

## Reorienting objects in Resnais and Marker's

### *Les Statues meurent aussi / Statues Also Die (1953)*

This article brings a current critical-theoretical investment in 'things' into dialogue with the filmic medium. Considering a recent turn to materialism alongside the question of cinema's ontology, this article foregrounds a tension between subjective and objective modes of image production. Despite the essentially phenomenological nature of spectatorship, I argue that cinema has a long history of attempting to engage with a noumenal realm of material objects in all their inscrutability. While a turn to objects might initially seem to offer an innocuous gesture of metaphysical speculation, I draw on the recent insights of Jordana Rosenberg to bring into relief the political drive subtending current ontological theories of matter and materialism. These concerns are subsequently brought into dialogue with Alain Resnais and Chris Marker's 1953 essay film *Les Statues meurent aussi/Statues Also Die*. Centred on a display of African artwork, Resnais and Marker's film addresses the ethics and politics of colonialism by largely visual means. This opens up the possibility, which I pursue here, of 'reading' objects as well as cinema's human-object entanglements through a postcolonial optic.

**Keywords:** Chris Marker; Alain Resnais; Thing theory; the material turn; ethnography; experimental documentary

Chris Marker shot his 6-minute film *Junkopia* (1981) alongside his ambitious feature-length project *Sans Soleil/Sunless* (1982). While the latter 'nomadic' film-text comprises a string of encounters spanning national and temporal registers with the most vertiginous of gestures, *Junkopia*'s geographic fixity is striking. The exacting intertitles anchor us in space: a latitude of 37° 45' north and a longitude of 122° 27' west. Experimental in nature, the film shows a succession of static shots at varying distances from the filmic subject matter of objects: junk, totems, fantastical statues formed from detritus that presumably once washed up on the shores. Through an unfolding sequence of shots, we

gradually move closer to the muddy banks. When the objects are framed against the backdrop of moving cars in a motorway lane nearby, the rhythms of everyday life are held in tension with the strangely a-human, atemporal world of statues.

I preface my article with this short film, less by way of a circuitous entry into the peculiarities of Marker's oeuvre, but rather to introduce a range of questions regarding the current preponderance of 'things' in critical theory and to consider how this might engage with the filmic medium. In recent years, theoretical enquiry across the humanities has been marked by a renewed interest in materialist and realist philosophies, or a 'material turn'—a term that is intended here as a loose and non-exhaustive designation comprising varied fields such as Thing theory, object-oriented ontologies, new materialism and speculative realism.<sup>1</sup> By considering this turn to materialism alongside the question of cinema's ontology, I aim to foreground a tension between subjective and objective modes of image-production. Though the nature of film spectatorship is essentially phenomenological, film theorists have long attempted to engage with a noumenal realm of material objects in all their inscrutability. While this turn to objects may initially seem to be an innocuous gesture of metaphysical speculation, the incisive interventions of Jordana Rosenberg have shown that a political drive may subtend ontological theories of matter and materialism. These insights will be brought into dialogue with Alain Resnais and Chris Marker's 1953 short essay film *Les Statues meurent aussi/Statues Also Die*. Centred on a display of African artwork, their film addresses questions of colonial hierarchy by largely visual means, thus opening up the possibility of 'reading' objects as well as human-object entanglements in film through a post-colonial optic. Through close consideration of the film's use of the extreme close-up, I ask whether this strategy fosters an ontological instability that resonates with vitalist accounts of our material existence. My article's final, broader line

of enquiry considers the film's use of statues to explore how the subject/object dynamic is negotiated across the multiple registers of cinema, art history and contemporary thought. By reading *Statues Also Die* in conjunction with Rosenberg's polemical prose, I hope to sketch out ways in which an aesthetic turn to objects may be politically inflected.

