhibited at the House of the Society of Arts, 18 John Street Adelphi, in December, 1852* (London: Royal Society of the Arts, 1852), p. 24.

3. Beaumont Newhall, "60,000 Eggs a Day," *Image: Journal of Photography of George Eastman House* 4, no. 4 (April 1955), pp. 25–26. The story can also be found in Newhall's excellent *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present*, rev. ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), p. 60. For an account of a nitrate-mine manager in Chile who created a photo album documenting the labor and topography of the mines, thus showing both sides of the flows between media and minerals, see Louise Purbrick, "Nitrate Ruins: The Photography of Mining in the Atacama Desert, Chile," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2017), pp. 253–78.

Films at the end of the nineteenth century represented trade in nitrocellulose, which itself resulted from trade in cotton, nitric acid, and various solvents, while recording and projection devices, such as Vitascopes and Cinématographes, derived from international trade in various glasses and metals necessary for their more complicated assemblies.

From ancient times, this Heraclitean flux of incoming and outgoing materials mapped the extents of imperial territories. A mosaic in Antioch during the waning days of Rome would have also been a mosaic of end points in a network of trade routes connecting quarries scattered throughout the empire: tesserae of raw glass from Egypt and the Levant and various colored marbles from the island of Paros in the Aegean, Carrara in northwestern Italy, and the Marmara region in Turkey.[4] The available variety of stones would compose what, in another context, Jordanna Bailkin has called an "imperial palette."[5] Like that later palette in the British Empire, it would have indexed broad practices of imperial subjugation, the consuming oppression of humans, animals, and the environment alike. No doubt mosaics throughout the Roman world embedded a story of slave labor at a time when both the emperor and private individuals owned slaves for quarrying.[6] The tessellations pointed back to oxen pulling single-yoke carts, whose work, while not as immediately fatal as eating an exclusive diet of mango leaves was for Indian cows tasked with producing with their urine the brilliant yellow of purree, nevertheless ended in the same fate.[7] As for the environment, one example is the Aliki peninsula in ancient Greece, whose prized white marble would be mined so extensively that only the coastline's photogenic waters would remain. As Bailkin argues about the case of India yellow in the nineteenth century, the demand for representational materials from a territory could, by force of its repercussions on the customs of the colonized, undermine the state's ability to rule, threatening the wider system of trade.[8] When oppression became visible, whether through the sight of brutal whippings or written reporting, as was the case with Trailokya Nath Mukharji's exposé on purree, people would resist.[9]

4.   This example of imperial trade is inspired by the Antioch mosaics at the Baltimore Museum of Art. For an isotopic analysis seeking out the provenance of stones in other Antioch mosaics, see Marie Jeanette Archambeault, "Sourcing of Marble Used in Mosaics at Antioch (Turkey)" (master's thesis, University of South Florida, 2004), https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1941&context=etd. For a brief account of sourcing for mosaics, see Oliver Nicholson, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 1037–38.

5.   Jordanna Bailkin, "Indian Yellow: Making and Breaking the Imperial Palette," *Journal of Material Culture* 10, no. 2 (2005), pp. 197–214.

6.   Alfred Michael Hirt, *Imperial Mines and Quarries in the Roman World: Organizational Aspects 27 BC–AD 235* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 315.

7.   Bailkin, "India Yellow," p. 205.

8.   Ibid., p. 209.

9.   For slave resistance, see Peter Hunt, *Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery* (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), pp. 137–72. For the Indian response to purree, see Bailkin, "India Yellow," pp. 207–09.

Yet the forms of visibility at play in understanding the source materials of these mosaics and paintings cannot be said to be operative in the works themselves. Onlookers taking in the figures of a mosaic would be unlikely to see in the tiles these lines of trade or the social relations that supported them, as the case of purree, so prized by British painters until its unsettling origins came to light, demonstrates. Tracking down these sources would only detract from its meaning as art, from the aura, as Walter Benjamin defined it, of its singular existence in time and space, or from its conceptual wellspring in the artist, as in the modern cult of authorship.[10] To trace an artwork's material chains of becoming would only make it derivative—literally derived from elsewhere. The more complicated the artwork, the wider the network of trade and the deeper the debt to history. In short, the more voluminous the elsewhere.

If I start from these wide expanses of geography and history, it is to consider how an art object might gather into itself their breadth. For years now I've been fascinated by watching—or rather, by my inability to watch—a film that attempts to do just this, to pull the expanses of a global logistics system into the fold of representation, to make it somehow visible or felt. Erika Magnusson and Daniel Andersson's *Logistics* (2012) holds the distinction of being the longest film ever made, at over thirty-five days in duration. The film is a documentary, or simply a document, of the reverse journey of a consumer product, a pedometer, from its destination in Sweden back to its manufacturing source in China. It dramatizes in this way the Marxist insight that products congeal the human labor that goes into them, insisting that the pedometer must be thought to bear the imprint of the logistics that facilitate its passage. Despite its overwhelming length, the film has a recognizable narrative structure, with a clear beginning, middle, and end, satisfying the basic Aristotelean definition of a dramatic whole.[11] It follows what Margaret Cohen has called the sea chronotope, where the time of narration unfolds along a course of movement punctuated by way stations and chance encounters: two days over land by truck and train to the Swedish coast; three days among the idle cranes at the port in Málaga, Spain, during a shipping strike; hours passing through the Suez Canal as water cuts along land for miles and miles; weeks on the open ocean, lines of containers framing an almost motionless scene of water and sky; and finally, a short truck ride from the port in Shenzhen to the factory gates, a transit filled with anticipation for the arrival at the source, which is also the end.[12]

10.   See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [Second Version]," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 25–27.

11.   Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Classics, 1996).

12.   Over the course of these travels, the film exhibits several of the sea chronotopes Cohen outlines: "*blue water*, or open sea"; "*the shore*, a zone of contact between land and sea"; and "*the ship*" as terra firma on an inhospitable ocean. See Margaret Cohen, "The Chronotopes of the Sea," in *The Novel*, vol. 2, *Forms and Themes*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 649. For a discussion of the road chronotope, see M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 243–45.

The wager that Magnusson and Andersson make in *Logistics* is that a very slow temporal unfolding in film can evoke the wide spatial network of transport and communication in international logistics. That is, the cinematic sublime aims to elicit the logistical sublime. Charmaine Chua, a scholar of global supply chains, introduces the concept of the logistical sublime in the final reflections of her "container ship ethnography" in the blog series "Slow Boat to China."[13] I take the concept, which in Chua's account refers to the impressive choreography of portside processes, to refer to the overwhelming scale and multilayered complexity of global logistics. "In the past," Allan Sekula writes, "harbor residents were deluded by their senses into thinking that a global economy could be seen and heard and smelled," but the concrete movement of goods "can be explained in its totality only through recourse to abstraction."[14] An outcome of this aesthetic problem is that the spatial field of logistical connections behind the pedometer in *Logistics*, or the digital video camera used to capture the film, must unfurl over time because it cannot be conveyed all at once; the content to be delivered is beyond comprehension. This serves as artistic justification for the film's strategy of durational viewing, but it also marks the point where the film departs from a classical understanding of dramatic action, violating the criterion that a work of art should be of a magnitude such that it can be enjoyed, so to say, in one sitting. To be sure, *Logistics* is not the first film to test the fortitude of its viewers with its sheer length. What I want to suggest, however, is that it unexpectedly reveals an important insight about the severing of the relationship between film and spectator, a departure that suggests a correspondence not so much between artwork and subject as between object and the logistical conditions of its creation.

