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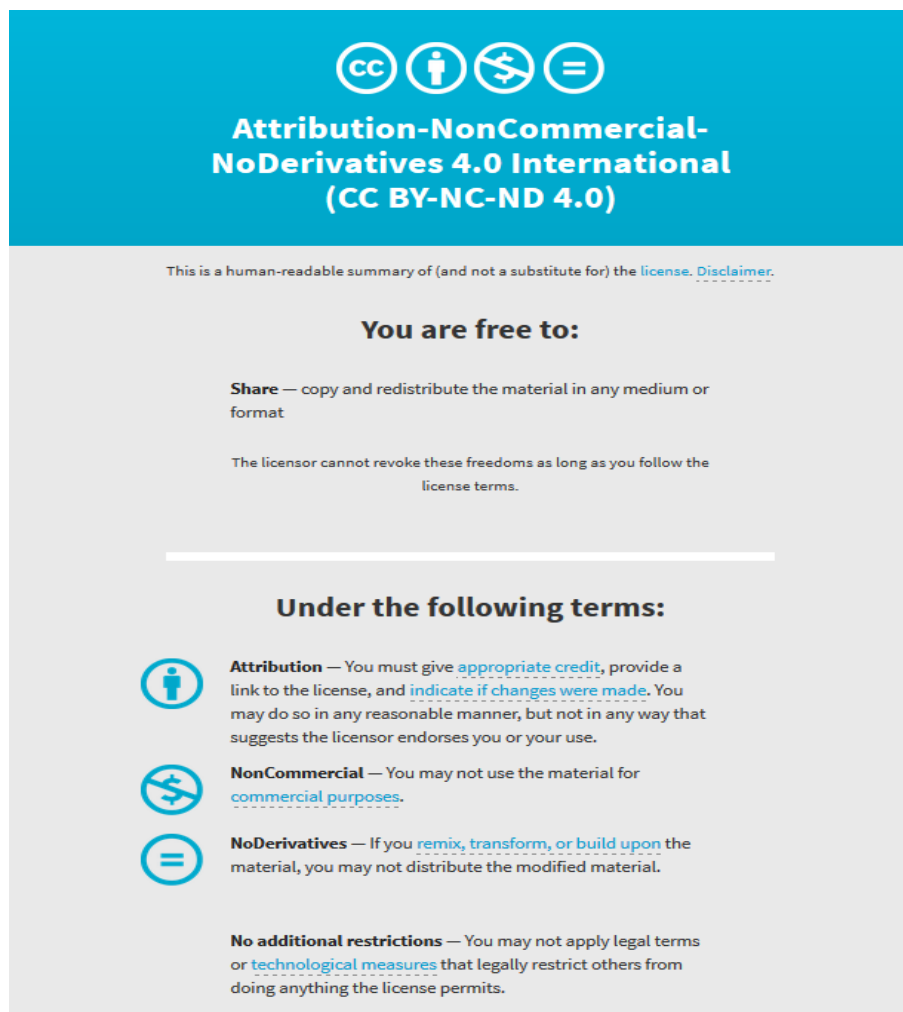Framing French Culture, 2015 / Edwards, N., McCann, B., Poiana, P. (ed./s), Ch.1, pp.3-25

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The doubling of the frame — Visual art and discourse

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The notion of framing is one that has emerged as a key factor in current investigations into representations of culture. In the disciplinary area of French Studies, framing is understood as collective and individual rules of identity construction that are based upon a combination of modes of visual production, past and present narratives, and discourses of knowledge and power. The present volume will pursue the question of framing in all three areas.

The first sustained discussion of framing, understood in the modern sense, is attributed to anthropologist and linguist Gregory Bateson. In 1954, in 'A theory of play and fantasy', Bateson argued that no form of communication can be understood without reference to its metacommunicative frame; monkeys are able to distinguish the same gestures as aggression or as play, depending upon their framing, according to one of his examples.[1] Sociologist Erving Goffman took up the concept in *Frame analysis* (1974), positing that individuals interpret experiences and situations through

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1   G. Bateson, 'A theory of play and fantasy', in *Steps to an ecology of mind* (New York, Ballantine, 1954), pp. 177-93.

a series of frames.[2] These frames are cognitive structures that guide perception; if one saw a person being chased down the street by a police officer, one could surmise that s/he had committed a theft, for example. The notion was soon adopted in the field of Literary Studies, which during the 1970s was busily adopting models from other disciplinary areas as ways of changing the scope and pattern of traditional literary interpretation. The rise of structuralism in particular gave prominence to the idea of 'narrative' and to the 'science' of narratology, and Gerald Prince notes how this new theoretical application led to the positioning of 'narrative as a thematic frame'.[3]

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, framing as a theoretical device has since been employed across an array of disciplines to open new modes of interpretation, and between disciplines as a way of crossing disciplinary borders. Studies of the use of frames exist in, for example, Sociolinguistics, Cultural Studies, Psychology and Psychotherapy, Anthropology, Sociology, Museum Studies, Film Studies, Architecture, Cognition Theory, Discourse Theory, Artificial Intelligence, Postcolonial Studies, Intermediality Studies, Communications and Policy Studies. Framing has become commonplace and we readily accept that we interpret the world through the medium of frames. We understand reading, in its broadest sense, as a framing activity and use framing as a way of approaching the heterogeneous quality of texts. As Werner Wolf summarises, '[O]ver the past few decades it has become a received notion that there is no human signifying act, no meaningful perception, cognition and communication without "frames" and … frames are practically everywhere'.[4]

As a result, the terms 'frames' and 'framing' are often employed with imprecise theoretical underpinnings. Wolf, for example, interrogates the variety of definitions of 'framing', noting the slippage that occurs in the word's meaning as it moves across disciplines. He points out that a 'frame' may be synonymous with a 'script', a 'schema' or a set of 'discursive exchanges' in certain disciplines, for example, and that, depending upon its usage, the term 'framing' can refer either to metacommunicative acts or to a set of metaconcepts. Comparing the use of framing across the visual arts, film, music and literature, Wolf designates frames thus: 'culturally formed

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2   E. Goffman, Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience (London, Harper and Row, 1974).

