In less than fifteen years, Camille de Toledo has established himself as a key figure on the contemporary French and European literary scene. Prominent literary scholars such as Dominique Rabaté and Claude Burgelin have praised his writings and featured him as a key writer of his generation. Camille de Toledo is the author of seven collections of essays and novels, including *Archimondain jolipunk: confessions d’un jeune homme à contretemps* (2002), *Visiter le Flurkistan ou les illusions de la littérature-monde* (2008), *Le hêtre et le bouleau: Essai sur la tristesse européenne* (2009), and more recently, *Vies potentielles* (2011) and *L’inquiétude d’être au monde* (2012). His filmography ranges from medium- and feature-length documentaries, *Globalement contre* (2001), *Une journée dans la vie d’un pneu: chronique de la mondialisation* (2002), and *Gêne(s)ration* (2003), to more experimental productions in short formats such as *La partie de Tennis* (2001) and *Traité d’économie politique* (2002) and the “speculative cinema” series composed of several narrative films, *The Story of my Brother* (2005), *Running Always* (2006), and *Un film de Peter Samek* (2007). More recently, he co-created with composer Grégoire Hetzel the video-opera *La Chute de Fukuyama / The Fall of Fukuyama* (2013), commissioned by Radio France and performed live in six languages with Radio France’s philharmonic orchestra in March 2013 in Paris. In 2009, Toledo also joined philosopher Dominique Quessada as co-presenters of *Mythophonies* (2009), a series of 25 radio conversations. Emulating Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* (1957), Toledo and Quessada discussed the literal and symbolic meanings of objects and signs emblematic of contemporary popular culture including for instance the GPS, the “Hummer”, pre-washed jeans and seedless watermelons.

If Camille de Toledo is recognized for his literary work, his mixed-media creations have failed to garner similar public and critical interest. It is true that accessibility to these has long been restricted, in comparison to his more widely available published novels and essays; but most of his short videos as well as links to *The Fall of Fukuyama* and some *Mythophonies* are now available on his personal web archives. He has turned his website into an evolving, digital matrix that provides him with greater authorial control over his corpus. Focusing only on his written works overlooks, therefore, a fundamental dimension of his critical and poetic project. Toledo’s creative intermedial play between music, text and images suggests an implicit reference to another of Barthes’s collections of essays, *Images-Music-Text* (1977). A self-proclaimed smuggler of ideas, a translator, Toledo explores the interstitial spaces where artistic creation and politics take shape, providing for a chameleonic figure of contemporary mixed-media artistry and inviting us to explore the relationship between literature and cinema anew. Camille de Toledo’s work opens endless layers, so the current analysis only seeks to promote greater recognition and foster further discussion of his status as an intermedial artist as well as a writer. I will focus more specifically on Toledo’s excavation of the cinématistèmes that have structured our experience of History and determined late 20th century politics of memorialization. In interviews as well as in his writings, Camille de Toledo contrasts the project of a European poethical – an ethics grounded in
poetics and language – that needs to be formulated and implemented in the 21st century with the American *cinématismes* that dominated our collective experiences of the world throughout the 20th century and that he strives to overcome and debunk in his work. Drawing primarily from two short video pieces, *The Story of My Brother* (2005) and *A film by Peter Samek* (2007), I argue that Camille de Toledo’s poetical project is first and foremost an intermedial archaeology of the creative frictions that exude in the interstitial spaces separating the literary voice and cinematic figuration. Camille de Toledo incarnates fully an early 21st century intermedial and interlingual mediator, following into the steps of Marguerite Duras and Chris Marker, whose experimentations defined them as amphibian artists.

“*What Have We Done*?”

§3 When scanning through this prolific audiovisual production, one is struck by the range and coherence of Toledo’s intervention. His website allows the curious visitor to browse through the corpus, stumble upon surprising links to intertextual connections, selected by the author, and discover the breadth of his work. More than side projects, these photographic, video and audio pieces provide essential insights into the author’s unraveling of the “ecosystem of fictions” that constitutes, in Toledo’s view, the aesthetic, historical and political horizon of the early 21st century. This ecosystem is, however, multidirectional. It is simultaneously rooted in the sedimented fictions of the past, and particularly the prescriptive fictions that drove our perception of history, social identity, politics and cultural production for most of the 19th and the 20th centuries, but it also constitutes the ground for fictions to come. According to Toledo, the main difference between the 20th and the 21st centuries is best illustrated in two fundamental questions that encapsulate respectively our past and our future ethos: the 20th century kept asking “what should we do?” when, in the 21st century, the predominant question, “what have we done?” points to the tragic awareness of past irremediable failures and breaches. Toledo’s obsession with the debunking of History as a vast assemblage of fictions is deeply haunted by acts of violence, real and symbolic, first perpetrated and then re-presented for memorial remembrance – the Holocaust, 9/11, but also, more recently, the 2011 Utøya massacre in Norway – and by personal traumas – his mother’s sudden death, his father’s disease, and his brother’s suicide. Fiction, literary and cinematic, is thus examined, critiqued and practiced as a way to process and work through the many forms of mediation of violence and loss.

