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VOL. XXVIII, No. 1   Fall 1974

Editor's Notebook

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next issue).

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ANDREW SARRIS's most recent collection of writings is
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LAWRENCE SHAFFER

Night for Day, Film for Life

"We linger unregenerately in Plato's cave, still reveling, our age-old habit, in mere images of the truth."—SUSAN SONTAG

The most melancholy comment in *All About Eve* is George Sanders's lament at Margo's party that Margo and Bill, as they head upstairs, are going to finish a spat they've been having "off-stage." Terrible news for the voyeur! *All About Eve* is a film about threatricality—Eve pretends to be something she's not, Margo is always "on," the principals upstage each other in a hectic sextet—but for us Sanders might have said "off-film." A death sentence. Like off the edge of the flat world for the medieval explorer or beyond the curvature of the universe for the modern astronomer.

In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* Walter Benjamin refers to the way in which photography robs real objects of their aura and art objects of their ritualistic cult value. What Benjamin failed to anticipate was film inself as ritualistic cult object. *All About Eve*—like *Casablanca, The Outcast of the Islands, One-Eyed Jacks, The Maltese Falcon, On the Waterfront, Now, Voyager, The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*—is a cult film watched ad infinitum on TV or at all-night Bogart, Davis, Brando film debauches in such theatres as the Elgin in New York City. At the Elgin the faithful sit through trilogies and tetralogies from 12 to 6 A.M. to hear their favorite lines coming out of their favorite faces:

"He gave me no selection." (Brando to Malden after killing Timothy Carey in *One-Eyed Jacks*)
"Life is foul." (Richardson to himself in *The Outcast of the Islands*)
"You are my shame." (Richardson to Howard in *Outcast*)

"You're maudlin and full of self-pity. You're magnificent." (Sanders to Davis in *All About Eve*)
"I don't like the country. The crickets make me nervous." (Brando to Saint in *On the Waterfront*)
"We may not have the moon, Jerry. But at least we have the stars." (Davis to Heinreid in *Now, Voyager*)
"Is this the last of Rio?" (The dying Robinson to no one in particular in *Little Caesar.* Or to the film-maker, the true arbiter in this matter.)

The film cultist waits for his moments in a different fashion from the theater or opera buff. The latter dote on the way their heroes render somone else's creation. But cult-film dialogue is completely identified with the film personality. "Here's looking at you, kid" can only come from Bogart, no one else. The Elgin is our version of Plato's cave. Except that the prisoners savor their servitude. When the lights go on at 6, to reveal a blank screen, the desolate viewers, eyes forsaken, stumble like fearful vampires into the dawn. What lights on and screen blank had revealed was the appalling fact that behind Appearances was—nothing.

Sanders committed suicide in 1972, bidding adieu to "this sweet cesspool" because he was "bored." He died in character. Why couldn't he have been satisfied watching *All About Eve* for the rest of his life? In a sufficiently humane, technologically advanced society, those afflicted with unbearable ennui could be given the Proustian option of watching their past on film, with freeze-frame, reverse, and slow-motion buttons at their side. For film actors, who already have this option (their past on film = their past films), the trouble is that they can never appreci-

ate themselves or their films as we do. Their delightful idiosyncrasy is apparent only to others; being inside the fragmented, out-of-sequential-order, carpentered making of a film destroys the illusion of being *in* it. That illusion belongs only to the viewer. So Sanders has disappeared while the illusion of him haunts late-night movies on television. Such a here-he-isn't, there-he-is polarity, our modern literalization of Plato's allegory, would have terrified the old philosopher, seeing his metaphor for real.

When such as Davis, Howard, Bergman, Olivier, Brando, and Hepburn appear on talk shows, they want to talk about their life (social concerns, anecdotes) not their films. They don't see their films—as cult objects—the way we do. They don't see their films at all. In a certain science fiction story, a man in his office suddenly sees it being dismantled by stagehands as, at the same time, his mistress-secretary removes her wig and abruptly exits. The man is an actor who has fallen off the edge. The stars see nothing but the dismantling. We could watch *Casablanca* over and over forever, but Bogart and Bergman were never even in *Casablanca*. This kind of dislocation may not seem so true of someone like Jean Pierre Léaud, who though he has lived his life from one film to another, just the way his persona in *Day for Night* has (when Truffaut tells him in *Day for Night* that for people like them film is everything and "life" of no consequence, one sees all the films they've made together in a flash—Léaud from 14 to 30), inhabits films so apparently filled with the actual texture of street-café-apartment life that there seems little or no divorce from the real world. But for Léaud, too, the streets, cafés, and apartments of his films have only been *mise-en-scène*.

In *Three Into Two Won't Go,* Rod Steiger and Claire Bloom played a husband and wife at the butt-end of their marriage. Steiger and Bloom's real-life marriage had recently disintegrated, and there they were reenacting their miseries for the camera. Taylor and Burton, Dewhurst and Scott have done the same thing. Making love, bickering, pretending to feel what they had really felt—everything is grist for public display. The "real" scenes between them, in the narrow confines of a kitchen or bedroom without a camera lens to carry the emotion to infinity, must have seemed unbearably unamplified. Why waste all that juicy emotion on just themselves? For beings like these the real world must seem shadowy and vague unless used as a locale for the recorded display of emotion. For them, true denizens of Bishop Berkeley's world, what goes unrecorded never truly happens.

Films are watched, photographs are looked at. "Looking" is considered intentful activity, adult scrutiny of an object. "Watching" is considered childish, passive, voyeuristic. Freeze frames and photographs within a film coolly alert the mind; we suddenly look intently, like intelligent adults, rather than watch for the next surprise, like idiot children. Photographs have elitist status in a film; they are incongruous "arrests" worthy *per se* of attention. In *Calling Northside 777,* the blown-up photo of a newsboy and what it signifies is the only epiphany in the film. In *Blow-Up* the photo enlargements are the film's distinction, the thing most worth looking at.

It's adult to be a walking camera, seeking out your own insights, performing your own tracks, pans, and close-ups. It's childish to gape in wonder at someone else's viewpoint, as if you were blind and had to be steered through the streets by a sighted helper. *Don't Look Now* has been admired for its visual brio. But, ultimately, are we stimulated or depressed by Nicolas Roeg's prestidigitations? Do we really want to watch Sutherland and Christie zipping through the Kama Sutra? Why should *they* be having all the fun? (Whatever reasons people go to films for, watching couples enjoying themselves more than the viewer possibly could—under the ideal guidance of the editor—is not one of them.) *Don't Look Now* demonstrates the true degradation of Plato's cave. Not that we are prisoners of images but that we are *spectators* of them. Rather than finding our own images we merely witness another's. And the more energetically strained the "show," the less energized and more

constrained the viewer. When the images are, to quote Dr. Johnson's pained description of the metaphysical poets, "yoked by violence together" to yield certain metaphysical meanings either too obscure for comprehension or too strained for credibility, then it is indeed time to "pay no attention to that man behind the curtain," as the frantically prestidigitating Wizard of Oz tries to persuade Dorothy and her friends against the evidence of their own senses. Overt image manipulation equals overt viewer manipulation. In the best films there are those cool oases where the film stops—where we stop—to look. *Don't Look Now* never stops. It force-feeds us with its conjunctions, a pinball machine of visual analogues and concurrences. And like all such mechanisms there is no conceptual import beyond the perceptual connections. We find ourselves in a spiritual wasteland of sheerly visual correspondences. Though we are mistaken if we demand reality from a film, we do have a right to ask for what might be called "felt meaning." Life has it, why shouldn't film? And if life were as meaningless as Roeg's film, then wouldn't it be a worthy achievement of film to fill the void?

The subtext of films is never life, only other films (conversely, the subtext of life is film). *Fahrenheit 451* is supposedly a homage to the word, but the great literary classics of one's youth are lovingly sacrificed to the flames. The glory of the film is not books but book-burning. Words are apotheosized as they slowly blacken, curl, and disappear. The subtext of these stunning dissolutions is not fascism in the thirties, or even Dickens and Defoe, but the old cinematic device of the calendar leaf, curling and finally being torn loose to convey the idea of passing time. Beginning with any film the true cinephile can free-associate a reverie at no point penetrable by daylight. In *Don't Look Now* Donald Sutherland ultimately finds himself confronted with an infernal version of his dead child. And *we* find ourselves with Vera Miles, confronting Norman Bates's mommy (or Mrs. Bates's mummy) in the fruit cellar. Underneath the color slide of Brando's upper-class Fletcher Christian is Gable's children's-book stereotype; Truffaut and Chabrol make films about Hitchcock's films; *Citizen Kane* reappears in *Day for Night, Red River* in *The Last Picture Show,* and *The Passion of Joan of Arc* in *My Life to Live;* Vincent Price's later career in hokey horror films is a whole substratum of *Theatre of Blood* (as is his only appearance in a Shakespearian film, *Tower of London);* the mute actress Elizabeth Vogler, in *Persona,* recalls no one so much as the mute magician, Vogler, in *The Magician; The Elusive Corporal* makes one think of *Grand Illusion;* the Dalio of *The Rules of the Game* has fallen upon lesser days in *Casablanca* and *To Have and To Have Not.* Actors remind us not of people, only of themselves in other films.

In the night sky the constellations remain constant throughout eternity. Bogart, Greenstreet, and Lorre stay in fixed relationship from film to film. Like the mortal deaths of their counterparts in ancient myth, theirs, too, have been transcended by star status. Their films are cryogenic capsules, or vampire coffins whose contents are destructible only if exposed to daylight. The constellations remain constant: von Sydow, Thulin, Björnstrand; Davis, Rains, Heinreid; Brando, Steiger, Malden, Cobb; Wayne, Bond, McLaglen; Welles, Cotten, Coulouris, Sloan. In a passing auto, seeing the huge drive-in screens at night while the audience is invisible, one can imagine the planet after life has disappeared, with projectors left running and screens filled, a busy simulacrum of life without end, Plato's cave without the prisoners. Isn't that the condition of film screening, anyway? When

there are viewers, aren't they dead to the real world and "projected" on to the screen world? When the planet is lifeless, the night sky will still be populous.

Walter Benjamin explains modern man's mania for film as a need to "bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly . . . [and to] overcome the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction." (For "reproduction" substitute "image.") According to Susan Sontag, "The most grandiose result of the photographic enterprises is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads—as an anthology of images." Film is a way of defanging the real world by replacing it with a parallel world. The menace of reality—that it constantly demands either self-assertion or self-defense—is replaced by a photo album of one's favorite films. Imagery holds no danger except in dreams (where it is no different from the real world). The real world is other, is outside, is as alien as Mars. Film is instantaneously incorporated. We're not—dangerously—in it, it's—comfortably—in us. Even so, film might be somewhat threatening were it novel. But instead it is tautological. Even when we see a film the first time, genre expectations, iconographic conventions, familiarity with the actors all provide the security of ritual. When a film has already been seen, the feeling of cozy warmth is absolute. Film is addictive because of all human needs and of all film's satisfactions, recognition is foremost.

When the film addict occasionally finds himself, perforce, in the real world, film rescues him. The evidence that film doesn't reflect life but, on the contrary, is reflected by it is that one's old sled acquires a definite aura after Rosebud (contradicting Benjamin's assertion that film robs objects of their aura). Three flagpoles swaying in the cold night air and emitting a metallic sound in front of an empty administration building on a deserted college campus might at first sound a desolate echo in the heart of a lone passerby. But as soon as there is *recognition* (one remembers an analogous scene from

L'Eclisse), the alienation is gone. The landscape is even friendly. That's what Antonioni has done for us. A kind of Christ, he has assumed the pain of alienation for us so that whenever the otherness of a landscape threatens us we can be comforted by the realization that Antonioni has, overcoming his initial dismay, already colonized it. Antonioni has defanged the Martian aspect of our world by translating it into his films. The Martian aspect of our world is recognized as (in terms of) a reification of Antonioni, so that when we encounter it we experience *déjà-vu*, the tautology of life imitating art. We know the enemy, he already exists in art.

What the camera shoots and film presents are two different things. The latter consists of devices and effects—formal operations peculiar to the mechanics of the medium. Therefore, all naturalistic approaches to cinema are as ontologically confused as the naive viewer who shoots the villain. Those bullet holes will be in the hero when he occupies that space on the screen. What film's formal operations are able to achieve—in terms of imagery, space-time manipulations, etc.—are comparable only to dream operations. Therefore, it is no criticism of *Ryan's Daughter* and *Elvira Madigan* to label their images pathetic fallacies, for if dream imagery is made to fit the moods and passions of the dreamer, then film imagery should reflect and amplify the emotions of the characters. It is a criticism to say of those two films, the first in particular, that the pathetic fallacies are vapid clichés.

Though not "redemptive" of reality, film is analogous to reality in a number of ways. It, too, is both chronological and spatial, moves from cause to effect, depends on the motivation of agents, etc, etc. Film, like life, also seems to be entropic. This may be illusory, the apparently progressive fatigue of a film actually being the fatigue of the viewer. (A whole phenomenology of film viewing is as yet unexplored: the effect on response of the all-night viewings at the Elgin; the effect on response of multiple viewings of the same film, both in a limited time

span and at various periods in one's life; what kinds of film experience sharpen perception, what kinds dull; etc., etc.). Undoubtedly, viewer receptivity is greater initially, for the same reason that children's percepts are fresher than adults'. But there also seems to be something entropic in the very nature of films. The problem may be endemic to narrative structure. Stories, like life, wind down. Films wind down in the sense that the circles of action and interaction narrow and rigidify. What had been open-ended and limitless in possibility becomes deterministic and predictable. Films lose their options. They become straitjacketed by the development of their structural premises just as surely as lives do. A film's narrative fate, like a child's, is not that apparent at first. But as the film unfolds, ruling out certain possibilities just as surely as it seizes on others, it comes up with "answers," and when have answers ever been as marvelous as questions? An exception, perhaps, is *Vertigo,* in which the "explanation" for Madeleine takes the film, in the person of the mundane Judy, out of the realm of the supernatural into the more clearly defined—i.e., "limited"—but also more satisfyingly ironic, psychologically interesting world of human cause and effect. We then get a series of Pirandelloesque twists that more than compensate for the loss of mystery. But for most films the feeling that anything can happen dies painfully, without compensation. In retrospect everything is seen as a sacrifice to outcome. To think of the marvelous ambiguity of the first few minutes of *Don't Look Now* and then of the grand-guignol anticlimax is to weep. The first 20 minutes or so of *Jules et Jim* had an unpredictable, open-ended quality rarely seen in film before, but by the later sequences the film had lost almost all of its seeming spontaneity. The trio that has at first such flexible, non-excluding interaction with each other and the world becomes progressively rigid, narrow, predictable, and, ultimately, lifeless. Films run backward would blossom like flowers, but narrative, unfortunately, is unidirectional. In *Day for Night* Truffaut shows a stunt man's stunt run backwards, but he is not defeating entropy, only

cheating it momentarily. The filmic solution to personal entropy—provision made for the optional viewing of one's antecedent selves *in situ* for the rest of one's life—has no application to film entropy. Seeing a life over, though we already know its constricted destination, is an experience full of revelations. We've never really seen it because we've been in it. But seeing a film over, as godlike in our hindsight we are now equipped with significations for the early signs, may enable us to understand a few things better sooner, but for that very reason robs us of our initial response when all significations seemed possible.
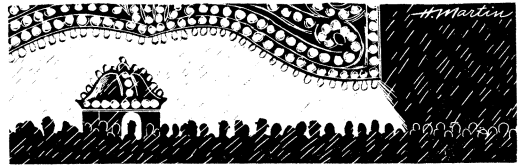
When Susan Sontag referred to "mere images of the truth," her subject was still photography. The motion picture introduces its own time-space truths, undreamt of in Zeno's philosophy. How would Zeno have formulated the logical impossibility of movement over *unreal* space? On the other hand the jump cut and stop-action photography fit in nicely with Zeno's idea that motion is, in reality, a matter of "stills." Also consonant with Zeno's parodoxes is the very process of motion pictures: "truth 24 frames a second." No mysterious entity called *movement* takes place either within a frame or between frames. The projection process confirms the epistemological implication of Zeno's paradoxes, that motion is in the eye of the beholder. Zeno would be amused by the semantic paradox of "motion picture": a picture in motion? motion within a picture?

Film's condensations and ellipses, dissolves and cuts and intercuts, accelerations and decelerations, enlargements and reductions, reversals and composites seem to create the miraculous supernature man has always been looking for. No clearer disparity exists between life and

film than life's resistance to time-space-identity manipulation and film's facility for it. The license is so total in film that there should be, as a control, a self-evident reason for every manipulation. A general effect of zaniness is insufficient reason for accelerated movement in *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*. The reason for the acceleration of the porno triangle scene in *A Clockwork Orange* is self-evident. Kurosawa's use of slow motion in the death of the kidnapper in the opening sequence of *Seven Samurai* compels us to look at death early in the film; later there will be only time to watch it. Roeg's deceleration of food-laden plates toppling and spilling over a fainting Julie Christie and of Donald Sutherland trying to resuscitate his drowned child is, in each case, an excess of manner over matter. But Hitchcock's backtrack into a mundane, indifferent street from a house in which murder is taking place is as pointed as Brueghel's *Fall of Icarus*.

Where life presents a generally unbroken time-space continuum, film consists of temporal-spatial fragments more or less obviously pieced together. More obviously in the Odessa steps sequence from *Potemkin,* the shower sequence from *Psycho,* the serial breakfast scenes spanning Kane's first marriage in *Citizen Kane,* the film-ending composite of *Persona,* the blow-up sequence from *Blow-Up,* the final bandit raid in *Seven Samurai,* and almost all of *Muriel.* Less obviously in the films of directors less self-conscious in their use of the medium, such as Ford, Hawks, Ozu, Renoir. Film is always reconstituting itself. Appearances and disappearance, being and non-being are the meat it feeds on. Since film images, like mental images, can be juggled in a way solid things can't, film disturbs our epistemological assumptions. Put another way: the formal operations of film correspond to the formal operations of the human mind as it observes, remembers, fantasizes, shifts its attention, etc., and therefore calls these operations into question.

An important distinction between our response to film and our response to the objective world is that in the case of film we are not responding to things but to someone else's percepts of things. And these percepts join with each other to form their own structure, peculiar and autonomous. But though neither a window on nor a mirror of the objective world, film must appear to have some of the unforced, "uncut" quality of the objective world. When film seems too overtly selective in what it shows and doesn't show, so that our eyeballs ache like horses yanked around via reins, bit, and riding crop, ipso facto we have a bad film. A classic example is *See No Evil,* in which a murderer stalking a blind girl is continually depicted from his boots down, simply to conceal his identity from the audience. If he were only "sensed" from the heroine's limited point of view there might be some epistemological cogency to the film, but as it is the device is transparently only for our mystification. We are the ones with blinders, so adjusted that we see just so much of the villain. But since we can see everything else in the film's environment perfectly well, there is no sensory relationship between our limitation and the heroine's. Other examples include *The Other,* with its insulting zooms, pans, and cuts, and *8½,* whose montages are dumped like readymades into our optic-cortical laps (solipsists like Fellini never dream there are other nervous systems eager to make their own connections). Who could possibly be responsible for the kind of neatly tied perceptual bundles packaged for us in films like *8½* but a psychoanalyst or an over-manipulative director? The human mind, at any rate, either awake or dreaming, certainly doesn't form *Gestalten* like those. If film by its essence constantly reconstitutes its reality out of fragments, its wholes should be left holey—i.e., fragments should be left visible on the perceptual level, untranslated into significance—to give the viewer room to make his own hookups. For example, in *Don't Look Now* if the drowned girl, the gargoyle, and the homicidal gnome had been left to the viewer to juxtapose and interpret, the result would have been no more mystifying while the process of association would have been left to the grateful viewer (in either case the only con-

clusion to be drawn is that sheer visual correspondence can be as meaningless in film as in life). But then should Eisenstein's three lions be scattered rather than juxtaposed, as they are, in sequence to give the illusion of a single lion springing to its feet? No. Because the symbolic message—the People's spirit awakening—is (a) otherwise impossible to suggest in terms of the lion image, and (b) left to us to deduce. But in Roeg's case, we seem to be having some kind of coded message thrown at us, though actually there is none except what our own fancy can superimpose.

If the essence of film is that what we see is whatever has been cut into the frame (and what we don't see has been, just as consciously, excluded from the frame), then a delicate balance must be kept between surprise and expectation. And by this criterion, too, *Don't Look Now* fails, over-weighted as it is toward surprise. The best films walk the tightrope: *Rules of the Game, L'Avventura, Vertigo, The Fire Within, Four Bags Full, McCabe and Mrs. Miller.* Each unpredictable from shot to shot, yet inevitable.

HANS BARKHAUSEN

Footnote to the History of Riefenstahl's 'Olympia'

Leni Riefenstahl has maintained that her two 1936 Olympics films, *Fest der Völker* and *Fest der Schönheit,* were produced by her own company, commissioned by the organizing committee of the International Olympic Committee, and made over the protest of Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels. In "Olympia, the Film of the Eleventh Olympic Games in Berlin, 1936," a paper written to defend herself in 1958, she says: "The truth is that neither the Ministry of Propaganda nor other National Socialist party or government bodies had any influence on the Olympic Games or on the production or design of the Olympia films."

The voluminous documentary material of the former Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment and the materials of the former Reich Ministry of Finances, today deposited in the Federal Archives in Koblenz (the central depository of the Federal Republic of Germany) tell a different story.

These records show that the two Olympia films were financed by the Nazi government, that the Olympia Film Company was founded by that government, that the government made money by distributing the films through the Tobis-Filmkunst Company, and that the government, finally, ordered the liquidation of the Olympia Film Company, in which Leni Riefenstahl and her brother were partners.

The true story of the origin of the two Olympics films of 1936 begins with a short memo written in the Reich Finance Ministry on October 16, 1935, saying: "On the order of Herr Minister Goebbels, Ministerial Counselor Ott, on October 15, proposed the following special appropriations to me: (1) for promotion of the Olympic Games: RM 300–350,000; (2) for the Olympic film: RM 1,500,000."

Ministerial Counselor Ott was the budget expert in the Propaganda Ministry, much respected, and rather liberal by the standards of the times. A carbon of the memo was sent to him by the Finance Ministry, and he initialed it on October 17, 1935. The words "to me" evidently refer to the section chief in charge in the Finance Ministry; his name in the note is recorded only by his initial "M."

The memo continues, with reference to point (2), that is, the Olympic film:

"The Ministry of Propaganda submits the draft of a contract for the production of a film of the

clusion to be drawn is that sheer visual correspondence can be as meaningless in film as in life). But then should Eisenstein's three lions be scattered rather than juxtaposed, as they are, in sequence to give the illusion of a single lion springing to its feet? No. Because the symbolic message—the People's spirit awakening—is (a) otherwise impossible to suggest in terms of the lion image, and (b) left to us to deduce. But in Roeg's case, we seem to be having some kind of coded message thrown at us, though actually there is none except what our own fancy can superimpose.

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Leni Riefenstahl has maintained that her two 1936 Olympics films, *Fest der Völker* and *Fest der Schönheit,* were produced by her own company, commissioned by the organizing committee of the International Olympic Committee, and made over the protest of Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels. In "Olympia, the Film of the Eleventh Olympic Games in Berlin, 1936," a paper written to defend herself in 1958, she says: "The truth is that neither the Ministry of Propaganda nor other National Socialist party or government bodies had any influence on the Olympic Games or on the production or design of the Olympia films."

The voluminous documentary material of the former Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment and the materials of the former Reich Ministry of Finances, today deposited in the Federal Archives in Koblenz (the central depository of the Federal Republic of Germany) tell a different story.

These records show that the two Olympia films were financed by the Nazi government, that the Olympia Film Company was founded by that government, that the government made money by distributing the films through the Tobis-Filmkunst Company, and that the government, finally, ordered the liquidation of the Olympia Film Company, in which Leni Riefenstahl and her brother were partners.

The true story of the origin of the two Olympics films of 1936 begins with a short memo written in the Reich Finance Ministry on October 16, 1935, saying: "On the order of Herr Minister Goebbels, Ministerial Counselor Ott, on October 15, proposed the following special appropriations to me: (1) for promotion of the Olympic Games: RM 300–350,000; (2) for the Olympic film: RM 1,500,000."

Ministerial Counselor Ott was the budget expert in the Propaganda Ministry, much respected, and rather liberal by the standards of the times. A carbon of the memo was sent to him by the Finance Ministry, and he initialed it on October 17, 1935. The words "to me" evidently refer to the section chief in charge in the Finance Ministry; his name in the note is recorded only by his initial "M."

The memo continues, with reference to point (2), that is, the Olympic film:

"The Ministry of Propaganda submits the draft
of a contract for the production of a film of the

Olympics, according to which Miss Leni Riefenstahl is commissioned to produce a film of the summer Olympics. The cost is budgeted at RM 1,500,000.