3   G. Prince, *Narrative as theme: Studies in French fiction* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 19.

4   W. Wolf, 'Introduction: Frames, framing and framing borders', in W. Wolf (ed.), *Framing borders in literature and other media* (Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2006), p. 1.

metaconcepts, most of which possess a certain stability even if modified … [that] enable us to interpret both reality and artefacts and hence other concepts that can be applied in perception, experience and communication'.[5]

It is this notion of framing as a metaconcept that provides the impetus for this volume. The chapters use frames as interpretative devices to produce new readings of textual and visual material, and as culturally derived concepts whose functioning in contemporary discourse needs to be further understood. Our approach allows for examination and comparison of cultural materials from different perspectives, calling attention both to the framing of their content and composition, and to the framing of their broader significance within culture and discourse. In this introduction, we explain how the twelve chapters that comprise the volume approach the concept of framing in its visual, narrative and discursive dimensions. The four sections of the book study examples of framing in different mediums: scientific illustrations, cultural artefacts, film, photography and art. Individually, the sections explore how framing may be used to interpret materials within a particular medium. Taken together, they demonstrate how the visual functions as a mode of cultural representation, and how acts of framing are constructions through which we may interpret cultural artefacts from the past and the present.

Historical framings

The first of the framing mechanisms examined in this volume is the grand Enlightenment project of constructing a complete picture of the universe and what it contains. The artefacts that were collected and the accounts and drawings that were produced during the sea voyages of exploration in the Antipodes offer a rich setting for the examination of the functioning of frames as interchangeable grids of understanding in which personal, historical, aesthetic and ideological considerations variously impose themselves. The way in which we view the accounts of the explorers, their drawings and collections is brought into particular focus by the multitude of critical and theoretical discourses that have arisen in the works of historians, human scientists and philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A blueprint for the study of competing discourses and their historical variations is to be found in Michel Foucault's opening lecture at the Collège de France, in December 1970,

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5   Wolf, p. 5.

published under the title *L'Ordre du discours*.[6] Foucault proposes to carry out firstly a 'critical' examination of discourses as they emerge and rise to prominence at a given historical period by way of the processes of exclusion, limitation and appropriation, and the ways in which they are modified and displaced by their confrontation with other discourses. He then conceives a second stage that he calls 'genealogical', which is concerned with the process of formation of new discourses according to the conditions of appearance, growth and variation that prevail at a given time.[7]

In his *Les Mots et les choses*[8], Foucault develops a series of empirical studies based on these 'critical' and 'genealogical' principles. He identifies certain points in history in which the categories of ordering and understanding the world were overturned. One of these was the demise of the classical model of thought at the end of the eighteenth century and the rise of a modern episteme that reflected the empirical and critical concerns advanced respectively by Hume in England and Kant in Prussia. The breach that appeared within classical thought systems concerned chiefly the way in which language aligned itself with, or detached itself from, the reality it supposedly accounted for. Foucault identifies several such changes of episteme in the history of Western thought, each bringing with it a breakdown of the processes of representation. Each brought about a change in the way in which the elements of experience were integrated into accepted forms or *lieux communs* of thinking, viewing and speaking, or alternatively excluded from these spaces. Foucault describes, for example, the widespread change that took place in the medical sciences when new clinical procedures were introduced, as a result of which the manner of 'seeing' the body shifted from a form of observation that scrutinised each detail 'on the surface' of the patient's body to a more penetrating vision that allowed the examination of each of the internal organs. The change in the manner of seeing the body was not just the result of a technological innovation, but corresponded more profoundly to the creation of new norms in the manner of creating knowledge and dealing practically with issues such as health and illness.

Like the changes that occurred in nineteenth-century medical science, the manner in which explorers conducted their activities in the South Pacific was also dependent upon a shift in the value attributed to visual perception, and beyond

6 M. Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1971).

7 Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours*, pp. 62-3.

8 M. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris, Gallimard, 1966).

this, to the relationship between the functions of vision and language.[9] In this respect, Foucault's approach is suggestive of the notion of framing as the process in which discourses variously determine and modify their objects, and this in a way that crosses disciplines and genres. The import of visual productions such as scientific drawings and maps during the voyages of discovery, their relation to the dominant discourses of the time, and their reinterpretation by a new generation of readers and viewers over a century later, are the three main questions raised in the first section of the volume.

The first chapter in the section, Nicole Starbuck's 'Colonial vision: French voyager-artists, Aboriginal subjects and the British Colony at Port Jackson', analyses the visual records and verbal accounts of the French expedition's sojourn in Port Jackson. Starbuck's examination of French and English depictions of the land and its people rests upon different sets of ideological discourses that the French and the British had brought with them to the Colony. The French artists tended to depict their Aboriginal subjects in their purported natural setting, away from the colonial context, unlike their British counterparts who were more concerned, for reasons of propaganda, to highlight the signs of civilisation that were 'visible' in the local Aboriginal people's dress and demeanour. The differences Starbuck identifies at the level of visual representation are related to the different political discourses that inform them; but there is also the question of the ethical and aesthetical standards that appear to guide the choice to either omit certain unsavoury details of Aboriginal life, as the French artists tended to do, or to distort or falsify them, as was the case with the British artists. Starbuck's analysis suggests that the paintings were governed precisely by what the artists wished to exclude from their pictorial space, as if the very unpalatability of the Aborigines' lifestyle dictated the style of the paintings, defining them paradoxically against their very claims to scientific accuracy.