§4 In Toledo’s work, contrary to the narratives he condemns, working through violence and loss is not an end in itself; digging through the fictional sedimentation enables new possibilities and utopias to emerge. For Toledo, too much focus on memory and memorialization, which has largely driven late 20th century politics and culture, blinds; History becomes a spectacle:

> Reconstruction, restauration, images de synthèse, spectacles du passé [...] Cette industrie [...] est une industrie où le passé devient le matériau d’un divertissement de masse.

In this nexus between History and entertainment, Toledo unravels a powerful critique of narrative mediation and an intermedial praxis or “po-ethics” – to borrow his own word. He defines this “po-ethics”, grounded in translation and
literature, – and I would like to add intermediality – as pedagogy and praxis for the 21st century:

Enfants du XXIème siècle ! [...] Vous qui aurez à inventer ce siècle, le XXIème, à lui donner sa force poétique, esthétique, politique. Et je dirais surtout: son sens éthique. Vous qui aurez grandi, comme moi, dans ce temps de fictions, mais plus que moi. Vous avancerez en portant en vous un répertoire infini d’images : archives, films, croisements de mondes que l’on dit réels ou virtuels, mais qui sont pour vous, indis-sociablement, un seul et même monde. [...] Notre responsabilité, c’est d’élever chaque citoyen du 21ème siècle dans cette politique de l’entre-des-langues.7

While Toledo anchors this European “po-ethical” project in language, translation, and literature, the two quotations cited above point to the centrality of cinema – in particular, American cinema – in his critical rehabilitation of gaps, intervals and confusion as essential principles of linguistic and cultural syncretism. Toledo develops his “po-ethics” of in-betweenness against the cinematic continuity that has become our epistemological horizon.

§5 Only a few decades after cinema was invented and became a mass medium, Sergei Eisenstein acknowledged the revolutionary epistemological impact of cinema. He noted: “Il semble que tous les arts aient, à travers les siècles, tendu vers le cinéma. Inversement, le cinéma aide à comprendre leurs méthodes”8. Eisenstein named this perceived superiority of film to reproduce reality and capture movement, light and colors cinématisme. When equating memorialization with mass entertainment and spectacle, Toledo suggests that, in the course of the 20th century, cinema has become our primary mode to account for, and grasp, History and memory. Toledo does not see cinématisme, meaning the capacity of cinema to structure as much as to represent our experience, as positively as Eisenstein or, perhaps, not only in hopeful terms.

§6 Toledo’s position vis-à-vis cinema is at the very least ambivalent. On the one hand, he seems to be absolutely fascinated with the medium and his works draw from a vast repertoire of images, that Toledo the cinephile has carefully stored and archived over time. On the other hand, his compulsive practice of mise en abyme reveals a profound mistrust for cinema’s walling off of our imaginary and its production of prefab fictions and narratives. In that regard, Camille de Toledo also suggests a reevaluation of Walter Benjamin’s description of cinema’s liberating impact in the early 20th century. Benjamin’s embrace of film lied primarily in the medium’s opening of our experience of space:

Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly on us. Then came film and exploded our prison-world with the dynamite of the split-second [...]. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended.9

More than sixty years later, Toledo’s work suggests that cinema has not brought about the imaginary and social liberation that Benjamin envisioned. Instead, he warns against late 20th century cinematic fabulations as the advent of a new “prison-world”, although principally the result of an industrialization of fictional production, whether cinematic or literary, as a matter of fact. Toledo shares Eisenstein’s and Benjamin’s faith in cinema’s political potential, only for him, this potential occurs in the emptying of the (filmic) image and the cinematic surplus and narrative overflow that he associates with the production of entertainment. In
other words, Toledo finds film political and po-ethical only insofar as it performs a de-cinematization of our reality – a project that he carefully undertakes in his “speculative cinema” series.

§7 Toledo’s concern is therefore not to pit literature against cinema, but to promote narrative ellipsis and emptiness where loss and incomprehension is consistently compensated with representations and figurations.

Ce que nous pouvons tirer comme vigilance éthique de la création – dans le lien que la création entretient avec la mémoire et le passé – tient dans la question suivante: les œuvres présentes ou à venir sont-elles du côté du plein narratif ou font-elles apparaître le vide, l’effacement, l’ellipse?  

