Comparisons of 9.11 with digital disasters in blockbuster films abound. The collapse of the Twin Towers was quickly linked to film scenes such as the destruction of the White House by aliens in *Independence Day*. In staging such sensational acts of destruction for the media, Al Qaeda terrorists also participate, of course, in the Western capitalist spectacle they profess to abhor. Terrorism’s role within the spectacle has been imaginatively conceptualized in Retort’s *Afflicted Powers*. But as Guy Debord argued, this ‘inconceivable foe’ is also constructed by the West itself: ‘the story of terrorism is written by the state’. ‘What remains underdeveloped is the analysis of the ‘perpetual present’ of the contemporary spectacle through which that tale is told, and the temporal politics which constitute it. This present is ruled by media events, structured in turn by a dialectic of suspense and surprise; it is through their manipulation of time that the larger historical picture is obscured. Under threat of terrorism, bloody surprises are accompanied by a sustained—or sometimes nagging, low-key—suspense, that can be perpetuated for weeks, months or even years on end. Historically, twentieth-century filmmakers took cues from terrorism when perfecting their production of suspense and surprise. Today those engaged in the production and mediation of ‘terror’ and ‘war on terror’ appear as savvy manipulators of people’s experience of time, masters of the bad infinity of that present in which nothing ever happens.

In various texts and interviews, published over the course of several decades, Alfred Hitchcock developed what might be called a poetics of suspense and surprise. In his conversations with François Truffaut, Hitchcock illustrated this opposition in graphic terms:

We are having a very innocent little chat. Let us suppose that there is a bomb underneath this table between us. Nothing happens, and then all of a
sudden, ‘Boom!’ There is an explosion. The public is surprised, but prior to this surprise, it has to be an absolutely ordinary scene, of no special consequence. Now, let us take a suspense situation. The bomb is underneath the table and the public knows it, probably because they have seen the anarchist place it there.

Hitchcock always insisted that the latter situation was preferable. ‘In the first case we have given the public fifteen seconds of surprise at the moment of the explosion. In the second case we have given them fifteen minutes of suspense’. Suspense, then, is more value for money, more time for money: it stretches time. Contrary to many suspense situations that involve real danger, the suspense experienced in the context of a film is usually a pleasurable one, the time-stretching desirable. The audience is asked to identify with the people who are in peril; editing and the use of ‘point-of-view’ shots are crucial for establishing this identification. Only when the public cares about the protagonist can suspense arise—but then, suspense also has the habit of creating sympathy for the characters involved no matter who they are; if Hitler were the potential victim, the audience could still be prodded to identify with him.

Hitchcock’s musings on suspense and surprise were repeated many times, with some interesting variations. While the term suspense stands alone, the term surprise is sometimes replaced by shock; in a late text, the explosion of the bomb under the proverbial table without forewarning is said to generate ‘five or ten seconds of shock’. The trailer for Psycho announced the film as a ‘shocker’ while that for The Birds promised ‘suspense and shock beyond anything you have ever seen or imagined’—indicating that Hitchcock’s preference for suspense was not as principled as he would have had us believe. He knew that it was not a question of choosing between two mutually exclusive options; rather than one or the other in isolation, it is the dialectic of suspense and surprise that is fundamental to his filmmaking. Hitchcock’s status as ‘master of suspense’ derives largely from his expert manipulation of this

dialectic. In *Psycho*, for instance, the murder of Marion in the shower comes as a complete surprise (for ‘innocent’ viewers), leading to a new build-up of suspense once her lover and sister start investigating her disappearance, and yet another drastic shock at the film’s climax.

For Guy Debord, the spectacle is marked by the ‘quasi-cyclical’ alternation of work and leisure. From a Debordian perspective, film is an integral part of the colonization of time by commodified experiences which appear to negate the dullness of modern clockwork time, while in fact cementing the numbing cycle of working hours and ‘free time’. Any sense of real historical time is thus precluded. The quasi-cyclical alternation of shocks and suspense in cinema such as Hitchcock’s reflect this logic, its apparent deregulation of time being produced with industrial precision. Film, however, inherited many strategies from the nineteenth-century culture industry, especially from serials and mass-circulation novels. The crucial difference between suspense in novels and in films is cinema’s greater ability to control the consumer’s actual consumption of time; a reader can vary his or her reading, a viewer must conform to the film’s pacing (at least when it is seen in a cinema; video and especially DVD have created more ‘readerly’ modes of viewing). Although Hitchcock stressed that he aspired to an ‘art of pure cinema’ that does not follow literary models, nineteenth-century literature—with its increasing audience, and the competition between various publications vying for a mass readership—had already developed a sophisticated understanding of the dialectic of suspense and surprise. Popular nineteenth-century authors from Hugo to Sue, from Dickens to Collins had systematized, industrialized their employment. Surprise endings to suspense situations were frequently used in literary serials.