Setting sights on this departure, I apply a logistics-of-media approach—known to this point for extending media studies beyond mere content analysis—back to matters of content and reception. In the case of cinema, this means charting a logistics of spectatorship. To develop this approach, it is necessary to follow the film: to spend time in port and at sea, to regain terrestrial footing, load and unload cargo, and set a course through the wide-open waters. I will therefore alternate between the story of the film, its production and content, and the important theoretical insights it offers. We start, as all human adventures start, on land.

13.   Charmaine Chua, "The Chinese Logistical Sublime and Its Wasted Remains," The Disorder of Things (blog), February 7, 2015, https://thedisorderofthings.com/2015/02/07/the-chinese-logistical-sublime-and-its-wasted-remains/. The notion of the logistical sublime appears also in Brett Neilson, Ned Rossiter, and Ranabir Samaddar, "Making Logistical Worlds," in *Logistical Asia*, ed. Brett Neilson, Ned Rossiter, and Ranabir Samaddar (Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2018), pp. 1–20. As will be relevant in the conclusion, the logistical sublime involves many of the characteristics of overwhelming complexity and spatial unboundedness that define "the digital sublime," "computational sublime," and "cybersublime." See Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Jules Moloney, "Kinetic Architectural Skins and the Computational Sublime," *Leonardo* 42, no. 1 (2009), pp. 65–70; and John Byrne, "Cybersublime: Representing the Unrepresentable in Digital Art and Politics," *Third Text* 13, no. 47 (1999), pp. 27–38.

14.   Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), p. 12. For further discussion of Sekula and the aesthetics of the container, see Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015), pp. 195–97.

On Land

The film has been playing for twenty-two days, twenty-one hours, and twelve minutes when I step off the train in Stockholm. In that time, I've shown it to my students, watched it for days on a monitor as I worked at home, checked it on my phone while in New York and Amsterdam, viewed it at its primary exhibition site in Germany, and caught it again on my computer in Berlin. I look across the platform as commuters merge and diverge between trains. The filmmakers and I haven't met in person yet, so I'm carrying a picture that Daniel sent me when I touched down at Arlanda.

Seeing the server streaming the film from their home Internet in a wardrobe is like seeing the end of *Citizen Kane*. It ends a search, sure—maybe even explains in a certain way where the figure we've been watching came from—but it can't explain the power of the journey, and it's transparently not its source. Whatever *Logistics* is, it isn't sitting on a hard drive somewhere, even if it wouldn't exist without one. The streaming server—like the pedometer that *Logistics* follows, like the young Kane's beloved sled thrown into the fire—is marked simultaneously by a fascination for what it contains and the inevitable letdown of its mundane existence. "It was the un-necessity of the pedometer that I found most intriguing," Magnusson said. "How an immensely complex logistics system is used for—junk."[15] Surely a massive system of global trade would never

15.   Erika Magnusson, email message to author, March 9, 2018. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Magnusson come from this exchange.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

have evolved if it trafficked only in essentials; surplus and excess lie at its very core. In part, the goal of the film is to document this excess and to offer an experience of it.

Logistics begins with a windshield shot looking out at the road as a truck leaves a warehouse in central Sweden and merges onto a quiet highway, white lines gliding past in the night. In preparation for this initial segment, Magnusson made a test trip in August 2010 by truck from Stockholm to central Sweden using a small PAL camera. The intent was to convey a sense of what Magnusson called "the 'boringness' of the footage," the raw duration of the process of transit. "We didn't want any possible sponsor to believe that it would be a blockbuster. Its value, as we saw it, was rather the concept of slowness." The rough video succeeded in securing a grant of 200,000 Swedish kronor, or around $30,000 at the historical exchange rate, from the City of Stockholm's Innovativ Kultur foundation. It was an important windfall because the quality of the PAL video was unappealingly low, and the tapes had a maximum recording time of 180 minutes, which would necessitate around three hundred breaks in the footage over its anticipated forty-day duration.

The eventual project would use high-definition video and limit the breaks in the footage to three. In Magnusson's words, "a rather blunt cut" fell between the segments by truck and freight train in Sweden, before the section documenting the container ship from Sweden to China, and before the truck voyage to the factory in Shenzhen. To travel on these different transportation lines, the filmmakers required permission from various companies and port organizations. "Going with the truck-transport company DHL was rather easy to arrange," Magnusson said, because the company allowed the filmmakers to ride in the cab and record out the windshield. Similarly, the railway segment from central Sweden to the port benefited from the cooperation of the cargo-train company transiting that line, which allowed the filmmakers to shoot from within the locomotive alongside the driver. The phase at sea, however, proved more complicated, requiring, beyond company permission to board the Dutch container ship *Elly Maersk*, allowances from various ports as well as health papers. "In total," Magnusson added, "we worked with this project for four years alongside our other, 'actual' jobs in the performing arts."

While Magnusson established relationships with the shipping lines, Andersson sought technical solutions. In an interview between the two filmmakers, subsequently translated into English, Andersson recalls an email conversation in October 2010 with the help desk of electronics company JVC about the possibility of making a forty-day continuous recording. From that conversation he was able to work out the first real solution for shooting in HD, using a dual-memory-card camera. But the setup was far from ideal. Using dual memory cards required one of the filmmakers to replace the card every twelve hours and either purchase enough cards to store the entire forty-day journey or transfer the data to a hard drive with each replacement. So with the grant money now in place, Andersson pursued other HD options from Matrox and Macoteket, reached out to video resellers, and

attended major video fairs, saying of the last effort, "It's often the easiest way to find the new products you're looking for."[16]

When I tell Magnusson and Andersson about my experiences with the film throughout its run, they remark that I may have watched more than they have—in all likelihood more than anyone has. That no viewer can watch *Logistics* in its entirety has led some people, when I present on the film, to disparage it as merely a surveillance document. But I tend to think that the resistance to understanding it as art is a symptom as suggestive as the film itself. The question it raises may be less about its aesthetic status than its ontological status, as the film appears to reverse the usual container-contained relationship of cinema. Generally speaking, a spectator's attention is not exhausted by a film, and any given spectator can be understood to contain multiple films: The same person can watch, for instance, multiple films in one day, while, similarly, a single person can hold many films in memory. *Logistics* can in a certain sense be held in memory, but it is only the schematic idea that we hold. We cannot sync up with it. We are confronted instead, in quite a literal and profound way, with what Stanley Cavell terms "a world viewed."[17] Even beyond the explicit representation of a global journey, the film necessarily implies an entire world-system.

Globalization and World-Systems

The filmmakers recall drawing inspiration from an article in *Der Spiegel* in 2006 called "The Global Toothbrush," which outlines the manufacture of a Philips Sonicare model involving "forty-five-hundred employees, ten countries, and five time zones."[18] Terms related to globalization appear throughout the film's description, as in the tagline, "Video installation tracking the global flow of products." Although market-centered concerns such as supply-chain management are important in understanding *Logistics*, a more useful frame than the concept of globalization is that of world-systems analysis. The approach to world-systems, advanced through the writings of sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, shifts perspective away from individual nation-states or corporations as primary economic actors to a transnational division of labor whose reference is the whole world economy.