John West-Sooby's 'An artist in the making: The early drawings of Charles-Alexandre Lesueur during the Baudin expedition to Australia' focuses specifically on the relationship between on the one hand the obvious scientific purposes of the drawings — that is, the need to reproduce accurately the real characteristics of the flora, fauna, humans and geographical formations encountered on the large

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9   Michel Foucault, in the preface of *Naissance de la clinique* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), mentions explicitly the mechanisms altering 'la structure commune qui découpe et articule ce qui se *voit* et ce qui se *dit*' (p. xv, emphasis in the original).

antipodean continent — and on the other the adherence of the artist to an aesthetic project that subtly manifests itself in Lesueur's drawings. Considered both in his concern with composition and in the sense of empathy he projects in his paintings, the underlying aesthetic preoccupations of Lesueur, observes West-Sooby, are as consistent as they are understated. Indeed, they colour the scientific purpose of the drawings in a manner that gives the entire expedition a distinctive sense of humanity.

The dynamics that structure competing discourses are also evident in the maps produced by the cartographers working on the expedition. In the following chapter, 'Framing New Holland or framing a narrative? A representation of Sydney according to Charles-Alexandre Lesueur', Jean Fornasiero focuses on one single detail in Lesueur's map of the east coast of Australia. The vignette that Lesueur added to the map features part of the landscape of a very distant region of the continent, a 'sacred grove' that had fascinated Lesueur's mentor, François Péron, when they had earlier visited the western side of the continent. Fornasiero shows how the small inset, physically separated from the main drawing and picturesque enough to trick the viewer into considering it as merely decorative, expresses in a way that words could not match Lesueur's strong feelings about the spiritual life of the Aboriginal people. The noble sense of a common humanity expressing itself via a compositional feature of the map of New Holland is both a limiting feature of the scientific nature of the map, and the key to unlocking the profound sense of discovery that occurred during the expedition.

Jane Southwood's chapter, 'The artwork of the Baudin expedition to Australia (1800-1804): Nicolas-Martin Petit's 1802 portrait of an Aboriginal woman and child from Van Diemen's Land', situates the portrait in question at the centre of three competing discourses, these being the formal artistic conventions that governed portrait painting in the early nineteenth century, the requirement of scientific accuracy to which each of the expedition's artists were beholden, and finally the advice provided to explorers by the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme, reminding them that people from other lands should be treated humanely and sympathetically. If it is unquestionable that these 'established' discourses combine to give the painting its final shape, Southwood points to a radical shift in its conceptual framework — one that alters its order of priorities — when she examines the written account of the chance encounter that brought together a party of astonished explorers and a bemused crowd of Aboriginal women on the beach. Southwood juxtaposes the conventional

features of the portrait with the narrative of the chance encounter to show how its unpredictability, and indeed its absurdity, invests the painting with an emotional undercurrent that overtakes its stated intentions of scientific accuracy, human contact and aesthetic unity, providing it with an entirely new imaginative dimension.

Taken together, the four accounts of scientific illustrations belonging to early nineteenth-century exploration demonstrate the way in which our understanding of the scientific and political discourses that seemingly informed their composition is confronted with a different series of relations, producing an unexpected configuration of meaning in the very space occupied by the official account. Each of the chapters shows how the interplay between competing discourses, particularly of art, science and politics, provides a framing mechanism that admits a measure of displacement and variation of meaning. As self-enclosed normative systems, they offer themselves up to different contexts of reception and different degrees of appropriation.

The historically framed account of nineteenth-century scientific illustrations must itself be re-framed in terms that recognise the distance from which we view them some 220 years after they were produced. Yet this repositioning of historical discourse must also take into account the way in which history and historiography have been viewed over time. To the extent that it developed a regime of explication, invented the concept of 'character' as an agent of change, put forward models of measurable and immeasurable time, and, finally, gave precedence to the medium of writing, history became one of the great framing devices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[10] Historians claimed to explain crises by situating them in a logical and chronological framework that connected an incipient moment to an inescapable destiny while providing a set of concepts (evolution, industrialisation, justice) which mapped out the stages of an aspiration towards a higher Good (the nation-state, scientific truth, social wellbeing).

However, history as the great bridge between the beginning of humanity and its accomplishment has since undergone a change of episteme that casts doubt over all of its presuppositions. Of note is Paul Ricœur's 'soupçon', which led him to state that the models of historical truth which served the needs of universal understanding owed their prestige to the rules of composition and presentation characteristic of narrative as Aristotle defined it in his unsurpassed study of the genre, the *Poetics*.[11]

10   P. Ricœur, *Temps et récit I* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1991), p. 269.

11   Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. M. Heath (London and New York, Penguin Books, 1996).

By declaring that history is fundamentally 'story', Ricœur highlights history's vulnerability to the imaginative excesses and the fictional distortions that it attempts to conceal. At the same time, he reveals how history itself has, over the course of time, redistributed its priorities, such that it has moved away from witness accounts and explanatory models, and towards the narrative reworkings that are now inseparable from its epistemological framework. The scriptural medium of history, its narrative deployment and indeed the entire *mise en scène* it entails mark the introduction of a new framework that allows us to re-evaluate past historians' attempts to make sense of the changing trajectory of humanity.