It is significant that Hitchcock, even in the 1960s, turned to the ‘classical situation’, as he called it, of the anarchist bomb plot to provide the kind of shocks and suspense his cinema needed. His *Sabotage* (1936) is based on Joseph Conrad’s 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*, itself loosely inspired by the ‘Greenwich bomb outrage’ of 1894, when a man blew himself up near the Greenwich Observatory. The man’s brother was apparently an anarchist newspaper editor, also employed as a police spy. In writing *The Secret Agent*, Conrad could assume his readers’ familiarity with media stereotypes of evil anarchists. His protagonist, Verloc, is both a

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police informer and a foreign secret agent moving in anarchist circles; a sluggish man who runs a porn shop as a cover for his other activities. His wife has a retarded brother, Stevie. The action is set in train by Mr Vladimir, an official at a foreign embassy, who is unhappy with the British government’s lax attitude towards the anarchist immigrants who have been wreaking havoc in his native land. To prod the British into action, a spectacular ‘anarchist’ outrage is needed: the bombing of Greenwich Observatory. A cornered Verloc uses Stevie—his wife’s darling—to place the bomb, but Stevie blows himself up.

In Hitchcock’s *Sabotage*, Greenwich Observatory is replaced by Piccadilly Circus, which is to be blown up by detonating a bomb in the underground. The porn shop becomes a small neighbourhood cinema and the retarded Stevie a ‘normal’ younger brother with whom the audience can more readily identify. In Hitchcock’s version too, Verloc is pressed into terrorism by Vladimir, but there is no real reference to anarchism. The suggestion, in keeping with the political climate of the 1930s, rather is that another government is trying to weaken Britain.

**The bomb on the bus**

In one of Hitchcock’s finest suspense sequences, little Stevie sets out to deliver a package—containing, unbeknownst to him, a time bomb—to a cloakroom at the underground station; the bomb will go off at 13.45. The boy gets fatally sidetracked during his journey through London: a toothpaste salesman enlists him for a demonstration, there is a parade . . . Stevie, who promised to have the package delivered by 13.30, is aware of the delay and takes a bus. Hitchcock cuts back and forth between the interior of the bus and various London clocks, to show clock-time becoming unbearably stretched and out of joint as the fateful moment draws near. After a final shot of a clock, the bus explodes. In this sequence, Hitchcock effectively combined the two archetypal scenarios he outlined: the audience knows there is a bomb, which is typical of suspense, and under ‘normal’ circumstances the protagonist will either be able to prevent the bomb from going off or at least save his own skin; however, in this case the boy is blown to pieces. Audiences did not react favourably to this nasty shock, and in later years, Hitchcock was contrite:

I made a serious mistake in having the little boy carry the bomb. A character who unknowingly carries a bomb around as if it were an ordinary package is bound to work up great suspense in the audience. He was involved in a
situation that got him too much sympathy from the audience, so that when
the bomb exploded and he was killed, the public was resentful. Hitchcock had broken the rule that a character with whom the audi-
ence is invited to identify will not be killed. Marion Crane in Psycho is
also a likeable character, but at the same time something of a ‘bad girl’
and thus—in the libidinal economy of the ‘shocker’—eligible for drastic
punishment; in Stevie’s case, there were no circumstances that made his
death seem remotely acceptable.

In Conrad’s novel, the reader does not directly witness how Verloc’s gam-
bit fails when the bomb-carrying Stevie is blown up in the Greenwich
Observatory park. The suspense in Conrad’s novel is fractured by its
multiple viewpoints, and its surprises work rather to reveal the cruel
ironies of social and psychological contradictions. A prime example is
Mrs Verloc’s flight after having killed her husband for sacrificing Stevie’s
life; she is accompanied by the womanizing Ossipon, clueless as to what
has happened and alarmed by Mrs Verloc’s erratic behaviour, which he
ascribes to hereditary insanity. He deserts her before her suicidal leap
from a Channel steamer. Hitchcock’s ending is more conventional: Mrs
Verloc can find solace in the arms of a friendly Scotland Yard Detective,
the body of the stabbed Mr Verloc having conveniently been buried when
the movie theatre is blown up at the film’s conclusion.