"I have pointed out that this film is certain to bring revenue, so that there would be no difficulty in financing the costs by private enterprise, for example by the Film-Kredit-Bank. This method would avoid government financing. But Ministerial Counselor Ott replied that Herr Minister Goebbels requests the prefinancing with *government* funds.

"According to information from Ministerial Counselor Ott, Herr Minister Goebbels will request the proposed funds in the cabinet meeting of October 18, 1935." [Emphasis in the original.]

This is what actually happened.

In the contract mentioned in the memo Leni Riefenstahl is commissioned to produce and direct the film of the Olympics. The contract repeats the costs of RM 1,500,000. This amount was to be disbursed in four installments:

RM 300,000 on November 15, 1935
RM 700,000 on April 1, 1936
RM 200,000 on November 1, 1936
RM 300,000 on January 1, 1937.

We shall soon see that these amounts were not enough to produce the film.

Section 3 of the contract with Riefenstahl says:

"From the amount of RM 1,500,000 Miss Riefenstahl is to receive RM 250,000 for her work, which is to cover expenses for travel, automobile, and social affairs." The contract stipulated—and this turned out to be an important provision—that Leni Riefenstahl was "to account to the Reich Ministry for Propaganda and Enlightenment for the disbursement of the RM 1,500,000 by presenting receipts." The contract specifically reconfirms that "she is solely responsible for the general artistic direction and overall organization of the Olympic film."

In her 1958 defense paper she writes: "On higher orders (Dr. Goebbels), the German news cameramen, who were the most important elements in the making of documentary pictures, were removed from Leni Riefenstahl's control."

Section 6 of the contract says:

"The Reich Ministry for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment undertakes (as previously in the production of the Reich Party Day film *Triumph des Willens*) to place the German

Riefenstahl in 1952, in Milan to set up a winter sports film.

weekly news shows [*Wochenschauen*] of the Ufa, Fox, and Tobis at the disposal of Miss Riefenstahl and to obligate them to make accessible the material filmed by them for the Olympia film."

The amounts that Riefenstahl was to pay for this material were spelled out by the Propaganda Ministry.

I presume the *Wochenschau* companies were not enthusiastic about having their cameramen take orders from Riefenstahl. But *Wochenschau* material was in fact delivered to her, as shown by the "Itemized List for Herr Minister, April 1937." It states all costs incurred until then for the Olympia film, with a total of RM 1,509,-178.09, which includes as item 11: "Raw film and *Wochenschau* material: RM 220,-003.41." Whether Riefenstahl actually used this material in her film is a different question. But in her distribution contract with Tobis this possibility is specifically spelled out for legal reasons.

In her postwar interviews Riefenstahl consistently referred to "her own company" that produced the Olympia film. In her 1958 defense paper she also says: "Goebbels did not want Leni Riefenstahl to show the victorious black athletes in the Olympia film. When L. R. refused to comply with these requests and did not honor them later either, Goebbels ordered the Film-Kredit-Bank, which was answerable to his Ministry, to refuse all further credits to the Olympia-Film Company (a private firm)." The parenthesis is in the original. These statements, however, are products of Leni Riefenstahl's imagination. What are the facts?

When a film company was funded, it was general practice to deposit in a court of law an initial capital of RM 50,000, after entering the firm in the official Trade Register. The funds for the founding of the Olympia Film Company were provided by the Reich government. But the Reich, in this case, was parsimonious. Hence Ministerial Counselor Ott, on January 30, 1936, wrote to the Berlin-Charlottenburg Court: "The Olympia Film Company is being set up at the request of the government and financed by funds supplied by the government. The means needed by the company to produce the film are likewise supplied exclusively by the government. The company has had to be established because the government does not wish to appear publicly as the producer of this film. It is planned to liquidate the company when the production of the film is concluded."

Evidently this was still not spelled out with sufficient clarity for the Court. Therefore the Reich Film Chamber, the body responsible for the founding of film companies, wrote to the Court on February 12, 1936: "We are not talking, then, about a private enterprise, or about an enterprise with ordinary commercial aims, but about a company founded exclusively for the purpose of external organization and production of the said film. It appears unwise [untunlich] for the government itself to appear as the producer." Hence Leni Riefenstahl's fictitious company was required to pay no more than RM 20,000 as original capital, from the funds provided by the government. Still, the Examination

Board of the Propaganda Ministry complained on October 16, 1936, that "the original capital has not been paid in up to now."

The report of the General Accounting Office which contains these words was an embarrassment for Riefenstahl which she never got over. It was probably one reason why she hated the Propaganda Ministry. Hence I will have to discuss that report further.

The auditors of the GAO, like those of any official agency, even in the Third Reich, were petty bureaucrats. The GAO had tackled audits for other agencies of the government, but presumably it had never dealt with a film production, and certainly never had to deal with such a temperamental and self-assured film artist as Riefenstahl. The auditors however chose to treat her strictly as the manager of the Olympia Film Company.

The auditors complain that as early as September 16, 1936, of the government-agreed RM 1,500,000 "RM 1,200,000 were requested by the Company and paid out, although by that time only RM 1,000,000 were due." They complain further that "the use of these funds contradicts the order concerning government economies to administer official funds economically and carefully." They add that there were no economies "in general expenses such as per diem payments, tips, meals, drinks, charges, and special charges." "Rarely," they say, "was there a meeting in which the company did not pay for breakfast, lunch, or dinner." The auditors take issue with the fact that the Geyer Works, where Riefenstahl edited the Olympia film and had it printed, on the occasion of its business anniversary was presented with two flower baskets and a gift, valued together at RM 117; that the firm paid RM 202.40 for a business course attended by Leni Riefenstahl's secretary; that RM 10.17 was paid without specification for the "Reich Race Research Office"; that "Miss Riefenstahl and her business manager Grosskopf were reimbursed RM 18 and 15.75 for lost fountain pens." It goes on in this way for pages— thousands of bills or receipts were examined, and where the auditors saw fit were commented on. A few passages read like comedy: those admin-

istering money are chided by the sentence: "The company has no strongbox." Business manager Grosskopf, being responsible for the safety of the cash, "was obliged to take the money home with him" and during the examination on October 3, 1936, "had produced RM 14,000 to 15,000 in various amounts from different pockets of his clothing." The outraged auditors state: "Such practices are verboten."

Incidentally, I happen to know Grosskopf and met him on occasion during the months when the Olympia film was in production. He was a solid, conscientious older businessman, visibly bothered by a situation that was beyond his control.

Goebbels treated this report, presented to him by Ministerial Counselor Hanke, chief of the Ministerial Secretariat (later Gauleiter in Breslau), far more generously than Riefenstahl will allow today. With a green pencil he wrote across the report "Let's not be petty" and ordered Hanke to talk with Riefenstahl. However, when Ministerial Counselor Ott presented Goebbels with an additional request for RM 500,000 because the RM 1,500,000 "presumably will not be sufficient," he wrote: "RM 500,000 are out of the question." But one can sense that this phrasing left the door open. At any rate, he approved an additional RM 300,000.

He refused Ott's suggestion "to include the Film-Kredit-Bank in the future, because it can factually check on the expenditures of the Olympia Film Company," but shrewd Ott has added to his suggestion: "One will have to assume, of course, that Miss Riefenstahl will fight such an order with all means at her disposal." Besides, observes Ott, "it could be undesirable for a private firm, such as the Film-Kredit-Bank, to have intimate information about a company entirely set up by the government." He suggests that perhaps the Reich Film Chamber should do the auditing.

It was undoubtedly disconcerting for Riefenstahl to have to answer the various criticisms of the auditors. Her annoyance was understandable; but there was a second reason to be annoyed. Goebbels ordered the Reich Film Chamber to make available "Judge Pfennig of the Reich Film Chamber as advisor to the Olympia Film Company." He was to ensure the "purposeful and economic use of the means of this company." The Reich Chamber, on its part, was to report to him, Goebbels, "about Judge Pfennig's activities and observations." Goebbels signed this order with his own hand.

Pfennig was the Legal Counsel of the Reich Film Chamber. Earlier he had worked for the major German film producing company, the Ufa. After Hugenberg in 1927 had taken over the Ufa and had appointed the Director General of the Sherl Publishing Company, Ludwig Klitzsch, as Director General of Ufa, economy was demonstrably practiced. As early as April 1927 Klitzsch appointed Pfennig, then a law clerk, as director of his secretariat and informed the Board of Directors accordingly. (Ufa, Board of Directors protocol No. 18, April 28, 1927). Klitzsch, however, could economize only as long as Goebbels would let him. But after about 1937 Goebbels increasingly prevented economy. It must have been Leni Riefenstahl's second great grief to have Judge Pfennig appointed to supervise her, even though disguised as observer.

In her paper of 1958 Riefenstahl says that she concluded a distribution contract with Tobis, but this tells little about the ownership of the Olympia Film Company. A government-owned company needed a distribution contract just as much as a privately owned one. The contract, concluded December 4, 1936, between Olympia Film Company, represented by Leni Riefenstahl, and Tobis-Cinema Company, represented by production chief Fritz Mainz, specifically points out that the production costs will be about RM 1,500,000. Tobis agreed to a guarantee for RM 800,000 for the first part and at least RM 200,000 for the second part of the film. What this contract did not mention, however, was the obligation by Tobis to account not only to Olympia Film Company but also to the Ministry of Propaganda. This was duly done, however; one copy of the accounting went to Olympia Film Company and two copies to the Ministry of Propaganda, one of which was routed to Ministerial Counselor Ott.

It took Leni Riefenstahl eighteen months to

complete the two films, a period of time envisioned by the contract with Tobis. The première took place on April 20, 1938, Hitler's 49th birthday, at Ufa Palace at the Zoo in Berlin in festive surroundings. There was no indication of a rift between Goebbels and Leni Riefenstahl, such as she has talked and written about.

As early as September 26, 1938, Ministerial Counselor Ott was able to report to the Ministry of finance that "a million Reichsmark of unplanned revenue have flowed into the coffers of the Reich treasury."

At that time the *Rechnungshof* (General Accounting Office) remembered that the understanding had been to liquidate the Olympia Film Company on the completion of its task. On November 5, 1938, the agency inquired of the Reich Minister for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment "when the liquidation of the Olympia Film Company is to be expected." On November 21 the reply came, saying that "according to present developments the end of business is to be expected in fiscal year 1939."

Barely six months later, on May 17, 1940, that is after the start of the war, the Propaganda Ministry was able to report to the Reich Finance Ministry that the RM 1,800,000, "needed for the production of the Olympia films and advanced by the government, had been repaid in *full* to the Reich." The liquidation of the Olympia Film Company, the report added, had been decided in a company meeting on December 6, 1939, to be effective December 31; the liquidation was to be carried out by business manager Grosskopf. Future revenues from the film would "as up to now be paid into a holding account of the Reich Treasury."

The liquidation process, in fact, took two more years. In the middle of Hitler and Goebbels' "total war," the tireless Ministerial Counselor Ott, still in the same position at the Propaganda Ministry (remarkable in view of the frequent changes in other departments of the agency), on February 1, 1943, reported to the Reich Finance Ministry that "the liquidation of the Olympia Film Company has been completed." According to the accounting submitted "the total net gain transferred to the Reich amounted to RM 114,066.45."

When a king dies another must be immediately proclaimed; hence the final paragraph states: "The further utilization and administration of the two films of the Olympics have been transferred to the *Riefenstahl Film Company* [my emphasis], which will report quarterly about the financial status." No inkling, indeed, of hostility between Propaganda Ministry and Riefenstahl.

Thanks to Adolf Hitler the German Reich has ceased to exist, but Leni Riefenstahl is still permitted to exploit her two Olympia films of 1936/1938. She does so now on the basis of a thirty-year contract concluded ten years ago between her and the Transit Film Company, which administers the film rights of the German Federal Republic. Of course, from time to time, she has to settle accounts.

BARRY SALT

Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures

It is nowadays fairly widely accepted that individual styles can be recognized for at least some film directors in the formal aspects of their films as well as in the content. However, just what constitutes these individualities of style has up to now been more a matter of loose assertion than demonstration, and indeed there have been some rather questionable suggestions on these points. This is hardly surprising since most of the ideas advanced have been suggested by people without any knowledge of how a film is actually put together, after seeing one or two projections of the films considered. Thus from time to time one reads statements such as "Fritz Lang, like Renoir, tends to film in long shot . . . ," references to a director's fondness for long takes, and so on. The feeling often seems to be that many directors have sharply different styles that are easily recognized. This is an attractive idea, but when one looks into the matter more carefully it becomes doubtful that the situation is that simple. To lend some objectivity to this area, and also in emulation of the statistical analyses of features of literary and musical style that have been in progress since the thirties,[1] the preliminary work reported here has been done.

The obvious approach in searching for individual characteristics in the formal side of a director's films is to consider those variables that are most directly under the director's control; also to a certain extent those that are easiest to quantify. First, we might expect the duration of shots to vary from director to director, some preferring to shoot a script scene with fewer and longer takes than others. Hence the number of shots of different lengths in a sample of films was determined. Also, for the same films I determined the number of shots of different types in terms of closeness of the camera to the actors: i.e., whether the shots were close-ups, medium

shots, etc. (The definition of these types of shots was as follows: Big Close-Up shows head only, Close-Up shows head and shoulders, Medium Close Shot includes body from waist up, Medium Shot includes hip to head of upright actors, Medium Long Shot shows body from below the knee upwards, Long Shot shows the full height of the body, and Very Long Shot shows the actor small in the frame.)

A further classification of shots in terms of camera movement was made. In this case it is to be noted that where small pans and tilts up to several degrees were made merely to keep the actors nicely framed, which is an automatic operation by the camera operator from the early thirties onward, the shots were classified as static, as were those where the camera was rigidly fixed relatively to the actors, the background behind them moving, e.g., an actor filmed in a car. The angle of shots—whether low or high angle—and the extent of angling was not generally considered, though it could well have been.

These analyses could be extended in various directions — an obviously important quantity being the strength of cut or, more exactly, the nature of shot transition from each shot to the next, using some quantitative consideration of strength of shot transition.

Though it would not be simple, it would be possible to give a rough measure of the strength of a cut in terms of the angular change of camera position and change of closeness to the actors (or other objects) across the cut—due allowance being made for the fundamentally different cases of an action filmed with multiple cameras simultaneously, and for the action being reperformed for the second camera position after the cut. Further factors also have to be introduced for amount of movement in the frame in cuts on action, and for sound continuity across the cut.

Renoir's RULES OF THE GAME: *deep focus and close-up.*

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

To establish the existence of an individual formal style in the work of a director, it is necessary to compare not only a sufficient number of his films with each other, but also—which is always forgotten—to compare his films with films of similar genre made by other directors at the same time. This is essential to avoid describing as characteristic of a director's work features which are in fact shared with the work of other directors. An even more absolute norm for any period is really needed as well, to give a standard of comparison that reflects the technical and other constraints on the work of filmmakers at that time and place—namely the analysis of a large number of films both good and bad chosen completely at random.

In parenthesis, it should be said that this comparative approach should be applied to the discussions of the singularities of content as well as of form in a director's work. If this were done it would eliminate a lot of the wild overinterpretation of films that continues to be produced.

The particular sample of films examined in this study for comparison with the group of early thirties Renoir films are some way from fulfilling these conditions; though chosen pretty much at random (in the sense that they were obtained by people other than the present writer for other purposes), they are all usually considered *good* films, there are no bad or mediocre films of the thirties among them. A few silent films are included to give some pointers for future research.

The statistics of interest to us can be derived from the post-production cutting continuity of

a film if this is available. (Production companies almost always have had these made in recent decades.) Alternately, the statistics can be taken directly from a print of the film, as these were. In this case it is slightly easier and faster to work with 16mm copies, and the quickest method of extracting the shot lengths is with a synchronizer, and the other quantities with a variable speed moviola, though in general any film-viewing machine can be used.

For comparative purposes the number of shots for each range of shot lengths considered has been normalized to correspond to the number there would be if the movie was 90 minutes long. The actual number can be reclaimed by multiplying by the ratio of the actual length of the film to ninety minutes. The shot lengths can be left in film feet (to the nearest half foot) for either 16mm or 35mm as the case may be, as the laborious conversion to seconds gives nothing useful at this stage. However, the average shot length is given in seconds in the table below.

In justification of the estimation by sampling of the quantities in some cases, note that for instance in *Le Million* the first 1000 ft. gives an average shot length (A.S.L.) of 5.19 ft., the next 1000 ft. an A.S.L. of 5.47 ft., and the remaining 896 ft. an A.S.L. of 5.26 ft. against an overall A.S.L. for the whole film of 5.31 ft. Here the fluctuation of the A.S.L. is only a few percent from the parts, each about 27 minutes long, to the whole, and this variation is of the same order in all the quantities we examine. So a 30 to 40 minute sample should give satisfactory results, though of course analysis of the

whole film is preferable. This sort of result also suggests that differences in quantities have to be well above 10% to be significant for style considerations, and that those differences below are not; and it also shows that there is no point in pushing accuracy of measurement too far. The nearest second is quite enough for measurement of average shot length, for instance.

The distributions of types of shot are analyzed in terms of numbers of each type per 500 shots rather than for a standard 90 minutes, as the latter approach would depend on the average shot length as well, and not give directly, as we have here, the relative probability of the director choosing a particular type of shot. It might be useful to consider the relative total times spent in each type of shot during the course of the film, as also giving an indication of the director's preference for the use of that type of shot, but this possibilty is declined for the moment on the assumption that the results would be much the same as those we do obtain.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

Looking at the frequency distributions of shot length, a considerable similarity of overall shape is apparent. This is a surprise; a greater diversity for different film-makers was expected. The profiles of the distributions approximate in nearly all cases to that of the Poisson distribution—the distribution of randomly arrived at events or quantities observed with such things as the distance between cars on a highway. However, there are small deviations in two directions from the shapes of the Poisson distributions appropriate to the different average shot lengths: there are somewhat more short shots (of smaller length than average) in the case of *Le Million, Hallelujah, Sylvia Scarlett* and *The Public Enemy,* perhaps indicating a conscious desire to keep the shots short; and alternatively, in the case of the Renoir films and *Kameradschaft,* there are a larger number of very lengthy shots, no doubt indicating a conscious desire to keep the shots going as long as possible without departing from conventional procedures of shooting a film. The extremely anomalous case of

Milestone's THE FRONT PAGE

The Front Page can only reflect definite and individual ideas that Milestone had at that time about how to break a script up into shots.

Altogether, as far as shot length distributions are concerned, the differentiation of Renoir's films from the rest is not great, and there is no real differentation of the other films one from another (with the single exception noted above), other than would be equally well provided by the average shot length taken alone. However, when we move on to look at the distribution of types of shot by camera distance it is apparent that we have a more definite differentiation of directors—Renoir's films are more like each other with respect to this quantity, which we shall call *closeness of shot,* than they are like other directors' films, and the films by the various other directors considered also differ appreciably one from the other. The exception to this are two films by Howard Hawks which are also more like each other than any other films are like them. Clair and Wellman concentrate about equally on the more distant shots (more than Renoir does), Pabst has virtually no close-ups in *Kameradschaft* and a heavy concentration on medium shots, *Sylvia Scarlett* has a strong concentration on closer shots, and so on.

As far as the silent films analyzed are concerned, the general shape of the shot length dis-

SHOT LENGTH DISTRIBUTIONS AS FOR 90-MINUTE FILM

(NUMBER OF SHOTS IN RANGE OF LENGTH INDICATED)

35mm feet	0–1	2–8	9–15	16–22	23–29	30–36	37–43	44–50	51–57	58–64	65–71	72–78	79–85	86–92	93–99	100+
The Hired Man	18	720	150	24	12	6										
Erotikon	9	561	227	31	17											
Kameradschaft	0	116	147	63	42	42	11	11	11							
The Front Page	18	232	13	31	31	9	23	4	9	13	0	0	0	0	4	
The Big Sleep	8	240	101	49	23	21	8	3	8	8	8	0	8	3		

16mm feet	0–½	1–3½	4–6½	7–9½	10–12½	13–15½	16–18½	19–21½	22–24½	25–27½	28–30½	31–33½	34–36½	37–39½	40–42½	43–45½	46+
Hallelujah	0	276	141	36	44	30	17	5	3	3	0	0	3	3			1
Public Enemy	9	259	119	56	22	16	10	0	0	3	0	0	3	3			
Le Million	15	314	137	68	36	18	13	4	5	2	0	1	2	0	1		5
La Chienne	2	78	61	42	21	27	15	8	6	7	5	4	2	3	1	3	
Boudu	0	122	137	60	34	18	8	5	4	5	5	3	5	1	2		
Toni	2	79	53	39	17	17	12	3	15	3	11	4	3	0	0	3	4
Partie de Campagne	7	171	74	43	41	21	16	16	11	2	0	2	2				
Sylvia Scarlett	24	244	96	36	56	8	8	0	4	4	8	4	4				
His Girl Friday	16	158	50	37	30	18	11	7	9	7	0	5	9				4

Films (in Chronological Order)   Average Shot Length

INTOLERANCE (Griffith, 1916, 168 min.) ..7 sec.
*THOMAS GRAAL'S BEST FILM
    (Stiller, 1917, 62 min.) ....9.sec.
*THE HIRED MAN (Schertzinger, 1918,
    65 min.) ....5.5 sec.
*EROTIKON (Stiller, 1921, 100 min.) ......6.5 sec.
NAPOLEON (Gance, 1925, 145 min.
    at 21 f.p.s.) ....5 sec.
BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (Eisenstein,
    1925, 54 min. at 16 f.p.s.) ....4 sec.
*HALLELUJAH (Vidor, 1929, 105 min.) ....9 sec.
*THE PUBLIC ENEMY (Wellman, 1931,
    85 min.) ....9 sec.
KAMERADSCHAFT (Pabst, 1931, 85 min.) 13 sec.
LE MILLION (Clair, 1931, 80 min.) ....13 sec.
A NOUS LA LIBERTE (Clair,
    1931, 97 min.) ....9.5 sec.
*LA CHIENNE (Renoir, 1931, 94 min.) .....19 sec.
*BOUDU SAUVE DES EAUX
    (Renoir, 1932, 83 min.) ....15 sec.
*TONI (Renoir, 1934, 90 min.) ....19 sec.
THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY
    (Beaudine, 1934) ....8.5 sec.
LE CRIME DE M. LANGE
    (Renoir, 1935, 80 min.) ....21 sec.
LIVES OF A BENGAL LANCER
    (Hathaway, 1935) ....5.5 sec.
*SYLVIA SCARLETT (Cukor, 1935, 95 min.) 10 sec.
*PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE
    (Renoir, 1936, 45 min.) ....14 sec.
SAN FRANCISCO (Van Dyke, 1936) ......9 sec.
HOTEL DU NORD (Carné, 1938) ....17 sec.
IN OLD CHICAGO (King, 1938) ....9 sec.
*HIS GIRL FRIDAY (Hawks, 1940, 92 min.) 13 sec.
THE GRAPES OF WRATH (Ford, 1940,
    129 min.) ....10 sec.
CITIZEN KANE (Welles, 1941, 119 min.) ..12 sec.
DIVE BOMBER (Curtiz, 1941) ....7 sec.
PASSAGE TO MARSEILLES
    (Curtiz, 1944) ....6.5 sec.

WILSON (King, 1944) ....12 sec.
LEAVE HER TO HEAVEN (Stahl, 1945) ..8 sec.
HANGOVER SQUARE (Brahm, 1945) ....10 sec.
THE SPANISH MAIN (Borzage, 1945,
    99 min.) ....9.5 sec.
NIGHT AND DAY (Curtiz, 1946) ....9 sec.
*THE BIG SLEEP (Hawks, 1946, 114 min.) .12 sec.
THE YEARLING (Brown, 1946, 130 min.) .9.5 sec.
IVAN THE TERRIBLE (Eisenstein, 1946,
    99 min. and 90 min.) ....7.5 sec.
                                    (each part)
NIGHTMARE ALLEY (Goulding, 1947) ..12 sec.
FOREVER AMBER (Preminger, 1947) ....18 sec.
OH, YOU BEAUTIFUL DOLL (Stahl, 1949) 19 sec.
RASHOMON (Kurosawa, 1950, 88 min.) ...13 sec.
DETECTIVE STORY (Wyler, 1951) ......15 sec.
CAPTAIN HORATIO HORNBLOWER
    (Walsh, 1951) ....8.5 sec.
PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET
    (Fuller, 1953) ....11 sec.
YOUNG BESS (Sidney, 1953) ....12 sec.
SEVEN SAMURAI (Kurosawa, 1954,
    160 min.) ....8 sec.
WRITTEN ON THE WIND
    (Sirk, 1957, 92 min.) ....11 sec.
WILD STRAWBERRIES (Bergman,
    1958, 90 min.) ....9.5 sec.
FROM HELL TO TEXAS (Hathaway,
    1958) (Scope) ....6.5 sec.
LES QUATRE CENT COUPS (Truffaut,
    1959, 93 min.) (Scope) ....14 sec.
ONE, TWO, THREE (Wilder, 1960)
    (Scope) ....14 sec.
UN HOMME ET UNE FEMME
    (Lelouch, 1966, 147 min.) ....12 sec.
OEPIDUS REX (Pasolini, 1967, 110 min.) ...7 sec.
IF (Anderson, 1968, 111 min.) ....9.5 sec.
THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY?
    (Pollack, 1969, 129 min.) ....12.5 sec.
*Analyzed in this study.

tribution is the same as for the sound films, indicating that the distribution has no connection with the lengths of particular lines of dialogue spoken in particular shots in sound films. However, the average shot length is shorter for the silent films, a not surprising result, though that it should be as short as 5.5 seconds in 1918 for *The Hired Man* is a little unexpected. But we

are incredibly ignorant of the state of the American dramatic film around the end of the First World War, a time when the methods of Griffith were being developed and elaborated by others.