Toledo reformulates the long-lasting opposition between art and entertainment, a dichotomy familiar to film scholars, but also another debate prevalent in the aftermath of Second World War about representability. The latter debate culminated, for instance, in film representations of the Holocaust, particularly in the contrast maintained between Claude Lanzmann’s exposure of empty, desolate landscapes of mourning in *Shoah* (1985) versus Steven Spielberg’s Hollywood narrative representation in *Schindler’s List* (1993). While entertainment is presented here as essentially industrialized and formulaic, and providing audiences with overdetermined representations, art is defined as mediating the direct confrontation of spectators or readers with a quandary and resisting patterns and spectacle. It is quite telling to hear Toledo compare his project to Marguerite Duras’s experiments with metacinema in an interview. Both share a taste for ellipses and a reflection on the representability of trauma, personal and collective. Toledo makes a direct reference to *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*’s famous line, “I saw nothing in Hiroshima”, in *The Fall of Fukuyama* where we can hear the voice-over say, “I saw everything. J’ai tout vu”, as surveillance video footage and drones appear in the background. Not only does Toledo play between literature and cinema and privilege art over entertainment, but these dichotomies are also presented in geographic terms – the American fictionalization of the real versus the European exposure of fictions. This leads me to my examination of Camille de Toledo’s “excavation” of American fictions and the principle of continuity central to Hollywood cinematic narration.

**Story-Taylorization: Jamming Cinematic Continuity, Reclaiming Authority**

§8 Two short films, *The Story of My Brother* and *A film by Peter Samek*, included in his “speculative cinema” series, develop a meta-reflection on cinematic continuity, fiction and memory, and demonstrate Camille de Toledo’s rejection of industrial standards and his efforts instead to perform the impossibility of cinema and to make films that cannot be made. Anecdotally, he explains that he became aware of his unwillingness to make films that conform to industrial standards of continuity and transparency, when, invited to present *Tango de Olvido* (1998) at the 2002 International Cannes Film Festival, jury members Martin Scorsese and Abbas Kiarostami dismissed the film. In an interview, Toledo recalls with great humor that, over dinner, Scorsese told him: “It’s too bad, I had to read all the time!” The film is narrated in Spanish, since the main character returns to Argentina in search of his father, a mysterious man who disappeared during the coup d’état of the military junta. Toledo explains having been dumbfounded by Scorsese’s justification
given the American filmmaker’s extensive use of subtitles in his own films. However, he concludes, when subtitles are used as supplements to an English voice-over, as is the case in a Scorsese’s film, there is transparency; in the case of a film narrated in a language foreign to the spectator, Toledo explains these subtitles are unavoidable and can conflict with the image. He adds, nonchalantly, “well, he didn’t like the film, probably for other reasons as well!” He nonetheless ends this anecdote by admitting, that unlike many writers who dream to either see their books adapted on the screen or to become filmmakers, his goal is to write books that are impossible to adapt or to make films and videos about films that cannot be directed or completed 16.

§9 With this anecdote in mind, the adjective “speculative” can thus be understood as the convergence of two properties. First, the cinema Toledo produces is speculative in the sense of being risky insofar as it does not abide by standard conventions and profitable formulas designed to meet audiences’ expectations. He has also used the term “poor”, or “cinéma pauvre”, to highlight the industrial precariousness of his enterprise. Second, it is also speculative or specular in its capacity to reflect and reveal what is otherwise invisible in the seamless fictions produced by classical cinema. His videos are, to some extent, anti-films or films that can only exist off-frame, in the margins, as annotations and offshoots of other narratives. Camille de Toledo describes his video practice as an exploration of the paratextual margins of the film:

En usant de mes petites connaissances du montage, je me suis mis à utiliser l’espace habituellement consacré aux génériques comme lieu d’écriture, d’une véritable écriture capable de changer la définition du film au fur et à mesure de son déroulement... un langage que je devais désormais explorer, qui était à l’endroit exact où l’écriture désormais se trouvait reléguée. En marge de la grande production fictionnelle, dans l’entre des langages, photographique, vidéo, cinématographique [...] 17

This scholium appears at the bottom of the webpage dedicated to the 2005 videopoem, The Story of My Brother, which is the most explicit example of Toledo’s deconstruction of Hollywood conventions.