Like the anarchist in Hitchcock’s anecdotes, the bombers in Sabotage
are a reminder that his practical and theoretical investigations of the
dialectic of suspense and surprise were in part shaped by real-life events.
Furthermore, both The Secret Agent and Sabotage emphasize that mod-
ern terrorism aimed to attract newspaper and newsreel coverage, even
while filmmakers and novelists drew inspiration from their outrages.
By changing the porn shop into a movie theatre, Hitchcock was able to
suggest parallels between cinematic and terrorist uses of suspense and
surprise. Sabotage insistently links cinema to the grim spectacle planned
by Verloc, who also attempts to shape time through the tactical use of
shocks and suspense; the explosion at Piccadilly Circus is meant to cre-
ate a nagging sense of suspense as people become insecure and fear new

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6 Truffaut, Hitchcock, p. 109.
7 See also Susan Smith, ‘Disruption, Destruction, Denial: Hitchcock as Saboteur’,
in Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès, eds, Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays,
attacks. While carrying the bomb, Stevie is also delivering a can with the film, *Bartholomew the Strangler*, a title suggesting shocking surprises.

While *Sabotage* does not propose a complete identity of terroristic and cinematic spectacle, the scene in which Verloc’s boss instructs him to bomb Piccadilly Circus suggests that terrorism is integral to the society it seeks to undermine. In the equivalent chapter in *The Secret Agent*, Mr Vladimir searches for ‘the fetish of the hour that all the bourgeoisie recognize’, and after dismissing the option of a bomb at the National Gallery (‘Art has never been their fetish’) he settles on astronomy, on a bomb placed at Greenwich Observatory. ‘There could be nothing better. Such an outrage combines the greatest possible regard for humanity with the most alarming display of ferocious imbecility. I defy the ingenuity of journalists to persuade their public that any given member of the proletariat can have a personal grievance against astronomy’.\(^8\) In this display of Conradian irony, the icy Mr Vladimir wilfully overlooks the fact that Greenwich Observatory, locus of the prime meridian, was a potent symbol of British imperial power. Ships all over the world calculated their positions with reference to the Greenwich meridian. Attacking Greenwich was therefore quite as logical as the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

In Hitchcock’s film, this scene does not take place in a foreign embassy, as in *The Secret Agent*, but at the London Zoo aquarium (and without such a memorable monologue). In Verloc’s distressed mind, an aquarium window turns into a movie screen, the fishes being replaced by Piccadilly Circus, which shakes and collapses. The atrocity Verloc is to commit is thus pre-imagined as a media event. Recently, artist Rod Dickinson has revisited the failed Greenwich bombing at the basis of both Conrad’s novel and Hitchcock’s film from a post-9.11 perspective: in his installation *Greenwich Degree Zero*, a manipulated black and white film of a burning Greenwich Observatory completes, as it were, the failed attack, emphasizing its spectacular potential.\(^9\)

**The bomb at the synagogue**

Anarchism has always had significant support among the artistic avant-garde. In its attempts to shatter bourgeois complacency and the

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\(^9\) Made with Tom McCarthy, *Greenwich Degree Zero* premiered in late 2005 at the Western Front in Canada and was shown at Beaconsfield, London in 2006.
passivity generated by the culture industry, the avant-garde embraced shock rather than suspense, and the ultimate shock is terrorism as an *acte gratuit*. As Breton famously wrote: ‘The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd’.\(^{10}\) In this case, the possibility of actual avant-garde terrorism creates what Benjamin called a ‘moral shock effect’, noting that the Dadaist work of art ‘hit the spectator like a bullet’, whereas cinema would later liberate the *physical* shock effect from the *moral* shock effect in which it had been wrapped.\(^{11}\) In contrast to the Dadaists and Surrealists, Benjamin emphasized the normality and ubiquity of the shock experience in modern culture: to walk through a city or work in a factory is to be constantly assaulted by the noise of traffic, the jostling crowds, the mechanized movements of the production process.\(^{12}\)