I take up the notion of the chronotope in relation to world-systems analysis because it assumes the interconnection of three coordinates: the time and the space of narration and the subjective position of the reader. *Logistics* invites us to think of these three coordinates of space, time, and subjectivity as connecting in some way

16.   Erika Magnusson, interview with Daniel Andersson, translated by Magnusson and emailed to author, March 9, 2018. All subsequent quotations from Andersson come from this interview unless otherwise noted.

17.   Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

18.   Ralf Hoppe, "The Global Toothbrush," *Der Spiegel*, Jan. 31, 2006, https://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/globalization-the-global-toothbrush-a-398229.html.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

with the geohistorical entities that world-systems analysis seeks to explain. Geohistorical systems, as the name suggests, are spatiotemporal meshes: Any histori-cal era enjoys its own unique sense of temporality in keeping with its geographical extent and spatial complexity. In this light, I propose that the encounter of film and spectator must be understood to share similarities in form, scale, and complexity with the geohistorical system that makes this encounter possible.

Following the industrial revolution, Wallerstein argues, diverse nation-states with their own spatiotemporal configurations came under the sway of one world-system, the capitalist world-economy.[19] Wallerstein is careful to point out that this does not mean that a single chronotope, or, in his words, a single "TimeSpace real-ity," came to define all areas of world life, thus flattening or homogenizing all space and time.[20] Rather, the dominant system of trade came to penetrate every social milieu, instituting a worldwide division of labor, such that no spatiotemporal configuration escaped reference to the whole.[21] Andre Gunder Frank has argued that in fact this world-economy began much earlier and centered not on Europe but China, a significant reorientation, to use Frank's term, for considering a film whose end point is a factory in Shenzhen and which makes it possible to counter-

19.   Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 5.

20.   Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Inventions of TimeSpace Realities: Towards an Understanding of Our Historical Systems," *Geography* 73, no. 4 (1988), pp. 289–97.

21.   Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, p. 5.

act Eurocentrism and scale up an inquiry into the world-system using a "temporally deeper and spatially wider perspective."[22]

As Nataša Durovicová argues in her volume on transnational cinema with Kathleen Newman, any image in film today must be understood to express not merely the vision of an artist or the cultural values of a state or empire but the articulation of a world-system: "Given the rapid and pervasive changes in moving-image economies and technologies, the backdrop against which any represented geopolitical entity now appears is the scale of the whole: the 'world.'"[23] *Logistics*' very existence confirms the argument. Although the film starts in Sweden and ends in China, passing through other ports in Spain and Egypt, it cannot be said to represent the national values of any of these states. While it is true that the film was sponsored by several arts funds in Sweden and that its filmmakers reside in a comparatively rich northern European country, the technical possibility itself cannot be ascribed or credited to the individual location. Nor can the images be reduced to European or Western markets. The film is an index of a world-system, its technical possibility achievable only by the massive exchange of world trade.

What Chua and others have described as the sublimity of international logistics results from the problem of visualizing this system of world commerce. It is not a matter of the size or distance but of the density of connections. Mapping projects such as Sourcemap and Empire Logistics offer businesses and concerned citizens a more informed understanding of trade movements around the world.[24] But even sophisticated supply-chain tools offer at best interactive political maps, showing factory-points connected by railroads and ship lines. A combination of the system's inbuilt unknowability and the "selective blindness" of corporate secrecy, Miriam Posner notes, makes picturing the whole impossible.[25] *Logistics* approaches these complexities and blind spots not through map-like abstraction but through a concrete passage of time.[26] It trades calculative knowledge for embodied experience and exposes the spectator's inability to comprehend the whole.

22.   Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 27.

23.   Nataša Durovicová and Kathleen Newman, eds., *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. ix.

24.   See http://www.sourcemap.com/ and http://www.empirelogistics.org/about/the-project.

25.   Miriam Posner, "See No Evil," *Logic Magazine* 4 (April 1, 2018), https://logicmag.io/scale/see-no-evil/.

26.   A particularly notable blind spot is what Philip Steinberg has analyzed as the disavowed space of the high seas. Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of Ocean Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 23. Nicole Starosielski provides a complementary understanding of this space in tracing the network of undersea cables stretching along the ocean floor. Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

<div align="right">

Through Ports and Canals

</div>

Days pass in the port at Málaga, Spain. Cranes stand idle. Sunlight passes into the incandescence of harbor lights and again into sunrise. The *Elly Maersk* waits, and from the ship deck a camera documents its downtime. We should take stock of this period of waiting. Far from being empty time, the period captured in port is suffused with the events of other ports and other lands, actions that are its causes and coincidents as part of a world-system.

On July 4, 2011, two days before the container ship arrived at Málaga, thousands of citizens gathered in Suez, Egypt, outraged that seven police officers charged with the murder of peaceful protesters in the Arab Spring uprisings had been released on bail.[27] Protesters chanted in remembrance of the twenty-nine dead and nearly thousand injured, victims of the brutal repression that marked the early days of the January revolution. They demanded the overthrow of the field marshal and resignation of top officials, as lawyers attempted to have the Suez Criminal Court decision revoked. The escalation of the protests, following renewed demonstrations the previous week at the slow pace of change, on the so-called Friday of Retribution, were enough to give Maersk pause in sending the ship forward.

On the same day, five striking dockworkers were arrested in Ismailia, part of an ongoing labor stoppage carried out jointly with stevedores in Suez and Port

27.   "Outrage in Suez after Policemen Accused of Killing Protesters Released on Bail," *Daily News Egypt,* July 4, 2011.

Said.[28] In the coming weeks, strikes and protests against seven shipping companies would threaten shutdowns of the Suez Canal. Longshore and canal workers had been integral to the earlier overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, who resigned as Egyptian president on February 11 as strikes blocked the canal, one of two major "logistics chokepoints" in the world along with the Panama Canal, causing massive economic losses.[29] The power of such demonstrations to shut down a crucial corridor of European-Asian trade was a lesson not lost on Egyptian officials, and on July 10 the military adopted increasingly aggressive tactics, firing into the sky and clashing with protesters to disperse crowds.[30]

The summer wave of protests in Egypt exhibited many of the characteristics of the early days of the revolution. The *Elly Maersk* waited in Málaga in response to a convergence of politics in the streets and activism in the media. Social media proved to be a transformative force, and while the protests shut down international shipping, they were also indebted to the products it trafficked in, such as cellphones, computers, network hardware, and the raw materials necessary to build them. Terms such as "online activism," "participatory culture," and "Twitter Revolution" have become firmly entrenched in explanations of the Arab Spring to account for the ways in which social networks circumvented traditional news outlets and disseminated images that catalyzed demonstrations.[31] In a not incidental way, these images and information, captured by cameras on mobile devices whose constituent materials circulated in systems of international trade, were folded into those days among the cranes of an idle shipyard. The snapshots circulated by the logistical power of the retweet were the spatial analogue of *Logistics*' duration, a glimmer of what each second of the film must contain.

As it became clear that the protests would not shut down the port, Maersk gave the green light for the ship to proceed on Saturday, July 9, a day after activist Abdel-Aziz Kamel remarked that the events reminded him of "the night of January 28," sometimes referred to as the Friday of Rage.[32] Despite the continued protests in Suez, Alexandria, Cairo, and Sinai throughout the year and into the following summer, before the election of Mohamed Morsi, maritime traffic proceeded without further stoppages. After three days of waiting, the ship embarked once again, leaving Málaga behind, *Logistics'* camera looking forward unceasingly.