Cultural icons and cinematic framings

The move of history towards scriptural media must be matched with the corresponding emergence of the visual as a key ingredient of historical understanding. One can expect that the rise to dominance of visual productions such as photography and film would trigger further changes in the conceptual framework by which we make sense of the past. Such is the hypothesis that informs Jacques Rancière's study of the historical film in his *Figures de l'histoire*. Rancière argues firstly that cinema is not anti-historical. The screen does not flatten the story or the forms of intelligibility associated with it, but rather enhances narratives by the way it accommodates the different layers of time which are the hallmark of storytelling. However, the way that cinema combines past and present is very different from the techniques proper to verbal narratives. Whereas the latter are infinitely hospitable towards multiple voices and seem to achieve without effort the synthesis of different viewpoints, cinema seems to exacerbate the divisions between them. This is evident in the way in which the cold, hard lens of the camera carves out the space of each scene, each bounded by its frame, just as the camera isolates each frame within a sequence of shots. The multiple frames produced by the work of the camera are an essential part of the manufactured illusion of cinema, in that they establish and maintain in place the perceptual and conceptual frame that separates the visual content of the film from considerations of its historical context. For Rancière, historical cinema does not tell us why things were as they were; it simply shows what was there. It simply says: 'Cela a été'.[12]

As such, cinema marks a transformation of the function of visual production in its relation to history. In the nineteenth century, Rancière notes, visual production,

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12   J. Rancière, *Figures de l'histoire* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), p. 12.

or images, served to educate. They were a means by which princes, emperors and bishops led the people to adopt their particular worldview. The image was a lesson that taught individuals their place in society. In the twentieth century, too, the image played to some extent a role in forming mentalities, such as what occurred in the USSR, where the image was honed as a powerful instrument for propagating belief in the Socialist model of society. Yet by and large, the twentieth century witnessed a change of episteme which caused the image to cut itself off from its instructive function. A 'democratisation' of the image ensued, in which the latter freed itself from social hierarchies and allowed itself to present different worldviews. Thus, Rancière observes, 'ceux qui n'ont pas le droit d'occuper la même place peuvent occuper la même image'.[13] The frame became a measure of inclusiveness enabling the different classes, genres and groupings captured by the camera to share equally in the light in which they bathed.

Rancière recalls a scene from Chris Marker's *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* in which the Tsar of Russia walks past the crowd while an officer exhorts the common people to pay their respects to their leader. For Rancière, the scene presents a situation whose visual richness distracts viewers from what they know of the decline of the Russian monarchy, just as it ignores the period of Soviet rule that emerged following this point in time. The lens is 'sans mémoire et sans calcul. Sans ressentiment donc. Il enregistre ce qu'on lui a dit d'enregistrer: le passage de la famille impériale au début de ce siècle … '[14] The values of authoritarian, tsarist Russia which an industrious, egalitarian regime abolished are of no concern to a rolling camera that says, without explanation and without judgement, 'Cela a été'. The lens organises the depicted universe, dividing the story into separate scenes; at the same time, its visual immediacy keeps at bay familiar explanatory models and other forms of ideological approximation. The frame as a mechanism for separating one scene from another repeats, or doubles, the rule of separation that cuts the scenes off from their ideological compass points. It ensures that the viewer ignores, provisionally, all but what appears to be there.

Concerning the status of visual productions as markers of historical understanding, one might take a step further in its elucidation by taking into account the realm of manufactured objects that serve as reminders or souvenirs of a particular city, culture or people. Sonya Stephens, in her chapter 'Framing the Eiffel Tower:

13   Rancière, *Figures de l'histoire*, p. 19.
14   Rancière, *Figures de l'histoire*, p. 13.

From postcards to Postmodernism', takes the most iconic and enduring urban icon — the Eiffel Tower — as her starting point. Stephens considers the status of the Eiffel Tower as an 'urban icon', by firstly examining the set of 'myths' (in the Barthesian sense) attached to it, and secondly by analysing the Tower as it appears in a range of associated visual media and objects (films, documentaries, postcards) which viewers propagate and consume as they circulate through and experience the city. The Eiffel Tower becomes, in Stephens's analysis, a vital element in the construction of urban experience and identity.

Following Roland Barthes's analysis of the Eiffel Tower as a semiotic system, Stephens brings to the fore two ways in which the iconic monument partakes of the logic of framing. Firstly, by its very ubiquitousness, the image of the Tower cuts itself off from the hierarchy of values that it previously served, just as it no longer indelibly marks its place in a particular space and time. The endless representations to which it gives rise progressively reduce and simplify it, transforming it into a useless, gratuitous cipher that sits alongside, metonymically, the multifaceted whole of the city of Paris. Secondly, as an increasingly redundant motif, the iconic object shifts to a different value system. Over a period of more than 120 years, it has moved from the grandness of a unique national symbol to the broad-based production of the image by way of the number of smaller reproductions of the Tower in Texas, Las Vegas and in China's World Parks. Framing, in this context, does not isolate and draw attention to what is there, but signifies ultimately the act of (non-) seeing as conditioned by the discourses of the liberal economy and the practices of cultural consumption it encourages.

What if the stories that constitute history were transposed onto a screen? To use Hayden White's delightful expression, we find ourselves increasingly in an age of historiophoty, which sees the 'representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse'.[15] Having started out as a vehicle for historical narratives, cinema now distinguishes itself by its visual capacity to alternatively interrupt, rewrite, trivialise, falsify or embellish, while at the same time bringing history 'back to life' for spectators unfamiliar with specific events or personalities. French cinema's ongoing dialogue with the Occupation is a case in point, whereby filmic representations of past events (from *Au revoir les enfants* in 1987 to *Lacombe,*

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15   H. White, 'Historiography and historiophoty', *The American Historical Review*, 93: 5 (1988), p. 1193.

Lucien in 1974, and from *La Rafle* in 2010 to *L'Armée des ombres* in 1969) offer alternative, competing discourses on the period within a visual framework that fastidiously recreates temporal and spatial markers.