§10 This 26 minute long, discontinuous road trip through Uruguay and Argentina layers a reflection on the road movie genre and a meditation on the loss of Toledo’s brother, who had recently committed suicide. The Story of My Brother is the first opus of the “speculative cinema” series – which also includes two shorter videos, Running Always (2006), inspired by Alfred Hitchcock’s North by Northwest (1959), and Vince, 26 ans, inaccessible on his otherwise exhaustive web-archives. All three present characters, visible on screen or not, who are on the run from an unknown situation. While this is a premise relatively common in Classical Hollywood cinema, in that dominant narrative form, spectators typically get to know why the fugitive escaped and from what he or she escaped, providing a rich context for narrative twists and resolutions. In The Story of My Brother, in contrast, we never learn who drives the car, why they ended up in this landscape, and no plot unfolds, leaving the spectator at the mercy of a very indecisive extra-diegetic narrator. The video piece consists of several rushes recorded in South America, from inside a car driving on unidentified roads in the middle of rural landscapes or in urban peripheries – perhaps “La Pampa” incidentally credited as the main actor of the movie. These rushes, tinted with sepia tones, are edited into a long sequence interrupted by variegated textual fragments – intertitles, credits, quotations from
the voice-over, from famous media reviews (*The New York Times, Le Monde*), from unidentified dialogues and obviously ironic comments. The industrial paratext is therefore foregrounded and becomes the film. The sepia color creates a bifurcation of the image, connoting at once the remains of a fictional, classic film and the recovery of found footage from old home movies, without ever finding a conclusive resolution about the actual genre or purpose of the film. The score adds a weighty, melancholic mood – with occasional variations suggesting specific musical generic conventions, such as the overblown music expected in a western or in a drama – to the sepia silent images. Images, music, and text intermesh or collide in this poetic excavation of cinematic narration. In *The Story of My Brother*, the paratext continuously interrupts and debunks the possibility of any sort of continuity editing: credits, trailer catchphrases, reviews gradually invade what started as an actual narration and narrative. While the paratext introduces suspicion as to the authenticity of this film, the voice-over signifies the images unfolding before our eyes. Camille de Toledo’s running commentary throughout the film threads in disconnected interpretations of the images on screen – the voice-over “*enfile les mots au kilomètre*”. He endorses therefore the role of the “story-taylor”, who combines a writer’s skilled craft with high-volume narrative productivity matching industrial standards.18

§11

Initial descriptions/visions of the landscape (1) progressively give way to imaginary extrapolations of who the main invisible character might be, what his motives could be, invoking predictable tropes of Hollywood genres (2), and gradually escalate into metaleptic confusions between the narration and the extra-diegetic conception of the film (3). Here are some examples of these three types of commentaries:

(1) On aurait besoin d’ajouter des nuages, […] et des poteaux télégraphiques, en bois, bousculés par le vent, qui feront la jointure comme des cicatrices, et les poteaux télégraphiques ressembleront à des croix, des croix à l’ancienne, plates à hauteur des bras, comme en Palestine dans l’Antiquité […]

(2) Non, s’il y avait une action, on serait au cinéma […] Peut-être faudra-t-il tout de même quelques Indiens. Ils descendront des montagnes, ce sera captivant […] Cela pourrait être l’histoire d’un homme qui revient, il reconnaît le panneau sur le côté […] Mais comment ne pas voir que cette voiture est conduite par un tueur à gages, un réfugié politique, un prisonnier en cavale, une femme adultère, un exilé qui revient chez lui après des années d’errance […] Il n’y a pas d’histoire, pas de héros, il n’y a qu’une route […]

(3) Les producteurs transpirent, […] ils veulent une histoire, des développements croisés, […] Nous sommes transportés, immobiles, assis sur la chaise velourée d’un théâtre. Nous ne bougeons surtout pas, la route défile […] Mais à l’instant, il faut s’interrompre, pour régler le sort de ce figurant, qui traverse l’écran de gauche à droite, c’est un home apparent, il court pour ne pas se faire happer par le tapis défilant de la route […]

The narration is constantly restarted, renegotiated, reinvented, delegitimizing and shifting signification away from the images to the voice-over. The off-frame voice-over and intermittent on-screen textual inscriptions produce a poetic, audiovisual cacophony that becomes the site of a symbolic *mise en abyme* of the “mental micro-Hollywood that has taken over our bodies and our minds”19.
The meaning of the video-poem and the ironic debunking of Classical cinematic narration emerge in the interstices of the images and the literary voice. The narration is written and produced in the space between, in the same way that “the road does not move forward” in a linear way but “digs through” the layers of the screen and the fictional production — to use Toledo’s own distinction heard in the film. It is therefore less the medium of cinema as a whole that Toledo regards with suspicion than a certain cinematic narrative mode, Classical American/Hollywood cinema. His continuous return to video productions — documentaries, poems, experimental films — attests nonetheless to his absolute fascination for images and renders his claim that cinema is now impossible to make purely rhetorical. It is therefore not filmmaking that is impossible for him but making films that follow the industrial narrative production template — what Toledo calls the dramaturgic assembly line. When asking, “in cinema, how much space is left to writing?” he thus validates what Jacques Rancière describes as the nostalgic indictment of “cinema’s involution, which [he] attributes to two phenomena: the breakthrough of the talkies [la coupure du parlant], which dealt a severe blow to the attempts to create a language of images; the Hollywood industry, which reduced directors to the role of illustrators of scripts based, for commercial reasons, on the standardization of plots and on the audience’s identification with the characters.” The Story of My Brother symbolically reverses this involution, removing the “talk” that gets added onto images and precluding any attachment to the plot and characters, absent from this film, by foregrounding the paratextual noise instead.