28.   "Five Ismailia Workers on Strike Arrested," *Daily News Egypt*, July 4, 2011.

29.   Deborah Cohen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 127.

30.   "Military Police Disperse Suez Protest by Force," *Daily News Egypt*, July 10, 2011.

31.   See Summer Harlow and Thomas J. Johnson, "The Arab Spring Overthrowing the Protest Paradigm? How the *New York Times*, Global Voices, and Twitter Covered the Egyptian Revolution," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011), pp. 1359–74; and Tamara Kharroub and Ozen Bas, "Social Media and Protests: An Examination of Twitter Images of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution," *New Media and Society* 18, no. 9 (2016), pp. 1973–92.

32.   "Protests Flare Up in Suez, Alex, Arish and Sinai," *Daily News Egypt*, July 8, 2011.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

What Logistics Are For

The image of a ship leaving port has throughout history been a privileged figuration of the human relationship with the nonhuman other.[33] Copernicus notably draws on such an image from Virgil's *Aeneid* to illustrate why stargazers would believe the heavens to be circling around them, misattributing their own movement to the objects they see:

> "Forth from the harbor we sail, and the land and the cities slip backward" (*Aeneid*, III, 72).

> For when a ship is floating calmly along, the sailors see its motion mirrored in everything outside, while on the other hand they suppose that they are stationary, together with everything on board. In the same way, the motion of the earth can unquestionably produce the impression that the entire universe is rotating.[34]

In the language of media studies, Copernicus's revolutionary insight is that of taking into account the medial conditions of seeing, locating the act of observa-

---

33.   The most impressive account of the evolving metaphor of the vessel at sea may be Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

34.   Nicolaus Copernicus, *Nicolaus Copernicus on the Revolutions*, vol. 2, trans. Jerzy Dobrzycki (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 16.

tion in a space among objects. Every astronomical observation he performed carried with it this thematization in that it traced and measured objects from this point of view, here, and specifically with reference to a technology of seeing, the telescope.

James Leo Cahill makes the case that cinema extends this "Copernican vocation" through its unfolding in the twentieth century, while Janet Harbord traces a lineage of "ex-centric" vision from Renaissance astronomy to the revolution of digital cinema.[35] Indeed, revolutions in technologies of seeing, in the tools we use to make sense of the world, are so common that they have become the norm. Against this backdrop of upheavals, it is not unexpected that we would be inured to what in *Logistics* will have marked a similarly momentous turning point. For as spectators walk through city squares or gallery spaces, glancing at the film or perhaps sitting for a time to watch, they are likely to be as those sailors leaving port, perceiving in their surroundings only their own movement, Ptolemaic creatures seeing the universe circle around them and themselves everywhere reflected. What we would see if we were to cease to see only ourselves reflected, to cease to see cinema as merely our own, is perhaps another project—the project of the *other*—that has been working through us in this technology designed to reflect us.

At issue in a film like *Logistics* is the very question of what the medium is *for*. Reconsidering this question, I argue, is essential to contemporary film theory and carries implications for art and media studies broadly. The for-structure has become an important part of John Durham Peters's call for a logistics of media, one that he discusses through the figures of the ship and the ocean. The ocean, according to Peters, is the medium par excellence, the shaping environment of life on Earth. But to understand the ocean as a medium is really to understand it in its plurality as so many media to so many life-forms, all "defined by the beings they are *for*."[36] By and large, humans and cetaceans are the focal points of Peters's consideration of what media are for. What I would like to suggest is that his approach also lends itself to a nonhuman perspective on how *media exist for other media*. This nonhuman perspective is possible, however, only by accounting for our own situation of looking.

We should continue, following Peters, with the metaphor of the ship. Effectively, human existence at sea remains terrestrial. The ocean is not the medium *for us*, so to traverse it we must rely on *craft*, in the many senses of this term: We must rely on ships as seacraft and on the many crafts that make seafaring possible. Without the usual reference points of roads and bridges, landmarks and milestones, humans at sea must devise means of orientation, which otherwise tend to

35.   See James Leo Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism: The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painlevé* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019); Janet Harbord, "Ex-centric Cinema: Machinic Vision in the *Powers of Ten* and Electronic Cartography," *Body and Society* 18, no. 1 (2012), pp. 99–119; and Janet Harbord, "Copernicus and I: Revolutions in Perception and *The Powers of Ten*," in *Technology and Desire: The Transgressive Art of Moving Images*, ed. Rania Gaafar and Martin Schulz (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2014), pp. 193–206.

36.   John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 55–56.

be bound to earthly practices such as "walking, looking, hearing, scanning, and taking one's bearings from the sky and the horizon."[37] These feats of technics are so transformative that they extend back to life on terra firma, taking their original name with them: navigation, from *navis*, "ship." Whether on land or at sea, these ship-tools are the medium for us, as the ocean waters are the medium for ocean life. "Digital media," Peters emphasizes, "revive ancient navigational functions." They are tools that ground us, "keep us on the grid."[38] They reveal that media only ever come to be able to deliver content and messages because they deliver on a primary function of ordering and orientation. In watching *Logistics*, one maintains and relives these orientation points, the horizon line cutting sky from sea, the ship charting a course perpendicular to whatever horizon it pursues. With the exception of some avant-garde films, such as Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale* (1971), and moments in commercial films that use disorientation for narrative effect, cinema as a whole maintains these orientation points.[39]

To the extent that film caters to us in this way, it conceals its nonhuman potential. In fact, all art conceals this potential when it appears *for us.* So long as we are immersed in our own affairs, we find only ourselves in art, just as we find only ourselves in that most primordial of all media, as E. E. Cummings concludes:

> For whatever we lose(like a you or a me)
>
> it's always ourselves we find in the sea[40]

At Sea

In May 2011, less than six weeks before their planned departure, Magnusson and Andersson learned that even their memory-card solution would be insufficient. A representative from Maersk notified the filmmakers that the company's lawyers could not permit them to continue past the Suez Canal because of the threat of piracy in the Gulf of Aden. The filmmakers would have to disembark in Cairo and rejoin the ship at the next stop in Hong Kong. That left fourteen days during which they would not be aboard the ship to change memory cards or otherwise tend to the camera, leaving the project in serious danger of not coming off at all. "It was a critical phase on many levels," Magnusson reflected.

---

37.   Ibid., p. 81.

38.   Ibid., p. 7.

39.   Even undersea films orient their perspectives in relation to crafted horizons for grounding sight. See Jon Crylen, "Living in a World without Sun: Jacques Cousteau, *Homo aquaticus*, and the Dream of Dwelling Undersea," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 58, no. 1 (2018), pp. 1–23; and Melody Jue, *Wild Blue Media: Thinking Through Seawater* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020). For insights into the effects of disorientation in cinema, see Shane Denson, *Discorrelated Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

40.   E. E. Cummings, "maggie and milly and molly and may," available at https://poets.org/poem/maggie-and-milly-and-molly-and-may.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

Recalling their sense of urgency, Andersson said, "I started to try everything possible." He bought and tested several video setups, only to have to return unworkable collections of computers, cameras, video cards, and converters. He sought out similar projects for tips, but there were desperately few. Surveillance footage tended to be low quality and in black and white. Artists tended not to have the means to record in much higher quality than surveillance video, while television companies, which had the resources, had never undertaken durational projects of this kind. The most promising example was the film *Modern Times Forever*, by the Danish art group Superflex, which premiered in Helsinki on March 23, 2011, and ran for a duration of ten days. Superflex's film, however, used computer animation rather than live footage. "It looked quite dark for a while," Andersson admitted.