Technically, the sequential nature of the film as storytelling is counteracted by the existence of the frame that operates as an instrument of separation of images. As was the case with scientific drawings, and as we shall see in our discussion of photography and plastic arts, cinema consists of the fertile interaction between two logical imperatives: the visual and the discursive. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson remind us that the film frame 'actively defines the images for us': framing choices require us to 'read' the image — close-ups concentrate on facial gestures and allow us to interpret emotional responses, while long shots place characters within their wider environment, often putting them at the mercy of external forces.[16] While the limited dimensions of the film frame — rectangular or oblong — differ from other visual 'frames' (like the oval and circular borders for paintings and photographs), the deployment of different aspect ratios can allow the film frame to introduce compositional ingenuity and pictorial nuance. Widescreen cinema in particular allows for the creation of striking horizontal compositions that accentuate side-to-side movement and tracking shots across wide, open environments (often deserts, landscapes and city streets) and draw our eyes to specific areas of space. One need only think of the films of Jean Renoir (*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* in 1935, *Une Partie de campagne* in 1936 and *La Règle du jeu* in 1939) to observe the importance of windows, doorways and other frame-within-a-frame compositions to determine mood, and link successive planes of action without the intrusiveness of editing.

In the opening chapters of *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement*, Gilles Deleuze defines 'framing' as 'la détermination d'un système clos, relativement clos, qui comprend tout ce qui est présent dans l'image, décors, personnages, accessoires'.[17] He identifies five aspects of the framed image:

i. The frame provides information — the more information, the more it is 'saturated', the less information, the more it is 'rarefied'.

ii. The frame is a limiting border that functions either 'geometrically' or 'dynamically'; it provides a fixed set of horizontal, vertical, parallel and

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16   D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film art: An introduction*, 5th edn (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 226.

17   G. Deleuze, *Cinéma I: L'Image-mouvement* (Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), p. 23.

diagonal co-ordinates or a series of more dynamic visual methods to introduce information.

iii. The frame both separates and brings together the distinct elements of the composition, and can include such 'frame-within-frame' devices as doors, windows and mirrors.

iv. The frame and the framed shot are filmed from a particular position in space to emphasise certain aspects and to control our understanding of the narrative.

v. The frame is never entirely closed; there exists an 'out-of-field' (*hors-champ*) beyond the framed image. This final emphasis on the out-of-field accentuates the creative potential of the framed image. For Deleuze, even a seemingly closed frame works alongside something beyond its demarcations. Because the frame can be placed in relation to what is outside its borders, the framed image becomes more dynamic.

This concept of the *hors-champ* recalls Noël Burch's observation[18] that there are six zones of off-screen space — the ones beyond each of the frame's four edges, the zone behind the camera and the zone behind the back of the set — and that film-makers may choose to take advantage of one or more of these zones to generate tension, surprise or mystery. Even while the frame fixes and demarcates the image, its potential to break out of the frame, to bleed into one of these zones, suggests that the frame, far from being a stable mechanism for presenting the world to us, may generate additional narrative space and increase the potential for other spaces and actions. Deleuze concludes that the framing is 'l'art de choisir les parties de toutes sortes qui entrent dans un ensemble. Cet ensemble est un système clos, relativement et artificiellement clos'.[19]

The framing that constitutes cinema as an art form is nowhere more evident than in the art of set design, in which the task is to produce literally the physical spaces for the action of the film. Production designers are integral components of each film, for not only do they create the visual and physical realm of the film and conceptualise sets consistent with the film's mood, but they are also closely involved in the creative process from pre-production to documentation to model-

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18   N. Burch, '*Nana*, or the two kinds of space', in *Theory of film practice*, trans. H. Lane (New York, Praeger, 1973), pp. 17-31.

19   Deleuze, p. 31.

making to final construction. In the words of V.F. Perkins, directors are always searching for that 'moment of choice' — selecting costume and props, and choosing the right framing, cutting or performance style. Directors seek to bind their films together 'in a design that offers a more personal and detailed conception of the story's significance, embodying an experience of the world and a viewpoint both considered and felt'.[20] Thus both Deleuze and Perkins stress the process of 'deciding' when it comes to framing the story. And decor is perhaps the most important choice of all. Where a film takes place, how actors interact within that space, and how lighting and camera movement work together to bring attention to the set are all part of this complex decision-making procedure — they provide a 'frame' for the entire narrative.

In his chapter, 'The return of Trauner: Late style in 1970s and 1980s French film design', Ben McCann refers to Alexandre Trauner's use of 'action spaces' in the late part of the set designer's career, in which he infused aspects of the French tradition of studio-based sets in the 1930s and the American film scene of the 1950s. McCann examines three of Trauner's late-French-style films — *Monsieur Klein* (1976), *Subway* (1985) and *'Round midnight* (1986) — noting in particular how Trauner's creative methodology altered the conception of the set design and its relation to the film director's role. Designers like Trauner not only created beautifully designed visual spaces, but also contributed to the dramatic composition of a film. They frequently rejected primary realism; theirs was no simple cut-and-paste job, extracting life 'as it is' and rebranding it for the screen. They may have identified pre-existing spaces, but they then would misrepresent them by altering their perspective, recalibrating their dimensions or overemphasising their visual fabric to create new, dynamic designs. The collusion between skilful director and set designer masked the division between real and imaginary, between what existed already and what had been totally fabricated from scratch, to create a sensation of the real filtered through the screen of make-believe. In the case of Trauner's historical reconstructions for *Monsieur Klein* and *'Round midnight*, the visual, the cinematic and the discursive are bound together in ways that complicate history's relationship to an objective retelling, framing very specific historical moments in such a way as to invite a symbolic reading.