Benjamin proposed that early modernist film might help the modern subject to deal with this culture of the shock by creating a raised form of consciousness: ‘The spectator’s process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind’.\(^{13}\) What Benjamin seems to theorize here is an avant-garde version of the early, pre-classical ‘cinema of attractions’, which emphasized the showing of new and surprising views rather than storytelling.\(^{14}\) In contrast to the modernist cinema evoked by Benjamin, Hitchcock’s is not one of quickfire shocks; its affinity to terrorist tactics lies rather in a preference for extraordinary suspense and ‘big booms’. Whereas Benjamin’s cinema has a therapeutic effect, making the subject capable of an active relationship to the everyday shocks of modernity, terrorist shocks aim to shatter the subject’s defensive shield. This is also what led some avant-gardists to play with the actual—rather than symbolic—use of terrorist means. A telling case is that of former Situationist Dieter Kunzelmann—once a member of the *spur* group,


\(^{13}\) Benjamin, ‘Work of Art’.

\(^{14}\) On the cinema of attractions, see Tom Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of the American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph*, Urbana, IL 1991, pp. 41–2.
which was for some time part of the Situationist International. In 1968–69 Kunzelmann and his ‘Tupamaros West Berlin’ placed fake bombs at department stores, and—on 9 November 1969, the anniversary of Kristallnacht—one at the community centre of a Berlin synagogue. Although Kunzelmann’s group had been supplied with a defective bomb, its discovery still generated huge media coverage—as Kunzelmann, an avid reader of the right-wing tabloid Bild, had hoped.15

One of the alternative names for Kunzelmann’s Tupamaros was Viva Maria, drawn from Louis Malle’s 1965 revolution-and-striptease extravaganza Viva Maria!, with Jeanne Moreau and Brigitte Bardot. The latter plays a young woman called Maria Fitzgerald O’Malley, daughter of an Irish Republican terrorist; in the opening scenes, we see her as a young girl, blowing up military and police targets all over the British Empire with her father. Maria joins a travelling circus and teams up with another Maria, played by Jeanne Moreau, to form a strip act. Together they head a peasant revolt against a Latin American regime. In 1965, one of Kunzelmann’s allies had published an interpretation in which the two Marias stand for communism and anarchism, their alliance leading to global revolution; what seems more salient in retrospect is the film’s suggestion that the revolution could be a joyous Technicolor farce, with a promiscuous Bardot thrown in for good measure. Far from a Hitchcockian thriller, Viva Maria! is closer to Malle’s earlier Zazie dans le métro in its attempt to develop an avant-garde ‘cinema of attractions’ within narrative filmmaking. The quasi-comical series of ‘booms’ at the beginning of Viva Maria! sets the tone, and during the ‘dramatic’ finale Malle steps up the slapstick component—culminating in a bizarre scene in which a hastily revived Inquisition tries to extract a confession from the two Marias but cannot get their rusty torture instruments to work. Viva Maria! is thus a far cry from the temporal politics of Kunzelmann’s late-sixties activities. While Malle attempted to free cinematic time from the constraints of classical Hollywood formulas, in part by going back to early filmmaking with its use of frantic pacing, slapstick and sight gags, Kunzelmann staged spectacular ‘booms’ that were complicit with the mass media in their use of shock.

**The bomb in the phone**

Terrorist attacks themselves also operate through the dialectic of suspense and surprise. In the events of 9.11, the Madrid bombings of 2004

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and the London underground and bus explosions of 2005, initial acts of surprise were followed by a politics of suspense as to what would follow. After 9.11, the London and Madrid bombings were less unexpected, but the suspense was generic and ill-defined. When new attacks were feared in their wake, the suspense was carefully managed by western politicians and media as much as by public expectations. Terrorism, then, attempts to expand the dialectic of suspense and surprise beyond the narrow time frame of, for instance, a feature film. Current attempts to turn 9.11 into disaster movies—focusing on people working at the wtc or being stuck on board one of the hijacked planes—have a normalizing effect: they reduce the events to more or less ‘classic suspense’ situations, in which we are asked to identify with a group of people whose life is immediately at risk, thus attempting to restore an old-fashioned aesthetic of reassurance. What this retro suspense neglects is that terrorism leads to a kind of generalized suspense, paralleling contemporary processes in the media.