It is worth reflecting at this point on what sets *Logistics* apart from many previous durational video pieces, particularly two that have received critical attention. Francis Alÿs's *Zócalo, May 22, 1999* is a single-screen live projection of the Plaza del Zócalo in central Mexico City and an early example of surveillance-footage video pieces.[41] Two qualities separate it from *Logistics*, the first being that at twelve hours, it is feasibly watchable, and the second being that it uses a surveillance camera with necessarily lower image quality. Wolfgang Staehle's *Empire 24/7*, an

41.   Alÿs's piece appears as an example in Catherine Fowler, "The Artists' Long Take as Passage in Sharon Lockhart's Installation *Lunch Break* (2008)," in *The Long Take: Critical Approaches*, ed. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 193–206.

homage to Andy Warhol's *Empire* for the digital age, documented the Empire State Building from 1999 to 2004, but the piece's still-image webcam captured images at only 15 frames per minute. *Logistics*, by contrast, is shot using a full high-definition frame rate.[42] The difficulty for Magnusson and Andersson was not in getting uninterrupted footage of the container ship from Suez to Shenzhen, which could be done using low-cost webcams or surveillance cameras; it was how to record such a trip in cinema-quality HD.

On June 21, a week before their scheduled departure on the *Elly Maersk*, Andersson bought an HDV camera from a representative at Ekab, a Swedish information-technology company. Based on its specifications, he hoped the camera would be capable of compressing 1080 interlace into a 25-megabits-per-second data stream, allowing for continuous HD video without having to change memory cards in and out. The camera would arrive, however, with no time to adequately test the setup. In 2011, no software was yet capable of recording for twenty-four hours straight. "All the software I could find," said Andersson, "could record up to six hours and then you had to press a button or something similar to start recording again." Another issue involved scheduling the recording to start anew each day because of the risk that large files would overload the computer, causing it or the program to crash. As Andersson put it, "If you record ten days and it becomes a data slog, then you may lose ten days." The only device he could find capable of twenty-four-hour scheduling was a cable box with a four-wire output made for recording television shows, and the largest hard drive had a capacity of 8 terabytes. Andersson "had just enough time to install it and test it for about five minutes before we had to go."

This solution, which the filmmakers made in response to constraints beyond their control, would introduce a significant line of separation between the artists' actions and the object produced. Magnusson relates that the filmmakers endeavored to use, in her words, "our bodies as tools, the camera as eye" to give viewers an impression of "the constant transport streams of goods." Just how far the camera-eye would be from their support would in the end be foundational to the film's achieving this goal. Such distance is a reminder that, even when handheld, a camera operates in a significant way without us. When Magnusson and Andersson stepped off the ship at the Suez Canal, taking with them their bodies as tools, they could only hope, as they transited through Cairo to the airport and anxiously problem-solved the next phase on the plane to Hong Kong, that the camera-eye they left behind could survive their absence.

42.   Staehle's piece figures prominently in a discussion of technical time in Mark B. N. Hansen, "Living (with) Technical Time: From Media Surrogacy to Distributed Cognition," *Theory, Culture and Society* 26, nos. 2–3 (2009), pp. 294–315.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

A Cinema for No One

Even given that a camera can capture fourteen days unattended, it strains a Ptolemaic, human-centered worldview to claim that cinema is for anyone or anything other than us. Although early film theorists acknowledged and at times lauded cinema's nonhuman potential, particularly in the writings of what Malcolm Turvey calls the revelationist tradition, they nonetheless retained a fundamental anthropocentrism.[43] Jean Epstein formulated cinema's autonomy rather clearly in his later book *The Intelligence of a Machine*, and Dziga Vertov exuberantly took up the voice of the camera to express its novelty: "I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it."[44] Yet in both cases the camera is understood to deliver its mechanical vision to the human. Indeed, the human has appeared as both origin and end point of all that is cinematic. Jonathan Crary situates its technical origins in a field of efforts to understand embodied human seeing.[45] At the same time that André Bazin recognized cinema as "the instrumentality of a nonliving agent," he argued that it fulfilled a primordial human wish to preserve one's likeness against the passage of time, the body of film standing in for the body of one's

43.   See Malcolm Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

44.   Jean Epstein, *The Intelligence of a Machine*, trans. Christophe Wall-Romana (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2014). Dziga Vertov, "The Council of Three," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 17.

45.   Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

material identity.[46] For Hugo Münsterberg, photoplays reduplicated outside us the internal faculties of memory, imagination, and attention.[47] For Epstein, film magnified for us.[48] For Eisenstein, it shocked us.[49] Theory throughout the celluloid era affirmed that all that was cinematic returned to us. Whatever commensurability must have been sustained to assure this mapping of viewer and image, however, appears to have slipped away in *Logistics*, a film that, properly speaking, no human being can endure.

It might be objected that durational films were never intended to be watched in their entirety. Magnusson and Andersson do not, of course, expect viewers to sit in a theater and view the film from beginning to end. As Noël Carroll writes about Warhol's *Empire*, which is probably the most common reference point for these arguments, extreme long-form films challenge the "acquaintance principle," or the Kantian argument that an aesthetic work must be experienced firsthand in its entirety to be appreciated.[50] Warhol himself said in an interview that he got up and left in the middle of the comparatively shorter, six-hour *Sleep*, and there are indications that he expected nothing more out of his audiences.[51] There are reasons, however, to be wary of accepting Warhol's terms too quickly. As a first response I would note that the very idea that artists could create works that are intentionally unwatchable in their duration or scale is underappreciated. The foremost examples of durational art, from Warhol's *Empire* (1964) to Anthony McCall's *Long Film for Ambient Light* (1975) to John Cage's *As Slow as Possible* (1987), notably emerged after the introduction of television, magnetic tape recording, and, by the time of Cage's work, digital audio and video. That is, these films followed in the wake of technologies that were capable of remediating film and phonograph recordings and enabling means of time-axis manipulation on them, such as slow motion, speedup, and reversal.[52] Such techniques allowed for new conceptual and creative orientations to film and sound works. As important, these long-form works came out amidst revolutions in electronics, computing, and

46.   André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

47.   Hugo Münsterberg, *Hugo Münsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings* (London: Routledge, 2013).

48.   Jean Epstein, "Magnification and Other Writings," trans. Stuart Liebman, *October* 3 (1977), pp. 9–25.

49.   See Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions," in *The Eisenstein Reader*, ed. Richard Taylor, trans. Richard Taylor and William Powell (London: BFI, 1998), pp. 35–52.

50.   Noël Carroll, "Warhol's *Empire*," in *Unwatchable*, ed. Nicholas Baer, Maggie Hennefeld, Laura Horak, and Gunnar Iversen (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), p. 191.

51.   J. J. Murphy, *The Black Hole of the Camera: The Films of Andy Warhol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 18.