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20   V.F. Perkins, 'Moments of choice', originally published in *The Movie*, ch. 58, pp. 1141-5. See the most up-to-date version published online by *Rouge*, 9 (2006) at http://www.rouge. com.au.

Photographic framings

The section devoted to the frame in photography presents a similar argument, but raises also a different set of questions. These involve the relationship between the fixed image and the reality to which it points, mostly allusively — particularly in regard to its manner of articulating the identity of the individual or the community it portrays.

The study of photography cannot avoid the question of its pure visual immediacy. Roland Barthes's work on photography, *La Chambre claire*, adopts his familiar semiological approach in that it seeks, first and foremost, to distinguish the formal relations between the visual content and the discursive context in which it is embedded. Recall that the entire critical project of Barthes's *Mythologies*[21] focused on discursive structures. This included the way in which the visual (television, publicity, magazines and so on) became part of the discursive manipulations that enabled economic and political powers to control the market economy. In *La Chambre claire*[22], however, his approach to the visual arts has less to do with social critique than with the exploration of his personal fascination with the genre of photography and other genres that are marked by the primacy of visual experience. In his assessment of Barthes's work, Jacques Rancière ironically refers to an act of contrition by the semiologist, who finally turns his back on the system he had constructed around the image. Rancière takes issue with the way in which Barthes naïvely opposes the raw visual presence of the photographic image to discursive structures, the *punctum* to the *studium*, for he believes that there is no collapse into silence, no marvellous passage into a world without discourse. Rather, for Rancière, the two sides of the image are two ways of making sense, and therefore two ways of functioning in the mode of discourse. They are both essentially systems of virtualities that Rancière calls 'puissances de l'image'.[23]

Be that as it may, it is instructive to view the way in which Barthes argues his position. On the one hand, he presents semiological analysis as a means of uncovering the cultural codes (*studium*) which a photograph conceals in the objects that populate

21 R. Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 1942-1965, ed. E. Marty (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1993).

22 R. Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, 1974-1980, ed. E. Marty (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1995).

23 J. Rancière, *Le Destin des images* (Paris, La Fabrique éditions, 2003), p. 19.

its space, or in the postures, the clothing and the expressions of its characters, or in the streetscape lying in the background. Having acknowledged the presence of these ideological values, he confesses that he is drawn forcefully to the minute detail or vague shadow (*punctum*) which, although hardly visible, affects him with such force that it suspends logical thought. He becomes aware of a series of affective responses, perhaps a feeling of tenderness that arises from this photo, or distaste at another, or else the feeling of being drawn into a universe of fantasies: '[P]ar la marque de *quelque chose*, la photo n'est plus *quelconque*. Ce quelque chose a fait *tilt*, il a provoqué en moi un petit ébranlement, un *satori*, le passage d'un vide'.[24]

Barthes's assessment of photography appears to revolve around two key points. The first is that the characteristic which distinguishes it from other genres is the privilege it accords the referent.[25] No other form of art, he states, is as wedded to the reality it represents. Before we can relate a photo to any idea or proposition, we focus exclusively on the thing or person in the frame. This is obviously not the case in painting and sculpture because of the artistic licence that artists enjoy in matters of subject, form and colour. Barthes's second point is that the preponderant role of the referent does not mean that we should reduce photography to simple imitation or reproduction. We do not just perceive the past reality captured in the photo in a singular occurrence that we can easily situate in time and place, but rather as a 'once was' that implies a mode of apprehending the world as a lost world. Photography's attachment to the here and now of its referent as it stands before the open shutter rests in fact upon the idea of the necessary absence of its here and now in the finished photographic image. In other words, the referent of a particular photograph is one that foreshadows the principle of disappearance that applies to all existing things, including, Barthes adds ominously, the viewers themselves.

The chapters in the third section, 'Photographic framings', focus on the relation of framing to self-narratives. Hence the derived term *photo-graphy* to designate the areas in which the practices of photography and autobiography intersect. The three chapters all confront photographic works with the vicissitudes of existence of the singular or plural subjects they portray. In her chapter 'Annie Ernaux's phototextual archives: *Écrire la vie*', Natalie Edwards focuses on the manner in which Ernaux chooses to frame her 2011 anthology of her best-known works, *Écrire la vie*. Edwards

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24   Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 1142, emphases in the original.
25   Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 1163.

argues that the collection of photographs strikes a conventional note to a story of selfhood — Ernaux presents the photographs chronologically and introduces familiar faces and scenes, much in the style of a traditional family album. Juxtaposed with the photographs, Ernaux places text extracts from her personal diaries, which she orders apparently by chance, upsetting the chronological order of the photographs. For Edwards, the effect of the collision between two modes of self-representation is at once revealing and concealing insofar as it demonstrates how framing can alter our interpretation of previously published texts.

Chris Hogarth's 'The image of self-effacement: The revendications of the autonomous author in Marie Ndiaye's *Autoportrait en vert*' also addresses the question of the use of visual supports to accompany an autobiographical text. This time, the focus is on the generic separation between autobiography as a constructed self-narrative on the one hand and self-portrait as a fleeting self-image on the other. Hogarth charts the textual manipulations that sustain the self-narrative/self-portrait dynamic in Ndiaye's work, through which the 'I' is refracted in a fashion analogous to the shifting colours, vision and perception in a moving kaleidoscope.

In the final chapter of this section, Amy Hubbell examines the use of visual archives in the particular context of a displaced people's collective memory. The diverse collection of material she analyses in 'Accumulating Algeria: Recurrent images in Pied-Noir visual works' is related to an overwhelming sense of attachment which the Pied-Noir population felt to its lost homeland. Hubbell is concerned to pit a series of visual representations against the historico-political discourses that inform and limit them. More particularly, she shows how the over-determined affective and memorial value of such visual representations, which include photographs, photodocumentaries, films and paintings, divests these representations of their avowed purpose, causing rather an estrangement from a past that now presents itself as a lost world.