With the development of 24-hour news and the internet, allowing people to check the news online at their desks, the dialectic of suspense and surprise is no longer confined to certain set moments of leisure within the workday; it seeps into the whole of postmodern time, squashing and stretching it. If for Debord, suspense and surprise—contained in the format of a fictional film—may have offered temporary escape from clockwork time, now there is no escape. Live reporting was an important step in the progressive integration of terrorism and media technology. With 1970s Palestinian airplane hijackings—as investigated by Johan Grimonprez in his video Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y (1997)—terrorism became a made-for-tv event, the suspense mounting as the planes stood on the runways and the outcome for the hostages hung in the balance. The exploitation of live broadcasting was anticipated by Welles’s 1938 radio version of War of the Worlds—an avant-gardist Halloween prank. As a pure media event, Welles’s show turned into a kind of virtual terrorism; listeners were so used to hearing disconcerting reports from Europe that some instinctively replaced ‘Martians’ with ‘Germans’, and thought the play to be an actual report of a German invasion of Pennsylvania.16 Interestingly, some listeners who at first accepted the show as a news broadcast began to have doubts when they noted that the time was the condensed time of fiction: ‘It all sounded perfectly real until people began

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hopping around too fast . . . When people moved 20 miles in a couple of minutes I put my tongue in my cheek and figured it was just about the smartest play I’d ever heard’.\(^{17}\) Even if suspense in a fictional film or radio play appears to stretch time, it is still much more condensed than the scattered, thinned suspense proper to terrorism and war as generated by radio and \textit{tv}.

The \textit{War of the Worlds} panic shows what happens when suspense and surprise appear to have a direct bearing on our lives. In Hitchcock’s archetypal scenario a knowing audience identifies with a protagonist who is unaware of the danger; in spite of this identification, there is still a clear barrier between the fictional event and the viewers. By contrast, when watching the results of terrorist carnage on \textit{tv}, we sense that we too may become victims, turning from audience members into unwilling protagonists. Rather than dismantling the distinction between spectacle and audience by transforming passive viewers into active participants, as various avant-garde movements demanded, we are all put in a passive position even as we appear to become potential participants: the audience watches itself become a mass of potential victims, dependent on the mercies of Homeland Security. Guy Debord’s remark that ‘this perfect democracy’ constructs terrorism, in order to be ‘judged by its enemies rather than its results’ seems more relevant than ever in an age of Pentagon ‘shock and awe’.\(^{18}\) Debord argued that the apparently ‘leftist’ terrorism of late 1970s Italy was often staged by those in power; in those cases, terrorism would fit nicely into Daniel Boorstin’s definition of the ‘pseudo-event’. Analysing the media of the early 1960s, Boorstin noted the rise of a kind of ‘newsworthy’ event that was staged for the media, driven to fight the repetitiveness inherent in their own industrial production and distribution.\(^{19}\)

In recent discourse, the pseudo-event has been recast as the nefarious Doppelgänger of the true event, which has the power to shatter an entire symbolic order. If Badiou and Žižek’s theorization of this elusive truth

\(^{17}\) Cantril, p. 91.


event—examples being the death of Christ, the French Revolution and October 1917—has taken on such a prominence in philosophical, political and aesthetic discourse, this is an indication of the degree to which the current order seems beyond reform; it has to be swept away. One of the problems is that the event may be impersonated by a pseudo-event, which is only apparently revolutionary:

Nazism was a pseudo-Event and the October Revolution was an authentic Event, because only the latter related to the very foundations of the Situation of capitalist order, effectively undermining those foundations, in contrast to Nazism, which staged a pseudo-Event in order to save the capitalist order. The Nazi strategy was to ‘change things so that, at their most fundamental, they can remain the same’.

While this was neither the aim of 1970s leftist terrorism nor of contemporary Islamist terrorism, the result is in both cases the strengthening of the existing order. Even though it rejects capitalist spectacle, Islamist terrorism creates spectacular images of destruction that fascinate both its (potential) sympathizers and its enemies. It must also participate in the spectacle’s temporal arrangement of images, even while attempting to turn it against itself—to blow up suspense and surprise to such an extent that they destroy their foundations. Islamist terrorism, then, strives to create a true event, but it does so by producing pseudo-events for the media—pseudo-events that are temporal knots of suspense and surprise.