52.   For the concept of remediation, see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). On time-axis manipulation, see Friedrich Kittler, "Real Time Analysis, Time Axis Manipulation," trans. and with an introduction by Geofffrey Winthrop-Young, *Cultural Politics* 13, no. 1 (2017), pp. 1–18.

container-ship logistics, which shared a common cultural effect: They greatly increased technological complexity and drove algorithmic solutions to practices that had formerly been the sole province of human labor. At a moment when human means of attention and comprehension were increasingly inadequate for searching, sorting, and retrieving data and encountering it as meaningful information, it is no wonder that artworks would mimic this problem of being unable to grasp the whole. Just as Warhol's iconic *Campbell's Soup Cans* captured the repetition and uniformity of the industrial logic of containerization through the superficial spectacle of corporate branding, films like *Empire* attest to more than a director's attempt to play with audiences' attention. It is a decisive turning point when an attentional medium like film can exceed human attention, and in some way, I believe, all durational art pieces since the mid-twentieth century respond, wittingly or unwittingly, to this juncture. The point is not how humans respond to works that exceed them but what it means that they create works that exceed them at all, and what those works must mean if we take it at face value that central to their significance is that they exceed us.

"Nonhuman photography" has been described by Joanna Zylinska as consisting of image practices that are not of, by, or for the human. Examples include landscape photographs ("not *of* the human"), automated image practices in surveillance and other spheres ("not *by* the human"), and patterned images such as algorithmic designs and QR codes ("not *for* the human").[53] *Logistics* can be seen to fall into the first two categories in presenting images of the open ocean from an automated camera with no human attendant. It is the third category—images designed outside of considerations for human spectatorship, which usually appear in cinema only as objects intended for their particular algorithmic readers—that concerns us here. *Logistics*, in its way, represents a photographic phenomenon designed *for us*, as if it were a slow phantom ride.[54] That it is not *watchable* by us, however, situates it in a register that Zylinska reserves for machine-readable images.

To better understand *Logistics*' inhuman scale, we might turn to Paddy Scannell's notion of the *for-anyone-as-someone* structure. For Scannell, film, like radio and newspapers, combines two basic structures of communication. Available to *anyone*, in the sense that "anyone and everyone can use and understand them,"[55] these media nevertheless address, in their content and form, not an indiscriminate mass of people but each individual as a particular *someone*. The television news format crystalizes this *for-anyone-as-someone* structure. The news anchor, seen and heard by millions, speaks to each person individually. Recorded with direct sound, having little or no reverberation (which invests a quality that Rick Altman

53.   Joanna Zylinska, *Nonhuman Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), p. 5.

54.   For more on this genre as a key example of cinema's "proprioceptive aesthetics," see Scott C. Richmond, *Cinema's Bodily Illusions: Flying, Floating, and Hallucinating* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 6.

55.   Paddy Scannell, "For-Anyone-as-Someone Structures," *Media, Culture and Society* 22, no. 1 (2000), p. 5.

describes as "for-me-ness"[56]) while positioning the anchor with shoulders square and eyes trained directly at the camera, the broadcast creates a structure of intimacy and interpersonal exchange.

The two structures implicated in this composite, the *for-anyone* and *for-someone* structures, are not confined to communication. Mass-produced goods, from hammers to toasters, are designed to be usable by anyone. They are convenient, well tailored to the human body, and often the same the world over, lending them to a system of global trade. "Their standard, uniform, repeatable character," Scannell explains, "is precisely the mark of their usefulness for anyone and everyone, any time any where."[57] Conversely, articles designed *for someone* have limited reach. The pair of glasses crafted *for me*, for the slight differences in vision between my right and left eyes, is fundamentally useless to anyone else. The two structures operate on a sliding scale, marked by greater or lesser generalizability to greater or lesser numbers of people. Family photo albums, home video, and love letters skew toward being for someone in particular, but they are nevertheless intelligible and meaningful, at least in part, to anyone. This is to say that technologies of all kinds tend to have a certain suitability to the scale and understanding of the human being in general, whether they are intended for a large or narrow population.

Advances in digital technologies since Scannell's writing, however, and exemplified by Magnusson and Andersson's *Logistics*, have highlighted a third communicational structure radically unlike these other two: the *for-no-one* structure. Modern devices involve innumerable processes that cannot be said, strictly speaking, to be *for anyone* or *for someone*. Semiconductor technologies, for instance, are photographic structures designed for attaining certain desired technical ends whose operations and even many outputs are inaccessible to human users.[58] Adopting language similar to Scannell's, Ian Bogost distills this idea in saying that "for the computer to operate at all *for us* first requires a wealth of interactions to take place *for itself*."[59] This is to say that for computers to offer up documents, songs, and videos *for someone* or *anyone*, they must first execute operations accessible to no one. *Logistics* differs from these technologies in an important way. In its mode of address, it exhibits a *for-anyone* structure. Magnusson confirmed this intention in saying that the filmmakers "had a true wish to communicate broadly, with a broad audience," a desire "to reach out to 'everyone.'" However, in its extreme duration as a dramatic whole, the film necessarily leaves this intended audience behind, exhibiting, like the semiconductor

56.   Rick Altman, "The Technology of the Voice" (Part One), *Iris* 3, no. 1 (1985), pp. 3–20.

57.   Scannell, "For-Anyone-as-Someone Structures," p. 6.

58.   See Kyle Stine, "Critical Hardware: The Circuit of Image and Data," *Critical Inquiry* 45, no. 3 (2019), pp. 762–86.

59.   Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, Or, What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 10.

technologies that process it, a *for-no-one* structure.[60] It thus constitutes a *for-any-one-as-no-one* structure.

In this sense, films such as *Modern Times Forever* and the proliferation of other worlds-without-us, such as *Life After People*, which Zylinska cites, express in a cultural way, in their content, style, and thematic emphasis, an outcome of the basic conditions of digital video. Digital video exceeds human intentionality and human finality while nevertheless delivering presentations for human consumption. It allows us to see the world as it is when no one is looking, an amplification of what Virginia Woolf, in 1925, recognized in scenes caught on film: "We behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it."[61] And like that earlier medium, the nonhuman perspective of digital video raises anew the question of the gaze.

The Sardine Can and the Gaze

Lacan introduces the concept of the gaze by relating an anecdote from his experiences on a fishing boat off the coast of Brittany when he was in his early twenties. A young intellectual seeking the practical insights of the working world,

60. Indeed, despite efforts to eliminate human sleep for the purposes of heightened productivity and vigilance, even the near-term goal of having soldiers capable of going a week without sleep is only one-fifth of the way to being able to watch *Logistics*. See Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York: Verso, 2013).

61. Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema," in *Collected Essays*, vol. 2 (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), p. 269.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

Lacan was tending the nets with his compatriots, looking out at the water, when a fisherman, who went by Petit-Jean, pointed to a small glinting object swaying along the surface—a sardine can—and joked, "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!"[62] This moment, highly amusing for Petit-Jean, gnawed at Lacan because the sardine can, he felt, *was* looking at him, and not in any metaphorical way, but precisely from that point of light at which everything looks back. A defining aspect of the scene, as Joan Copjec points out, is its smallness, that is, how unremarkable and everyday it is, as conveyed by the repetition of the word itself: "a small boat" ("un petit bateau"), "a small port" ("un petit port"), Petit-Jean, "a small can" ("une petite boîte").[63] Instead of a Hegelian epic, as might befit a scene meant to show the encounter between self and other, we have an ordinary moment of working-class life. But crucially, as we'll see, this everyday object will be read in a sort of Hegelian way, in terms of its world-historical significance, the way it stands at a convergence of multiplicitous historical lines from which it opens onto a future. We'll see that Lacan reads this sardine can *logistically*. In his remarkably paratactic way, Lacan defines the gaze within a logistics of media.