In the three abovementioned chapters, the authors underline the centrality of the 'I' or the 'We' through the use of the frame as a means of establishing a dialectic of presence and absence. For Barthes, the paradoxical situation of the absent referent is crucial for the fact that it connects with the anxieties associated with existence. It is no coincidence that the word 'métaphysique' occurs often in *La Chambre claire*, for Barthes ultimately places the spotlight on the affective dimension of

photography, its unsettling effects and finally its affinity with fantasy and reverie.[26] It is useful to recall the two contrasting approaches we outlined earlier. The first follows Rancière's proposition that the image is not a suspension of discourse but a means of constructing a different kind of discourse, one that maps differently the space between 'le dicible et le visible'.[27] The other path is one that is haunted by the principle of disappearance, which signals an experience as ungraspable because it lies outside of discourse. Barthes's preoccupation with death indicates that it is clearly to this second category that he belongs. We note also that his *La Chambre claire* proceeds from the premise that photography's essence is tied up with the emotions it elicits. All stages of photographic production, diffusion and reception must eventually return to this fundamental emotion, as if returning to their source. Considered in light of the Rancière-Barthes debate, we can situate the three chapters in this section between the two definitions of framing they imply. All three address the tension between the discursive logic inherent in the image and the rule of separation that causes it to break away from language.

Barthes's position recalls the esoteric quality which Georges Bataille describes as an ecstatic moment 'où l'existence défaille dans un cri'[28], and which Walter Benjamin, in his critique of photography, calls the *aura*.[29] Curiously, Benjamin denies photography access to the *aura*, citing its dependency upon industrial means of reproducibility as a factor that destroys the hidden connection tying it to the time and place of its initial appearance. Painting and the other plastic arts, in contrast, enjoy a privileged relationship with the *aura* by means of which they attain their depth and significance as creative events. Certainly, one hundred years of experimentation in photography have put an end to Benjamin's hierarchy of the visual arts in which he unjustly relegates photography to a secondary position. However, in essence, the question Benjamin poses is suggestive enough for us to return to it. How does the principle of exclusion and inclusion function in other plastic arts such as painting and sculpture, and how does it participate in the notion of framing by which visual artworks stage the crossover of the visual and discursive domains?

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26   Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 1167.

27   Rancière, *Le Destin des images*, p. 21.

28   G. Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1954), p. 138.

29   W. Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, trans. J.A. Underwood (London, Penguin Books, 2008).

Artistic framings

The fourth and final section discusses the realm of painting and its manner of articulating the divide between that which is given visually and the set of discourses which both justify and deny it: 'Il y a du cadre mais le cadre n'existe pas', writes Jacques Derrida in *La Vérité en peinture*.[30] Framing is an act, he suggests, and one in which the onlooker is frequently oblivious to its process and product. Derrida insists upon the inevitability of the act of framing; the frame is at once present and absent, explicit and yet invisible, but inescapable. There is something inside the frame and something beyond it, and the frame itself, the distinction between interior and exterior, vanishes in the process. Frames and the act of framing emphasise containment and contribute to categorisation, yet also allow for transgression and subversion.

At stake is the cultural paradigm in which art emerges as a particular set of relations connecting it to discourses that confirm the qualities of uniqueness, magnitude and universality to which the 'work of art' aspires. Following Derrida's quote above, and Foucault's position, which we outlined earlier, the set of conditions in which art detaches itself from the noise created by such ambient discourses is never stable. These conditions appear rather as a series of fault lines by which common discursive patterns periodically unhinge themselves, overturning the representations that accompany them. At stake is the *subject*, understood as the person, reality or idea that gives the work its authenticating principle.

Two points can be made here in respect to the framing that connects and disconnects the work in relation to its subject. The first concerns the proposition that the 'a été' of the absent referent is actually inflected with a particular affective orientation, for it presents 'what is there' also in terms of a desired but unattainable presence. Thus its visual and emotional acuity is paradoxically linked to the fact that the frame necessarily loses, conceals or casts off the depicted object, person or scene. The second point is that the detachment that orders the work of art by way of its frame doubles the interplay of discourses and the system of mutual exclusions, restrictions and variations which constitute them as historically marked modes of appropriating the world. Through its frame, visual art repeats a separation that has already been consummated in the passage of one episteme to another. Its subject is a fallen subject. This is akin to saying that we must first and foremost consider the painting in terms

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30   J. Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris, Flammarion, 1978), p. 83.

of the 'trait' or brushstroke whose function, essentially, is both to make present and conceal. Thus Derrida writes: 'Un trait n'apparaît jamais, jamais lui-même, jamais une première fois. Il commence par se retirer'.[31] This is not to suggest that the work lacks creative energy, but that following the latest collapse of the modern episteme, it imposes itself only through the re-enactment of the demise of the subject. Such is the problematic of framing which the three chapters in the section 'Artistic framings' attempt to outline in their analyses of the paintings of Édouard Manet, Surrealist art, and finally cave drawings.

