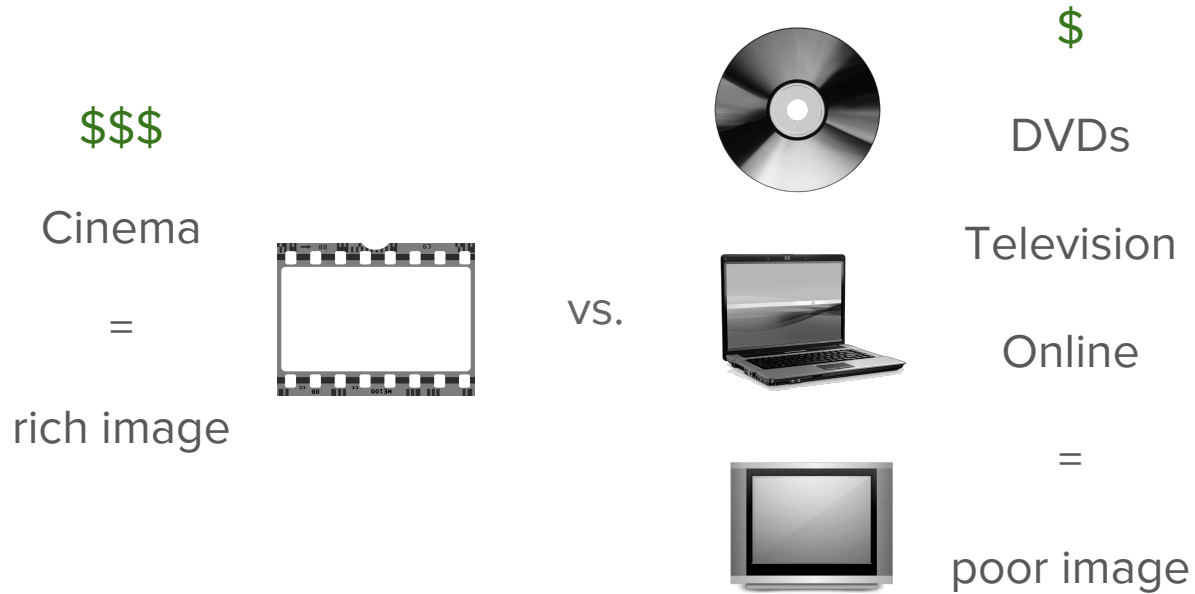


in defense  
of the  
poor image

hito steyerl

1. low resolution

# hierarchy of images



# importance of resolution



2. resurrection (as poor images)

# *invisible images*

Restructuring of media production  
obscures non-commercial imagery



Experimental and essayistic cinema  
becomes almost invisible



It becomes expensive to keep these  
works circulating in cinemas and they  
are deemed too marginal to be  
broadcasted on television



Non-commercial imagery disappears  
from the public sphere

# neoliberal radicalization

culture as commodity

commercialization of cinema

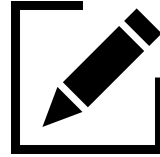
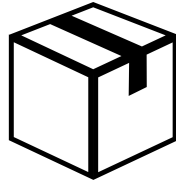
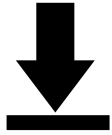
cinema dispersion into multiplexes

marginalization of independent filmmaking

restructuring of global media industries

establishment of monopolies over the audiovisual

# economy of poor images





3. privatization and piracy

# origin of poor images

Poor images are poor because...

their not assigned any value within the class society of images

their status as illicit or degraded grants them exemption

their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement

# significance of poor images

Their situation...

reveals the conditions of their marginalization

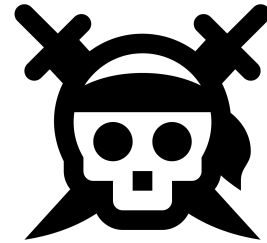
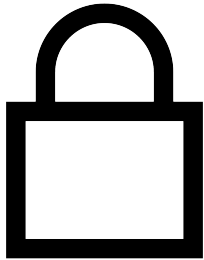
reveals the decline and degradation of the film essay, experimental and non-commercial cinema, which was only possible because the production of culture was considered a task of the state

# circulation of poor images

Privatization of media production gradually  
grows more important than state  
controlled/sponsored media production

BUT...

enables piracy and appropriation; it gives rise to  
the circulation of poor images



4. imperfect cinema

# imperfect & perfect cinema

perfect cinema

=

rich image

technically and artistically masterful; is almost always reactionary cinema

vs.

imperfect cinema

=

poor image

strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society; merges art with life and science; blurs the distinction between consumer and producer, audience and author; insists upon its own imperfection; is popular but not consumerist, commits without becoming bureaucratic

# pros and cons of poor images

Enables the participation of a much larger group of producers than ever before



Contains experimental and artistic material and allows access to excluded imagery



Enables the users' active participation in the creation and distribution of content



Drafts users into production

Operates against the fetish value of high resolution



# pros and cons of poor images



**PARENTAL  
ADVISORY  
EXPLICIT CONTENT**



Hate speech, spam, and other rubbish make their way through digital connections

Circulates an incredible amount of porn and paranoia

Integrates into an information capitalism thriving on compressed attention spans, impression rather than immersion, intensity rather than contemplation, previews rather than screenings



# new perspective of the image

Redefining the value of the image...

velocity - speed

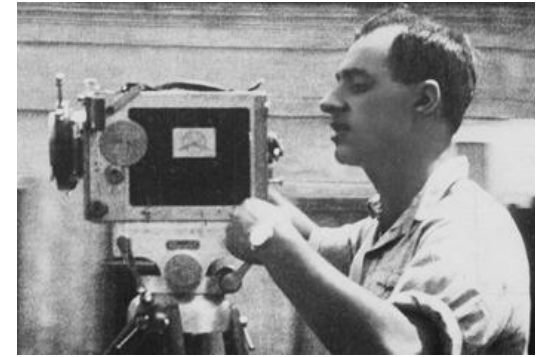
intensity - condition of dematerialization

spread - shared legacy and production

5. comrade, what is your visual  
bond today?



# visual bond



The circulation of poor images...

creates an alternative economy of images where even marginalized content circulates again

reconnects dispersed worldwide audiences

constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared history

Dziga Vertov's "visual bond" links the workers of the world with each other as a sort of communist, visual, Adamic language that can inform or entertain, and organize its viewers

Global information capitalism = visual bond

6. now!

# reality

Masterpieces of cinema and video art are...

kicked out of the protected and often protectionist arena of national culture

discarded from commercial circulation

revived as poor images

“The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the ordinary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation.

In short: it is about reality.”

# questions

1. What are some well-known examples of poor images?
2. Does new technology degrade the rich image? How?
3. What are cases in which rich imagery is better than poor imagery? Vice versa?