Let us begin with a seemingly simple proposition, so emphatically true of cinematic images that Copjec places it in italics: "*There are no objective shots in cinema.*"[64] Put another way, this means that every shot in cinema is *for someone*. Every shot implies a spectator. This follows, from the reverse side, the founding gesture of reception studies, which differentiates the embodied viewer from the imaginary or implied viewer constructed by the film. Judith Mayne formalizes the distinction in the terms "reception" and "address."[65] "Reception" is plural and varied, and encompasses people having diverse experiences in disparate settings with distinct screen technologies. In the case of *Logistics* this can be seen in the difference between its premiere in a public setting and its subsequent screenings via streaming video over the Web. "Address," on the other hand, refers to an ideal figure as a structural effect of the film, a figure that the film targets for certain reactions and assumed responses. For Mayne, the gap between the two positions opens up critical space for understanding the unique experiences and resistances of real audiences.[66]

62.   Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), p. 95.

63.   Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 30. For the French, see Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), pp. 109–10.

64.   Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 200.

65.   Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 79.

66.   Ibid., p. 79. For examples of such resistances, see Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23, nos. 3–4 (1982), pp. 74–88; and bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 94–105.

Underlying theories of spectatorship is a basic assumption of commensurability between real viewer and ideal viewer. The implied spectator constructed by the film is inhabitable, on its proper scale, such that one can measure a reading against this ideal position, as one measures oneself against the look of another. Phenomenological film theory presents an alternative way of getting at this problem in distinguishing between what Jenny Chamarette calls "subjectively lived time" and "cinematically presented time."[67] Even if not stated explicitly, this distinction, with its emphasis on the lived embodiment of viewers and the real materiality of technologies and institutions, opens up the possibility of thinking the gaze in terms of historically specific magnitudes. No one could say that the experience of a Lumière short, perhaps less than a minute, has the same magnitude as a contemporary three-hour feature film. In a similar way it needs to be considered whether the cinematic subjects are of the same magnitude and whether the gaze itself suffers inflation.

Lacan himself suggests that the spectator position in an artwork is historically conditioned. In a reading of Rubens's *The Elevation of the Cross*, he argues that perspectival painting must be understood in some way to contain an architecture for its own viewer. What is seen in this painting is not simply a depicted scene but the folding of building and pictorial techniques, assembled over the course of generations and centuries, all fleeing what Lacan sees as "the meaning of this emptiness" at the heart of architecture and painting.[68] The painting includes a space outside itself, the space of its own viewer, carved out for looking. It takes the development of perspective to see this empty space produced outside itself, in the sense that perspective is the mirror of this viewer position in the painting, but Lacan is clear: The empty space, the holding of the void, as Heidegger puts it in his discussion of *Das Ding*, is there from the outset. What remains to be considered is whether that architectural space in the artwork, the void that it holds, can increase in scale, whether the implied spectators, or "addressees," of a seventeenth-century painting, a twentieth-century film, and *Logistics* are commensurate.

Lacan's discussion of the gaze takes part in a consideration of the ethics of psychoanalysis, of the good and the creation of goods in moral law, as a central concern, but also of consumer goods and aesthetic goods, such as the beautiful and the sublime. He states:

> The long historical development of the problem of the good is in the end centered on the notion of how goods are created, insofar as they are organized not on the basis of so-called natural and predetermined needs, but insofar as they furnish the material of a distribution.[69]

67.   Jenny Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 6.

68.   Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), p. 136.

69.   Lacan, Seminar VII, pp. 228–29.

And it is at the point of the convergence of the distribution of consumer goods and aesthetic goods that we see the meaning of Lacan's little story about the sardine can.

The sardine can, in Lacan's story, is a processing point for various social, cultural, and industrial flows. It is not simply the surface of a mirror reflection or a brute object seen by a neutral onlooker. It carries the weight of an embodied articulation of relations among earth and sky, manual and intellectual labor. A testament to Lacan's understated insight, to the disarming power of everyday description, is that these relations come out in a single sentence: "It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply."[70] This "we" of a "young intellectual," as Lacan describes himself, and the members of a family of fishermen "who were earning their livings with great difficulty in the struggle with what for them was a pitiless nature," worked together to supply an industry, the canning industry, which produced this object now glinting before their eyes.[71] The circuit of the gaze expressed here has been all but lost in discussions of Lacan's little story. The object looking back, rather than standing in remote exteriority, is already part of the onlookers through their working interactions. We should not lose sight of the fact that Lacan describes this object, figure of the *objet a,* as a witness or testimony to the industry that provides containers that might conserve and preserve (*témoignage de l'industrie de la conserve*).[72] The object not only looks back; it looks out, and in all directions, to so many connected points. When Lacan looks at it, at the bidding of Petit-Jean, he has first to acknowledge that, rather than being an inert object, indifferent to them, as suggested in the exclamation "It doesn't see you!," this sardine can is instead already enfolded in their world, such that it looks back. But when Lacan attempts to understand his uneasiness at the joke, he finds that this container, made to hold and conserve, instead deflects his thoughts, or reflects them in all directions: back to himself, to Petit-Jean, to the canning industry, and to their wider social and economic relations. Lacan tries to get a picture, to see a measurable reflection in that container, but he finds himself dispersed by its light in all directions. Such a dispersal defines the conditions of digital spectatorship.

In Containers

The Indian Ocean stretches to the horizon in all directions, and in the foreground are stacked rows of containers, blue and red and dull gray, some new and some showing signs of rusted age, intended for so many trucks that will pass along divergent highways to their destinations. In depicting this array of containers, each with its own address, *Logistics* provides an image of the network of threads that the

70.   Lacan, Seminar XI, p. 95.

71.   Ibid.

72.   Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux*, p. 110.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

sardine can, in Lacan's example, largely conceals. In being an empty food container, the sardine can evokes little more than the idea of sardines, if it is cognized as anything other than debris. But these containers, which can house just about anything that can be shipped, express in their very anonymity something on the order of the system of world trade.

In Seminar III on the psychoses, Lacan begins the line of thinking that would culminate in his discussions of *Das Ding* and the *objet petit a* with an apologue about the function of the signifier. The scene, once again, is set aboard a ship at sea:

> I'm at sea, the captain of a small ship. I see things moving about in the night, in a way that gives me cause to think that there may be a sign there. How shall I react? If I'm not yet a human being, I shall react with all sorts of displays, as they say—modeled, motor, and emotional. . . . If on the other hand I am a human being, I write in my log book—At such and such a time, *at such and such a degree of latitude and longitude, we noticed this and that.*[73]

The primary function of the signifier, in this sense, is to elicit a signifying response. It matters not what it says. In fact, the less it says, the better; as Lacan

73.   Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), p. 188. For another application of this apologue to film, see Paul Eisenstein, "Visions and Numbers: Aronofsky's π and the Primordial Signifier," in *Lacan and Contemporary Film*, ed. Todd McGowan Sheila Kunkle (New York: Other Press, 2004), pp. 1–28.

states, "Experience proves it—the more the signifier signifies nothing, the more indestructible it is."[74] In the context of that colorful array of containers aboard the *Elly Maersk*, this might be understood to mean that the more the container contains nothing, the more goods it can transit. In fact, the container principle, to use Alexander Klose's term, means exactly this.[75] It is the signifier that signifies nothing and thus opens up in its emptiness to hold anything. Goods and products change year by year, but the containers remain the same. It would not be until Seminar VII, but this is exactly the direction in which Lacan would extend his discussion of the signifier.