Despite recent debates prompted by a material turn in critical theory and ongoing discussions about film's capacity to renegotiate the visual in a supposedly post-anthropocentric epoch, there has been surprisingly little discussion of objecthood in film. Volker Pantenberg explains that '[t]he list of disciplines and discourses involved in the "return of things" is long and keeps getting longer. It is therefore striking to see that film and media studies has been largely absent from these discussions'.<sup>2</sup> While a surge of interest in animal life seeks to rekindle the 'creaturely' dimension of inter-subjective encounters across the species divide,<sup>3</sup> the occlusion of the 'object' dimension of material co-presences (outside of their instrumental function in the *mise-en-scène*) rests on a longstanding assumption of their inertness and agential impoverishment. Object-oriented thought, championed by theorists such as Bill Brown and Jane Bennett, virulently challenges such a doxa that renders objects unassimilable into the structures of dynamic encounters typically assumed to generate meaning. This prompts the question of whether film, an index registering the concreteness of external reality, might therefore hold some promise for achieving the kind of material decentring sought by speculative philosophies.

In his contribution to Pantenberg's *Cinematographic Objects*, a coedited volume seeking to stage the overdue dialogue between film theory and speculative thought, Francesco Casetti writes, with Kracauerian undertone, that cinema 'allows us to become

conscious of the objects that surround us after we have long since taken them for granted', thus allowing the spectator to 'once more grasp and interact with the fabric of the world'.<sup>4</sup> Going perhaps further than this claim, Sam Ishii-Gonzales suggests that cinema is a medium 'which has the capacity to affirm things-in-themselves without the presumption of *a priori* schemas of knowledge'.<sup>5</sup> This investment in cinematic realism as a gateway into the noumenon has, as Malcolm Turvey argues, a much longer history. He traces this genealogy back to classical film theorists such as Jean Epstein, Vertov, Kracauer and Balázs, each of whom reveal a greater or lesser investment in cinema's capacity to reveal the 'truth of the world'.<sup>6</sup> Vertov, in particular, conceives of cinema as a corrective to the fallibility of human sight: this appeal to reach beyond the human sensorium negates film's function as a phenomenological enterprise in a way that resonates with the anti-correlationist ambitions of speculative thought. For Turvey, a more recent point of reference would be Stanley Cavell who, working out of a tradition of Bazinian realism,<sup>7</sup> argues that cinema satisfies the demand to 'overcome the gulf created by skepticism between subject and object, self and other, consciousness and nature – our 'metaphysical isolation''.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Cavell's writing on the 'ontological equality of objects and human subjects in photography'<sup>9</sup> which one can substitute metonymically for the filmic image, sounds in keeping with current ambitions to re-orient relationality away from an anthropocentric hubris and to establish a state of what Manuel DeLanda has called 'ontological flatness'.

Considering film and object-oriented thought together allows us to foreground a tension between subjective and objective modes of image production and theoretical enquiry. Just as reflections on cinema's ontology rest uneasily between the diegetic realm crafted in the subjective register of authorial intention and the medium's 'objective' dimension which seeks purchase on the indexical function of film,

speculative thought similarly tries to reconcile an anthropocentrically-charged will to engage with the extra-human realm while also wrestling with our epistemic incommensurability with it. Marker's *Junkopia* serves here as an example; through our estrangement from the opaque subject 'matter' presented to us, we are forced to meditate on the gap arising between our expectation at the level of reception, and our inability to assimilate the inert stuff presented on screen into a legible semiotic structure. To formulate this chiasmically: the filming of objects elucidates, to a certain extent, the object of film. Here, I hope to convey a sense of the *hyperawareness* of looking—and consequently, of the filmic medium—when faced with objects whose material indifference seems to forestall communication and have little to say to us.<sup>10</sup> While there are perhaps parallels here with the Duchampian tradition of the *objet trouvé*,<sup>11</sup> my aim is to explore, by moving from silent film to documentary, the various ways in which the audiovisual medium of film approaches the alterity of objecthood.<sup>12</sup>

Addressing the subject/object dynamic in her reading of Marker's short film, Sarah Cooper writes that he 'takes us closer to the structures of "junkopia" than to the surrounding world, as this liminal, watery space registers the passage of time and tide to which the human world, although oblivious here in its sturdy substantiality, is also subject'.<sup>13</sup> Refracting these concerns back into the anthropocentric domain, Cooper pre-empted the central contention of my subsequent argument; that even the most obstinate of objects always returns into the fold of the social.