If we look at the types of shot used in these silent films, the large number of close-ups in the American film stands out against Stiller's films; it is possible that to use less close-ups has always

been a general European tendency. (See also the other films studied.) Noting also the emergence of shots with camera movement, it is apparent even from the bare figures that the characteristic American style is taking definite shape, a style that was not altogether of Griffith's creation, since he avoided using pans and tilts.

Camera movements do not seem, on the evidence available so far, to be so characteristic of a director's work as closeness of shot. There is still a certain amount of resemblance amongst Renoir's films in this respect; however, the large number of tracks in La Chienne must be noted, and the very small number (for Renoir) in Boudu. This is undoubtedly intentional, and probably relates to Renoir's statement with respect to the style of his films that he did different things in each of them—a statement that is superficially somewhat surprising.

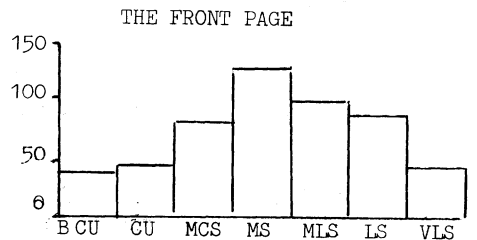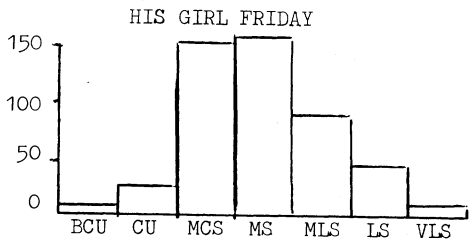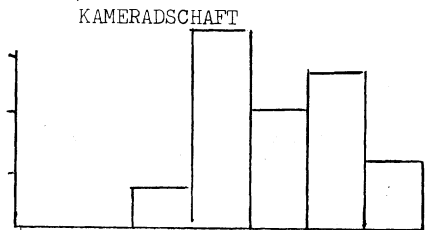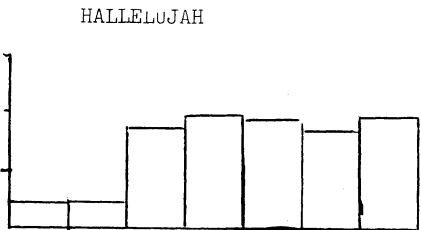His Girl Friday has been included in the analyses because chance presented the opportunity of a comparison with The Front Page, and the possibility of checking an assertion of Andrew Sarris about the two films. He wrote of His Girl Friday, "Hawksian fluidity of camera movement and invisibility of editing was actually faster than in Lewis Milestone's classical montage in The Front Page."[2] Now The Front Page when analyzed has a far greater number of tracks of both kinds than the Hawks film; objectively it has far greater fluidity of camera movement. The average shot length of both movies is the same; however, the Milestone film achieves this by having a larger number of very short shots and a larger number of very long shots, and this latter is certainly not a classical feature by any reasonable definition of classical. The Front Page does have somewhat more close-ups, which might be considered more of a tendency in a classical direction, if we assume that classical means something like the style of Sylvia Scarlett, but this is hardly enough
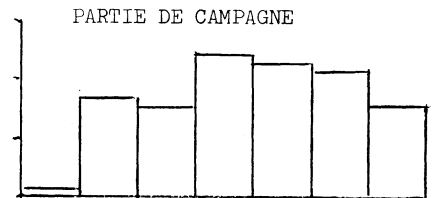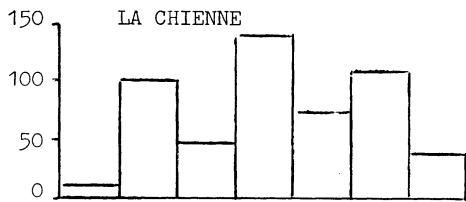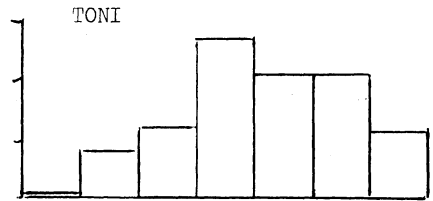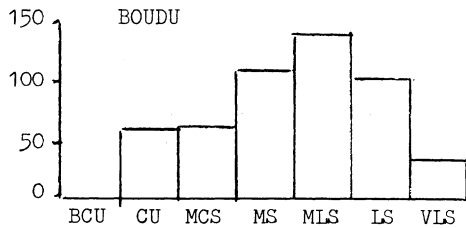
NUMBER OF SHOTS PER 500 SHOTS WITH GIVEN CAMERA MOVEMENT

Film	Pan	Tilt	Pan with Tilt	Track	Track with Pan	Crane
THOMAS GRAAL'S BEST FILM	0	0	0	0	0	0
THE HIRED MAN	4	7	0	10	0	0
EROTIKON	0	0	0	0	0	0
HALLELUJAH	3	0	0	3	3	0
THE PUBLIC ENEMY	36	3	3	36	18	0
KAMERADSCHAFT	61	25	12	76	51	0
LE MILLION	16	4	2	2	0	2
LA CHIENNE	45	9	3	44	17	0
BOUDU	30	1	0	7	7	0
TONI	45	8	8	23	25	0
PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE	58	12	0	23	21	0
SYLVIA SCARLETT	22	4	0	15	11	0
HIS GIRL FRIDAY	82	0	0	20	9	0
THE BIG SLEEP	77	3	1	36	64	0
THE FRONT PAGE	0	0	6	39	65	0

(With the exception of BOUDU, LA CHIENNE and LE MILLION these quantities are estimated from 30-40 minute samples of the films.)

Histograms of number of shots with given closeness of shot per 500 shots, for: BOUDU, TONI, LA CHIENNE, PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE, THE BIG SLEEP, SYLVIA SCARLETT, THE PUBLIC ENEMY, LE MILLION, HALLELUJAH, KAMERADSCHAFT, HIS GIRL FRIDAY, THE FRONT PAGE.

NUMBER OF SHOTS WITH GIVEN CLOSENESS OF SHOT PER 500 SHOTS
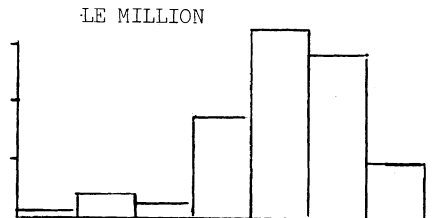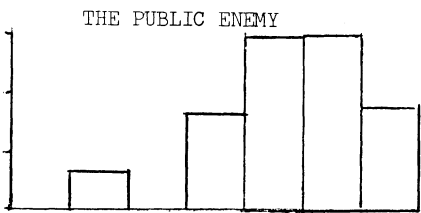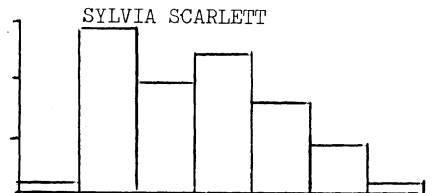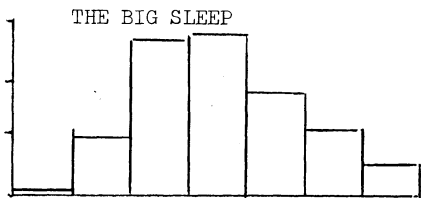
CLOSENESS OF SHOT (OR TYPE OF SHOT)

to override the previously mentioned aspects of *The Front Page.* In fact, from the data we have here, and from unbiased further inspection of *His Girl Friday,* noting particularly the way the sequence of violent action just after the escape of Earl Williams is shot and edited, one can see that there is only a moderate difference in the styles of the two films. The greater effect of speed in *His Girl Friday* is due solely to the extra speed of delivery of the dialogue (count the words per minute) and the addition of lots of business in the acting. Andrew Sarris is the most perceptive writer on the style of films, but the indulgence of his prejudices and his reliance on screenings only can lead him to make serious mistakes, despite his praiseworthy espousal of a comparative method. It is indeed even possible for an experienced film-maker who bases his judgments on one screening of a film to be mistaken about these matters.

There are further incidental benefits to be gained from this approach to film style analysis in the emergence of all sorts of detailed points about film construction while one is actually analyzing the film on the editing table. To give just one example, when comparing *Boudu, Le Million,* and *Hallelujah,* which are all pretty much static-camera films, one becomes aware that without sound *Le Million* is a rather boring film to watch, but the other two are not. The statistical results indicate partly why this is so: Renoir and Vidor in general get the camera in closer to the actors. But the points that become apparent only on the viewer are that in crosscutting between parallel actions, Renoir cuts while the actors in each shot are still moving, rather than between points of repose, and also that in *Le Million* there are a number of unnecessary cuts—shots that could have been continued from one of the chosen camera positions are cut short, and the camera position changed for no apparent reason at all, the change being too small to add any dynamic impulse to the film.

SEQUENTIAL PATTERNS

In all these films superficial inspection of the preliminary lists of shot lengths written down in order reveals no patterning in the way the different lengths follow one another, except for very rare appearances of pairs of shots of approximately equal length, and one or two occurrences of three successive shots of roughly the same length. That there is no overall patterning in the succession of shot lengths in the films considered is suggested, though of course it is not proven, by the conformity of the shot length distributions to the Poisson type of random distribution. Nevertheless, it would be of interest to apply Markov chain analysis not only to shot lengths, but also to some of the other shot characteristics, or parameters, particularly the previously suggested strength of shot transition. (Markov chain analysis means finding the influence on the characteristics of a shot of those of the preceding shot, and in the second-order analysis finding the influence of particular characteristics in the *two* previous shots on the next shot, and so on to higher orders.) There could be patterns in the higher orders of the succession of shot characteristics which are not visible to superficial inspection of the list of shots.

AVERAGE SHOT LENGTH

The average shot lengths that could be easily obtained for a number of films are tabulated here, and some reflections on these follow. Unfortunately, figures for some typical silent films of the twenties have not been obtained, but my subjective impression is that the average shot length in American and most European films stabilized at several seconds, but that exceptionally Gance, and following him, Eisenstein, pushed on to using even shorter shots as illustrated by the figures here. This trend had virtually no effect on other film-makers, probably at least partly because sound intervened.

Also, when looking at these results, strong doubt begins to arise about the accuracy of André Bazin's ideas about pigeonholing directors of the late thirties and the forties into two classes, those using long takes and deep-focus, and those not. In fact, the average shot length for *Citizen Kane* is about average for its period, and, on the other hand, the figure for Carné's

Hotel du Nord is similar to that for Renoir's films. Also, if anyone really cared to look, they would see that there is only a handful of deep-focus shots in any of Wyler's films, such as *Mrs. Miniver,* when Gregg Toland was not behind the camera.

A further note of caution is suggested by these figures about the too easily accepted claim that shot lengths increased with the introduction of CinemaScope and wide screen. (All American films were composed for wide screen after 1954.) This may or may not be true, but one certainly cannot be sure at this stage. Look at the figures for *Written on the Wind,* made by Douglas Sirk, who has been claimed to be a master of wide screen. Also note the near equality of average shot length for Henry Hathaway's *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935) and *From Hell to Texas* (1958 and in Scope).

Although the values for average shot lengths collected here are not extensive enough to be entirely conclusive, they strongly support the impression that the average of the A.S.L. for Hollywood movies in the late thirties and early forties was 9-10 seconds, and there was an increase in this average of a few seconds through the latter part of the forties as more and more directors strove for longer takes. This tendency was commented on at the time,[3] and culminated of course in *Rope.* The introduction of Scope and wide screen came after this development and was not its cause.

CONCLUSION

However that may be, it is also important to note that average shot lengths for the work of different directors at any period cover a continuous range, and there is no sharp distinction between directors, although there is a tendency for a director to stick to approximately the same A.S.L. This continuous distribution of films along a dimension of form also emerges in the other dimensions of film form considered here, that is in closeness of shot and in camera movement, as can be seen by looking at the bar chart presentation of the results for different films. It is speculated that the same is really true with

respect to other aspects of style in the mainstream of cinema which are more difficult to quantify, such as style of acting and dialogue, of treatment of sound (i.e., amount of background music etc.), of lighting and image composition.

The evidence presented here runs counter to the idea of "montage style" and "deep-focus style" and "wide-screen style" as pigeon-holes into which films can be neatly fitted, and it is further suggested that such terms are misleading if used as exact analytic tools.

At this stage it seems possible that a sufficient characterization of formal style for the films of a director might be obtained from their average shot length, plus the two distributions of numbers of shots according to types of shot (by camera closeness and movement). But shot length distribution should continue to be taken till it is clearer whether the non-Poisson distribution for *The Front Page* is a true anomaly or whether similar deviations occur in other films. This could well be the case for a number of films made after 1960, for instance. It might also be advisable to subdivide the classification Big Close-Up by the introduction of the category Choker Close-Up, which is already used in the film industry to describe a shot that shows part of the face only. And it might be worthwhile to collect numbers of high-angle and low-angle shots in a film; some style distinctions and developments might emerge through this quantity also. For instance, it seems that Howard Hawks used a greater number of high-angle, and even low-angle shots in the thirties than he did later; his style changed.

Thorough extension of the investigation to the films of other directors than Renoir means taking say all the films of Howard Hawks made in the late thirties and comparing them in the ways indicated with one another and with a hopefully random selection of about 20 (or more) films made in Hollywood during the same period in the same genres. And so on for such other directors as seem relevant in that period and other periods.

Several times the number of films so far analyzed need to be dealt with before definite con-

clusions about statistical style analysis can be arrived at. However, the results so far are based on more objective facts than have ever been used in the field of style comment before. The methods used can obviously be applied also to sections of a film when one is considering the interactions between, and relations of, form and content. And they can decide questions of attribution, such as who really directed *The Mortal Storm,* Borzage or Saville? A few hours with a film on a moviola is always more instructive than

watching a second screening of it, and then retiring to an armchair and letting one's imagination run riot.

NOTES

1. H. B. Lincoln (ed.), *The Computer and Music,* Cornell, 1970; Dolezel and Bailey (eds.), *Statistics and Style,* Elsevier, 1969.
2. A. Sarris, *The Primal Screen.* Simon & Schuster, 1973, p. 59.
3. *American Cinematographer,* December 1972.

DANIEL DAYAN

The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema

Semiology deals with film in two ways. On the one hand it studies the level of fiction, that is, the organization of film content. On the other hand, it studies the problem of "film language," the level of enunciation. Structuralist critics such as Barthes and the *Cahiers du Cinéma* of *"Young Mr. Lincoln"* have shown that the level of fiction is organized into a language of sorts, a mythical organization through which ideology is produced and expressed. Equally important, however, and far less studied, is filmic enunciation, the system that negotiates the viewer's access to the film—the system that "speaks" the fiction. This study argues that this level is itself far from ideology-free. It does not merely convey neutrally the ideology of the fictional level. As we will see, it is built so as to mask the ideological origin and nature of cinematographic statements. Fundamentally, the enunciation system analyzed below—the system of the *suture—* functions as a "tutor-code." It speaks the codes on which the fiction depends. It is the necessary intermediary between them and us. The system of the suture is to classical cinema what verbal

language is to literature. Linguistic studies stop when one reaches the level of the sentence. In the same way, the system analyzed below leads only from the shot to the cinematographic statement. Beyond the statement, the level of enunciation stops. The level of fiction begins.

Our inquiry is rooted in the theoretical work of a particular time and place, which must be specified. The political events of May 1968 transformed reflection on cinema in France. After an idealist period dominated by André Bazin, a phenomenologist period influenced by Cohen-Séat and Jean Mitry, and a structuralist period initiated by the writings of Christian Metz, several film critics and theorists adopted a perspective bringing together semiology and Marxism. This tendency is best represented by three groups, strongly influenced by the literary review *Tel Quel:* the cinematographic collective *Dziga Vertov,* headed by Jean-Pierre Gorin and Jean-Luc Godard; the review *Cinéthique;* the new and profoundly transformed *Cahiers du Cinéma.*

After a relatively short period of hesitation and polemics, *Cahiers* established a sort of common front with *Tel Quel* and *Cinéthique.* Their

Brian Henderson collaborated in writing this article from a previous text.

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program, during the period which culminated between 1969 and 1971, was to establish the foundations of a science of cinema. Defined by Althusser, this required an "epistemological break" with previous, ideological discourses on cinema. In the post-1968 view of *Cahiers,* ideological discourses included structuralist systems of an empiricist sort. In seeking to effect such a break within discourse on cinema, *Cahiers* concentrated on authors of the second structuralist generation (Kristeva, Derrida, Schefer) and on those of the first generation who opposed any empiricist interpretation of Lévi-Strauss's work.

The point was to avoid any interpretation of a structure that would make it appear as its own cause, thus liberating it from the determinations of the *subject* and of *history.* As Alain Badiou put it,

> The structuralist activity was defined a few years ago as the construction of a "simulacrum of the object," this simulacrum being in itself nothing but intellect added to the object. Recent theoretical work conducted both in the Marxist field and in the psychoanalytic field shows that such a conception of structure should be completely rejected. Such a conception pretends to find inside of the real, a knowledge of which the real can only be the object. Supposedly, this knowledge is already there, just waiting to be revealed. (Cited by Jean Narboni in an article on Jancsó, *Cahiers du Cinéma,* #219.)

Unable to understand the causes of a structure, what they are and how they function, such a conception considers the structure as a cause in itself. The effect is substituted for the cause; the cause remains unknown or becomes mythical (the "theological" author). The structuralism of *Cahiers* holds, on the other hand, that there is more to the whole than to the sum of its parts. The structure is not only a result to be described, but the trace of a structuring *function.* The critic's task is to locate the invisible agent of this function. The whole of the structure thus becomes the sum of its parts plus the cause of the structure plus the relationship between them, through which the structure is linked to the context that produced it. To study a structure is

therefore *not* to search for latent meanings, but to look for that which causes or determines the structure.

Given the *Cahiers* project of a search for causes, what means were available to realize it? As Badiou points out, two systems of thought propose a structural conception of causality, Louis Althusser's Marxism and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis. Althusser's theses massively influenced the *Cahiers* theoretical production during the period in question. His influence was constantly commented on and made explicit, both within the *Cahiers* texts and by those who commented on them. Less well understood is the influence on *Cahiers* of Lacanian psychoanalysis, that *other* system from which a science of cinema could be expected to emerge by means of a critique of empiricist structuralism.

For Lacan, psychoanalysis is a science.

> Lacan's first word is to say: in principle, Freud founded a *science.* A new science which was the science of a new object: the unconscious . . . If psychoanalysis is a science because it is the science of a distinct object, it is also a science with the structure of all sciences: it has a *theory* and a *technique* (method) that makes possible the knowledge and transformation of its object in a specific *practice.* As in every authentically constituted science, the practice is not the absolute of the science but a theoretically subordinate moment; the moment in which the theory, having become method (technique), comes into theoretical contact (knowledge) or practical contact (cure) with its specific object (the unconscious). (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* [Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971], pp. 198–199.)

Like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Lacan distinguishes three levels within human reality. The first level is nature, the third is culture. The intermediate level is that in which nature is transformed into culture. This particular level gives its structure to human reality—it is the level of the symbolic. The symbolic level, or order, includes both language and other systems which produce signification, but it is fundamentally structured by language.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is a theory of intersubjectivity, in the sense that it addresses the relationship(s) between "self" and "other" in-

dependently of the subjects who finally occupy these places. The symbolic order is a net of relationships. Any "self" is definable by its position within this net. From the moment a "self" belongs to culture its fundamental relationships to the "other" are taken in charge by this net. In this way, the laws of the symbolic order give their shape to originally physical drives by assigning the compulsory itineraries through which they can be satisfied. The symbolic order is in turn structured by language. This structuring power of language explains the therapeutic function of speech in psychoanalysis. The psychoanalyst's task is, through the patient's speech, to re-link the patient to the symbolic order, from which he has received his particular mental configuration.

Thus for Lacan, unlike Descartes, the subject is *not* the fundamental basis of cognitive processes. First, it is only one of many psychological functions. Second, it is not an innate function. It appears at a certain time in the development of the child and has to be constituted in a certain way. It can also be altered, stop functioning, and disappear. Being at the very center of what we perceive as our self, this function is invisible and unquestioned. To avoid the encrusted connotations of the term "subjectivity," Lacan calls this function "the imaginary." It must be understood in a literal way—it is the domain of images.

The imaginary can be characterized through the circumstances of its genesis or through the consequences of its disappearance.

The imaginary is constituted through a process which Lacan calls the mirror-phase. It occurs when the infant is six to eighteen months old and occupies a contradictory situation. On the one hand, it does not possess mastery of its body; the various segments of the nervous system are not coordinated yet. The child cannot move or control the whole of its body, but only isolated discrete parts. On the other hand, the child enjoys from its first days a precocious visual maturity. During this stage, the child identifies itself with the visual image of the mother or the person playing the part of the mother. Through this identification, the child perceives its own body as a unified whole by analogy with the mother's body. The notion of a unified body is thus a fantasy before being a reality. It is an image that the child receives from outside.

Through the imaginary function, the respective parts of the body are united so as to constitute one body, and therefore to constitute somebody: one self. Identity is thus a formal structure which fundamentally depends upon an identification. Identity is one effect, among others, of the structure through which images are formed: the imaginary. Lacan thus operates a radical desacralization of the subject: the "I," the "ego," the "subject" are nothing but images, reflections. The imaginary constitutes the subject through a "speculary" effect common to the constitution of all images. A mirror on a wall organizes the various objects of a room into a unified, finite image. So also the "subject" is no more than a unifying reflection.

The disappearance of the imaginary results in schizophrenia. On the one hand, the schizophrenic loses the notion of his "ego" and, more generally, the very notion of ego, of person. He loses both the notion of his identity and the faculty of identification. On the other hand, he loses the notion of the unity of his body. His fantasies are inhabited by horrible visions of dismantled bodies, as in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. Finally, the schizophrenic loses his mastery of language. The instance of schizophrenia illuminates the role of language in the functioning of the imaginary in general. Because this relationship language-imaginary is highly important for our subject, the role of the imaginary in cinema, we will pursue this point in some detail.

The role of the imaginary in the utilization of language points to an entire realm of inadequacy, indeed absence, in traditional accounts of language. Saussure merely repressed or avoided the problem of the role of the subject in language utilization. The subject is eliminated from the whole field of Saussurian linguistics.

This elimination commands the famous oppositions between code and message, paradigm and syntagm, language system and speech. In each case, Saussure grants linguistic relevance to one of the terms and denies it to the other. (The syntagm term is not eliminated, but is put under the paradigms of syntagms, i.e., syntax). In this way, Saussure distinguishes a deep level of linguistic structures from a superficial one where these structures empirically manifest themselves. The superficial level belongs to the domain of subjectivity, that is, to psychology. "The language system equals language less speech." Speech, however, represents the utilization of language. The entity which Saussure defines is language less its utilization. In the converse way, traditional psychology ignores language by defining thought as prior to it. Despite this mutual exclusion, however, the world of the subject and the universe of language do meet. The subject speaks, understands what he is told, reads, etc.

To be complete, the structuralist discourse must explain the relationship language/subject. (Note the relevance of Badiou's critique of empiricist structuralism to Saussure.) Here Lacan's definition of the subject as an imaginary function is useful. Schizophrenic regression shows that language cannot function without a subject. This is not the subject of traditional psychology: what Lacan shows is that language cannot function outside of the imaginary. The conjunction of the language system and the imaginary produces the effect of reality: the referential dimension of language. What we perceive as "reality" is definable as the intersection of two functions, either of which may be lacking. In that language is a system of differences, the meaning of a statement is produced negatively, i.e., by elimination of the other possibilities formally allowed by the system. The domain of the imaginary translates this negative meaning into a positive one. By organizing the statement into a whole, by giving limits to it, the imaginary transforms the statement into an image, a reflection. By conferring its own unity and continuity upon the statement, the subject organizes

it into a body, giving it a fantasmatic identity. This identity, which may be called the "being" or the "ego" of the statement, is its meaning, in the same way that "I" am the meaning of my body's unity.