Taking up Heidegger's storied example of the jug—or vase, as it appears in this translation—Lacan seeks to separate out an object's signifying function from its use.[76] Of the vase, he says, "If it really is a signifier, and the first of such signifiers fashioned by human hand, it is in its signifying essence a signifier of nothing other than of signifying as such or, in other words, of no particular signified."[77] That is, the vase carves out a space within its rounded sculpting that produces an emptiness that it contains: "It creates the void and thereby introduces the possibility of filling it."[78] When Lacan then speaks of perspectival space as holding a void that reveals the gaze in structurally showing the holding, he is equating it with this primordial container technology that introduces emptiness and fullness into the world.

The picture is *for* the spectator in precisely the way the vase is *for* holding water. The picture traces out a void that the spectator might occupy, just as the vase shapes an emptiness that water might fill. But size and scale matter. The vase carves out a void that only so much water can fill. It is not a void for all of the ocean. If it holds sand, it does not hold not all the beaches. In a similar way, the picture inscribes an absence that only so much looking can fill. It is not a void for a life of looking. If it is a film, it does not hold the time of all days. Or at least film had not historically traced such an emptiness in its usual, circumscribed duration. Vases have historically held water *for us*, as have all human-built vessels up until modern inventions such as the hydroelectric dam, which Heidegger lamented in his reflections on modern enframing.[79] By the same token, films have, even in their recent history, always held spaces clearly *for us*. With *Logistics*, however, the temporal space emptied out for a viewer exceeds any legitimate expectation that a human could fill it.

74.   Lacan, Seminar III, p. 185.

75.   Alexander Klose*, The Container Principle* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

76.   See Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Language, Poetry, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), pp. 161–84.

77.   Lacan, Seminar VII, p. 120.

78.   Ibid.

79.   Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland, 1977).

Cinema, digital networks, and global logistics are signifying systems for producing a place of emptiness where something might be. Containers mark addresses where commodities might be; digital networks mark places where data might be; and cinema, the system most aligned with our experience, marks where subjects of looking might be. Of all the innovations of container systems, the most fundamental is the empty cargo container. It is the idea that this container, here, might be substituted with any other container in the system, that the cranes at any port might lift it from any ship and load it onto any truck or train. In satisfying this goal, it carves out a space where all qualities go missing and all local specificity and particularity vanish. It is only by the mobilization of this emptiness that it becomes possible to mark an address with an RFID tag and track a product using precise GPS coordinates at any moment along its course, a service that DHL carried out for the pedometer in *Logistics* to provide "proof of journey." As historian Marc Levinson demonstrates in a wonderful description of the portside processes that must take place when a container ship like the *Elly Maersk* arrives in Shenzhen, these data and logistics systems compose a joint choreography:

> Computers, and the vessel planners who use them, determine the order in which the containers are to be discharged, to speed the process without destabilizing the ship. The actions of the container cranes and the equipment in the yard all are programmed in advance. The longshoreman who drives each machine faces a screen telling him which container is to be handled next and where it is to be moved—unless the terminal dispenses with longshoremen by using driverless transporters to pick up the containers at shipside and centrally controlled stacker cranes to handle container storage.[80]

The final variable to consider in this choreography is where we stand in relation to the image that seeks to represent the whole.

Uncontained

A common method of signaling duration, going back to the earliest years of film, is time lapse. Maersk makes available time-lapse videos that show the construction of its ships, condensing a process that can take up to a year or eighteen months into a minute-long video.[81] Magnusson and Andersson have been asked on occasion to allow exhibitors to show a condensed version of *Logistics,* and in one instance, at a business fair in Gothenburg, the filmmakers obliged. But abridging the film in this

80.   Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 6. It is perhaps worth noting that the *Ideal-X* embarked on the first-ever container shipment only two weeks after Lacan's lecture on the little boat and the signifier, on April 26, 1956. See Levinson, p. 1.

81.   See "Maersk Line—Building the Triple-E Timelapse," YouTube video, 1:16, Mar. 17, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxeREd3s_UE.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

way, making it digestible and consumable, only disappointed. Magnusson had a terse answer for the failure of time lapse: "The way of showing it *is* the work itself."[82]

     There is an ethical valence to the act of durational looking, expressed nowhere more completely than in Chantal Akerman's reflections on her choice to use extended long takes to frame the character of Jeanne Dielman as a way "to respect the space, her, and her gestures within it."[83] Allowing people, objects, and environments to come into their own in time is a fundamental cinematic act. Yet this ethical gesture of synchronizing with figures is dependent on our understanding them. Laura Marks explains this well in noting the importance of "virtual archives," such as memory, in the sensibility of film.[84] The virtual archive that a film must engage with to be comprehended is possible only in the most incomplete, abstract ways for *Logistics.* Only through an external, supplementary archive can we construct its depth. In its way, *Logistics* offers what Patrick Jagoda calls a "network aesthetic" through its allusion to a wide network of complex interconnection, but it can only initiate this aesthetic.[85] For, in its local specificity and sublime vastness, it resists subjective recuperation.

82.   Erika Magnusson, interview with author, June 6, 2018.

83.   Chantal Akerman, interview with Janet Bergstrom, "*Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* by Chantal Akerman," *Camera Obscura* 1, no. 2 (1977), p. 119.

84.   Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 194–95.

85.   Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

I had to sit for years with the film for it to render up the meanings I felt in that protracted instant when I first saw it. It was only through long research, tracking the camera's path, mapping the system of container movements, and exploring the cultural and political events surrounding the film, that it began to cohere into a story. I thought for a long time that the film was impossible to write about. But then I found an email address at the bottom of the project's website, and this one line of connection led to another, which led to another, and then we were screening the film for a conference and I was interviewing the filmmakers in their home.

As with Rubens's painting of the Crucifixion in which Lacan perceives the entire history of painting and architecture, their individual developments and their folding together, *Logistics* should inspire in us a sense that it "could have never been produced without a whole preceding development." There is behind it the entire history of systems of trade as well as that of networks of communication, "their combination and the history of this combination."[86] The film *Logistics* relies on the system of global logistics not in an incidental way for its content but for every aspect of its existence: It is a vessel for the continuing circulation and exchange of those emptinesses—shipping containers and data points—that might be filled and proliferated. It is not irrational to suppose that the film could have never been produced without the Internet; the filmmakers' experiences suggest quite the opposite. It would seem sensible as well to conclude that the film would need to be read through that network of information.

86.   Lacan, Seminar VII, p. 135.

Magnusson and Andersson. Logistics. *2012.*

The subjective counterpart to *Logistics*' film object is not any individual view-er alone but, in the most encompassing way, a cultural network that connects all of these multimedia and people together. And this points to a crucial insight largely invisible before the Internet, one betrayed by the tools of audience targeting and recommendation algorithms but left lingering in its potential: All films, as with all mosaics and paintings and photographs, refer to a subjectivity that could never be contained in a single person. A spectator is instead an intermediary, not an origin or end point. Spectators mediate between cultural networks in the same way that media artifacts, technologies, and infrastructures mediate between people. An entire social network of persons and things must be understood to be both source and address of every film. So when in viewing *Logistics* we are directed to look up its meanings on the Web, we see, through these lines of connection, as Lacan saw in that sardine can, that the film really is looking back.