In Bill Brown's *Thing Theory* (2001), the essay that came to inaugurate our present philosophical investment in inanimate things, he wonders with a slightly trepidatory tone whether we shouldn't just leave things alone 'in the balmy elsewhere beyond theory?'<sup>14</sup> We may indeed wonder whether the assimilation of objects into the spheres of theory

and politics, a ‘perverse’ act as Brown puts it, might underscore their subservience to man—a state in which discussion of the intrinsic qualities and opacity of what Kant called the *thing-in-itself* is elided in favour of an object’s metonymical function in a frame of social relations.

A similar friction can be discerned in Emma Wilson’s account of how Alain Resnais and Chris Marker came to develop their short film *Statues Also Die* (1953). As she notes, the film’s initial impetus was to showcase African art, which they felt was underappreciated in 1950s France.<sup>15</sup> The political framing that marked the end product, however, came from a pressing ethical imperative to respond to Resnais’s question of ‘why African art was placed in the Musée de l’homme (an ethnographic museum) while Assyrian, or Greek art, by contrast was shown in the Louvre’.<sup>16</sup> Though the film’s *visual* subject is overwhelmingly that of masks, fetishes and statuary from Benin, it ultimately eschews its initial art-historical purpose, as is suggested by the telling lack of any contextual indicators. An aesthetic appreciation of objects gives way to politics: the film’s thematic focus lingers with the broader questions of race and colonialism of which Resnais’s point on the asymmetry in curatorial politics is ultimately symptomatic. While I will later address more fully the circulation of objects across the multiple registers of film and art history, I firstly want to bring this film into dialogue with new materialist thought to attend to the questions of scale, matter and materialism in relation to the film’s political vision.

We can first note the general sense in which an attention to scale in the work of both Alain Resnais and Chris Marker has often attained a political dimension. *Statues Also Die* reveals certain trademark touches—albeit in their embryonic form—that we will later remark in the oeuvres of both auteurs. For instance, cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet’s delicate attention to the tones and texture of inanimate matter up-close, attains

a palpable sense of testimonial and political salience, a skill that would two years later go on to garner him critical acclaim in Resnais's *Nuit et Brouillard/Night and Fog* (1955).<sup>17</sup> Cloquet and Resnais's predilection for tracking shots that sweep through abyssal, indeterminate space marks the first half of the film, as cameras circle art objects to effect a sense of cultural and historical dislocation. Similarly, Chris Marker's novel use of the voice-over, in this case the hyperbolic address of Jean Négroni, acts as a connective tissue to the film's vast, disconnected bricolage of images, paving the way for later experimental projects such as *La Jetée/The Jetty* (1962) and *Sans Soleil/Sunless* (1982). *Statues Also Die* also engages with the problematics of scale at a discursive level. As Sarah Cooper notes, the film's humanism appeals to a universalising conception of 'man' which inevitably conflates culturally heterogeneous ethnic groups and forecloses the recognition of non-hierarchical difference.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the complicity—and at times, trickery or ekphrastic tension—between voice and image is something I now turn to, in my consideration of this film alongside the questions posed by new materialist philosophies.

The film's first scene opens onto a discussion of 'Man' and statues, grounded in the commonality of finitude. The narration is accompanied by a range of still shots of 'a botany of death', the rubble of crumbling statues to which I will later return. The subsequent scenes consist of exposing a range of tribal masks and artefacts—through either static or panning shots—while the percussive beats of drums punctuate the dialogue and sequencing of images to achieve a peculiar rhythmic and affective pulse. Following this sequence of the film, the ethnographic gaze of the camera leaves the scene of masks set against the black backdrop, and enters the outside world. This transposition of scale and context, from inside to outside, allows for the spectatorial gaze, now attuned to object-oriented enquiry, to revisit the messy world of human-object

entanglements afresh. While the film's initial display is of discrete objects, Resnais and Marker proceed to fold them into the dynamic, 'living' realm of people and animals. Pausing momentarily on a scene of a woman weaving on a loom, [See Figure 1] the narrator explains that:

'God made these gestures. The god who wove this flesh, in turn taught her [the weaving woman on-screen] to weave the loom. Each and every one of his gestures comes to symbolise the weaving of the world. The world is the fabric of gods, where they took Man'.<sup>19</sup>

The narrator threads together these movements, across multiple scalar and ontological registers, to evoke a sense of worldly self-renewal and becoming through the weaver's motile gestures. Figuring objects and movements as actants that are central to this perpetual state of genesis, the film reminds us of Jane Bennett's appeal to develop a more distributive conception of agency.<sup>20</sup> Such an account would seemingly dislodge the Cartesian cogito; as she notes, 'the philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends is too often bound up with fantasies of a human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature'.<sup>21</sup>

The film returns to the confines of a studio, where the narrator plays close attention to the patterns and detailing adorning artefacts. He picks out the 'animal forms of a weaving spool' and the 'vegetal form of a trinket box' to emphasise the organic plasticity of forms when crafted 'in the hands of the black artist.' In the subsequent sequence this attention to texture is explored further by cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet through the use of close-up vision.