This enunciatory framework established as early as the opening credits of The Story of My Brother (the introduction of the director’s name, the title, etc) closes with a final reassertion of Toledo’s authorial control over this production. In the final credits, Camille de Toledo plays with the many fictional layers of his public persona, as one can read “Images Alexis Mital”, “editing Alan R. Gonzales”, “Texts by Camille de Toledo”, “Guitars Oscar Philipsen”, “sound production Charlie Vetter”, before a final dedication “to my brother”. At least three of the names credited — Alexis Mital, Camille de Toledo and Oscar Philipsen — are well-known pseudonyms used by the author himself, which Toledo’s faithful readers and spectators will recognize. As Toledo has explained in interviews, to escape the current industrial rationalization and taylorization of audiovisual productions,

[...] Un auteur, au XXIème siècle, doit rentrer dans une approche d’usine warholienne, de marque ou alors dans une forme collaborative.

He somehow mocks both when the seeming collaborative production in The Story of My Brother turns out to be the making of one author, Camille de Toledo, his now official pen name. Born Alexis Mital, he produced his early documentary films and first short, Tango de Olvido (1998), as Alexis Mital or Alexis Mital Toledo. He later published his first critical book-length essay, Archimondain jolipunk (2002) under the now widely known pseudonym, Camille de Toledo, using his grandfather’s first name and his grandmother’s last name. Other pseudonyms, including Peter Samek and Oscar Phillipsen, participate in the many metaleptic interferences that blur the lines separating the fictions created by Camille de Toledo, author, and the fictions he inhabits (personal memories, History, as well as contemporary events mediated by television and cinema). Beyond the creative process deployed and renewed piece after piece, digital new media and, in his case his web-based archives, equalize
otherwise hierarchized, fragmented productions in the dominant market model and consolidate the body of work scattered across media\(^23\). Camille de Toledo has turned this market fragmentation into a game of authorial affirmation, performed against autobiography and autofiction, genres he considers excessively navel-gazing in their contemporary manifestations. While continuing the “excavation” of American cinematic narration and fictional production initiated in *The Story of My Brother, A film by Peter Samek* (2007), Toledo’s own film adaptation of his novel *Vies et mort d’un terroriste américain* (2007), explores further this intertwining of fiction, reality, biography, autofiction and autobiography. Intermediality becomes even more essential to Toledo’s reflection on fiction as replication in this second video.

**Towards a dramaturgy of excavation and replication**

\(\S\)14 Camille de Toledo’s prolific activity situates literary, visual and oral utterances as part of a meta-project that enables him to excavate what he calls “the present hypnosis”\(^24\).

Hélas, au lieu de nous instruire, l’hypnose du présent, la sédimentation des images et des sons qui nous englobent, toutes les strates de réalités, fictions vraies, fictions documentaires, pures fictions, recréations, reconstitutions, reproductions, entre lesquelles nous vivons et qui nous éloignent du sens du texte principal, qui nous empêchent de remonter à l’image première, originelle, à la preuve d’une vérité établie par le verdict que ces strates nombreuses, insondables, nous assignent à percevoir, savoir qu’il n’y a pas, à l’origine, d’essences nobles, pures, une vérité stable, assurée, mais une bâtardise, une maison branlante, tant d’ellipses historiques, tant de silences, tant de mystères que nous ne pouvons réellement croire en rien de définitif, ce vacillement général de toute chose nous effraie.\(^25\)

The concern Toledo expresses above for the fictional noise that separates us from personal and historical truths or from original events and images recalls, and prolongs into the 21st century, previous theoretical and creative interventions by Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Chris Marker — he has in fact acknowledged their legacy in different parts of his work. Like his predecessors, Toledo insists on the impossible recovery of an immediate experience that is not already mediated. *A Film by Peter Samek* exposes this noise created by conflicting fictions, saturating our audiovisual landscape.

\(\S\)15 If the replication of America’s monumentality and expansiveness, as a myth and a hyperreal decor, is at the core of the novel *Vies et mort d’un terroriste américain* (2007) — which itself replicates narrative elements of *L’inversion de Hieronymus Bosch* (2004) —, the video *A film by Peter Samek* (2007) plays more directly with the “present hypnosis” described above. The film shifts narrative focalization from Eugene Green, the novel’s protagonist, to Ted Kaczynski, aka The Unabomber, whose life is being narrated to us by Camille de Toledo himself, impersonating the French novelist introduced in the novel, Alexis Mital. Interestingly, Toledo chooses to name this semi-fictional novelist after his own birth name, blurring further the line dividing reality and fiction. In the novel, Alexis Mital is a French novelist and screenwriter for a film commissioned by an imaginary Hollywood filmmaker, Peter Samek. *A film by Peter Samek* could thus be the product of this collaboration, or rather an attempt on Toledo’s part to endorse successively the role of a French
novelist and screenwriter and the role of an American filmmaker, in other words a film that can never be. The film enacts the narrative intermeshing of American cinematic narration and a French or European literary voice, and to some extent, the gradual dissolution of this European literary voice in the vast cinematic simulacrum that Baudrillard defined as the essence of late 20th century postmodern experience.