The imaginary function is not limited to the syntagmatic aspect of language utilization. It commands the paradigms also. A famous passage by Borges, quoted by Foucault in *The Order of Things,* illustrates this point. An imaginary Chinese encyclopedia classified animals by this scheme: (a) belonging to the emperor; (b) embalmed; (c) tamed; (d) guinea-pigs; (e) sirens; (f) fabulous; (g) dogs without a leash; (h) included in the present classification. According to Foucault, such a scheme is "impossible to think," because the sites where things are laid are so different from each other that it becomes impossible to find any surface that would accept all the things mentioned. It is impossible to find a space common to all the animals, a common ground under them. The common place lacking here is that which holds together words and things. The paradigms of language and culture hold together thanks to the perception of a common place, of a "topos" common to its elements. This common place can be defined at the level of history or society as "episteme" or "ideology." This common place is what the schizophrenic lacks.

Thus, in summary, the speculary, unifying, imaginary function constitutes, on the one hand, the proper body of the subject and, on the other, the limits and the common ground without which linguistic syntagms and paradigms would be dissolved in an infinite sea of differences. Without the imaginary and the limit it imposes on any statement, statements would not function as mirrors of the referent.

The imaginary is an essential constituent in the functioning of language. What is its role in *other* semiotic systems? Semiotic systems do not follow the same patterns. Each makes a specific use of the imaginary; that is, each confers a distinctive function upon the subject. We move now from the role of the subject in language use

to the role of the subject in classical painting and in classical cinema. Here the writings of Jean-Pierre Oudart, Jean-Louis Schefer, and others will serve as a guide in establishing the foundations of our inquiry.*

We meet at the outset a fundamental difference between language and other semiotic systems. A famous Stalinian judgment established the theoretical status of language: language is neither part of science nor part of ideology. It represents some sort of a third power, appearing to function—to some extent—free of historical influences. The functioning of semiotic systems such as painting and cinema, however, clearly manifests a direct dependency upon ideology and history. Cinema and painting are historical products of human activity. If their functioning assigns certain roles to the imaginary, one must consider these roles as resulting from choices (conscious or unconscious) and seek to determine the rationale of such choices. Oudart therefore asks a double question: What is the semiological functioning of the classical painting? Why did the classical painters develop it?

Oudart advances the following answers. (1) Classical figurative painting is a discourse. This discourse is produced according to figurative codes. These codes are directly produced by ideology and are therefore subjected to historical transformations. (2) This discourse defines in advance the role of the subject, and therefore pre-determines the reading of the painting. The imaginary (the subject) is used by the painting to mask the presence of the figurative codes. Functioning without being perceived, the codes reinforce the ideology which they embody while the painting produces "an impression of reality" (effet-de-réel). This invisible functioning of the figurative codes can be defined as a "naturali-

zation": the impression of reality produced testifies that the figurative codes are "natural" (instead of being ideological products). It imposes as "truth" the vision of the world entertained by a certain class. (3) This exploitation of the imaginary, this utilization of the subject is made possible by the presence of a system which Oudart calls "representation." This system englobes the painting, the subject, and their relationship upon which it exerts a tight control.

Oudart's position here is largely influenced by Schefer's *Scénographie d'un tableau.* For Schefer, the image of an object must be understood to be the pretext that the painter uses to illustrate the system through which he translates ideology into perceptual schemes. The object represented is a "pretext" for the painting as a "text" to be produced. The object hides the painting's textuality by preventing the viewer from focusing on it. However, the text of the painting is totally offered to view. It is, as it were, hidden *outside* the object. It is here but we do not see it. We see through it to the imaginary object. Ideology is hidden in our very eyes.

How this codification and its hiding process work Oudart explains by analyzing *Las Meninas* by Velasquez.* In this painting, members of the court and the painter himself look out at the spectator. By virtue of a mirror in the back of the room (depicted at the center of the painting), we see what they are looking at: the king and queen, whose portrait Velasquez is painting. Foucault calls this the representation of classical representation, because the spectator—usually invisible—is here inscribed into the painting itself. Thus the painting represents its own functioning, but in a paradoxical, contradictory way. The painter is staring at *us,* the spectators who pass in front of the canvas; but the mirror reflects only one, unchanging thing, the royal couple. Through this contradiction, the system of "representation" points toward its own functioning. In cinematographic terms, the mirror represents the reverse shot of the painting. In

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*See Jean-Louis Schefer, *Scènographie d'un tableau* (Paris: Seuil, 1969); and articles by Jean-Pierre Oudart, "La Suture, I and II," *Cahiers du Cinéma,* Nos. 211 and 212 (April and May, 1969), "Travail, Lecture, Jouissance," *Cahiers du Cinéma,* No. 222 (with S. Daney—July 1970), "Un discours en defaut," *Cahiers du Cinéma,* No. 232 (Oct. 1971).

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*Oudart borrows here from ch. 1 of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock, 1970).

theatrical terms, the painting represents the stage while the mirror represents its audience. Oudart concludes that the text of the painting must not be reduced to its visible part; it does not stop where the canvas stops. The text of the painting is a system which Oudart defines as a "double-stage." On one stage, the show is enacted; on the other, the spectator looks at it. In classical representation, the visible is only the first part of a system which always includes an invisible second part (the "reverse shot").

Historically speaking, the system of classical representation may be placed in the following way. The figurative techniques of the quattrocento constituted a figurative system which permitted a certain type of pictorial utterance. Classical representation produces the same type of utterances but submits them to a characteristic transformation—by presenting them as the embodiment of the glance of a subject. The pictorial discourse is not only a discourse which uses figurative codes. It is that which somebody sees.

Thus, even without the mirror in *Las Meninas,* the other stage would be part of the text of the painting. One would still notice the attention in the eyes of the painting's figures, etc. But even such psychological clues only reinforce a structure which could function without them. Classical representation as a system does not depend upon the subject of the painting. The Romantic landscapes of the nineteenth century submit nature to a remodeling which imposes on them a monocular perspective, transforming the landscape into that which is seen by a given subject. This type of landscape is very different from the Japanese landscape with its multiple perspective. The latter is *not* the visible part of a two-stage system.

While it uses figurative codes and techniques, the distinctive feature of representation as a semiological system is that it transforms the painted object into a sign. The object which is figured on the canvas in a certain way is the signifier of the presence of a subject who is looking at it. The paradox of *Las Meninas* proves that the presence of the subject must be signified

but empty, defined but left free. Reading the signifiers of the presence of the subject, the spectator occupies this place. His own subjectivity fills the empty spot predefined by the painting. Lacan stresses the unifying function of the imaginary, through which the act of reading is made possible. The representational painting is *already unified.* The painting proposes not only itself, but its own reading. The spectator's imaginary can only coincide with the painting's built-in subjectivity. The receptive freedom of the spectator is reduced to the minimum—he has to accept or reject the painting as a whole. This has important consequences, ideologically speaking.

When I occupy the place of the subject, the codes which led me to occupy this place become invisible to me. The signifiers of the presence of the subject disappear from my consciousness because they are the signifiers of my presence. What I perceive is their signified: myself. If I want to understand the painting and not just be instrumental in it as a catalyst to its ideological operation, I must avoid the empirical relationship it imposes on me. To understand the ideology which the painting conveys, I must avoid providing my own imaginary as a support for that ideology. I must refuse that identification which the painting so imperiously proposes to me.

Oudart stresses that the initial relationship between a subject and any ideological object is set up by ideology as a trap which prevents any real knowledge concerning the object. This trap is built upon the properties of the imaginary and must be deconstructed through a critique of these properties. On this critique depends the possibility of a real knowledge. Oudart's study of classical painting provides the analyst of cinema with two important tools for such a critique: the concept of a double-stage and the concept of the entrapment of the subject.

We note first that the filmic image considered in isolation, the single frame or the perfectly static shot, is (for purposes of our analysis) equivalent to the classical painting. Its codes,

even though "analogic" rather than figurative, are organized by the system of representation: it is an image designed and organized not merely as an object that is seen, but as the glance of a subject. Can there be a cinematography not based upon the system of representation? This is an interesting and important question which cannot be explored here. It would seem that there has not been such a cinematography. Certainly the classical narrative cinema, which is our present concern, is founded upon the representation system. The case for blanket assimilation of cinema to the system of representation is most strongly put by Jean-Louis Baudry, who argues that the perceptual system and ideology of representation are built into the cinematographic apparatus itself. (See "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Cinéthique* #7–8.) Camera lenses organize their visual field according to the laws of perspective, which thereby operate to render it as the perception of a subject. Baudry traces this system to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during which the lens technology which still governs photography and cinematography was developed.

Of course cinema cannot be reduced to its still frames and the semiotic system of cinema cannot be reduced to the systems of painting or of photography. Indeed, the cinematic succession of images threatens to interrupt or even to expose and to deconstruct the representation system which commands static paintings or photos. For its succession of shots is, by that very system, a succession of views. The viewer's identification with the subjective function proposed by the painting or photograph is broken again and again during the viewing of a film. Thus cinema regularly and systematically raises the question which is exceptional in painting *(Las Meninas)*: "Who is watching this?" The point of attack of Oudart's analysis is precisely here—what happens to the spectator-image relation by virtue of the shot-changes peculiar to cinema?

The ideological question is hardly less important than the semiological one and, indeed,

is indispensable to its solution. From the standpoint of the imaginary and of ideology, the problem is that cinema threatens to expose its own functioning as a semiotic system, as well as that of painting and photography. If cinema consists in a series of shots which have been produced, selected, and ordered in a certain way, then these operations will serve, project, and realize a certain ideological position. The viewer's question, cued by the system of representation itself—"Who is watching this?" and "Who is ordering these images?"—tends, however, to expose this ideological operation and its mechanics. Thus the viewer will be aware (1) of the cinematographic system for producing ideology and (2) therefore of specific ideological messages produced by this system. We know that ideology cannot work in this way. It must hide its operations, "naturalizing" its functioning and its messages in some way. Specifically, the cinematographic system for producing ideology must be hidden and the relation of the filmic message to this system must be hidden. As with classical painting, the code must be hidden by the message. The message must appear to be complete in itself, coherent and readable entirely on its own terms. In order to do this, the filmic message must account *within itself* for those elements of the code which it seeks to hide—changes of shot and, above all, what lies behind these changes, the questions "Who is viewing this?" and "Who is ordering these images?" and "For what purpose are they doing so?" In this way, the viewer's attention will be restricted to the message itself and the codes will not be noticed. That system by which the filmic message provides answers to the viewer's questions—imaginary answers—is the object of Oudart's analysis.

Narrative cinema presents itself as a "subjective" cinema. Oudart refers here not to avant-garde experiments with subjective cameras, but to the vast majority of fiction films. These films propose images which are subtly designated and intuitively perceived as corresponding to the point of view of one character or another. The point of view varies. There are also moments

when the image does not represent anyone's point of view; but in the classical narrative cinema, these are relatively exceptional. Soon enough, the image is reasserted as somebody's point of view. In this cinema, the image is only "objective" or "impersonal" during the intervals between its acting as the actors' glances. Structurally, this cinema passes constantly from the personal to the impersonal form. Note, however, that when this cinema adopts the personal form, it does so somewhat obliquely, rather like novelistic descriptions which use "he" rather than "I" for descriptions of the central character's experience. According to Oudart, this obliqueness is typical of the narrative cinema: it gives the impression of being subjective while never or almost never being strictly so. When the camera *does* occupy the very place of a protagonist, the normal functioning of the film is impeded. Here Oudart agrees with traditional film grammars. Unlike them, however, Oudart can justify this taboo, by showing that this necessary obliquity of the camera is part of a coherent system. This system is that of the suture. It has the function of transforming a vision or seeing of the film into a reading of it. It introduces the film (irreducible to its frames) into the realm of signification.

Oudart contrasts the seeing and the reading of a film by comparing the experiences associated with each. To *see* the film is *not* to perceive the frame, the camera angle and distance, etc. The space between planes or objects on the screen is perceived as real, hence the viewer may perceive himself (in relation to this space) as fluidity, expansion, elasticity.

When the viewer discovers the frame—the first step in reading the film—the triumph of his former *possession* of the image fades out. The viewer discovers that the camera is hiding things, and therefore distrusts it and the frame itself, which he now understands to be arbitrary. He wonders why the frame is what it is. This radically transforms his mode of participation —the unreal space between characters and/or objects is no longer perceived as pleasurable. It is now the space which separates the camera

from the characters. The latter have lost their quality of presence. Space puts them between parentheses so as to assert its own presence. The spectator discovers that his possession of space was only partial, illusory. He feels dispossessed of what he is prevented from seeing. He discovers that he is only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the glance of another spectator, who is ghostly or absent. This ghost, who rules over the frame and robs the spectator of his pleasure, Oudart proposes to call "the absent-one" (*l'absent*).

The description above is not contingent or impressionistic—the experiences outlined are the effects of a system. The system of the absent-one distinguishes cinematography, a system producing meaning, from any impressed strip of film (mere footage). This system depends, like that of classical painting, upon the fundamental opposition between two fields: (1) what I see on the screen, (2) that complementary field which can be defined as the place from which the absent-one is looking. Thus: to any filmic field defined by the camera corresponds *another* field from which an absence emanates.

So far we have remained at the level of the shot. Oudart now considers that common cinematographic utterance which is composed of a shot and a reverse shot. In the first, the missing field imposes itself upon our consciousness under the form of the absent-one who is looking at what we see. In the second shot, the reverse shot of the first, the missing field is abolished by the presence of somebody or something occupying the absent-one's field. The reverse shot represents the fictional owner of the glance corresponding to shot one.

This shot/reverse shot system orders the experience of the viewer in this way. The spectator's pleasure, dependent upon his identification with the visual field, is interrupted when he perceives the frame. From this perception he infers the presence of the absent-one and that other field from which the absent-one is looking. Shot two reveals a character who is presented as the owner of the glance corresponding to shot one. That is, the character in shot two occupies

the place of the absent-one corresponding to shot one. This character retrospectively transforms the absence emanating from shot one's other stage into a presence.

What happens in *systemic* terms is this: the absent-one of shot one is an element of the code that is attracted into the message by means of shot two. When shot two replaces shot one, the absent-one is transferred from the level of enunciation to the level of fiction. As a result of this, the code effectively disappears and the ideological effect of the film is thereby secured. The code, which *produces* an imaginary, ideological effect, is hidden by the message. Unable to see the workings of the code, the spectator is at its mercy. His imaginary is sealed into the film; the spectator thus absorbs an ideological effect without being aware of it, as in the very different system of classical painting.

The consequences of this system deserve careful attention. The absent-one's glance is that of a nobody, which becomes (with the reverse shot) the glance of a somebody (a character present on the screen). Being on screen he can no longer compete with the spectator for the screen's possession. The spectator can resume his previous relationship with the film. The reverse shot has "sutured" the hole opened in the spectator's imaginary relationship with the filmic field by his perception of the absent-one. This effect and the system which produces it liberates the imaginary of the spectator, in order to manipulate it for its own ends.

Besides a *liberation of the imaginary,* the system of the suture also commands a *production of meaning.* The spectator's inference of the absent-one and the other field must be described more precisely: it is a *reading.* For the spectator who becomes frame-conscious, the visual field *means* the presence of the absent-one as the owner of the glance that constitutes the image. The filmic field thus simultaneously belongs to representation and to signification. Like the classical painting, on the one hand it represents objects or beings, on the other hand it signifies the presence of a spectator. When the spectator ceases to identify with the image, the image

necessarily signifies to him the presence of another spectator. The filmic image presents itself here not as a simple image but as a show, i.e., it structurally asserts the presence of an audience. The filmic field is then a signifier; the absent-one is its signified. Since it represents another field from which a fictional character looks at the field corresponding to shot one, the reverse shot is offered to the film-audience as being the other field, the field of the absent-one. In this way, shot two establishes itself as the signified of shot one. By substituting for the other field, shot two becomes the meaning of shot one.

Within the system of the suture, the absent-one can therefore be defined as the intersubjective "trick" by means of which the second part of a given representative statement is no longer simply what comes after the first part, but what is *signified* by it. The absent-one makes the different parts of a given statement the signifiers of each other. His strategm: Break the statement into shots. Occupy the space between shots.

Oudart thus defines the basic statement of classical cinematography as a unit composed of two terms: the filmic field and the field of the absent-one. The sum of these two terms, stages, and fields realizes the meaning of the statement. Robert Bresson once spoke of an exchange between shots. For Oudart such an exchange is impossible—the exchange between shot one and shot two cannot take place directly. Between shot one and shot two the other stage corresponding to shot one is a necessary intermediary. The absent-one represents the exchangability between shots. More precisely, within the system of the suture, the absent-one represents the face that no shot can constitute by itself a complete statement. The absent-one stands for that which any shot necessarily lacks in order to attain meaning: another shot. This brings us to the dynamics of meaning in the system of the suture.

Within this system, the meaning of a shot depends on the next shot. At the level of the signifier, the absent-one continually destroys the balance of a filmic statement by making it the

incomplete part of a whole yet to come. On the contrary, at the level of the signified, the effect of the suture system is a retroactive one. The character presented in shot two does not replace the absent-one corresponding to shot two, but the absent-one corresponding to shot one. The suture is always chronologically posterior to the corresponding shot; i.e., when we finally know what the other field was, the filmic field is no longer on the screen. The meaning of a shot is given retroactively, it does not meet the shot on the screen, but only in the memory of the spectator.

The process of reading the film (perceiving its meaning) is therefore a retroactive one, wherein the present modifies the past. The system of the suture systematically encroaches upon the spectator's freedom by interpreting, indeed by remodeling his memory. The spectator is torn to pieces, pulled in opposite directions. On the one hand, a retroactive process organizes the *signified*. On the other hand, an anticipatory process organizes the *signifier*. Falling under the control of the cinematographic system, the spectator loses access to the present. When the absent-one points toward it, the signification belongs to the future. When the suture realizes it, the signification belongs to the past. Oudart insists on the brutality, on the tyranny with which this signification imposes itself on the spectator or, as he puts it, "transits through him."

Oudart's analysis of classical cinema is a deconstruction not a destruction of it. To deconstruct a system implies that one inhabits it, studies its functioning very carefully, and locates its basic articulations, both external and internal. Of course there are other cinematographic systems besides that of the suture.* One of many such others is that of Godard's late films such as *Wind from the East*. Within this system, (1) the shot tends to constitute a com-

plete statement, and (2) the absent-one is continuously perceived by the spectator. Since the shot constitutes a whole statement, the reading of the film is no longer suspended. The spectator is not kept waiting for the remaining-part-of-the-statement-which-is-yet-to-come. The reading of the shot is contemporary to the shot itself. It is immediate, its temporality is the present.

Thus the absent-one's functional definition does not change. Within the Godardian system as well as within the suture system, the absent-one is what ties the shot (filmic level) to the statement (cinematographic level). However, in Godard's case, the two levels are not disjoined. Cinematography does not hide the filmicity of the shot. It stands in a clear relationship to it.

The system of the suture represents exactly the opposite choice. The absent-one is masked, replaced by a character, hence the real origin of the image—the conditions of its production represented by the absent-one—is replaced with a false origin and this false origin is situated inside the fiction. The cinematographic level fools the spectator by connecting him to the fictional level rather than to the filmic level.

But the difference between the two origins of the image is not only that one (filmic) is true and the other (fictional) false. The true origin represents the cause of the image. The false origin suppresses that cause and does not offer anything in exchange. The character whose glance takes possession of the image did not produce it. He is only somebody who sees, a spectator. The image therefore exists independently. It has no cause. It is.

In other terms, it is its own cause. By means of the suture, the film-discourse presents itself as a product without a producer, a discourse without an origin. It speaks. Who speaks? Things speak for themselves and of course, they tell the truth. Classical cinema establishes itself as the ventriloquist of ideology.

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*Indeed, shot/reverse shot is itself merely one figure in the system(s) of classical cinema. In this initial moment of the study of enunciation in film, we have chosen it as a privileged example of the way in which the origin of the glance is displaced in order to hide the film's production of meaning.

PETER BISKIND

Rebel Without a Cause:
Nicholas Ray in the Fifties

Auteur critics of a liberal persuasion have a habit of making over their pet directors into political and cultural radicals, of making them seem more subversive than they really are. Thus, one critic repeatedly compares Samuel Fuller to Brecht and Mailer, and writes that Fuller "assaults the social preconceptions of his audience."[1] Another critic sees Nicholas Ray's *Bigger Than Life* as "a profoundly upsetting exposure of middle-class aspirations . . . Each emblem of the American Dream . . . is systematically turned on its head."[2] While both Fuller and Ray are critical of certain aspects of fifties America, to see them as fundamentally subversive to its central institutions is the reverse of the truth. Such a reading of their films is encouraged by the independent, even rebellious stance adopted by Fuller, Ray, and other directors of this period, and it is flattering both to them and their admirers (we feel better about spending so much time with *Underworld USA* if we see it as social criticism), but in the end it is misleading, obscuring rather than revealing the relationship between film, individual talent, and ideology.

A moment's reflection will disclose, for example, that *Bigger Than Life* in no sense makes a radical critique of American middle-class values. Ed Avery (James Mason), demented by cortisone treatment, becomes a spokesman for elitist and authoritarian antidemocratic values, entirely at odds with the dominant Dewey-Spock progressivism of fifties child-rearing and educational theory. If Avery's malady is expressed by his delusions of grandeur (he feels "ten feet tall"), his behavior constitutes a warning to keep your place, keep your aspirations in line, don't rock the boat, be like everyone else—which was,

after all, a characteristic impulse of the fifties, examined in Whyte's *The Organization Man,* questioned in Lindner's *Must We Conform?* and recommended in Reisman's *Individualism Reconsidered.* Avery's bloated ego threatens the integrity of the family which formed the backbone of the fifties consensus.

Nicholas Ray's career began promisingly in the late forties with *They Live by Night* (1947), spanned the fifties, and petered out ingloriously in the early sixties with *King of Kings* (1961) and *55 Days at Peking* (1963). It was a prolific career: he contributed with distinction to almost every genre except the musical, and it serves as a sensitive barometer of the changes in the cultural climate of Hollywood during the cold war. Moreover, as a serious director concerned with social problems, the corpus of his work provides some insight into the nature and limitations of social criticism, Hollywood style.

Ray's films share with other films of the fifties a fondness for psychological and occasionally mythic categories which replaced the social and political ones of the thirties and forties. *Johnny Guitar* (1953) shows this tendency at work within a single film. Early in the film, the conflict between Vienna (Joan Crawford) and Emma (Mercedes McCambridge), is portrayed as both a political and a psychological one. The political dimension concerns the economic antagonism between old entrenched money (the big ranchers and the bank) on the one hand, and new money (the railroad and the entrepreneurial enthusiasm of Vienna) on the other. Reinforcing this clash of interests is the traditional resistance of the big landowners to the westward movement of civilization, with the attendant evils of nesters and barbed wire. The psycho-

logical conflict centers on Emma. She is jealous of Vienna and the Dancing Kid (Scott Brady), hating the Kid because, as Vienna suggests, "he makes her feel like a woman." Later, during the climactic confrontation between the posse and Vienna, Johnny Guitar (Sterling Hayden), and the Kid's gang, the political motivation is brushed aside, leaving only the psychological one. One of the men in the posse wants to call it all off because he doesn't want any more bloodshed. MacIver, the big rancher and leader of the posse, agrees. It has never been their battle anyway, he says, only Emma's. So much for economics. By this time we have learned that Vienna, a strong woman like Emma, is in danger of becoming, like Emma, hard and fanatical. She is punished for her independence from men by losing her casino (set afire by the posse), and must vanquish Emma, her evil, desexed other half so that she can accept the loving embrace of Johnny Guitar before a gushing waterfall in the closing shot. The larger conflict is reduced to Vienna's psychosexual conflict with herself, rendered as a confrontation with her double.

In *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), two years later, the social and political themes have been largely banished. The fifties juvenile delinquent was the spiritual heir of the obsolescent *film noir* hero. Films like *East of Eden, The Wild One, Crime in the Streets, Blackboard Jungle,* and *Rumble on the Docks* dealt with the vexing problem of the asocial youth who remained stubbornly unreconciled to the fifties consensus. Ray had dealt with the subject of delinquency twice before, in *Knock on Any Door* (1949), and even earlier in *They Live by Night*. Both these films employed an attenuated thirties perspective on the problem, although *They Live by Night,* with its strong sense of domesticity, looks forward to the fifties. Delinquency and crime were products of poverty, which in turn had a catastrophic effect upon the family. But by 1947, this approach had already become dated by postwar prosperity. *They Live by Night* was regarded as an anachronistic Depression film; its release was delayed for two years until How-

ard Hughes, the new owner of RKO, could decide what to do with it. Fifties prosperity seemed so pervasive by 1955 that a movie on delinquency could focus solely on the upper-middle class. Moreover, youthful rebelliousness in the fifties, as in Kazan's *East of Eden* (1954), was seen as a function of lack of love and meaningful contact among people. The central integrative structure of society, the family, was in trouble. Most fifties films contained strong domestic elements, especially in comparison to the male groups of early forties war films and the lone males of late forties *film noir:* Ray in particular often dealt with the problem of reconstructing the family after the Second World War had taken the men to the front and the women to the factories. The emphasis on domesticity was well suited to a postwar era afflicted with the problem of surplus labor, and it performed two functions. It served to remind women that their place was in the home, and it provided an emotional adhesive to bind up the psychological and ideological wounds of the forties.