Entering into dialogue with Eisenstein's reading of the 'close-up' in D.W. Griffith's cinema and Balász's discussion of the 'latent physiognomy of things', Deleuze and Guatarri have advanced a counterintuitive logic whereby the close-up *envisages* forms



of expressivity that are untethered to an anthropomorphic subject. This cinematographic technique thus effects a mode of subjectivation in which the inanimate thing (in Eisenstein's case: Griffith's kettle) might 'return' the gaze.<sup>22</sup> Resnais and Marker's film employs similar tactics of visual obfuscation to destabilise perceived hierarchies between humans, objects and landscapes in a way that not only invites comparison with the aforementioned frame of film theory, but which might be further developed in relation to new materialist thought.

The spectator is addressed directly and asked to distinguish between the textures 'of the earth and those on a loom, to identify which shot is black skin or an aerial view of land and to discern the bark of a tree from the peeling surface of a statue' [See Figure 2]. The extreme close-up, here, is called upon to effect a disidentificatory logic. Deleuze would later go on to write that the close-up 'tears apart all spatio-temporal coordinates'<sup>23</sup> while Mary Ann Doane notes that by 'simultaneously figuring on microcosmic and macrocosmic registers the close-up acts as a nodal point linking ideologies of intimacy and the authority of the monumental'.<sup>24</sup> The dual-directionality of the extreme close-up's spatial logic also mirrors the ontological oscillation between the list of potential objects (earth, weaving, skin, bark, statue) which may, or may not, be featured on screen.

For Doane this uncertainty inevitably attains an ethical dimension: 'it is the very possibility cinema has of representing disproportion, of interrogating and displacing realism, that opens up a space for political critique'.<sup>25</sup> When the film's voiceover states that 'man is never separate from the world / the same force nourishes all of its fibres', there is an attempt to render this message explicit: Resnais and Marker appeal to material objects and a monistic vision to lend credence to their universalist ethics.

However, are there alternative ways of interpreting the political import of the film's account of the mutability of matter?

We can first turn our critical attention to the film's purportedly egalitarian vision, through the visual appeal to a logic of co-presence and relationality with the non-human, inanimate other. Various accounts of the film emphasise how '[the] camera treats all subjects in front of its lens without differentiating between humans, statues, animals, landscapes, architecture, or signs'<sup>26</sup> to create a state of what Pierre-Philippe Fraiture calls a 'pure realm of transitive relations'.<sup>27</sup> Given the static nature of these close-ups, it is tempting to draw parallels with Cavell's above account of how photographic images establish ontological parity between humans and objects. Yet, it does not necessarily follow that the political import of these aesthetic tropes similarly tends towards a state of equity.

To take a key new materialist account of relationality in the physical world, we can note how Jane Bennett explicitly mobilises a Deleuzian idiom of 'assemblages' to emphasise a logic of material continuity that, in keeping with the close-up sequence described above, attempts to transcend categorical differences.<sup>28</sup> However, Anat Pick perceptively notes the drawback of these rhizomatic configurations when the subject of political power is broached. She writes that 'by distributing agency flatly across the network' the question of power dynamics is largely forgotten as we tend to focus on the 'vital flow of "relations" and "contact"'.<sup>29</sup> Such an approach, Pick writes, risks the charge of 'political and ethical vacuity' by failing to engage directly with questions of hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> Applying these insights to Resnais and Marker's film, we can assert that the su(pe)rificial emphasis on textural appearance seems, at times, to obfuscate underlying questions of colonial power. What is more, the problematic exposition of 'la peau noire' (black skin)—which the white narrator, Jean Négroni, invites us to liken to

an aerial view of arid land—renders the ethnographic gaze of the camera uncomfortably palpable.<sup>31</sup> In this particular instance, the ethical intervention of *Statues Also Die* seems only to run skin deep. Here, we start to tease out the film's central ambivalence. This paradox lies in this simultaneous drive to flatten forms as well as bringing them into relief; attempting to politicise material culture while aestheticizing alterity. In my final section, therefore, I will elaborate on this argument by addressing, more comprehensively, how objects circulate across the multiple registers of art history, anthropology and critical theory.