§16

As Eugene Green, the main character of *Vies et mort d’un terroriste américain*, leaves his Midwestern small town, conveniently called Little America, his perception of the plains surrounding him recalls Baudrillard’s awe before America’s hyperreal expansiveness in *America* (1986):

> Autour de lui, les champs de maïs, d’orge, de blé, les sycomores jaunes, rouges, auburn, dorés par le soleil matinal, la crête ombrageuse, escarpée, des Rocheuses à l’horizon, le tourbillon açaïant des moustiques, l’odeur douce, méléeuse, d’érable, de labours, de rosée et de foin, même la silhouette lointaine d’un fermier fourré dans une salopette bistre par-dessus sa chemise à carreaux, qui le salut d’un geste confraternel, un ondulation ralenti du bras qui, vu de la route, semble une allumette brisée; […] ; tout, à cet instant, […] ; tout paraît si vrai.26

Shortly after, Eugene Green gets deeper into this fable when he meets Ted Kaczynski, The Unabomber, and shares a ride with him across this decor. Paradoxically, Toledo’s expansive prose empties, or picks this vast decor apart, as words fill up the page. This contradictory effect becomes even more obvious when the literary scene is confronted to its cinematic equivalent. In *A film by Peter Samek*, the immersive description is replaced with footage from *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991) – always not identified as such in Toledo’s film – starring River Phoenix as a possible incarnation/cinematic replica of Eugene Green. The clip inserted in *A film by Peter Samek* starts with River Phoenix’s character alone on the side of a desolate road, taking in the grandeur of the landscape – which the voice-over presents as Wyoming and not Idaho. While the literary voice unfolds the expansiveness of the landscape through a detailed description, the film’s editing contains it and fills the spectator’s visual experience with alternating medium and close-up shots of the actor and point-of-view shots of the plains. The large majority of the video aestheticizes this intermedial collusion of cinematic and textual narrations through sustained superimpositions of archival footage and Camille de Toledo’s close-up. Mixing pre-existing reel, archival footage and what looks like home movies, *A film by Peter Samek* becomes a manifestation of what Toledo describes as the infinite repertoire of images and fictions that makes up the reality of late 20th and 21st century children. Camille de Toledo’s personal fictions blend with those familiar to his characters Eugene Green and Ted Kaczynski: Hollywood movies, Ronald Reagan’s Star Wars program, Ted Kaczynski’s arraignment in 1996, tornado warnings and governmental emergency guidelines, radio broadcasts, folk music, etc. *A film by Peter Samek* is basically a mixed-media compilation film, except for the long close-up take of Camille de Toledo reading Ted Kaczynski’s life story – the life and the death of an American terrorist, the subject of the novel and the script written by Alexis Mital in *Vies et mort d’un terroriste américain*.

§17

*A film by Peter Samek* flips the fictional continuity system inside out: the imaginary character, Peter Samek, becomes the invisible hand – until the end of the film when we see a filmmaker/editor manually cut and edit celluloid reels – behind the film while the novel’s author enters the screen. Toledo superimposes himself both
onto the screenwriter, Alexis Mital, and onto the filmmaker, Peter Samek, staging in the process of this intermedial correspondence the symbiotic convergence of the writer and the filmmaker, and of reality and fiction. One might even say that Camille de Toledo, a fictional pen name, embodies this intermedial convergence of a real person, Alexis Mital, and an imaginary filmmaker Peter Samek. In the last few minutes, though, the fictional account leaves way to what would be the screenwriter’s imaginary extra-diegetic personal experience. Images fade in and out over the close-up of Toledo’s face reading the script behind a large microphone, presumably in a recording studio. While opening credits announce the film’s title, the names of the director and the screenwriter, A film by Peter Samek ends with a fade to black, as if incomplete or as if Toledo were thereby refusing industrial authority on this film, or as if the diegetic universe of the film opened up onto the extra-diegetic context in which it is produced. The narration foregrounds this porous interference of fictions and reality in the last few lines uttered by Toledo:

J’étais entré dans un bar pour me reposer. J’ai vu que le patron avait recouvert ses murs de gigantesques écrans plasma; il n’y avait plus un centimètre carré de plâtre ou de peinture. Tout bougeait, tout était animé. En buvant mon café, j’ai pensé, hélas, que mes films n’étaient plus que les petites parcelles d’un écran plus vaste. [...] En vérité, le cinéma, désormais, c’est l’H/histoire, et l’H/histoire, c’est le cinéma. Voilà ce qu’a compris Eugène avant les autres. [...] J’ai payé mon expresso. Dehors, le Golden Gate Bridge, la baie, les requins dans la baie, les surfeurs sur les vagues, les voitures qui allaient et venaient sur le pont, les rues en cascade qui plongeaient vers la mer, et aussi les retraités et leurs chiens, et tous les habitants de San Francisco, me parurent comme les miniatures d’un immense papier peint, découpé en une multitude de rectangles sur lesquels je les regardais marcher, respirer.27

This description once again, as in Eugene’s observation of the plains, materializes as it picks apart the screenwriter’s real-life decor. At this moment, as we are left watching Camille de Toledo, silently breathing and still in the screen frame, the audiovisual dispositif dominant in A film by Peter Samek starts making sense. In order to be heard, literary narration needs to enter the cinematic screen to remain relevant in this age where everything is mediated by screens, but as it does so, it also undermines cinematic figuration.