Jim (James Dean), a high school rebel from a well-to-do family (what they do is kept in the background: nobody in fifties movies is ever shown working; prosperity is taken for granted, and apparently does not require work), is challenged to a chicken fight by a Dawson High tough named Buzz (Corey Allen). Buzz wins, or rather loses; unable to get out of his roadster in time, he goes over the cliff to his death. (For delinquents, to win is to lose.) Jim tries to go to the police, but after failing to find his pal Ray (a cop in the juvenile division and surrogate for Nicholas, perhaps), he takes refuge with his girlfriend Judy (Natalie Wood) in a deserted mansion in the Los Angeles hills, and is soon followed there by a delinquent admirer. his class-mate Plato (Sal Mineo). Plato has with him a nickel-plated .45. When Buzz's gang arrives on the scene, in search of Jim who they think has ratted on them to the cops, Plato shoots one, and escapes to nearby Griffith Park Observatory with the law in hot pursuit. Jim and Judy follow him to the planetarium with the intention of disarming Plato in order to prevent

a certain tragedy, a shoot-out with the cops. Jim convinces Plato to hand over his gun for a moment; he stealthily removes the clip, and then returns the gun to his unsuspecting friend. Plato agrees to give himself up. As he ventures forth, he panics in a spotlight, and is shot dead by a trigger-happy cop. After an obligatory show of grief, Jim and Judy are reconciled with Jim's parents, and they all drive off together in police cars.

This brief recapitulation of the plot hardly does justice to the film, but it does serve to emphasize the theme of reconciliation which emerges strongly at the end. The reason that Jim can be so easily reintegrated into society is that his disaffection has not been very profound in the first place. Jim and Judy's estrangement goes little deeper than Bowie and Keechie's in *They Live by Night,* who just want to be like everybody else. Jim and Judy suffer from adolescent *Angst;* they are lonely. They just want love. Judy tells Ray: "I'll probably never get close to anyone." When Jim and Judy find each other, they are happy. Once the abyss of personal isolation is bridged, their rebelliousness ceases. And unlike the couple in *They Live by Night,* a darker film from a darker decade, they can now reenter society.

Judy's problem is entirely oedipal. Her handsome father prefers his tousel-haired son to her cathected expressions of affection. Jim's problem is that his father is not strong enough. He is a permissive parent who tries to be Jim's pal, who refuses to discipline him, and who evades Jim's anguished questions. Worse, he is a weak male, dominated by his wife. As Jim explains to Ray: "She eats him alive and he takes it . . . if he had the guts to knock Mom cold once, then maybe she'd be happy and stop picking on him . . . I don't ever want to be like him." In one famous scene, Jim comes upon his father wearing an apron, and mistakenly addresses him as "Mom." When Jim's parents finally do take a stand, it is an unprincipled one. Jim's mother tries to discourage Jim from going to the police over Buzz's death. Jim looks to his father to overrule her: "Dad, stand up for me." His father, as usual, fails the test.

Ray offers Jim all that his father doesn't. He proves a stern yet understanding disciplinarian. Jim needs a strong and upright male figure with whom he can identify and, as is customary during the fifties, the police department supplies it. Yet Ray is not Jim's father, and when Jim needs him most, he is unavailable. No other institution can replace the family.

Plato, unlike Jim and Judy, is an authentic rebel. Although the source of his disaffection is the same as theirs (he comes from a broken home and needs love), it has an emotional desperation that theirs lacks. Moreover, being younger than Jim, he cannot satisfy his need for love through a woman, as Jim can. Rather, he relates to Jim as son to father. Jim willingly reciprocates by viewing Plato as a son. The domestic vision of the film is so strong that all relationships are seen in family terms. But in reality, the nuclear family is exclusive. Plato's relationship with Jim is extra-familial, and there is no room for it in the emerging family of Jim and Judy. Plato is ultimately superfluous.

The real reason Plato must die, however, is that irreconcilable rebellion cannot be tolerated: it is equated, in the film, with insanity. Buzz's gang is similarly discredited. Their rebelliousness is not sentimentalized like Jim's. They are seen as proto-criminals. They are dangerous because they form an autonomous peer group beyond adult control. Like the crazed Plato, they are inaccessible, opaque. From the perspective of social control which, after all, is what *Rebel Without a Cause*, like other films of the fifties, is about, the problem is to prevent Jim from assuming the leadership of the gang, now that Buzz is dead. As in *On the Waterfront* (1954), where Terry Malloy must testify against John Friendly, Jim is expected to betray Buzz's gang to the police.

An important difference between Ray and Kazan is evident in the fact that it is considerably easier to prevail upon Jim to testify against the gang than it is to persuade Terry Malloy to testify against the mob. This is because Jim has been well socialized already. In the sentimental and romantic world of Nicholas Ray, Jim is a noble savage; it is his parents who discourage him from acting in accord with his own decent impulses. It is *they* who have to change. It is society which imposes restraints on natural goodness. This is not to say that Jim's parents have to change very much; Ray is far from offering a radical critique of society. In fact, blaming the family for delinquency, as Daniel

Moynihan a decade later blamed the matriarchal black family for the absence of upward mobility among blacks, merely serves to let society off the hook.

The role of the informer is an honorable one in films of the fifties; not only is informing construed as an act of courage, it is the defining moral choice which separates Jim from both the walleyed self-interest of his craven parents, and the nihilism of the delinquents. The game of chicken-racing cars up to the edge of a cliff mimics the apocalyptic world of adults, the world presented by the planetarium lecturer who shows the teen-agers a vision of a fiery holocaust: We "are destroyed, as we began, in a burst of fire." In the face of the apocalypse, man is reduced to a helpless, isolated atom: "Man existing alone seems an episode of little consequence." Against this image of flaming conflagration, against the anguish of man alone facing the abyss, the children of *Rebel Without a Cause* invoke an ethic of mutual responsibility. "We are all involved," shouts Jim at his parents when they deny their complicity in Buzz's death.

It is only Plato who really understands this vision of the end, who senses the depth of the sickness. He knows that he personally will be consumed by flames: "Do you think the end of the world will come at night?" he asks, anxiously. He knows that despite what Jim says, the people outside the planetarium, parents and police, are not his friends. His suspicion that Jim and Judy have betrayed him when they leave him sleeping while they go off to explore the mansion, is an intuition of the real betrayal to come, and it drives him mad. As the shattered vessel of real knowledge, he becomes dangerous. In the same way that Vienna has to exorcise her sexually repressed double before she can release her own pent-up emotions and accept Johnny Guitar's love, so Plato, Jim's irreconcilable, asocial double must be exorcised before Jim can be readmitted to society. As if to underline this *Doppelgänger* theme, Plato is wearing Jim's red jacket when he dies.

Although Plato had a clearer emotional grasp of the emptiness at the center of society than did

Jim and Judy, although he sensed their betrayal of him, he could not see how deep and dangerous this betrayal might become—that he would be sent to his death by his best friend in the name of his own welfare, and that his death would become the condition for the reconciliation of the survivors, literally over his dead body.

Jim betrays Plato by abusing the ethic of trust and mutual responsibility that is the core of his moral position. He convinces Plato to let him see his gun because he cares about Plato. Asking for the gun, Jim says: "Don't you trust me, Plato?" Plato: "You promised to give it back." Jim, handing it back without the clip: "Friends always keep their promises." Playing father to Plato's son, Jim must reconcile the contradictory roles of authoritarian parent and sympathetic friend. This proves to be impossible; it is only through manipulation that the situation is resolved, and then, tragically. Rather than forthrightly keeping the gun which Plato had given him, and coercing him into submission (the authoritarian solution), or siding with Plato in helping him to escape (the fraternal solution), Jim chooses to persuade Plato to give himself up while depriving him of his means of defense, on the assumption that the real potential for violence lies within Plato, rather than in the police who surround him. The film encourages and disguises this turnabout first by portraying Plato as dangerous (he has just shot one of Buzz's gang), and second by portraying the gunfire of the police as accidental. Moreover, the film steadfastly refuses to see Jim's behavior as a betrayal, but attempts to justify it as the only tactic available under the circumstances. After all, Plato is crazy, and he is faced with overwhelming police power. Jim's only alternative is to save Plato from himself. But, as the outcome of the action shows, Jim's manipulative paternalism fails. Plato, with his gun but without his bullets, with the form of rebellion but without its content, is shot dead. Portrayed as an accident, the relationship of his death to both the logic of reconciliation which demands it, and to Jim's betrayal which provides the means, goes unrecorded.

Jim's behavior can only be explained by concluding that once his own alienation has ended (he has found Judy), he adopts society's view of the rebel, and therefore he is no longer certain that the people outside the planetarium are not his friends. Moreover, Jim's pal Ray takes charge of the police operation; as the one person in a position of authority whom Jim trusts, Jim believes he can be depended upon to restrain his men and handle the crazed Plato with care and understanding. Jim mistakes the integrity of the few decent individuals in the system for the integrity of the system itself. In fact, it is the institutions and the roles they enforce which prove decisive in the end. The role of the cop being what it is, and the role of the rebel being what it is, it is inevitable that the one will destroy the other, despite the good intentions of the individuals employed in these roles. It is inevitable that there will be a trigger-happy cop in the cordon which surrounds the planetarium. Jim has allowed himself to be beguiled by the one person, Ray, who offers him sympathy, discipline, and an example to admire because, like Nicholas Ray, he seeks moral solutions to political problems. He looks for the one good man to set things right.

Although Ray finds a cosmic resonance for the failure of the family in the apocalyptic vision of the elderly planetarium lecturer, this is merely a rhetorical gesture, much like Kazan's casual inclusion in *On the Waterfront* of the scene of the Big Shot watching the crime commission on television to suggest the ramifications of a venality larger than he is willing to specify. The vision of the end of the world has its roots in the threat of nuclear annihilation bequeathed by the parents of the fifties to their children, but here it is transformed into an existential statement about the human condition, a condition of helplessness in which the individual has no control over the world of objects. So he turns inward, to the private realm of friends, family, and self in which he still hopes to control his destiny. Jim perceives himself as free, as a moral agent making voluntary choices, but the film reveals, despite itself, that this is an illusion. On the level

at which these choices are carried out, Jim remains, like Plato, an object of forces he barely understands.

That this startling revelation is an inadvertent, almost incidental one is a consequence of the film's limited perspective on the social problems it tries to deal with. In accord with the general stance of fifties liberalism, Ray is attempting to define a sensible middle ground which avoids extreme solutions to the family crisis—neither the weak feminine permissiveness represented by Jim's father nor the rigid masculine authoritarianism represented by Buzz's gang, with its hierarchical pecking order. His solution is an unstable mixture of the best of both worlds which attempts to exclude the worst—the evasive moral cowardice of the one, and the tyrannical oppressiveness of the other. But as long as Ray sees the failure of the family as primarily a moral one, the result of the actions of selfish and cowardly individuals, as long as he sees its consequences as psychological injury to the children issuing in asocial behavior, his gestures of sympathy for the rebels must remain mere gestures. As long as his rebels are without causes —real concrete grievances rooted in structural contradictions within the society—his search for a reasonable and humane compromise must end in failure. At best, it will be like Jim's: the rhetoric of mutual responsibility will serve as a cloak for authoritarian manipulation which ultimately delivers its victims to the purposes of the state. The balance struck between strength and sympathy, justice and mercy, which Ray would like his ideal father to embody, is bound in practice to be weighted towards authority, because Ray's social criticism is so superficial. His solution to the problem of the failed family is merely to begin again, with each family member, sadder but wiser, making minor adjustments in his and her roles. Radical reexamination of the family model is unthinkable, because the family is essentially sound.

What is most fascinating about *Rebel Without a Cause,* however, is that it mocks the fifties attempt to carve out a vital center, and chronicles, despite itself, the failure of the effort to

shore up the family. This internal subversion is evident in the irony which forms a dissonant minor chord in the final orchestration of reconciliation. Jim's father is transformed by the catastrophe of Plato's death into the strong and courageous figure Jim has always wanted. He tells Jim that he will stand up *with* him (a partnership), asks Jim to "trust" him, ironically echoing Jim's words to Plato, minutes before, as he portentously drapes Jim with his coat, in the same way Jim had given his own coat to Plato earlier. Jim accepts his father's jacket, introduces Judy to his parents, and they all pile into squad cars and drive off. Even Plato's black nanny smiles benevolently on the departing couples, whose union and reunion have been achieved at Plato's expense. The old family is reconstituted, and the new family, Jim and Judy, is born. The rebellious children can be accepted into the fold because the form now taken by their breach with their parents, a new family, does not threaten but perpetuates their parents' own values.

It should be clear by this time that despite appearances to the contrary *Rebel Without a Cause* is a profoundly conservative film. Although it reeks with sympathy for the misunderstood rebel, although it looks with his eyes across the generation gap at weak and venal parents, it nevertheless delivers him into their hands. True, the parents have changed, but in a regressive direction: Jim's father has learned to play the orthodox male role and his mother has learned to subordinate herself to it. The film critiques the family only to reaffirm its vitality.

The agonizing process which issues in Jim's coming of age presumably guarantees that he will avoid the mistakes of his father. But the prospect is not encouraging. As in so many other films of the fifties, the growth of maturity and the development of the capacity for leadership have ominous implications. In *On the Waterfront,* for example, maturity implies the willingness to turn on old friends, to sever intimate neighborhood bonds in order to subscribe to larger and presumably higher values. Personal

loyalty is regarded as an adolescent virtue. In Fuller's *Merrill's Marauders* (1962), Merrill tells a junior officer that "When you lead you have to hurt people, the enemy and sometimes your own." In *Flying Leathernecks* (1951), Ray confronts these themes directly. Griff (Robert Ryan), a squeamish liberal overly concerned with his men's problems, finally proves himself to the tough squadron commander, Major Kirby (John Wayne), by sacrificing his brother-in-law's life to the success of the mission. He is rewarded with the promotion he had long been denied, and we know that he has now reached maturity. He is now a leader. The ideal leader (father), rather than integrating sympathy and strength, responsiveness to the needs of his men and responsibility for the success of the mission, sacrifices the one to the other, and in so doing, *Flying Leathernecks* makes clear what *Rebel Without a Cause* obscures. All these films, in one way or another, deal with the price of ma-

turity, and all of them find the price acceptable, even necessary.

It is difficult not to see in this preoccupation a reflection of America's new role as leader of the "free world," and it is equally difficult not to see in the obsessive worrying of this issue traces of bad conscience. America's mainstream intellectuals of the fifties liked to congratulate themselves on having reached "maturity," on having emerged from the leftwing childhood of the thirties. Leslie Fiedler collected his notorious essays on McCarthy, Hiss, and the Rosenbergs under the title *An End to Innocence,* and it was in the name of maturity that cold-war liberals rationalized their complicity in the postwar witch hunt. Leadership required a clear eye and steady hand, freedom from sentiment, and a readiness to sacrifice local attachments and personal ties for greater good. But it is clear from the evasiveness of *Rebel Without a Cause* that this was a formulation with which Ray, unlike Fuller, was not entirely happy.

It would be unreasonable to expect a Hollywood director to produce radically incisive and critical films, and I wish to make it clear that this analysis of *Rebel Without a Cause* should not be construed as a criticism of Ray for not having achieved the impossible. It is, however, an attempt to demonstrate that Ray's films are not nearly so subversive as his auteurist admirers would make them. Given the institutional, cultural, and economic limitations of Hollywood production, they cannot be, and it is naive to think otherwise.

NOTES

I am indebted to Mary P. Ryan for many of the ideas expressed in this article.
1. Nicholas Garnham, *Samuel Fuller.* New York, 1972, p. 37.
2. Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Circle of Pain: The Cinema of Nicholas Ray," *Sight and Sound,* Autumn, 1973, p. 221.

WILLIAM CADBURY

Theme, Felt Life, and the Last-Minute Rescue in Griffith After *Intolerance*

There have come to be two positions on D. W. Griffith, a modern orthodoxy and a much-needed revisionism. The orthodoxy is a picture of Griffith the great innovator, whose values and intentions however amount only to a style for his times.[1] When those times changed (it happened with startling suddenness, Karl Brown reminisces, between the making and exhibiting of *Intolerance*[2]), Griffith's values and his style fell away from those congenial to his audience. In this view the later films are spasmodic attempts to accommodate the new audience without, however, any aesthetic growth on Griffith's part. Griffith is aesthetically the same throughout his career, and the films only come to look a bit different because they get worse.

The welcome revisionism offered recently by John Dorr challenges both aspects of the orthodoxy.[3] It admits Griffith the early innovator but sees him breaking new aesthetic ground after *Intolerance,* moving to a new style built not on melodramatic action and last-minute rescues but on investigation of spiritual states through close-ups; not on passive victim-heroines but on actively assertive New Women; not on Lillian Gish but on a Carol Dempster quite different from the poor actress of the orthodoxy. In this view, Griffith's real value only emerges after the "great" period is over, and his later films improve in style and content. In effect, Griffith changes and his films get better.

The revisionism is most welcome, as it encourages recognition of the wonderful later films. But I think the earlier films are as wonderful, and render the same rich vision, as the later; and the later ones use just as brilliantly (though often, naturally enough, a little differently) the devices of the early. Dorr misreads key Dempster films to make them seem more different from key Gish films than they are. And he misanalyzes the structural centers of the late films, which simply develop the parallel editing techniques which always were at the heart of Griffith's conception of expressive cinematic form.

Let us first deal with the claim that the late films mark a change in vision. Dorr argues that in *Dream Street* "a decidedly neurotic element enters Griffith's cinema." For instance Billy, the younger brother of Gypsy's (Dempster's) favored Spike, is "pathologically insane." He murders someone, but wins release, to our full approval, by lying about the crime during courtroom confession of it. But in fact that is not what Griffith shows us. In the initial presentation of the killing we see Billy first maddened by the demonic violin-player and then in close-up shooting the intruder whom he has found in his room. (The shooting is intercut also with Sam Jones, the incredibly offensively portrayed "black" comic relief, running away from the sound of the shot.) We then see the victim go out of focus and fall, and when we finally return to medium long shot of the room we see that there is a chair overturned on the floor which wasn't there at the start of the sequence, before we went to close-ups and diversions.

Then in the confession Billy tells us remorsefully of the killing, but this time we see the victim in fact hit viciously at Billy with the chair, miss, and come at him again with it; it is only at that point that Billy shoots him. Clearly Billy is not lying; clearly we are seeing what we

had not seen before because we cut away from it; clearly the killing was in self-defense. And equally clearly it is appropriate that in Billy's turmoil of mind the fact of the shooting, its quality of matching by its violence the violence of his own motives (half crazy with love for Gypsy, he has just seen her in an impassioned love scene with his brother Spike), would be what we would *rightly* be shown at that point. It is not the fine points of legal culpability which count for Billy there, but the fact that his assertiveness, always before submerged for his brother's sake, has suddenly gotten out of control and caused him, to his own abject panic, to lash out. But in the clearing of accounts of the confession it is equally appropriate that the extenuating circumstances which actually held might come to Billy's consciousness. There is reconciliation here, not the achievement of a criminal loony's freedom through a false confession.

Similarly, though Dorr says there is doubt about the paternity of Gypsy's baby, Griffith gives us no reason to doubt that the baby is Spike and Gypsy's, and Billy's being included in the domestic scene at the end, when Gypsy and Spike and Billy all watch the baby play, is no "perversion of earlier scenes and situations" but just what you would expect after anguish, repentance, and a last-minute confession which admits and purges moral even as it clears of legal guilt. Likewise, Dorr finds it shocking that Gypsy dances around her father's deathbed; but her action is not some strange rite but because he, knowing himself dying, asks her to dance for him. She does so until she learns that he has died. There is nothing perverse there.

Nor does the dance to quell the panic in the burning theater work as Dorr says. He calls it a "daring and unsettling scene," in which close shots of the rioting audience come to seem "defined and confined" while "Dempster's movement within the larger frame" of the long shots "is anarchy." "Dempster is more out of control than the riot." But what Griffith shows us of the audience is a series of vastly disturbing vignettes of as motley a crew as you could hope

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to find. They are indeed in close-up, but not thereby confined and defined but rather bursting outwards from a crowded, explosive, painful, ungainly frame. In contrast Gypsy, saying "Sit down, I'm the only fire here!"[4] rushes on to a bare stage and, shot always in clear air with adequate psychological space, does what is far less a dance than a set of acrobatic posturings and steps which all say "Here I am, attend to me and have fun, look, look!" It is ridiculous as a dance, but its effect is immensely charming. The contrast is not between anarchy and control. Rather, Gypsy is personal assertiveness, innocent and gamboling and avowedly sexually appealing, and the riot is inward fantasy, oppressive and oppressed, crushed and crowded and breathless.

In no sense is Gypsy's innocence "tainted and dangerous," as Dorr thinks. Nor is there ambiguity to the themes or the heroine. Spike indeed "demonstrates his love for Gypsy in heavy-handed bullying ways," but this is not because Griffith is rendering a statement about the forms love must sometimes take—how for instance like the violin player it is grotesque under its mask of beauty. Spike must show love in awkward ways, at first, because of the "thoughtlessness of exuberant youth" (this is about the first title defining Spike) and because of the pressures militating against sensitivity in the ghetto. But he learns, he learns—and that he does so is the very theme of the film.

Dorr may say that not "all Griffith films [are] about Lillian Gish and the imminence of rape," but it remains true that in *Dream Street* Spike does try to rape Gypsy, who is saved only by Billy's intervention. "Oh Lord, why won't the men love me right?" asks Gypsy, whose charming desire is frank and open, sexual and innocent. We see her in her street pensive and yearning with a flock of doves, and in her apartment playing with a stuffed rabbit, and it is as natural for her to be shown that way as for Susie of the true heart to be shown with her chickens and cow, or Anna Moore with her pigeons, or Mountain Girl with her goat. There is indeed "animal freedom" in Gypsy's desires, but there is no "moral anarchy"—unless for a woman to be sexually yearning is an anarchic situation. The irony of Gypsy's lot is not that she is "lethal, erotic and demanding," but that men confuse sex with aggression.

Far from *Dream Street* rendering a neurotic perversity, it simply works its way toward a typical Griffith image of the good, a picture of a mutuality only barely achieved against pressures from within and without—tendencies to withdrawal and to insensitivity to others, the tendencies we find in most Griffith films. How is the unprotected person like Gypsy, full of desire for self-expression, to achieve fulfillment when it looks as if the two sorts of character we find in the world are equally powerless to avoid turning monstrous? Spike's jovial, demonstrative assertiveness all too easily becomes brutal because it is unable to accommodate or to respect others. But Billy's responsive reflectiveness, sensitive and concernful, all too easily becomes paranoid because its very valuation of others hinders action.

But it turns out that assertiveness and reflectiveness are not the only character choices. On another level in this world other forces are fighting it out, represented by the violin player in touch with the forces of evil and the preacher in touch with heaven, and themselves supervised by the morning star. What happens is less that Billy loses and Spike wins than that a new organization displaces the hopeless contraries of

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assertiveness and reflectiveness which had seemed all the world had to offer. There may be selfishness and unselfishness, in free variation with the different character types. Assertiveness may limit itself, and reflectiveness may learn to come forward. Thus Griffith turns what looked like "You can't win either way" into "You can win both ways."

Dream Street's structure works up to rendering the conquering of selfishness first for Spike and then for Billy. We have discussed Billy's climactic confession; the whole first half of the film shows how Spike gets over his problems. When he first courts Gypsy in front of her house, as a "man of action" he bends her wrist back and tries to force a kiss. He even slaps her before she runs into the house to escape and complain to the Lord about her incompetent suitors. She has been attracted to Spike, leaning toward him as if magnetized when he sings a song for her on the dock, but she claps her head as if to clear it, and one feels that her attraction and his desire will have much trouble coming to terms.

Again on the inner stairs of her house Gypsy is attracted to Spike, only fleeing to her room when he tries to kiss her. Though she tells him not to come into her room he does. She is bothered, but after all she wants to love him; she plays langorously with a piece of string, she claims that his feet don't match (such play amazes Spike, he has no idea how to deal with it), she sits across the room when he pulls up a chair for her, she jumps away from him and does little enticing steps. Griffith makes us un-

derstand perfectly the necessary admixtures of aggression in the sexual games, the requirements that integrity be preserved for both people to allow them to let their guards down and let each other in, the tentativeness of it all along with the obvious sexuality of the atmosphere.