A reading of object-oriented thought through a post-colonial optic may at first appear novel, not least because of the way in which new materialist philosophy is largely framed as a metaphysical, rather than political, enterprise. However, in Bill Brown's article *Objects, Others and Us*, he considers how the representation of culture is itself inscribed in material objects. With theoretical dexterity, he argues that object culture ought to be approached from the angles of aesthetic and politics simultaneously:

‘[Art-historical objects] teach us about the otherness of objects as such, the differentiation between subject and object, as between human and nonhuman, serving what [he] take[s] to be the phenomenological infrastructure on which an apprehension of alterity as such is built’.<sup>32</sup>

By structuring his argument around the dyadic oppositions of: subject/object, self/Other, Occident/Orient, Brown echoes the set of dynamics negotiated in *Statues Also Die*. Indeed, the article's primary contention, echoed in recent work by anthropologist Severin Fowles,<sup>33</sup> is that the questions spurred by a material turn in theory reveal parallels with debates that took place in the field of anthropology over previous decades. This reference to anthropology (precisely the discipline that recent

materialist thought has sought to disavow) undermines not only the will to distance thought from the anthropocentric, but it also calls into question the originality to which object-oriented theories often lay claim.

However, the theorist who goes further than Brown in exploring the links between objects and (post-)colonial politics is Jordana Rosenberg. Recuperating the semantically slippery term ‘materialism’ with a rhetorical fervour that lies closer to the Marxian sense of the word than the ‘thingly’ dimension evoked at present, Rosenberg offers a politically radical account of the philosophical turn to objects and matter. They assert that: ‘The ontological turn [to matter and materialism] is a theoretical primitivism that presents itself as a methodological *avant-garde*’<sup>34</sup> – thus echoing Brown’s above point on new materialism’s unacknowledged debt to anthropology. ‘It is so because it fetishizes the sundering of human and object worlds’.<sup>35</sup> They goes on to write that:

The urge towards objects comports itself in a very particular fashion, one that will be familiar to scholars of colonialism and settler-colonialism, and that calls to mind any number of New-World-style fantasies about locations unmediated by social order. The ontological turn, that is to say, reshapes an old paradigm, a primitivist fantasy that hinges on the violent erasure of the social: the conjuring of a realm – an “ancestral realm” [...] <sup>36</sup>

The crux of their article is that we ought to be wary of theories – masquerading as naïve metaphysical speculation – that posit that there is a heretofore undiscovered realm of ‘things’ to be, as they controversially suggest, ‘colonised’. By framing the all-too-human urge to make contact with the noumenal world as akin to a form of epistemological domination, they bring into relief the set of problems explored, often with striking literality, in *Statues Also Die*.

In the opening of their film, Resnais and Marker highlight the transient nature of our fascination with objects. The narrator reminds us that just as aesthetic preferences are subject to change according to ever-shifting trends, past worlds of statues are also vulnerable to being forgotten. A succession of still shots focus on the eroded detailing of statues – effigies at the whim of changing tastes – figures left to disintegrate in a graveyard, or ‘botany of death’ as it is referred to by Négroni. The voice-over figures the viewer’s engagement with statues as not only unidirectional, but akin to a form of domination:

An object dies when the living gaze cast upon it disappears. When we, too, disappear our objects will be sent to join those of the black Africans: in the museum.<sup>37</sup>

Accordingly, the scene moves to an ethnographic museum. With this shift in location, Resnais and Marker transpose this narrative of vulnerability and domination from the realm of statues and into the curatorial practice and geopolitics of the present. The previous scene’s residual imagery of the statues’ ‘traces mutilées’ (marks of mutilation) underscores the all-too-real losses of those sacrificed to the colonial mission. As Emma Wilson perceptively writes:

this material concern shadows the more trenchant awareness of the loss and embalming of a living civilisation. In the images of broken marble, in the images of African statues, objects in western glass cases, Resnais counterpoints two narratives of loss, of the erosion of art through time and the acts of the (colonial) other.<sup>38</sup>