§18 In “La fable contrariée”, (in English “A Thwarted Fable”), the prologue to La fable cinématographique/ Film Fables (2001), Jacques Rancière describes how, in the early 20th century, Jean Epstein saw cinema’s dialectical “mechanical automatism” as the vector of narrative “de-figuration”28. To a large extent, Camille de Toledo’s speculative cinema, and his video-poem The Story of My Brother in particular, returns to Epstein’s intuition, “extract[ing] the theoretical and poetical fable that describes the original power of the cinema from the body of another fable, from which he erased the traditional narrative aspect in order to create another dramaturgy, another system of expectations, actions, and states of being”29. Rancière sees Epstein’s “dramaturgy of origins” revived in Jean-Luc Godard’s Histoire(s) du cinéma (1988) and Gilles Deleuze’s “dramaturgy of ontological restitution” evidenced in his two-volume intervention, Cinéma 1: L’Image-mouvement/ The Movement Image (1983) and Cinéma 2: L’image-temps (1985)/ The Time-Image (1989), thus tracing a genealogy between several key figures of French cinema and criticism. Where Epstein used technology to achieve narrative defiguration, Toledo uses the narrative to reveal the mechanics of cinema as social and political fiction. In Toledo’s work, the process of extraction points, as in The
Story of My Brother, to a dramaturgy of “excavation”, or instead, a dramaturgy of “replication” as in the novel, *Vies et mort d’un terroriste américain*, which tells the story of an impossible film, and in *Un film de Peter Samek*, a tentative film adaptation of this novel. Describing the creative process behind the writing of his novel *L’inversion de Hieronymus Bosch* (2004), Toledo mentions how replication constitutes a narrative trigger in this particular novel:

> Je pars de la réplication. C’est le point de départ du roman: le décor et le péplum qu’il va falloir déconstruire. Le pouvoir de réplication. La ville de Paris recréée au Texas dans *L’Inversion*, faisant suite au film culte de Wenders, *Paris-Texas*. Ce n’est plus seulement comme au temps de Benjamin, celui de l’œuvre d’art dont le statut est profondément bouleversé par la réplication. C’est le monumental, l’architecture, la ville entière qui deviennent les objets possibles de la réplication.30

Architectural when Paris is recreated in Texas in this novel, replication also appears as an intertextual principle when Toledo loosely replicates narrative tropes previously introduced in others’ films and when he replicates parts of his novel into a film. Replication does not necessarily mean copy here; in fact, differences between the original and the replica are accentuated more than they are erased. Contrary to Epstein and Godard, for whom this dramaturgical extraction remains within the realm of images, Toledo’s foregrounding of replication as a narrative device evidences the artificiality of our assumed reality and is mediated through the intervention of a literary voice, typically Toledo’s own voice. The relationship between literature and cinema is thus framed in aesthetic, political and economic terms through his work. In that regard, Camille de Toledo’s aesthetic project recalls Jacques Rancière’s definition of politics as the “distribution of the sensible”31. Intermediality participates in this redistribution. Each medium becomes therefore a tool to undo the fictions of another medium as it itself weaves the threads of new ones.

**Conclusion: From Intermediality to Poet(h)ical Vertigo**

§19  *The Story of My Brother*, insofar as it interweaves a reflection on the absence, memory and mourning of his brother with the debunking of the road movie as a classical genre, might be presented by Toledo as the first opus of his speculative cinema series, but its thematic concerns place it in continuity with earlier videos like *Tango de Olvido. Un film de Peter Samek*, in contrast, mobilizes more clearly concerns relevant to his archeological project, *Strata*, which he summarizes as follows:

> L’unité des Strates tient de l’archéologie: une excavation romanesque où chaque livre creuse dans la fiction précédente, pour y trouver, non pas l’image première, originelle, mais le vertige d’une histoire cachant une autre histoire, comme des poupées russes.32