But Spike can't sustain it, and he fails her. The violin player sounds for him, and Gypsy's proud teasing, by which she will keep her sexual submission from being a defeat, just comes to make Spike mad. The scene of courtship becomes a rape. But though Gypsy is as terrified as later she is of Sway Wan, we have seen enough of Spike to be full of pity for him as well as for Gypsy. He would like to love her right, but knows no other way than force and no other motive than self-gratification. Billy with his roses comes in, and helped by the preacher's voice gets Spike to leave—but Billy is overcome by sentiment, and can merely offer the roses (as earlier he offered a song) and flee. If Spike cannot go towards Gypsy except to force her, Billy cannot go towards her at all but turns everything inside in a very paradigm of self-defeating sentiment.

At home, then, Spike is torn between the voice of the preacher and the violin player, as he visualizes Gypsy terrified as she was when he attacked her and also as she might be, seraphic and lovely. The preacher shows him Gypsy coming to her door and waiting for him outside her house, yearning and ready on the bench in the empty street. Spike goes to her, indicates his rejection of his old ways, and "The first battle won, the pure flame at last," they kiss each other in a holy and sensual ecstasy. No more awkward rough fumbling, but full mutuality— and it is utterly convincing, despite how conventional the description makes it sound, that Gypsy should blush, be embarrassed, hide her head on Spike's chest. The sense of "felt life" is very strong for me in these sequences,[5] as Griffith convinces us of the plausibility of shy retreats from such openness, and of just how hard it is, in unsupportive surroundings, to get together with others, to get past one's own limiting styles and awkwardnesses.

After following Billy's story for a bit, we return to Gypsy and Spike on their bench. The scene is designed as a contrast to the scene of the near-rape; Gypsy tells Spike not to come in and this time he obeys. She closes the door on him but as he falls on his knees in adoration outside she looks back out. She sees him, laughs as she had laughed before, but goes in again refusing to let him follow: and this time far from being offended Spike is delighted, and struts off down the street comically far more self-satisfied than he could ever have been if his forcefulness had been successful. Above, Gypsy does one of her little dances and sinks in her chair to kiss her stuffed rabbit. As we see Spike walk off happily we realize that though they are separated, though they are withholding, though Gypsy is teasing Spike and he is being teased, both are infinitely satisfied. Griffith here has to prove the case, difficult to make plausible, that there is net gain from abstention. He proves it by embedding the decision to abstain in an emotional context in which not to abstain would have to amount to dominance of the man over the woman and her abject submission to him. Dorr thinks it neuroticism to hold it difficult to "make pure and sweet the dreams" of a "Life [which] is not always what it seems," as the titles have it. But it seems to me that by showing the actual emotional danger of selfishness and the emotional rewards attendant on mutuality, Griffith proves that a forceful but sensitive responsiveness to others can give joys as great as those symbolized by Gypsy's happy little shuffle with her rabbit or Spike's delighted strutting as he leaves Gypsy's door.

But I do not think this proof is higher in quality than those of the best Gish films, nor indeed that it is different in point. Griffith films tend to have the same form, with which they render Griffith's insistent imaginative vision, and the form is supported by the principal actors whoever they are. Characters in Griffith's films are pressed by circumstances into emotional holding actions. From these their natural vitality can only briefly glance out until the issues of accommodation of personal assertiveness and con-

straining commitment (which each film raises in its own terms) can be brought to resolution. And when they are. the force of the characters' privately held assurance of the good can be implemented and the necessarily hidden power of their buried life can reach the surface of the action.

We knew the force of buried life in *Dream Street* in part through Gypsy's dances, public and private. And Gypsy went out to Spike in quite overt ways. But to think of Gish as "sweet, innocent and cloying," in a way Dempster is not, is simply untrue to Gish's display of inner life bubbling up in a hostile world. *True Heart Susie,* for instance, is as solidly Gishian a film as one could find. And the main sense we have of Susie is of someone who has to suppress her natural spark because of the cloddishness of those around her. Just like Gypsy, Susie isn't loved right, and we keep seeing her worth, like Gypsy's, press against her lover's inadequacy to appreciate it.

Just as Gypsy from the start has a project—to express her sexuality so the men will love her right—so from the start has Susie. "I *must* marry a smart man," she confides to her cow after outspelling William, and sending William to college is her way to make him that man. Susie comes forward sexually to William as much as Gypsy to Spike, though William can no more figure how to love Susie right than Spike can Gypsy. After the spelling bee Susie reaches up to be kissed, but William awkwardly turns aside. When William is going off to college, Susie at her gate tries again for the kiss and William fails her again. After Susie has overheard William's heavy flirtation in her own rose garden with the flapper Bettina (Truffaut recreates Susie's later faint in that garden in *Two English Girls*), she dresses up and "prepares for war," putting on necklace, silk stockings, and cornstarch for make-up. But then she makes "a dangerous move," and goes back to her old clothes and sits on her porch to let William see her as she is and, hopefully, love her right this time. But he misses her quality again and only asks her if she thinks he should marry.

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She says yes, but he goes away, having Bettina not Susie in mind.

Like Gypsy, Susie offers herself delicately but clearly, and her assertiveness is as plain as her decorum. A girl tries to stop William and flirt with him—Susie plucks insistently at his sleeve until he comes with her. Walking with William, Susie does an amazing little side-kick every three or four steps as she walks. It has no verisimilitude, but it perfectly renders the quality of Susie's inner life, the vitality which pops through the demure surface of her social relations. And that vitality, the sense of Susie with energy to spare, in a context which, like Gypsy's, is not up to appreciating it, charges the film for us.

The assertiveness Susie must suppress is summed up in a climactic scene which is full of felt life. Bettina has sneaked out from William to party with her friends, has lost her key and been caught in a rainstorm coming home (she catches her death, in fact). She comes to Susie, begging to be taken in and to have Susie cover for her. Of all the people in the film, only Bettina has trouble pushing Susie's gate open, and Susie herself is, entirely reasonably, most reluctant to help or to lie for Bettina. But she agrees, and we see the two of them in bed. Susie thinks about it, gets madder and madder, and hauls back to punch Bettina out, with a most disgusted expression.

But we see Bettina in close-up and in troubled sleep, and we see Susie realize her inadequacy and pathos as a person. She shakes her head a little, accepts it all, and cuddles Bettina with open eyes to a fade. And Griffith earns it: the scene is not coy or cloying, since Susie is aware of Bettina's unworthiness of William and that that is just what makes Bettina so annoying and at the same time makes her human appeal so irresistible. Susie's inner life is suppressed here as everywhere not because Griffith intends to praise passivity, but because activity itself, in a world out of tune with one's needs and deserts, must often take this form. In the bind Gypsy is put in by Spike, action becomes yearning and waiting. In the bind Susie is put in by William, it becomes this sort of annoyed amused tolerance.

Of course Griffith renders not just the buried life pushing outwards but also what holds it in. Just as the low point of *Dream Street* is Gypsy finding the very man she longs for turning monstrous before her eyes even as she tries to work out a way to adjust her assertiveness to his, so the low point of *True Heart Susie* is Susie mounting a full-scale effort finally to get William for herself yet finding herself suddenly pressed upon in as nightmarish a way as anything provided by Sway Wan. Susie arrives at a party, all dressed up and ready to charm, only to have to come into a crowded room to congratulate William as he tells her he took her advice to marry and that Bettina has accepted him. Susie must be demure and proper here, and before the scene closes on her surreptitiously wiping her eyes Griffith gives us a virtually Eisensteinian set of close-ups of the people in the room, of Susie's aunt looking disturbed and Bettina's looking triumphantly complacent, of Bettina looking smugly down on William looking fatuous, of various members of the group sitting silently in what amounts, as a series of shots, to a montage tableau. The very treatment renders the complacency, the irrevocable quality, the sense that possibilities have suddenly been exhausted and feeling has been socialized in the worst possible way, which characterize the situa-

tion. In its varnished parlor stasis it forms the diametric opposite of the hitch-legged walk down the country path which renders this film's picture of the good. Such kinds of control of feeling through the cinematic surface, and its truth to narrative context, are what make Griffith great.

Both early and late, Griffith invested his films with that felt life which the revisionism of Dorr finds only late, and, both early and late, Griffith structured it by variants of the device of the "last-minute rescue" which the orthodoxy of Casty finds thematically dessicating and which it is the essence of the revisionism to say that Griffith went on beyond. Fundamentally a technique of parallel editing leading to a climax, the rescue is properly neither a category of content nor a mere technique for audience manipulation, but rather a specifically cinematic device for rendering the development of the issues raised by a film in order to give an aspect of their resolution a striking representation whose feeling will match its thematic import.

Thus in *True Heart Susie* the entire sequence leading up to Susie's gesture against and then accepting Bettina is treated in the characteristic rhythms and patterns of the device. We observe Bettina sneak out and enjoy her party, get caught in the storm and come to Susie. But we observe two other locations as well, William agonizing at Bettina's door and Susie caring for her sick aunt. Bettina's charming weakness is played against Susie's charming strength as she sits on the covers to keep her aunt's restless arm under, and Susie longs for William's house from her own window, toward which William yearns from his. Bettina's dancing and Susie's caring, William's moral unease and the aunt's physical unease, the lost key and the arm out of the covers, all illuminate each other and lead to Susie's sadly going to her bed just while Bettina equally sadly can't find her way to hers. The sense of converging lines and the treatment in mutually revealing shots of decreasing duration are just those of the last-minute rescue, and the climax in Susie's moral triumph of acceptance

feels just like the rescue's triumph.

Even in films where action sweeps us up and where there is a literal rescue, the sequence of the last-minute rescue interplays with the issues of the film for enrichment and specification of theme. No one, for instance, would deny that *Way Down East* is overwhelmingly impressive for the rescue from the ice. But the rescue is experienced in the context of the sequences by which Anna Moore has come to be there. Anna's progression from openly sexual delight in Lennox Sanderson, to emotional closedness as she walks toward Bartlett's, her fiercely but restrainedly scornful antagonism to Lennox and her developing feeling for David Bartlett are richly particularized. There is a dogged quality to Anna Moore, more serious because more initially wounded, and more determinedly assertive of her right to happiness, than Susie's youthful quality. It gives consistency and appropriateness to the lovely close-ups of Anna in her party gown and as Elaine of Astolat which would have been impossible for Susie, and gives psychological density to the famous confrontation scene.[6]

It gives also a specific thematic effect to the rescue from the ice. Anna's despair as her possibilities come to nothing, and then her virtually committing suicide on the frozen river, are not mere passivities like those of The Boy being taken to execution in *Intolerance,* but are, like Susie's ironic resignation, the very mode of action of her dogged and serious character in that plight. And David's finally chasing her is an eruption into action of a character whose error (like the errors of all the Billy types) is to turn feeling inward and be ineffectual; but his saving of Anna expresses as it rewards the value of her character as well as of his own.

Like Anna's, Henriette's vitality in *Orphans of the Storm* is squelched between the same alternatives: by Lennox-like aristocrats who press for sensuality during a party, and by rubish revolutionaries who catch Henriette up in a dance of their own but, finding she is not one of themselves, threaten her with their guillotine. (In a doubling, we note that Pierre Frochard and his brother Jacques who threaten Henriette's sister Louise are perfect versions of Billy and Spike.) It might seem, in summary of the action, that Danton's rescue of Henriette from the guillotine is just like David's rescue of Anna from the ice. But it by no means feels that way or renders the same theme; Griffith is not repeating himself even if he is using the same structure. As soon as it happens it is clear to us that David's change of mind, by which he breaks free of his family and cleaves to Anna, represents a counter-assertiveness to the tendencies of his social system to become inflexibly intolerant—and he goes after Anna very much for himself. But Danton's rescue, motivated by his recollection of Henriette's kindness to him and of her lover the Chevalier's having fed the poor, represents rather a selfless submission to the appeal of old values, treasured kindnesses, personal relations. What David does for himself in rejecting his family's stasis, Danton does for others in turning his revolutionary society's chaos in the direction of more humane action. David's action is a personal triumph of assertion of energies, but Danton's is a triumph of the channeling of energies into a broader tolerance.

Even in these avowed spectaculars, the rescues do not replace thought with action, but rather articulate and resolve particularized themes. The Griffith themes, as we have seen, center around issues of social constraint against which, without becoming monstrous, human character must somehow find a way to assert its legitimate demands. Often the solution for the individual is acting morally by refraining from action or by acting counter to his or her own immediate interests. But the force of that moral action impells someone else into activity, for instance a rescue, which will reward it. The last-minute rescues, as well as rewarding the central figure, also thus manifest his or her force, since it is the moral force which made the difference. Thus it is only natural variation that the last-minute rescues may be either by someone else, as in *Orphans of the Storm,* or by the hero or heroine, as in *True Heart Susie.* And as with any device which may be used to render developments of

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specific issues in terms subtly adjusted to the issues' necessities, the last-minute rescue is capable of other variations as well, to match the particular requirements of specific variants of Griffith's general theme.

In *True Heart Susie* the rescue pattern leads up to Susie's triumph. In *Abraham Lincoln* the rescue pattern is set aside from Lincoln's triumph in order both to manifest it and to keep a clear distinction between its spiritual and social aspects. The film has two strands, one of which is the establishment of Lincoln's value in his sacrifice of himself. As is typical of Griffith's structures, Lincoln's assertiveness is made clear at the start. In John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* Lincoln faces down with stern patriarchal repression a bully who shouts "I'm the buck of this lick," but in Griffith's film it is Lincoln himself who fights a bully and then explodes into shouting the same sentence. But the assertiveness is constrained by the demands of history, and for the bulk of the film Lincoln's inner life can only express itself in acts whose assertiveness is largely to deny assertion. Lincoln pardons a young deserting soldier whose legs ran away with him when he saw his friend's corpse—a reminder of Lincoln's own legs' running away with him when he first tried to marry Mary Todd. The soldier's reluctance is linked, through his dead comrade, to Ann Rutledge dead, and to

the whole weight of Lincoln's personal obligation to a vanished frontier past. It is in this context that Lincoln pardons the South itself, despite the pressures on him not to do so.

But pardonings take their toll. Rather than acting as against a bully, the pardonings are a giving up of what Lincoln might have done as buck of this lick. For all their sense of moral tranquillity they entail also Lincoln giving up a part of himself, becoming less than he was. The assassination is of course the climax of this development towards giving himself up, as it completes the chain by which the heroic and boastful frontier hero becomes an awkward dancer, a president whose legs will not fit under the White House sofas, a rube who cannot be kept in his own shoes. For "The Union, we've saved it at last," Lincoln gives up dignity and life itself; the sacrifice of personal forcefulness for the Union is Lincoln's cost for which we are to be grateful to him.

But Griffith wants Lincoln's movement toward assassination to be seen as an action: it is Lincoln's spirit which leads him inexorably, as the last set of shots makes clear, from log cabin to the Lincoln Memorial. The fact that it is not submissiveness but profound assertiveness which drives that development is shown in another plot strand which presents the feeling appropriate to Lincoln's achievement. In it Lincoln passes on his assertiveness to others like him, whose activity may thus be assigned to him. The war is run at first by a grotesque ineffectual General Scott, a kind of Toby Jug parody of a European general, but Lincoln takes the conduct of the war from him and gives it to Grant—as backwoodsy and disreputable as Lincoln himself. And in turn this assertiveness is passed on to another cut from the same cloth: Sheridan's ride, his turning of the losing army to "rally round the flag, boys, rally once again," is treated in Griffith's best last-minute rescue style, with pounding hooves and all his most stirring techniques of mass action, striking close-ups, and exciting editing. Since these events derive from Lincoln's assigning the war effort to people who are like what he was once himself, it can seem to be Lincoln's best quality (though im-

plemented by others while he sits in the White House in mystic trance) which actually saves the Union through just that forcefulness for which Lincoln earns our gratitude by allowing it to pass out of himself for the general good. He has found the way, as do the heroes of many Griffith films, to socialize assertiveness and to make restraint action.

The case against the last-minute rescue is that it simplifies, so that as a rhetorical pattern obligatorily coming near the ends of films it limits the imagination about what can be in the films which must be ended with it. In the later films especially, says Alan Casty, "even the style seemed to collaborate with the reductive conceptions, restricting the kinds and degrees of felt life that could become the content of the work." But that is simply not true. *Abraham Lincoln* symbolizes a passive-seeming achievement so that its truly active nature will be rendered in the surface of the film; *Isn't Life Wonderful?* goes further and uses the last-minute rescue pattern to raise feelings in us which the whole film will deny. Far from investing all value in the conclusion of the rescue, that film puts into it everything which will turn out to be false. Clearly we must say, faced with cases like these, that Griffith (like any artist) uses the devices he learns to control to make his points; and he employs whatever clever variations on their ordinary use will serve his purpose. That is not being impoverished by one's rhetoric, but enriched.

Inga and Paul in *Isn't Life Wonderful?* have harvested their potatoes, but they are spotted by destitute workers who seek profiteers transporting hoarded food. The chase is treated just like Gus chasing Flora through the woods in *Birth of a Nation*. Paul and Inga are caught and their potatoes are stolen—but it is as clear a moral triumph as Susie accepting Bettina in her bed that Inga creeps up the side of the empty potato wagon, realizes that all is lost, and then decides that life is wonderful after all. The potatoes have been treated as the necessary and sufficient means of Inga's achieving what she wishes most in life, her marriage to Paul. And the marriage

will have to be put off because they are stolen. But Griffith does not want just to say that putting off is not renouncing, or that while there is even a life of resignation there is hope. He wants to say that life is wonderful, not just bearable. And for this he sets up a double proof: intensity is what one treasures, moment by moment and success or no; true intensity may entail transformation of its natural drive into a more general understanding than of one's own purposes. The real danger is not of loss, but of truncation. It is a particularly rich version of the general Griffith theme, rendered in a particularly rich treatment of the characteristic Griffith device.

Intensity is provided most obviously in the particularization of experience which has struck so many viewers of this film. Dempster's extraordinary acting, the fully realized personal relations throughout the family, the warm rendition of the festivals of turnips and feasts of liverwurst in gamely struggling lives, and the light-sculptured love scenes between Paul and Inga combine to make us feel the attitude to life which can properly experience such things, and not the goal to which they are directed.[7] As usual in Griffith, the bulk of the film builds up an intensity of felt life to which whatever happens later must be related.

But Griffith means us to see, through his last-minute rescue in which all is gained as all is lost, that this sort of intensity has its psychic hazards, developing attitudes which in their selfishness may be like the monstrous character deformities we have seen in the other films. Throughout the film a disturbing double valuation has been built up toward the pursuing workers. On the one hand, we have a lot more sympathy for them than for most villains. In the very middle of Paul's family's "lucky day" dinner we are shown "the giant" who leads the chase resolving to spare his wife the suffering of having only rotten meat; that resolution leads to the foray into the woods. Much as we like Paul and Inga, our awareness of the suffering of others makes us aware too that the family's good fortune *is* unusual, and perhaps in a sense unjustified. In the workers we have a brutalism

which is simply assertiveness gone too far, and for which, as for Spike's similar case, we feel sympathy.

But on the other hand (and this is characteristic for Griffith), there has been throughout a distinct aura of sexual menace. We were told at the beginning that the giant's righthand man would rob Inga of her greatest earthly possession. A little later, unaware, she is followed home by this man. While she displays lots of leg taking off her stockings in her room the man pauses outside as if entranced—we can see her, and it is distinctly as if he can too. The same man is among the loutish idlers Inga must pass on her way to the meat store, and he is one of those who menace her as she walks her chickens on a leash. The episodes suggest that Inga's most precious possession may be her chastity. So when, with the couple caught, Inga babbles naively to this very man that of course the gang won't hurt a fellow worker like Paul, we fear the worst.

But the giant rejects Paul's union card, and the whole tone changes. The henchman shares in expressing self-loathing and ironic laughter at the justice of their self-description as no longer workers but now made beasts through war and privation. Rape was on no one's mind but ours, and the simple personal threat against Inga dissolves (for her too) into understanding of the straits to which people may be forced by deprivation. It is against that sense of reduction, of the vulnerability of people pressed into turning monstrous, that Griffith sets the assertiveness of Inga's final "Oh, isn't life wonderful?"—since she still has the relation to Paul which matters, and which in this social context is all she may have without selfishness.

Clearly here, as in many other Griffith films, the last-minute rescue has been used to undercut the very expectations of simplification of theme which its use suggests: potatoes are not everything, nor even chastity. Here, as elsewhere, the device supports and renders a striking demonstration of the Griffith theme: that despite pressures towards simplifications of self-gratification or of brutalism, the assertiveness of self-

hood can through patience, unselfishness, and love find a way of acting in the world so as to find fulfillment in terms not forced upon it, but its own.

Far from passing beyond the mere melodrama of the last-minute rescue, as Dorr suggests, or from decaying into its mere employment for simplification of response, as Casty argues, Griffith as he develops the technique throughout his career gives the device, as André Bazin said of Hitchcock's development of montage itself, "a relativity and a meaning."[8] And there seems little more we can ask of an expressive device than that it bear exactly what shades of meaning, what relativities to its context in a developing story, its author's subtly developing but stable vision would have it bear.

NOTES

1. See Alan Casty, "The Films of D. W. Griffith: A Style for the Times," *Journal of Popular Film,* I (Spring 1972), 67–69, which is in slightly different form Ch. 11 of his *Development of Film: An Interpretative History* (New York: Harcourt, 1973). See also the classic argument that there is something reductive about Griffith's technique, Eisenstein's "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today."

I am indebted to the University of Oregon Office of Scientific and Scholarly Research for financial support of this study.

2. Karl Brown, *Adventures with D. W. Griffith* (New York: Farrar, 1973), pp. 173–4. Like Casty, Brown emphasizes Griffith's achievement in creating exciting cinematic effects out of the material of stage melodrama. See especially pp. 31–96. The orthodox view of Griffith's decline is accepted whole, and the trivial grounds for it revealed in the imperceptive treatment of the films, in Robert M. Henderson, *D. W. Griffith: His Life and Work* (New York: Oxford, 1972).

3. John Dorr, "The Movies, Mr. Griffith and Carol Dempster," *Cinema,* VII (Fall 1971), 23–24, and "The Griffith Tradition," *Film Comment,* X (March–April 1974), 48–54. My quotations are from the earlier article.

4. My viewings are full-screen not Moviola viewings, and while I do my best I do not guarantee total accuracy of transcriptions of intertitles, especially as to punctuation.

5. The phrase is not unusual, but I refer to Casty, p. 77

(quoted below), one of whose main points is that Griffith's films lack the quality.

6. Griffith must have Anna's story in mind as that of Tess of the D'Urbervilles. The false marriage (as in the editions of *Tess* common in Griffith's time) to a wealthy rake whom the heroine meets on a journey from a shiftless mother to a rich cousin; the dying baby baptized by the heroine in the middle of the night; the farm surrounded by water meads where the recuperating heroine meets and loves but feels guilty at accepting an angelic lover: these and other details must be means to recreate *Tess,* and there is no hint of them in the melodrama by Lottie Blair Parker, *Way Down East* (n.p.: privately printed, 1899).

7. The visual treatment of Paul and Inga interplays with their rendered experience much as the music of Act II of *Tristan und Isolde* interplays with the experience of the lovers. While these cases are particularly striking I think they are merely especially obvious instances of a general rule which also applies to the last-minute rescue. Joseph Kerman rightly argues in his wonderful *Opera as Drama* (New York: Knopf, 1956) that for dramatic poetry "in the largest sense the dramatic form is articulated by the poetry in conjunction with the plot structure. The same can be true of music" (p. 9). I think it can be extended: as language is to written literature and as music is to opera, so *mise-en-scène* is to film.

8. André Bazin, "The Evolution of Film Language," translated by and in Peter Graham, *The New Wave* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), p. 49.

I Have Played Christ Long Enough!

Mikles Jancsó talks with Gideon Bachmann in Rome

It is the first Sunday on which Italians are forbidden to drive. A warm winter drizzle turns the big square in front of Rome's Pantheon into a shiny mirror, reflecting incongruous images: hundreds of brand-new bicycles ridden by unusually calm-faced families. Fathers who shamefacedly wobble along on rusty old knowledge while their kids are far ahead into the crowd. Mothers trying to mould their fur coats to the new requirements. An occasional collision, unlike the ones common for the square: calm, rather joyful encounters between cyclists and pedestrians. No screaming. It seems that the oil shortage has given Italy back its human dimension. But hanging in the air, grey in its imminence like the rain, is tomorrow, when tumultuous traffic will again engulf the ancient ruins, and when the same people who now benignly share the unexpected comfort will unlimber their arsenal of aggressive verbiage, ready at a fender's screech to launch into damnation.

It all seems terribly symbolic of the fate of the man with whom I am looking down at all this. From his window, which gives on the square, Miklos Jancsó seems to regard the temporary benevolence with the grain of salt that his life has taught him: the dreadful tomorrow sits in the corners of his mouth like the fake smile of doom. He has made the films he has wanted to make, he has made them in the country where he would have liked to make them, he has said the things he has been hoping to say and people have understood him. But will it all have been worthwhile when the chips of automation and industrialization are counted?