Resnais and Marker trace the trajectories of objects across these domains; from outdoors in rural Senegal to inside Parisian galleries, as well as from the dark spaces of the atavistic imaginary to the white and clinical setting of the museum. In this latter space, the metaphor of *objectification* is subsequently reinscribed into the domain of art history. The voice-over suggests that ‘primitive’ art’s *raison d’être* can be derived from

the mystical value it obtains in the eye of the Western beholder – in this case, a woman momentarily peering through the vitrine of the museum display. As museum-goers and dilettantes observe the totems and masks displayed for them, the only curatorial cue is a plaque reading ‘*Origine Inconnue*’ (‘Of Unknown Provenance’). This divorcing of objects from their history illustrates precisely the ‘violent erasure of the social’ to which Rosenberg eludes.<sup>39</sup> As the women look out to the screen as if to address the audience [See Figure 3] the film constructs a *mise-en-abyme* to suggest that spectatorial relations ought themselves to be put on display. Through this interplay of gazes, brought into sharp relief against the sterile artificiality of the white backdrop, the film starts to reveal a self-reflexive awareness of the ethical stakes of looking.

While the politics of curation and archival practice would later sustain Resnais’s attention in his short documentary *Toute la mémoire du monde/All The World’s Memory* (1956), the ‘violent erasure’ seen in *Statues Also Die* gestures urgently towards tensions in France’s museological discourse which remain intimately interlocked with its colonial past. The question of how institutions at ‘very center of French power and culture’ engage with ‘the dignity of otherness’, to use the terms of *Présence Africaine* activist Valentin-Yves Mudimbe,<sup>40</sup> continues to be negotiated in the contemporary period—having most visibly crystallized in national debates surrounding the 2007 opening of Paris’ ‘primitive arts’ museum on the Quai Branly.<sup>41</sup> In *Statues Also Die*, Resnais and Marker’s critical engagement with the spaces, practices, and cultural capital of the museum, while perhaps not ultimately sufficient to offer a corrective to the exoticising tendencies of the aforementioned cinematography, does go some way towards nuancing the film’s message and widening its critical scope of engagement.

In closing, I wish to suggest that the overarching vision of the film lies ambivalently between two subject positions. The first aligns itself with the woman

marvelling at masks in the gallery, momentarily succumbing to the pull of their otherworldly charms. The second hinges on the more didactic and political voice of the narrator who introduces a critical exposition of the dynamics of domination and submission that feed the primitivistic fantasies of the Western imaginary. By framing this opposition as an ekphrastic tension—a disconnect between the verbal and visual—we ought to cast our mind back to the site of the film's museum. Invoking the lexicon of the art gallery, we can draw our attention to the film's *curatorial* impulse: the will to grasp, to make sense of, to apprehend the alterity of objects and others as they are presented to us. Given Resnais and Marker's relentless exposition of masks and artefacts, I take inspiration from Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1975 book *La voie des masques* which in the original French exploits the homophonous 'voie' of the title to signify both the 'path' and the 'voice' of masks. Despite the paths that object-oriented thought may erringly lead us down, the narrator informs us that statues are unable to speak: 'They have mouths but do not speak [...] these statues are mute'. Indeed, by problematizing what it means to speak on their behalf, the film casts radical doubt on whether we can apprehend the alterity of objects outside of the frame of social relations. The film's curatorial impulse, therefore, gestures not only to asymmetries of power across the subject/object divide at the level of diegesis—but it also reveals, more generally, a consonance with critical accounts of new materialism's ethical and epistemic shortcomings.