In Spielberg’s 2005 blockbuster remake of War of the Worlds, the dialectic of suspense and surprise is replaced by the freneticism of shock-and-awe special effects, in what seems an attempt to overwhelm the audience with the serial shocks of a roller-coaster ride. When the Martians attack, the little girl yells ‘Dad, are they terrorists?’—rendering the current ‘enemy’ as inexplicable and alien as monsters from outer space. His remake functions as a machine for producing acquiescence, encouraging a fatalist acceptance of the colonization of time and of history by spectacular terror. Instead of shock and awe, Spielberg’s next film, Munich (2005), deployed retro-suspense, an equally regressive aesthetic. Made in the director’s ‘Oscar mode’, Munich follows a fictionalized team of hitmen

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21 Zizek, Ticklish Subject, p. 139.
who, paid by Israel, attempt to kill Palestinians after the massacre at the Munich Olympics. Spielberg fashions the narrative into a kind of 1970s international suspense adventure, complete with picture-postcard views of Paris and Rome. That the repetitiveness of the list of victims to be killed leads to a kind of boring suspense seems more accident than design; Spielberg tries to camouflage it through scenes such as the one in which a bomb in a telephone at a Palestinian representative’s house threatens to blow up his little daughter. Spielberg being the great sentimentalizer of children, one knows in advance that Hitchcock’s bomb-on-the-bus outrage will not be repeated: business as usual, just another old-fashioned suspense situation.

*The bomb on the bus (again)*

In the current temporal deadlock, the coercive effects of the dialectic of suspense and surprise are all too clear. Historically, it may well be the case that, as Benjamin suggested, the use of suspense and surprise in films and other media could equip people to respond to the anxieties of modern life, and suggest alternatives to industrial uniformity; in this respect, they could be regarded as possessing an emancipatory potential. But they may also lead to the passive acceptance of a culture in which no alternative to the deadly spiral of suspense and shock in contemporary politics is imaginable. Even in the 1950s and 1960s, the cinematic dialectic functioned in this manner: Hitchcock used the Cold War both as manifest content and as subtext for a number of his films in these decades, including the remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *North by Northwest* and of course *Torn Curtain*, and one can argue that they normalized a situation in which the superpowers threatened each other with annihilation. The suspense in these films is localized: the bomb-throwing anarchist having been definitively replaced by sinister foreign agents, the plots typically involve stolen papers and individuals whose lives are at stake. This is clearly a displacement of sorts of the global suspense of the nuclear arms race, in which the existence of much of humanity was at stake. Kubrick desublimated this suspense in *Dr Strangelove*: as tensions mount over the mission of a bomber plane, viewers find themselves perversely rooting for the plane’s crew, in spite of the fact that it is patently clear the successful accomplishment of their mission will result in a nuclear apocalypse.
Contemporary ideologues of the ‘war on terror’ feed the fear that terrorists may get hold of The Bomb. There is no logical end to such a war, no longer waged against a foreign state that can be vanquished, but against a protean and hydra-headed monster. It can be stretched at will, and used to transform society on a long-term basis. In this sense, terrorism becomes a foundation for politics: for the state needs its terrorists. There is, of course, a long and dubious history of the use of terrorism by the state—either by actually perpetrating outrages itself or by using terrorist acts carried out by others. Dickinson’s Greenwich installation includes documents which suggest that the police masterminded the actual failed attack on the Observatory in order to ensure that a law weakening asylum rights for foreigners would be passed; in The Secret Agent, the anarchists are used by a foreign agent rather than by the police, although Verloc is also a police informer. While the resurgence of terrorism in the 1970s appeared to pose a serious threat, it in fact turned out to strengthen the state, and since 2001 we have seen the culmination of the use of terrorism by the state as its perfect enemy. And ‘the state’, one could argue in a Debordian vein, is little more than a front for multinational corporations, media conglomerates and the military-industrial complex.