We are moved to make our statements by the blind hope that saying things will change matters. Such is the human weapon against destruction: illusion and hope against all odds. Jancsó has been stating and restating the theme of the century which we all share and which none of us seems capable of altering: that continuing down the path of intolerance we destroy the last vestiges of all that is human in our souls. It is a romantic theme, and like all romantic themes denigrated by intellectuals and political realists alike. Jancsó's romanticism has been slightly

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more successful than others', because he is a formalist and we love the accomplished forms of the technological age. But, like Roman traffic, he provides no hope.

The man himself is a perfect illustration of his work. The apartment he shares with an Italian writer, a woman who has done a lot of work in theater, is modern. The tables are transparent, the chairs square metal and plastic, the bookshelves laden heavily with Adorno, Lukács, Benjamin, and Marcuse. It is the citrus season; oranges and mandarins abound. There is an air of acceptance mixed with a fatalism of style. The decor seems to say, with the man: I do not like my epoch but I live in it and will do the best I can. After we finish our conversation he invites us back for dinner which he will cook. I am a romantic myself: I will come.

Miklos Jansció: photograph by Deborah Beer.
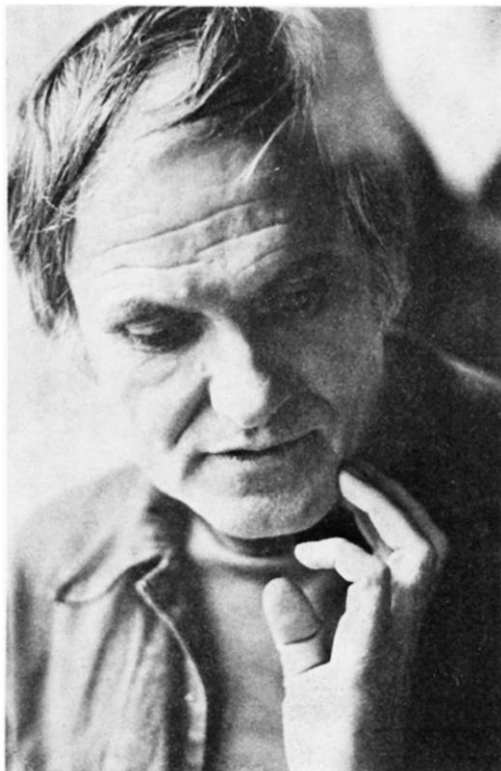
Are you religious?

Now, most probably, I am an atheist. Or have become one. But I have a lot of experience with the Christs. I have played the part in life. I used to think that humanity could be saved.

And you were disappointed and have given up that idea?

Perhaps. I can't judge myself very well. I feel quite old, too. I'm really not sure whether I've given it up.

Do you feel much has changed within the period since you started making films?

Yes. I began 25 years ago. Documentaries, newsreels. About eight or nine years of that. Also criticism. Nothing very significant; after all, it was the Stalinist era. Small magazines. Now the epoch of the commissars is somewhat over.

Revolting against it created some fine films in Hungary. Now it seems to me the waves you make are smaller.

What can we do? The most interesting theme is finished. We have become experts in Stalinism. But to talk of it today is boring. We know too much about power and the games played with it by the leaders. So what is left to the Hungarian cinema now, in terms of themes, are little things: how life changes, how it is full of contradictions and conflicts. But I think that at this moment cinema the world over is somewhat in decline.

Maybe it's a decline in the cinema's utility in the fight for the liberation of the soul. Since it hasn't proven a very useful tool, people believe in it less.

No, I don't think that's it. People continue believing in literature, for example. Great literature is always successful. Things go in waves. Where ten years ago the public went for American literature, today they seek out that of South America. Because today that's where there is a need for hope. The reason I find cinema is in decline is because the world is. There is a lack of philosophy, a lack of hope. There is nothing concrete to attach yourself to. Neither in cinema

nor in art nor anywhere else. It's our consumer society . . .

Do you believe then, that even in other times, before conscious culture, say in the beginning of agriculture, in the first Chinese and Egyptian empires, people always needed a hope for a better future in order to carry on? Wasn't it ever enough for man to live day by day?

We were never such a big group as now. And there have always been middle-class intellectuals who have directed society. A class that exploits and assumes power. We know very well that a certain antihumanitarian consciousness has always existed. So the others, the exploited, have always needed hope in order to continue. This dichotomy has always existed. At the moment, with Giovanna, I'm doing a small film for Italian television about old Rome, a play on Caesar and Octavian, and together we have read a thousand source books, and we find little has changed. Even Caesar went along on the basis of hope. I must say that I find him to have been rather an idiot. I think, finally, that we are built to need hope.

You think we are the only animal suffering from this deformation, this need of living always tomorrow?

Exactly.

That practically says that our end is foreshadowed by our intrinsic make-up.

Yes. We know the end. We are, in fact, slightly ahead of ourselves. And that seems to be our basic dimension. It's incredible, nobody, not even the petite bourgeoisie, can live for the day. Look at all the shopowners around this square: why do you think they are all fascists? Because they are looking for security, security for tomorrow. They live perfectly well now, but they seek insurance. And for them this insurance lies in order, in power, in maintaining a governing system.

So really this is a result of fear?

Certainly. Perhaps without fear you wouldn't have to rely so heavily on hope. Tomorrow, the future, they always instill fear in human beings. Only rare intellectuals can escape this constant fear, especially those not used to employing oppressive methods in dealing with their peers. A writer or artist can manage to live without touching the rights of others.

The way the artist touches one's rights may just be a different form of aggression, not a physical form. Perhaps mentally influencing you is worse? The physical aggression, being the natural, animal form, is perhaps preferable.

What is natural? Is eating more natural than thinking? Perhaps. That would be why the working classes are always right, yes? They live a physical existence, so physical action is more "correct" . . . maybe.

Marxism would be endangered by such a viewpoint. To say that revolutions without theoretical analysis are impossible, as Lenin did, would be wrong. In fact, as Susan Sontag claims, in the cultural sense, which is what we are talking about, the fascist ones were revolutions just as much as those of the left, with the theories just romantically added later.

I wouldn't go that far. For me, without thinking, nothing can be done. Philosophy, the working of the mind, is the center of anybody's day, and something always grows out of it which cannot necessarily be justified tomorrow. Perhaps that is how we are always creating religions. In order to survive, the ruling class always creates a religion. Stalinism was a religion, too. I know, I was a Stalinist myself.

But you won't claim that it was a result of the working of minds? It was an emotionally born need to belong, in other words, another hope.

I am not sure. We don't know how the mind works. We are totally separated from nature. We find something always stands in our way, something keeps us from realizing our natural physical existence without conflict. None of the ways we have embarked upon to eliminate these conflicts have been very direct ways. Probably nobody has found a good way to live naturally today.

Perhaps if we didn't insist on seeking answers with the limited forces of the brain and instead tried to seek answers directly through our bodies, we might find it easier to bridge the culture gap;

to reach a peace within society.

Or through the sensibility of our soul, perhaps. As I say, religions don't exist by accident. The bible, for example, bases its whole theory of salvation on purity of soul. This theory has always existed. The Christians and Jews didn't exactly invent it. We've known for centuries that we are evermore separated from nature and that we must find our way back to it. Maybe in another century or two we'll get there.

You are really optimistic in the sense that we will achieve this through the use of the mind? You think we can find ways that do not exist in nature? Ways back?

Yes, I am sure. Science will help man to find the ways.

In your films this conflict is always depicted, but never resolved. Hope, then, judging from your films, can exist at best in the spectator.

Why should I actually depict hope? My films are always small films that do not reach many people. They can touch maybe ten or a hundred people. They are like a conversation between us. There is no need to show my friends, on the screen, the existence of optimism. If optimism exists, it exists inside of us.

This might lead us to the question of why are you making films at all? There is always, in public art, the conflict between wanting to express oneself and wanting to convince others. I think artists must always face this conflict.

Then I don't think I am an artist. I make cinema, and cinema is not an art. It's a new form of expression that may or may not be useful. Useful to what? I don't even know. I make cinema for myself, for my friends, and sometimes, let's say, I have more friends than at other times. But even when I touch more people, it's always only students, young workers, some intellectuals. I've never made anything very popular. Probably just because I don't want to convince others. I start with the belief that people are intelligent. I don't think I need to begin at A all the time.

Are you sure, or is this another hope?

It's a sure hope.

Very talmudic. It could also just be an alibi.

An alibi for someone who can't do anything else? Yes, perhaps so.

Well, the cinema seems an awfully heavy form for talking to one's friends. Even in order to enlarge their circle, you might be better off writing or lecturing. You'd get to the same number of people with less effort.

Oh, of course. I am convinced that it was a mistake on my part to make films. It is true that it is a heavy medium: organizing, preparing, convincing, discussing, negotiating . . . incredible. I should paint, discuss with the young . . .

Or the old . . .

. . . or the old, yes. Anyway, with friends.

No, I'm serious. Isn't there, in what you say, an echo of that coffeehouse anarchism of the turn of the century, when politics were discussed among friends of convinced groupings, but failed when confronted with the Czar's police? After 1968, so many creative people seem to retreat to the position of working in small circles, "with the young." And even that kind of work, of course, includes what you say you wish to avoid: convincing.

As I said, I think much has changed since I started, and certainly since politics were elitist. The world is smaller and faster. The coffeehouses are bigger. I mean the intellectual circles. I think that today ideas cannot remain abstract and limited to the few.

The easy accessibility of ideas, or let's say the expansion of ideas in the age of their technical reproducibility, is just as dangerous. Look at the blind Marxism of the young in France and Germany, the whole Third-World mystique. Most of their widely held ideas are not founded in autonomous experience, and Lenin would have been one of the first to shudder at their emotional base. This is a phenomenon of insecurity as well: the need to belong to what you think is tomorrow. It is also a result of the world having become smaller and faster, and thus less suited to individual thinking.

You may be right. We must fight against taking ideas as if they were religion. Marxism as a point of departure for individual thinking. Again I think it was Stalin who was the villain:

he made a bible out of theory. At the time per-
haps that was the only way to go about things,
since people wanted secure beliefs. It may have
been the only way to save the Soviet Union then.
Whereas Lenin had been full of contradictions.
Stalin did what Jesus did: he took the doubts
out of the bible. But I hate this political
Jesuitism. I have played Christ long enough!
We have seen all religions fail, including our
Stalinist one.

*Don't you sometimes feel that the more re-
mote and inaccessible a thing is, the more it
attracts us? That in fact the difference between
an idea and a religion may be its mystic remote-
ness? Isn't it safer if our idols are not in danger
of being approached?*

Of course! Why else do you think Christianity
still exists? All this crap like paradise is safely
remote. As I said: hope is a basic human need.
Here on earth we are poor, but rich in promises.

*We started out by talking about the fascist
shopkeepers on the square downstairs. You
said they were fascist because they were afraid
of tomorrow. But couldn't it be reasoned that
this fear is better, because it's physical, com-
pared to the intellectual's hope, which is mythi-
cal? They will never become Jesuits . . .*

But they will become violent. This is an obses-
sion of mine: I cannot stand violence, especially
in society, and I cannot stand oppression. I
cannot accept the physical gesture. To me it
represents the great danger. To say this is really
my reason for making films.

*But in your films violence is sensual, carnal,
aesthetic, almost attractive. You never show
its culmination. The tremendous plasticity of
your images never permits an explosion of sav-
agery. It's a ritualistic apotheosis. That's why
I started by asking you if you were religious.*

I think this aesthetic violence is more danger-
ous. Take the films of Leni Riefenstahl. There
is deep beauty in the shot of Hitler walking be-
tween the thousands saluting him in silence. It's
not the ideas of national socialism that make
this an attractive film, but the attractiveness of
the shots that sells the ideas. The beauty of vio-
lence is extremely suggestive. That's its danger.

*Showing this beauty, isn't that dangerous in
itself? Couldn't your films work against you?*

I can only hope that they won't. I am cer-
tainly trying to show that mankind can't go on
like this. That beauty hides destruction.

*Another hope, then. You hope your work
will counteract that which you show. You trust
the spectator to be capable of a moral step: from
the attraction of (or to) violence, to its refusal.
Your shopkeepers aren't likely to be able to
make this step. You will end up making films
for those who really don't need them. Your
hopefully-large group of friends will agree with
you without seeing the film.*

But the others, the shopkeepers, may not be
convincible at all! Finally I think my films are
addressed to neither my convinced friends nor
the unconvincible shopkeepers, but to an in-be-
tween group, that may be capable of opening
up just a little bit, at least. And I think it's this
in-between group that is ever growing as the
world is getting smaller and faster. And I think
that the growth of this group also serves as a
guarantee in the political sense: it's because of
them that fascism will not pass. Of course you
could say that the mystic group, the fascism-
seekers, grows as well. But I trust in the think-
ing of the in-between more than in the mysticism
of the shopkeepers.

*Except that we have established that there is
a great deal of mysticism in the left as well . . .*

Yes, but I find this rather an interesting de-
velopment, this movement of youth from right
to left and back again, with methods often diffi-
cult to distinguish. Often they are very coura-
geous, and positive in their refusal to accept tra-
ditions. Of course it's a basic search for power,
because once you have the police and the tanks,
you no longer need philosophy. Even Khaddafi
claims he's a socialist, and then starts to laugh
like a madman. The young fascists at least have
the courage to say that they are the reaction.
Inasmuch as this is a return to point zero, it may
even be a positive development. At least it
teaches us to give up the comfortable, intellec-
tual illusions. A start with less empty hope. Un-
less this leads to Buddhism . . .

Oh, no! There's a notable difference. I think Buddhism is a giving up.

Certainly. I am, in fact, ferociously against all that, all this nonsense of India and Nepal and all that. Those are renunciations. I won't renounce. Maybe we can agree on something, after all.

Yes, except that I don't think that the cinema is useful as a medium for expressing oneself or for talking to anybody about these ideas. Even this conversation we are having seems more useful to me. We can have one each day, and maybe say something radically different each day. With cinema it would take me half a year to say what I've said to you this afternoon.

That is true, but I am not young enough. I have done many things, but all useless.

I wouldn't say that. Your work has given a sense of identity to many people. I don't know whether it will reach as many people as you hope it will, but that creative circle that every artist attempts in the form of a bridge between himself and his interlocutor, you are closing it with hope. It becomes part of your creation itself.

That's very beautiful. I hope it's true. The fact is that I am in crisis. Why don't I really do other things? Like cooking, for example. Finding physical relationships, more direct relationships. Expressing oneself in a relationship with one other person. I've tried to go along these lines; I've recently directed two small plays. In Hungary, one after *Confrontations* and one after *Red Psalm.* Plays give me another way of contacting people. I stay in the theater when they are given, and it gives me a physical contact, an immediate connection. It's in a small studio theater in Budapest, with about 80 seats, the actors are nonprofessionals, friends. The contacts are not cold as in the cinema.

Do I understand you correctly to be saying, in response to my question, that the reason you are continuing with cinema is that you are not sure you can do anything else, but that you are, at least, trying?

Exactly.

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Reviews

THE CONVERSATION

With *The Godfather,* Francis Ford Coppola managed to avoid a single moment that could really be called "bad"—bad technically, bad visually, bad conceptually. But, formally speaking, there isn't a single memorable moment in the film either, not a single moment, when you feel the medium is being used. Obviously Coppola was not about to lose sleep thinking up epiphanies for a story such as Puzo's. In fact after *The Conversation* it's difficult to imagine Coppola stretching himself for anyone's story but his own. The place to look in *The Godfather* is always screen-center. Search your memory for peripheral details, the kind of details that mean a fully rounded world is going on, and you won't find them. It's not that the screen isn't crowded. It is—the way naturalistic stage settings are. And for the same reason: to establish a convincingly illusionistic milieu for the principals. In *The Godfather* nothing apart from the central characters and events has a life of its own.

The Conversation stewed in Coppola's mind for seven years before he completed a screen play and directed what is unmistakably his own bad dream. Instead of a competent but obvious piece of archaeological reconstruction, we have a here-and-now world with lots of incidental, unpieced-together detail. The real-life subtext of the film is contemporary man's devotion to media—his loving manipulation of switches, knobs, and buttons—in contrast to his Martian estrangement from both other people's bodies and, even more frightening, his own. The film could be titled *The Hard Skin.* The Truffaut film's concentration on switches, buttons, zippers, etc. vis-à-vis soft body contact is a psychological anatomy lesson. Coppola enlarges the schism into social psychosis.

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The prime film subtext for *The Conversation,* as Coppola freely confesses, is *Blow-Up.* In *Blow-Up* the regress is the by-now familiar one of us watching them looking at images of each other. *The Conversation* brings our modern malady of voyeurism up-to-date, substituting auditory "peeking" for visual. As in *The Soft Skin* and *Blow-Up,* medium is the message. Just as Truffaut's professor and Antonioni's photographer find it so difficult to break through their media to a more direct contact with the world, so Coppola's master bugger, Harry Caul, discovers how hard it is to land without his customary instrumentation for guidance. When Harry begins to depend on his own faculties for navigation, they almost seem vestigial. It's not easy to forsake the modern mania for trying to find things out *indirectly.* To adapt McLuhan's image to this most McLuhanesque of films, the human nervous system expresses itself by constructing external analogies of itself—electronic circuity systems — through which it passionately operates isomorphically. As far as the human brain is concerned, there is simply no substitute for gaining knowledge circuitously. The body's needs are another matter. Like most of us Harry Caul has a mind-body problem. He abortively makes love in a raincoat. His body and lower brain crave immediate access, but his cerebral cortex cherishes the medium game. The conflict erupts in the later sequences, where it is not so much resolved as exhausted.

The Conversation is far more successful in the first half when it focuses on the operational workings of bugging than later when it gets into psychoanalysis. Just as Harry Caul is more successful at manipulation—at being a ghost in his machine—than at "being in the world." In other words the film, like its hero, is more at ease with the mechanical apparatus of remote sensing than with the flesh-and-blood of INVOLVEMENT. What else would you expect from a film-maker so much more obviously captivated by means than by ends? Just as Frankenheimer's *The Train* managed to survive the lofty moral conflict between Lancaster and Scofield by devoting most of its footage to the operational working of trains, so *The Conversation* overcomes the humanistic message of its later sequences, essentially "We must all become involved," through its McLuhanesque preoccupation with medium. Of course without the involvement antithesis we couldn't have the medium thesis, but the conflict is made too explicit for comfort, with Eichmann-like references to "just doing a job" and "It's not my responsibility" in case we miss the point.

The film begins with some wondrously mysterious shots of an anonymous lunch-break crowd circulating around San Francisco's Union Square. Coppola moves in slowly from an aerial view but then lingers awhile somewhat beneath the eye of God. The "eye" turns out not to be God's, however, but a sight used by Harry Caul's crew to zero in their recording devices (Coppola's problem throughout the film is to make visual content out of auditory). But before Coppola picks out the young couple whose conversation is the sole *raison* for all the formalistic fuss of the film, we are given simply the anonymous flow of the crowd. All options are kept open. The suspense is similar to the opening of *Psycho,* where the camera takes its time before offering us the particular window on the lives we are to follow. Strollers come and go. Who are our characters? The only focal point, in the lower left corner of the screen, is a sidewalk mime in whiteface who mimics the gaits, postures, and gestures of those around him. Coppola's camera doesn't insist on him the way Antonioni insists on his mimes in *Blow-Up,* but he serves a metaphoric function just as vital—the parasitic intrusion into others' lives, the anonymous recorder.

This little symbolic prologue to the film finally gives way to shots of a young couple in desultory conversation, intercut with shots of Harry Caul, his bugging crew, and various tracking devices. Like the mirror image in Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror,* Harry and his associates look quite distinct from their subject but function strictly as a tautology. A more debased image of humanity would be hard to imagine. Harry then goes to his workshop in a deserted warehouse to check and synthesize the day's work. Content is irrelevant. Formal matters, such as tonal and volumetric consistency, need only be spot-

near zero distortion. Clearly, Coppola has gone to school on *Blow-Up*. We really begin to sense the debt when Harry, despite himself, begins to attend to the content of the conversation, replaying certain parts which now take on suggestive overtones. The couple, at first seemingly innocent and unguarded, becomes increasingly problematic. Ultimately we fall down the Nixon-in-Wonderland hole: the couple knew they were being taped! So everything we've heard must now be fitted into another framework; for what purpose, knowing they were being taped, did the lovers say this or that? The plot twists, whereby the apparently designated murderees become the murderers, are too holey to merit attention.

Compared to *Blow-Up* Coppola's film fails in two major respects. For a man so interested in epistemological turns of the screw, Coppola resolves the enigma of the conversation too definitively. The couple in *Blow-Up* retain their mystery. The ambiguity of appearances is Antonioni's theme, and he stays with it rather than delving into the photographer's psyche. But Coppola reveals the true state of affairs because he then wants to explore the effect this revelation has on Harry's psyche. We have already been treated to some contrived nonsense—flashbacks, nightmares, etc.—about how Harry's snooping had once been responsible for three murders. Granted that we should be given glimpses of Harry's private face behind his professional mask. The appearance-reality conundrum should not apply only to Harry's professional situation but to his character and personal identity *within* that situation as well. But instead of spurious psyche-diving it would have been enough for Coppola to develop further Harry's interpersonal scenes in the film, perhaps bringing him into eventual contact with the couple and to certain realizations *that way* (which would also enrich the levels-of-reality theme). We do want to see Harry's real face, but not his mythical psyche. That ordinary social exposure is the way to "get at" Harry is demonstrated by Coppola's success with Harry's face-to-face scenes, especially those with his girlfriend, with a prostitute, and with his assistant,

checked. Thus Harry's check, intercut with close-ups of the speakers, is extremely fragmentary. And for an audaciously long stretch the film remains an unassembled puzzle. It's up to us to surmise connections. The film's mosaic form follows Harry's piecemeal functioning, and both are its content. We deduce that Harry has been assigned "surveillance" of what are apparently a couple of young lovers—why he knows not nor does he care. He is a technician, from the same breed as the photographer in *Blow-Up*, subsisting on stolen feedback, adept at picking up signs, untroubled by significations. Emotion is bric-a-brac with which other people clutter their lives. For Harry there is no existential problem of "the other," only the technical problem of other voices. Andy Warhol once speculated on how nice it would be to be a machine. Harry Caul has achieved Warhol's dream. The scientist's nightmare is the distortion the observer's point of view imposes on the observed. Harry, like his counterpart in *Blow-Up*, achieves

Stan. In these scenes we see Harry struggling —sweating—in utter contrast to his effortless conduct of his business. With the women we can often barely hear him, an audibility problem that never occurs in the media scenes (the one instance when something can't be heard on the tape is due to competing noise, which Harry efficiently removes). One reason Harry is so secretive in personal conversation is that he has starved his private life for so long he has no secrets. Instead he has professional stories, details of operations, which he begrudgingly discloses to fellow professionals. Another reason is that he has spent so much of his life monitoring the results of other people's expressiveness that he has no expressive "apparatus" of his own. His voice is a monotone; he has difficulty in moving the parts of his face. Other people and their needs bug Harry because they place demands on his mechanisms of response, which have rusted from disuse. All this has point and is pointedly exposed. But then Coppola gives Harry a heavy psyche to bear, a guilty past that catches up with him. Where *Blow-Up* ends with the photographer's breakdown as an acknowledgment of the uncertainties of human knowledge and perception, *The Conversation* ends with Harry's breakdown. Of course his breakdown might be his breakthrough. His psychotically neat apartment has been stripped in his vain search for a bug (he has been warned *he* is being "listened to"), and after failing to find the bug perhaps his imagination, like Hemmings', has been liberated from the literalist fallacy of media. Playing his saxophone for the first time in the film without the mechanical accompaniment of a recording into which his solos had always been fitted, he too has been stripped. Without recorded applause, perhaps he will now be able to hear the sound of one hand clapping. But the breakdown is solipsistic. The public world of *The Conversation* has not been well-lost for Harry's psyche.

Coppola's other major failure vis-à vis Antonioni is Harry's "blow-up" sequence. His obsessive monitoring of the tape does not yield the thematic intensification, the progressive insight of the comparable sequence in *Blow-Up*.

In an interview Coppola has said that he expects the audience to find progressively new meanings and overtones in the tape and the visual footage that goes with it, as both, separately or in concert, are repeated eight times in the film. But since the conversation as it is constituted simply doesn't contain the rich ambiguities for such a progressively varied reaction, it's unfair of Coppola to impose such a burden on the viewer. Doubtless Coppola shied away from making the conversation more complex to avoid a verbal challenge rarely asked of filmgoers. Footage of the speakers with facial expressions, etc. to correspond with new verbal implications could have been a helpful visual aid. But Coppola said that he already was afraid the whole business was too "boring," too sheerly repetitive, and so he was hardly prepared to make it even more demanding. Thus, where Antonioni succeeds in developing clues from the blow-up sequence while at the same time not spoiling everything by letting the clues add up to a solution, Coppola fails to find a way for Harry, and us, to *progressively* discover clues in the tape (we are abruptly hit over the head with the word "kill" when we hear it for the first time together with a reference to a place and time that has obvious significance) while at the same time spoiling the mystery of the conversation by explicitly resolving it.