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- 1 A renewed interest in materialist and realist philosophies as well as actor-network theory, for instance, has prompted reflections on how objects are ontologically irreducible to their relation to the human. See, for instance, (eds.) Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman, *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2011)
  - 2 Volker Pantenberg, *Cinematographic Objects* (Munich: August Verlag, 2015), pp. 10-11.
  - 3 I borrow this term from Anat Pick's *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
  - 4 Francesco Casetti, 'Objects on the Screen: Tool, Things, Events' in (ed.) Pantenberg, *Cinematographic Objects*, p. 26.
  - 5 Sam Ishii-Gonzales, 'Speculative Realism and Cinematic Objects' presented at *Film-Philosophy* Conference, Liverpool John Moores University, 7 July 2011.
  - 6 Malcolm Turvey, 'Balázs: Realist or Modernist?' in *October*, vol. 115 (2006), pp. 77-78.
  - 7 Stanley Cavell writes that 'a photograph does not present us with the "likenesses" of things: it presents us, we want to say, with the things themselves', *The World Viewed*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p.17.
  - 8 Turvey, 'Balázs: Realist or Modernist?', p.77.
  - 9 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 72.
  - 10 Indeed, this point finds resonances with the theory and practice of 1970s structuralist filmmakers such as Peter Gidal and Michael Snow.
  - 11 Marcel Duchamp's artistic probing, for instance, drastically at odds with the plastic paradigms of his contemporaries, sought to open questions in a meta-discursive mode, about the ontology of art as well as the shaping of its reception by emphasising how objects circulate across aesthetic, material and political registers.
  - 12 As this essay moves from silent film *Junkopia* to the documentary film *Statues Also Die*, I will address how Resnais and Marker's use of the 'curatorial' voice-over is central to the political dynamics at stake in the cinematic rendering of objects.
  - 13 Sarah Cooper, *Chris Marker*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 114.
  - 14 Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory' *Critical Inquiry*, vol.28, no.1 (2001), p. 1.



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- 15 Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 22.
- 16 Wilson, *Alain Resnais*, p. 22. This call for the entry of African art into the Louvre was forcefully echoed by André Malraux in his 1976 essay, 'L'Intemporel'.
- 17 See Emma Wilson. 'Material Remains: Night and Fog' in *October*, vol. 112 (2005), pp. 89-110.
- 18 Cooper, *Chris Marker*. pp. 14-15.
- 19 All translations my own. The French transcription can be found in Chris Marker *Commentaires I*. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1961) p.15.
- 20 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Economy of Things*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. ix.
- 21 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p.ix.
- 22 See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.175. This is subsequently explored in greater depth in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 87-93.
- 23 Deleuze. *Cinema 1*. pp. 95-96.
- 24 Mary Ann Doane, 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema' in *differences: Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2003), p. 108.
- 25 Doane, 'The Close-Up', p.108.
- 26 Nora Alter, *Chris Marker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 59.
- 27 Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, 'The death and after-death of African art' in *Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 18, no 2-3 (2015), p. 198.
- 28 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, pp. 23-24.
- 29 Anat Pick. 'Why not look at animals?' *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 2015), p. 118.
- 30 Pick, 'Why not look at animals?', p.118.
- 31 The film was originally commissioned by Présence Africaine, a publishing house founded in 1947 by the Senegalese intellectual Alione Diop. If the film's discourse on race seems particularly pronounced this must be contextualized in relation to the notion of *négritude* which informed its conception. Resnais and Marker's (and at a diegetic level, Négroni's) own positionalities in this identity matrix, however, remain a point of contention.
- 32 Bill Brown, 'Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things)' in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2010), p.186

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- 33 Fowles has similarly argued that ‘the shift from people to things – and the subsequent reimagining of objects as anthropological subjects – has a history that is interdigitated with the unfinished postcolonial critiques of Euro-American representational authority.’ For a sustained account of these disciplinary dynamics from an anthropological vantage point, see ‘The Perfect Subject (Postcolonial Object Studies), *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2016), pp. 9-27.
- 34 Jordana Rosenberg, ‘The Molecularization of Sexuality: On Some Primitivisms of the Present’ in *Theory & Event*, vol. 17, no.2 (2014).  
<[muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v017/17.2.rosenberg.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v017/17.2.rosenberg.html)> [accessed 23 February 2017].
- 35 Rosenberg, ‘The Molecularization of Sexuality’.
- 36 Rosenberg, ‘The Molecularization of Sexuality’.
- 37 French transcript available in Marker, *Commentaires 1*. p. 9.
- 38 Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 24.
- 39 Rosenberg, ‘The Molecularization of Sexuality’.
- 40 Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, *The Surreptitious Speech: Presence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. xvii.
- 41 For a sensitive contextualization of this issue, see Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac’s Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).