In her 'Georges Bataille's *Manet* and the "Strange impression of an absence"', Caroline Sheaffer-Jones examines the subject in terms of the alteration of perceptions and expectations that occurred at the time of the appearance of Edouard Manet's startling works. She approaches the question not through a simple survey of Manet scholarship but through the double prism of Manet's art and Georges Bataille's commentary, which he wrote almost a century later. She thus conceives *Manet* as a particular discursive structure through which representation itself is questioned. Sheaffer-Jones establishes the framework for re-viewing *Manet* through a consideration of Bataille's position regarding art, which he defines in terms of the excesses and the impoverishment it enacts. *Manet*, she suggests, constructs its subject in terms of a collapse, a flight towards insignificance, a singular embrace of the nothingness from which art emerges and to which it necessarily returns. The subject of art, declares Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, a philosopher who openly declares his affinity with Bataille, is indistinguishable from the notion of crisis. What happens, he asks, when art can no longer rest upon the prestige accorded to it by religion and social class? He answers, provocatively, by suggesting that what occurs at this juncture is the 'désastre du sujet'[32], by which he means not the obliteration of the subject but a radical change in the way it constructs itself, such that it experiences itself as crisis, as a manner of reinventing itself in and through its displacement and relocation outside the frame.

The other two chapters in this section develop similar ideas, firstly by means of an examination of the frame in its compositional function — in other words, in the manner by which visual motifs and textures enter into a formal relationship with the frame which completes and limits them — and secondly metaphysically, in

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31   Derrida, p. 16.

32   P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Écrits sur l'art* (Genève, Les Presses du Réel, 2009), p. 180.

terms of the mode of questioning that the artwork instigates regarding its own status as art. Klem James's 'Entropy and osmosis in conceptualisations of the Surrealist frame' considers the practices by which the Surrealists enacted the redistribution of energies on either side of the frame, causing confusion in the categories of the inside and the outside. James uses the analogy of the scientific description of the process of entropy to show that the artworks, far from evaporating into an infinitely extensible homogeneous space, occupy a region of uneasiness in which the frame works to accentuate the work's monstrous hybridity.

To complete the picture of the collapse of the subject, Peter Poiana's 'Art and origin: Bataille and Blanchot's return to Lascaux' traces the subject's demise to its very origins in the first cave drawings at Lascaux. After posing the question of origins in historical terms, the focus shifts to the ontological self-questioning of art. Here, the discussion proceeds in line with Blanchot's proposition that art commences precisely when it finds itself exposed to an absence of foundation. For Bataille, in contrast, art originates from that which makes the idea of art intolerable, namely the erotic and violent impulses which pull apart its pictorial splendour, disengaging it from social concerns and transgressing norms including those of genre. Ultimately, the frame that establishes what Blanchot calls the 'solitude' of art, and Bataille its 'sovereignty', is the salutary mode of questioning by which its status as a privileged object of contemplation is overturned. Art is henceforth that which, devoid of foundation, constructs itself upon its ruin. This is the consequence of two earlier collapses of art, the first being the crisis in which art lost the authority of the gods, and then of God; and the second, the crisis that saw art lose the authenticating seal of the human as principal reference point. The frame lies precisely where the self-questioning of art encounters its limit in the figure of the fallen subject, whereupon it embarks upon a different path to accomplishment.

Framing French culture

Writers, painters, photographers, illustrators, directors and designers search for the perfect frame to capture, isolate, subvert or aestheticise an image, and may deploy a range of framing devices to tell their stories: the layered photograph, the jumbled time frame, the flashback, the voice-over, the unreliable narrator, the hybrid assemblage. Throughout this book, the concept of framing allows us to think together art, photography, scientific drawings and cinema as visually constituted, spatially

bounded productions. The way these genres relate to that which exists beyond the frame, by means of plastic, chemically transposed, pencil-sketched or moving images, allows us to decipher the particular language of the visual and at the same time to circumscribe the dialectic between presence and absence which is proper to all visual media. Yet these kinds of reframing owe their existence to the ruptures and upheavals which marked the demise of certain discursive systems in the past, announcing the emergence of others that were in turn overturned.

The modern episteme has led to the foregrounding of the rule of separation which appears by way of the frame. The frame of the camera shot, the painting or the photograph separate the *now* of the visual experience from the *then* of its production, just as it disassociates the *here* of its material presence from the *there* of its assumed surroundings. Jean Baudrillard admits that what he admires most about photography is the separation of time and place. For Baudrillard, photography provides a more intense experience of the lost presence than the other visual arts. This is because it comes closest to the total abolition of the values associated with cultural heritage. In the illusory world that it creates, photography 'met toujours fin à quelque chose, il y a arrêt sur image, arrêt du monde sur image, et en même temps cette chose définitive a déjà près fin'.[33] The fact that photography never alerts viewers in advance to the appearance of the photographic subject, thus exposing them to surprise and sometimes shock, and the fact that each photo seems indifferent to the mechanics of photographical reproduction, shows the extent to which photography operates in a very different fashion to the meaning-bearing and value-laden structures of discourse. For Baudrillard, however, the visual immediacy of photography does not imply the possession of an innate purity. Nor does it simply rely on the evacuation *hors champ* of the noise associated with conventional discourses and familiar viewpoints.

Following Paul Virilio who, in his provocative piece 'Expect the unexpected'[34], underlines the panic that drives contemporary visual culture, Baudrillard sees photography in terms of an acceleration of illusion, a multiplication of its strategies of attraction and fascination. In a fashion that rehabilitates photography, by restoring the *aura* that Benjamin saw fit to take away from it, Baudrillard seeks to make us aware,

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33   J. Baudrillard, *D'un fragment l'autre: Entretiens avec François L'Yvonnet* (Paris, Éditions Albin Michel, 2001), p. 128.

34   P. Virilio, *L'Art à perte de vue* (Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2005).

in photography, of 'une rupture plus étrange … un point de fuite plus radical'.[35] Here, the formulation 'Cela a été' that sums up the functioning of visual productions is inflected towards the motif of catastrophe: cela *a été*, understood in the 'satanic' sense of *nous ne serons plus les mêmes*.

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35   Baudrillard, p. 134.

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