This second moment in Camille de Toledo’s corpus – if such moments can be identified, considering the rhizomatic nature of his work, endlessly revisiting and rewriting itself in between and across media – confronts the symbolic violence of cinematic narration and our contemporary epistemological cinématisme, as a continuous and totalizing system of fictions and simulacra. Intermediality between literature, film, photography, and various aural performances enables Toledo to interrupt the convergence of artistic, media and social fictions into a vast hypnotic state.
The rise of digital media has in recent years promoted a renewed interest in intermediality. As Ginette Verstraete explains, the concept of intermediality has not only been used to describe the “linkages within and between the various media that have intensified with the arrival of the digital (hyper)medium”, but its appeal also speaks to the legitimacy crisis of older media and arts and non-digital humanities, particularly “literary studies, performance studies, art history, film theory and philosophy”33. Verstraete continues and distinguishes between convergence and intermediality, the latter “interrupt[ing] the smoothness of so called media convergence to address the critical space in-between media, art, and the surrounding world”34. Examples of intermedial practice thus encompass a wide range of formal experimentations, including the hybridization of genres (ciné-roman, ciné-poème, and so on), which qualified the work of Chris Marker, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Agnès Varda and others in the early 1960s for instance, as well as intermedial “readings” and reception of certain works. Camille de Toledo’s intermedial practice does not manifest anxiety towards the predominance of digital media over literature, photography and film. Quite the contrary, the digital – materialized through his ever-growing webarchives – facilitates creative autonomy and offers a counter-model to the contractualization and the commodification of literature, art and media productions. When taken in as a contiguous corpus, Toledo’s cinematic, literary and aural productions and collaborations intermesh at all levels of this spectrum. Not only does he hybridize genres when he makes video-poems, a video-opera, but the thematic, narrative and metaletic interactions woven in between his various practices and productions invite the reader/viewer/audience to navigate a fairly wide sensory spectrum.

The scope of Toledo’s intermedial probing of fiction as an episteme is best encapsulated by Joachim Paech’s focus on narration as the site of intermedial difference between literature and cinema:

> We could also say that there is no intermediality between literature and film; there is one only between media narrating literarily or cinematically. [...] The transmediality of narration, as a tertium comparationis, opens up the relationship between the two media without being assignable to either of the two as specific characteristic.35

Toledo’s emphasis on narration, especially through the extensive reliance on the voice-over, shifts, in a similar manner, the intermedial convergence of literature and cinema in between narrative templates rather than in between genres or strictly defined media. He is less concerned with the cross-contamination of literature and cinema, a dominant theme in studies looking at writers turned filmmakers and vice versa. Even though Camille de Toledo explains that “writ[ing] [comes] after and with images”, his relationship with cinema, and thus his status as a writer/filmmaker is atypical36. In spite of the obvious breadth of his intermedial practice, literature is supplemental in his project and his body of work, it is trusted to make up for the deficiency of film, a deficiency that stems from what he identifies as the industrial and totalizing quality of (American) cinematic narration and representation. Instead, Camille de Toledo uses intermediality to target what Valerie Deshouslières describes as Western “fables of continuity”37. In this essay, I have focused primarily on Classical American cinematic narration, but Toledo has more recently turned his attention to others, including European nationalism and “declinism”. Last year, he confided in fellow writer Gilles Rozier:
J’ai grandi à une époque où le mot de fin était partout ... comme si l’Europe était comme ça hantée aussi par l'idée de sa fin, qui est une idée que je ne peux pas accepter une seconde... Les époques sont beaucoup plus métamorphiques.38

Engaging themes and practices central to the artistic and intellectual avant-gardes of the early 20th century, Camille de Toledo’s po-ethics of intermediality and interlingualism fosters a temporal compression of two fins de siècle, the 19th and the 20th centuries.

While early 20th avant-gardes embraced the potential of cinema as a medium opening new political and artistic horizons, Toledo designs an intermedial vertigo that jams the “great fictional production” that engulfs our times. Camille de Toledo’s theoretical engagement with cinema deserves greater attention insofar as his creative and critical intervention intersects with numerous contemporary theoretical and ethical concerns that cut across disciplines as varied as literary studies, documentary and film studies, trauma studies, and history.

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NOTES
2 The website is accessible at http://toledo-archives.net/
5 Ibid., p. 25. “L'Europe, pour se sauver des gouffres du XXème siècle et de cette reversibilité barbarie-civilisation, a suivi une voie mémoriable. Matérialiser ce qui s'est passé. [...] C'est la phrase: Plus jamais ça qui gouverne nos régimes depuis des décennies et prétend avoir évacué la violence. La mémoire est devenue [...] la garante d'un régime de tolérance et de non-violence. Mais au lieu de cette non-violence, ce que l'on voit est, au contraire, une tolérance infinie à la violence [...] une sophistication culturelle et sociale de l'aveuglement.”
6 Ibid., p. 25.
12 Ibid. Camille de Toledo mentions Marguerite Duras during this interview.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 “Camille de Toledo répond aux questions de Dominique Rabaté”, Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine, n°1.
20 Ibid.

Ibid.

English translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.


I chose to write H/histoire with the two possible spellings to emphasize the ambiguity of both History and cinema as narrative systems producing fictions.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Camille de Toledo, “Strates – une archéologie fictionnelle”, http://toledo-archives.net/oeuvres/?letter=s


Ibid., 8.


As Christian Quendler explains, Joachim Paech posits narration as a shared “generic frame” through which literature and cinema can interact and through which intermedial difference can emerge.

Ibid.