In this situation, critical reexamination is an urgent project for critics and theorists as well as for filmmakers and artists. A historical precedent can be seen in Buñuel’s The Phantom of Liberty (1974), which revisits Breton’s ultimate surrealist act as a traumatic moment of avant-garde history and self-conceptualization. Decades after the Surrealist scandal of Un Chien Andalou, Buñuel cast a disenchaned gaze on the politics of shock. A bespectacled, besuited hitman positions himself high up in a skyscraper, takes out a gun and starts to shoot. People drop dead in the streets below. Rather than ‘dashing down into the streets’, the tueur-poète—as he is called in The Phantom of Liberty—retreats to lofty corporate heights; the avant-garde act has become a strangely clinical enterprise perpetrated by someone with a Panopticon-like viewpoint. This corporate context also suggests that terrorism in the end strengthens the society it attempts to overthrow—a pseudo-event highly compatible with the culture industry, even if the production of these pseudo-events is outsourced to obliging ‘enemies of democracy’.

Deleuze praised Buñuel’s late films for their break with the ‘naturalist and cyclical point of view’ of his earlier work in favour of a ‘pluralist cosmology’ in which ‘one and the same event is played out in . . . different
worlds, in incompatible versions’, giving rise to a ‘direct time image’. Deleuze adapted Bergson’s distinction between modern industrialized time, which is parcelled in equal units, ‘spatialized’, and duration, or pure Becoming; an ontological memory that cannot be objectified and reduced to numbers. Despite Bergson’s own dismissal of (early) cinema, Deleuze theorizes film as the production of movement-images and time-images that represent duration—indirectly in the case of the movement-image, directly in the time-image. While Deleuze disparages the ‘naturalist and cyclical point of view’, he himself, as Jacques Rancière noted, can only conceive of history as natural history. What matters is Being, Becoming; history is relevant only insofar as it is a manifestation of the untramelled productivity of Becoming. However, the human mind is apt to impose all kinds of constraints on this productivity; it forced Being into rigid representations, and subjects pure Becoming to clockwork time—or, in the language of The Logic of Sense—the aeon to chronos. The aeon is the time of events: the event is ‘coextensive with becoming’. For Deleuze, Buñuel’s late films show ‘not the subjective (imaginary) points of view in one and the same world, but one and the same event in different worlds, all implicated in the event’s inexplicable universe’.

If the event is an exception for Badiou and Žižek, a break in the order of being, Deleuzian events are everywhere—especially on the silver screen, where movement-images and time-images liberate Becoming from chronos, from clockwork time. For Deleuze, liberation is always already accomplished—one just has to embrace it. While this accounts for much of Deleuze’s seductiveness, his celebration of cinema’s liberation of time seems more questionable than ever, now that the costs of our consumption of cinema’s industrial duration have become increasingly apparent. However, there is still a critical potential in his monumental exercise in Bergsonian cinephilia, in his paens to cinema’s power to provide temporal experiences that introduce a radically different dimension into Fordist clockwork time. While Deleuze’s narrative of the movement-image’s succession by the time-image may be problematic

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23 By contrast, Benjamin saw the predominance of shocks in modern capitalism—reflected in the cinema—as an indication of the atrophy of the mémoire involontaire, that deep, unconscious memory which was Proust’s psychologized version of Bergson’s pure memory, duration.
25 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 103.
in historical terms, it does offer tools for theorizing alternatives to the Hitchcockian ‘action-image’ and contemporary mainstream cinema, in which digital attractions, fast pacing and extra shocks are injected into this classical model. Buñuel’s nonlinear, pluralist narratives—if they can be called that—are one alternative to the pseudo-cyclic repetition of shocks and suspense.

More recently, Palestinian independent filmmaker Hany Abu-Assad has created a concise and rigorous deconstruction of the dialectic of suspense and surprise in terrorist spectacle. *Paradise Now* (2005) follows two Palestinian suicide bombers, Said and Khaled, during their final days. The film emphasizes the role of image-production, both of photographs of the ‘martyrs’ that are to be mass-produced, and of a kind of video testament that will be for rent and sale at local stores. Because of some practical problems and because of the attempts of a woman who has recently moved to Palestine to dissuade the men from their plan, the ‘booms’ are postponed several times, resulting in meandering movements rather than a linear build-up towards an explosion. The result is an erratic suspense that creates space and time for reflection on the mechanism in which the men participate. When, in the final scene, Said is sitting on an Israeli bus he is about to blow up, the camera zooms in on his eyes. This is the film’s closing image; showing the explosion of yet another bus would be futile. As the postponement of the pseudo-event becomes a cinematic event, time is stretched beyond recognition: if a way out of this cul-de-sac is to be found, the temporality of our ‘perpetual present’ must be derailed—time and again.