The parallels with *Blow-Up* extend from the title—focus on a single piece of sensory information—to the final scene. In both films the technicians do a lot of living (sleeping, even partying) in their labs. (The most phantasmagoric sequence in *The Conservation* is an impromptu winging in Harry's workshop, during which colleagues depressingly trade inside jokes and references, a brash competitor without even Harry's aborted soul plants a bugged fountain pen on Harry, everyone seems separated by interstellar distances, and lovemaking seems as natural as in a monastery, or a hospital). In *The Conversation* candid tape (perhaps not so candid) seems as apropos now as candid camera did when *Blow-Up* first came out. In each case "contact" is made through media while direct confrontations are strained, halting, stillborn.

Telephoto lenses and long-distance mikes produce an instantaneous, if only one-way, bridge in contrast to hands and mouths that seem in the grip of Zeno's paradox. But media are ultimately shown to be impotent. They attempt to get "inside" but are hopelessly restricted to surfaces. Motives, feelings, *real* knowledge eludes them. And this is the main parallel between the two films. In each a spied-on couple receives a "media fix," but the fix turns out to be fluid. Intense examinations of the components of the fix, instead of yielding more precise information, dissolve a finite sensory event into the general mysteries of images and words. Look at something, listen to something, repeat something *long enough* and the object or event blurs, becomes meaningless—meaningless in a specific sense but meaningful in a general, formal sense. The problem is not so much the metaphysical one of "what's real?" but the phenomenological one of "what's really going on here?" Snatches of reality are recorded and made to cohere, only to mislead. The question in both films is, "What can we know and how can we know it?" This is the great visual motif of *Blow-Up*. *The Conversation* uses the word "know" as a recurrent verbal motif. Harry's girlfriend asks him questions because "I want to know you." Harry asks a prostitute if she were his girlfriend and he had left her, would she take him back if he loved her, and she answers: "How would I know that you loved me?" And Harry, the inaudible man, mumbles, "You'd have no way of knowing." In his room Harry is called on his unlisted phone and told "We know that you know, Mr. Caul. We'll be listening."

Coppola's attention to verbal texture extends from such obvious references as "Private" on the door of the "Director," the man who has hired Harry for reasons unknown to both him and us (we never know more than Harry at any point), and "Do Not Disturb" (murder taking place) on the young couple's hotel room door to the more subtle "Please turn lights out" on a tag suspended from the ceiling in Harry's workshop. This last little signmarker attests to the neat, orderly world Harry is comfortable in which finally disintegrates.

It also attests to the fullness of the film, the way in which Coppola was overpowered by a concept so compelling that myriad details pop up which, as in a Brueghel or Bosch landscape, may not all have the same thematic transparence but obviously occupy the same universe. "Please turn lights out" somehow connects with a little vignette of Harry on a bus whose lights temporarily go out. Harry, programmed to detect the slightest technological variance from the norm, is ill at ease until the lights come back on. The film is filled with such subterranean tie-ins. The telescopic sighting device seen in the opening sequence has a near relative in front of the Assistant Director's desk, which Harry simply can't help looking through. A scale model of Union Square mysteriously appears at a surveillance convention attended by Harry and his associates. Harry flushes a toilet in the hotel room to cover the sound of drilling preparatory to planting a bug and is later seen flushing the toilet in the adjoining room on an intuition which, shockingly, is confirmed. The only nature in this technological horror film, aside from a dream flashback, is a banal seascape in Harry's apartment, which is later echoed by an equally banal mural of San Francisco Bay in a hotel room (one of a number of reminders of *Vertigo*). The appalling absence of the sensual world from the film, defined by these widely separated, sparse representations of nature, is capsulized by a cookie on the Assistant Director's desk, which Harry picks up, inspects—and rejects. The moment makes one freshly aware that there isn't a single instant in the film when anyone is shown enjoying a natural pleasure.

The Conversation is like those problem propositions in philosophy that are paradoxical: "I always lie" or "I know that I know nothing." The film is a rich use of media to show how empty media are. Just as Antonioni's darkroom revealed the ultimate truth that darkrooms reveal no ultimate truths, so Coppola's recording devices demonstrate that recording devices demonstrate nothing. Harry rips open a telephone to find only circuitry. All technicians, the brain surgeon included, are condemned to the same nonrevelations. Coppola shows just how far the

inspired selection of the formal means for depicting nihilism can save us from nihilism. Though some of his ironies are too facile—Harry, master bugger, is himself bugged; Harry confesses and we dimly perceive the priest's ear through the screen—others reverberate. On Harry's birthday a bottle of wine left in his apartment by his landlady becomes the occasion for the obsessively secretive Harry to wonder how the hell she got in. As far as Harry is concerned there's no need for the landlady to be able to get in, in case of an emergency, because he has "nothing personal, nothing of value—except my keys." Harry then takes the unwelcomed bottle to his girlfriend's apartment for whatever meager celebration the paucity of his spirit will permit. He wouldn't have thought of buying a bottle, himself, but the landlady's gift will do just as well and he carts it along as a second thought. Such tokens have absolutely no value for him, as indeed nothing "personal" has. Or, again, Harry is a Catholic with a (shaky) belief in the moral neutrality of his work. If his belief is correct, his job may not certify his virtue but it shouldn't improve his chances for damnation, either. The objects and rituals of orthodox religion are the only thing other than the objects and rituals of "surveillance" that he has to hold on to. It is with great reluctance, then, that (in a moment somewhat distractingly reminiscent of *The Maltese Falcon*) he smashes open an icon of the Virgin Mary to see if it's been bugged. The sacrilege offers no compensation. Like the dismembered telephone that revealed nothing but circuitry, the icon too is empty. Like the dynamo, the Virgin also seems to hold no answers.

But Coppola's finest device is his consistent use of explicit framing, whereby subjects are turned into objects, and, related but not quite the same thing, the notions of subjectivity and objectivity are made problematic. Explicit framing isolates, therefore distances. At times Coppola does it himself but often, and more appropriately in terms of his theme, he employs structures and mechanisms within the film to delimit people, converting them into objects. The tape itself is a prime example. Another occurs in one of the film's early sequences. Two women check their make-up against a pair of one-way mirrors set into one of the sides of Harry's van. As Harry and this assistant cannibalistically watch, the mirrors look like television screens and the women objects of male phantasizing in a lipstick commercial. The saddest thing about Harry and his associates is that their "business" is also their only pleasure. The film makes it clear that the problem with voyeurism is not only the reduction of the observed to an object but also of the observer, whose passive monitoring blocks self-awareness and self-activation. Perhaps the cruelest frame is the telescopic sighting device which initially picks out for us the subjects of the conversation, and which at first seems, certainly for anyone who has lived through the 1960's, to be an assassin's rifle (an instantaneous converter of subjects into objects). At the surveillance convention, first Harry and then the Director's assistant appear on closed circuit television. Television screens in Harry's van, workshop, and motel room capture people's heads like trophies. Though films like *A Hard Day's Night, Seven Days in May, The Best Man,* and *The Candidate* certainly made extensive use of television, *The Conversation* is the first to interrelate a whole galaxy of monitoring devices in such a way that the entire film seems like closed-circuit television. There are so many framing devices within the film that Coppola's over-riding frames—his own cameras and editing machine—are not that noticeable. The general effect is that people never seem organically related. Groups—in Union Square, at the party in Harry's workshop, at the convention — are groups of loners. Coppola reserves most of his own explicit framing for Harry, isolating him within his own room, along a hall, on his way to see the Director. In the final scene in which a Harry stripped of his professional facade demolishes his apartment in a vain effort to locate a bug, Harry moves in and out of the frame of a static camera, as if he is being studied by an electronic eye.

One result of all the framing is to make the terms "subjectivity" and "objectivity" lose their

meaning. Everyone is seen "objectively" but from particular viewpoints, which suggests subjectivity. Harry keeps going over the tape, thus reframing the young couple again and again, but the result is not increased objectivity but an increasingly subjective response. In interpreting rather than just recording, Harry understands less and less and feels more and more. But Harry's new-found subjectivity is not very persuasive. Coppola has confessed that *The Conversation* is a "concept" film, that he could never feel anything for the character of Harry and could only "enrich him from the outside," depending on Hackman for the rest. (In a sense Coppola is the source of Harry's problem.) Nevertheless, since subjectivity is a sine qua non of characters, there are moments in the film when things are seen and heard from an apparently subjective point of view, mostly Harry's. But Coppola's emotional (as opposed to cerebral) absence from his work ("There's not a lot in the movie that I feel viscerally about, except maybe technology. . . . ") tends to objectify even these moments. The film comes closer than perhaps any other to presenting a world of automata, in which media, a near affectless hero, and alien "other minds"—apparently debased, certainly unknowable—interact blindly.

Coppola can show Harry cut off from others, but only Hackman can show Harry cut off from himself. Hackman does this by keeping Harry's emotions in cold storage for most of the film so that in those moments when he expresses feeling it seems to come from miles within and across so many circuit breakers that its final expression seems defused. Harry is reminiscent of Steiger's pawnbroker, handling merchandise without responding to his human significance. In both cases feeling isn't dead, only repressed, and both Steiger and Hackman are brilliant at suggesting humanistic reserves beneath zombie facades. The pawnbroker's release is a shriek of rage. Harry's explosion is less sharply defined and more strangely directed. But the pawnbroker's trauma is of simpler origin than Harry's. Coppola doesn't give us a special case. We don't get into how Harry got that way. Harry is seen as inseparable from a whole world, in which voyeurism has replaced direct action, lenses and mikes direct contact, and switches and buttons immediate involvement. Harry's personal psychosis is inseparable from the social psychosis around him. In fact what's around him seems worse. He certainly seems more salvagable than his would-be partner, Bernie Moran (Allan Garfield, who seems to be cornering the market on sleezy PR merchandisers), or his totally out-of-it assistant, Stan (John Cagale), or the enigmatic young couple whose ominousness Frederick Forrest and Cindy Williams build to Pinteresque proportions. One might almost say there's more hope for Harry than for his world. But the world of media preceded Harry and it is the only world still waiting for him the morning after his rampage. It is our world and *The Conversation* should be remembered—amidst a nostalgia bonanza—as the first film since *Blow-Up* to capture it.

—LAWRENCE SHAFFER

Controversy & Correspondence

AUTEURISM IS ALIVE AND WELL

The recent pseudo-controversy over auteurism in the hospitable pages of *Film Quarterly* seems to have collapsed of its own weightlessness, and I don't wish to prolong the agony unduly. The dreary "debate" between Graham Petrie and John Hess dwindled inevitably into petty squabbles over real and alleged distortions of one's position by the other. In the process of playing Tweedledum and Tweedledee, however, both Petrie and Hess have completely misstated my own position by first setting up straw men labeled "auteurists," and then ascribing (without quotation marks) to these invented imbeciles the most idiotic statements imaginable. Mis-

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statement is perhaps too precise a term to apply to two such imprecise and ill-informed polemicists. Mistakement is closer to the mark. Hence, it would be too tedious for me and for the readers of *Film Quarterly* to plunge into a morass of blind items and anonymous accusations. For one thing, I do not happen to be the world's foremost authority on the writings of Graham Petrie and John Hess. Consequently, I cannot rule out the possibility that they have deviated into sense elsewhere. Nor can I conclusively evaluate their intention to take over the future of film scholarship from us graybeards of an earlier generation. I suspect, however, that people who wilfully misread the past can never hope to influence the future. My present effort is intended therefore to place the past in its proper perspective. Unlike Petrie and Hess, I happen to believe that methodology is no substitute for history. There are no shortcuts to film scholarship, and no magic potions from Paris with all the secret ingredients of truth and beauty. I admire the writings of the late André Bazin as much as anyone. Indeed, I was the first American critic to quote Bazin extensively, and I don't need lectures on the subject from Petrie and Hess. Nonetheless, Bazin died in 1959, which means that his writings reflect no consciousness of the cinema of the past fifteen years. His enormous impact can be understood today only in terms of the absolute authority of the Anglo - Russian montage theoreticians up until the late fifties and early sixties. I speak on this very subject in *The Primal Screen,* pages 138–139: "Thus I find myself compelled to bridge the generation gap between my aged self and my students by resurrecting the traditional Anglo-Russian montage-documentary aesthetics against which I have been rebelling for the past fifteen years. I suppose it is like a Trotskyist's being forced to explain who Stalin was in order to achieve self-definition. Similarly, I must assign readings in Eisenstein and Pudovkin and Rotha and Griffith and Kracauer and Spottiswoode and Reisz and Lindgren and Balázs and Manvell and Sadoul and Grierson and Bardèche and Brasillach and Wright and Arnheim and many others before I can make my students appreciate the shattering impact on my sensibility of the anti-montage formulations of the late André Bazin. Unfortunately, Bazin has been translated piecemeal into English at least twenty years too late for any polemical confrontation with the Old Guard of Film Scholarship. Neorealism and the New Wave have come and gone, Godard and Antonioni have risen and fallen, and all now seems confusingly eclectic. Even when I screen *Citizen Kane* and *Open City* for my students on successive weeks, it is difficult for them to perceive the aesthetic resemblance Bazin discerned between these two meditations on *mise-en-scène.*

Similarly, auteurism can be understood only in terms of its own historical coordinates, namely Crowther and Kracauer as the Power and the Glory of social significance in film criticism and scholarship. By contrast, Ferguson, Agee and Warshow were in their own lifetimes merely cult figures in the film world. Petrie credits (quite correctly) Manny Farber with "praising the 'masculine' values of Walsh, Fuller and Siegel for many years and for reasons that have little to do with *auteurism.*" Petrie's otherwise unexplained quotation marks around the word "masculine" constitute a snide throwback to Pauline Kael's diatribe against the alleged closest homosexuality of the Hawksians more than a decade ago. I don't know (and don't care) what Petrie's sexual politics happen to be, but even Kael can't get away with that kind of innuendo in polite company anymore. Indeed, Kael seems to occupy in the Petrie-Hess Punch-and-Judy Show a role even more marginal than my own. Are we (Pauline and I, Perils and All) being phased out for a new critical vaudeville team? Petrie-Hess? Sorry, boys, but your names on the marquee won't draw flies. And your timing is off. Above all, your premises are erroneous.

Auteurism is not now and never has been an organized religion or a secret society. There are no passwords or catchwords. Furthermore, the members do not spend their time speculating on the number of auteurs who can dance on the head of a pin. I have never taken out a patent on the words "auteur," "auteurist" or "auteurism," and I don't consider myself ripped off when someone writes a book on a director, or screens a retrospective of the director's films. Petrie's book on Truffaut would seem to make Petrie an auteurist by Petrie's own loose standards of what makes an auteurist. And there is certainly more than a little closet auteurism in Petrie's own awkward category headings for directors (Creators, Misfits, Rebels, Unfortunates, and Professionals). Welcome to the auteurist closet, Mr. Petrie, but you'll have to stand in line. And why stop with Manny Farber as a precursor of certain aspects of auteurism. Why not go even further back to such director-conscious critics as Frank Nugent of the *Times,* Richard Watts, Jr. of the *Herald-Tribune,* and the late Robert Sherwood of *Life.* Dwight Macdonald and the late John Grierson wrote classic thumbnail surveys of Hollywood directors in the manner of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *The American Cinema* way back in the early thirties.

Around 1960, however, there were only two regularly published auteurists in America—myself and the late Eugene Archer. And even Archer ran for cover after the first outburst of anti-auteurism. So there I stood all alone against hundreds of non-auteurists. Archer hap-

pened to be writing at the *Times* in the shadow of Bosley Crowther, and he (Archer) chose to be cautious on the subject of American auteurism. I remember an article he wrote (in 1963 or 1964) in which he puffed up the *Cahiers* regulars who had gone into film-making from criticism. Archer himself was beguiled by the siren call of the nouvelle vague to make his own films, and he wound up becalmed on the beach, ridiculed by the French cinéastes he had promoted in the pages of the *Times*. But that is another story.

I had been writing straightforwardly Griersonian criticism for about five years before I entered my Bazinian period. The critical problem in the late fifties was how to assimilate new stylistic initiatives in color and composition, and still retain the classical criteria of coherent narrativity. The screen suddenly seemed bloated and unnatural, very much like John Huston's rubber whale in *Moby Dick*. We had no way of coping with apparent failures such as Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, Ford's *The Searchers*, Renoir's *French Can Can*, Ray's *Bigger Than Life*, Rossellini's Ingrid Bergman movies, Hawks's *Rio Bravo*, and many, many other latent masterpieces. The dominant critical tone in America was one of sociological sermons in which Hollywood was urged repeatedly to repent. Our discovery of Bazin and the other critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* was invigorating largely because it liberated us from this gloomy critical atmosphere in which Left was always right, and in which Man towered over mere men and women. (Mr. Hess's Marxist-structuralist prescription for the New Criticism seems to be taking us back to the gloom and doom of the past, but with more bureaucratic jargon than ever before.) Also, we were reassured that no movie was too ignoble to be seen by the noblest sensibility. Hench, the mindless arrogance of Petrie's casual suggestion that *Sea of Grass* (part of our permanent record of Spencer Tracy, Katherine Hepburn, Robert Walker and Melvyn Douglas) be destroyed because it does not measure up to Petrie's standards for Elia Kazan's career. So much for Petrie's lip service to film scholarship.

Both Petrie and Hess try to puff up the French *Cahier*istes at the expense of various critics working in the English language. Petrie doesn't even bother to use real names for his anti-auteurist diatribe; Hess mentions me and Robin Wood, who, I am sure, has never termed himself an unmitigated auteurist, as indeed who has, myself included. The epithet "auteurist" is flung about by Petrie and Hess with the same gay abandon with which the catch-all "communist" is hurled at the outside world by the less enlightened citizens of Orange County. Miraculously, however, François Truffaut is absolved of any complicity in auteurism by Petrie and Hess as if they intended to make American and British

auteurists play Haldeman and Erlichman to Truffaut's oh-so-innocent Nixon. Petrie suggests that Truffaut was more sophisticated than American and British critics about the processes of film-making. Petrie neglects to mention that Truffaut reviewed English-language films for years without even a minimal comprehension of the language. I grew up on Hollywood novels, production gossip, star-gazing, etc. It's in my blood stream. I never found Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol *et al.* particularly sophisticated about the realities of Hollywood. What astounded me was their ability to intuit a creative situation simply from the evidence on the screen. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, contrary to what Petrie implies, started going downhill as soon as it began to substitute tape-recorded interviews for speculative critiques. The fact that most of the *Cahiers* critics depended on French sub-titles or dubbing to know what was going on in English-language movies had two consequences. First, they were able to find redeeming qualities in films with bad dialogue. Second, they were free to concentrate on the visual style of American movies, something that most American reviewers neglected to do. In this way, *Vertigo* could be revaluated in Paris as the progenitor of *Last Year in Marienbad*, whereas in America Resnais was considered high art, and Hitchcock was not even considered pop art.

Petrie and Hess can't have it both ways. They can't assail auteurism on the one hand and applaud *Cahier*ism on the other. François Truffaut, contrary to the sweetness and light reasonableness he has cultivated in the past decade for his public personality, was once the most hated film critic in France. He was the most forceful polemicist of *la Politique des Auteurs*, and it was he, not I, who insisted most strongly that the worst film of Renoir was more interesting than the best film of Delannoy, and he still holds to that position. I recently confronted him with the notion that Delannoy's Inspector Maigret film with Gabin, Girardot and Dessailly struck me as more entertaining than Renoir's Maigret film, *La Nuit du Carrefour*. Truffaut refused to discuss such a heresy. Also, Petrie and Hess tend to imply that Truffaut was above the more esoteric cult games of Anglo-American auteurism. Quite the contrary. It was Truffaut himself who put the late Edgar G. Ulmer on the map as a crazy *Cahiers* taste, and not for such relatively respectable efforts as *The Black Cat, Bluebeard* and *Detour,* but for a really peculiar poverty-row quickie called *Murder Is My Beat.* Indeed, Truffaut's disastrously cheeky interview with the fair-minded Archer Winsten of the *Post* in the late fifties gave *Cahier*ism a black eye from which it never fully recovered. I remember going to a 42nd Street theater one night with Gene Archer to see an Ulmer double bill: *The Amazing*

Transparent Man and *Beyond the Time Barrier*. As we emerged from the theater three stupefying hours later, Archer remarked in his slow Texas drawl: "The French call him a *cinéaste maudit*." (pause) "They don't come any more maudit."

Nor was Ulmer a passing critical fancy of Truffaut's. When Truffaut had become a world-renowned director he persuaded Jeanne Moreau to do a film with Ulmer on Mata Hari. Rumor has it that the production was a disaster, and Ulmer had to be replaced by another director. Nor was Truffaut alone on *Cahiers* with his grotesque predilections. It was interesting that neither Petrie nor Hess brought up the very painful subject of Jerry Lewis, and they both seem blissfully unaware that Truffaut has recently written a book on Alfred Hitchcock, that touchstone of touchstones for auteurism. Hess even tries to suggest that *Cahiers* has evolved painlessly from auteurism to Maoist-structuralism. The truth is that Truffaut, Rivette, Chabrol *et al.* are now anathema at the new party-line *Cahiers du Cinéma*, where an editor was fired a few years ago for retaining his membership in the allegedly reactionary French Communist Party.

Petrie quotes an interview with Franklin Schaffner (out of context) to suggest that the final cut is the ultimate criterion of film creativity. This quaintly pre-Bazinian notion has fallen into the rubbish heap of history. Then Petrie makes the audacious suggestion that Greta Garbo might have had something to do with *Ninotchka*, and Bette Davis with *Now Voyager*. Hallelujah! What sophistication on Petrie's part! I was brought up on Hemingway's ode to Garbo in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and Charles Jackson's eloquent appreciation of her performance as *Camille* in his novel, *The Lost Weekend*. Indeed, I once said explicitly in an essay on Garbo (reprinted in *Confessions of a Cultist*) that Garbo was her own *auteur*. I remember speaking with Franklin Schaffner on a jet flying back from the Mar Del Plata Film Festival. The late Van Heflin was clowning around on the line to the rest room. Schaffner told me to look at Heflin's hands. They looked small and claw-like in relation to his head and the rest of his body. Heflin's hands, Schaffner told me, were what had kept Heflin from becoming a big star. Like the late Robert Ryan's clouded, ambiguous eyes. Truffaut once noted in his diaries on *Fahrenheit 451* that Julie Christie had a much smaller head than Oskar Werner, and this affected the psychological balance of their love scenes together. We have a long way to go before we fit all the pieces together in the massive jigsaw puzzle of the cinema. Auteurism was never meant to be an exclusionary doctrine, nor a blank check for directors. It was stated at the outset that it was more the first step than the last stop in film scholarship, and I think its

basic approaches have stood up remarkably well over the years. In practice, after all, it depends on where one is writing, at what length, and for whom. I am currently working on a film history which will be organized atomistically by movies rather than auteuristically by directors. After that, I shall revise and update *The American Cinema* auteuristically. I have recently done a survey of Warners music for *Rolling Stone*, and I shall soon write an evaluation of the entire structuralist scene about which Hess professes to be so euphoric. And I am not now, nor have I ever been interested exclusively in American movies. Back in 1962, I noted (in "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962"): "In fact, the *auteur* theory itself is a pattern theory in constant flux. I would never endorse a Ptolemaic constellation of directors in a fixed orbit. At the moment my list of auteurs runs something like this through the first twenty: Ophuls, Renoir, Mizoguchi, Hitchcock, Chaplin, Ford, Welles, Dreyer, Rossellini, Murnau, Griffith, Sternberg, Eisenstein, Stroheim, Buñuel, Bresson, Hawks, Lang, Flaherty, Vigo. This list is somewhat weighted toward seniority and established reputations. In time, some of these *auteurs* will rise, some will fall, and some will be displaced by either new directors or rediscovered ancients. Again, the exact order is less important than the specific definitions of these and as many as two hundred other potential auteurs. I would hardly expect any other critic in the world fully to endorse this list, especially on faith. Only after thousands of films have been revaluated will any personal pantheon have a reasonably objective validity. The task of validating the auteur theory is an enormous one, and the end will never be in sight. Meanwhile the auteur habit of collecting random films in directional bundles will serve posterity with at least a tentative classification."

After twelve years auteurism is still in a transitional stage, and the cinema continues to confound our expectations. If I choose to continue analyzing the artist behind the camera by studying the formal and thematic consciousness flitting back and forth on the screen, it is because I do not wish to return to the sterile sermonizing of the past. I should hope that differing critical approaches can coexist. If not, it should be remembered that auteurism was born out of a passion for polemics. What I object to most strongly in the Petrie-Hess exchange is the shared disdain of both writers for what they consider to be excessive specialization. This again is the old Kael argument, restated recently at the National Book Awards where she declared that film criticism is a "mongrel art." This phrase seems more appropriate for a lapdog of the literati than for a mastiff of the movie medium. I rejected this attitude in 1962, and I reject it today.   —ANDREW SARRIS

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