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ARTICLES

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morally superior to the director. In short, he must make more of an effort to watch, and learn not to rely on the easiest, most superficial reactions, the reactions of a feeble spectator for whom all experience is vicarious. This kind of spectatorship worries Peckinpah. It is a primary source of woe in the sad world of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia.*

NOTES

1. Perhaps it's no coincidence that both films owe a great deal to Francis Ford Coppola, one of the few directors working in America whose work Peckinpah admires. His expression of this admiration is, as usual, disconcerting: "I don't want any other son of a bitch making good movies." ("Playboy Interview: Sam Peckinpah," *Playboy,* March, 1972, p. 192).

2. *Playboy,* p. 72.

3. As Philip French blithely asserts when he says that "now one views *The Wild Bunch* as a new-style, soured Kennedy Western and a rather obvious and bitter allegory about Vietnam . . . "(*Westerns* [New York, 1973], p. 32).

4. *Playboy,* p. 192.

5. *Ibid.,* p. 72.

6. Peckinpah has always been acutely aware of the problem of pretentiousness. See the conclusion of Ernest Callenbach's interview with Peckinpah in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1963–64), and this remark: "I'm not going to get between my audience and the story. I hate the feeling in a theater of being more aware of what the director's doing than of what's actually up there on the screen." (*Playboy,* p. 72).

7. *Playboy,* p. 62.

8. *Ibid.,* p. 74.

9. There is a striking consonance between Peckinpah's own pet phrases and some of the most memorable lines in his films. Steve Judd's exquisite "All I want is to enter my house justified" was a favorite saying of Peckinpah's father. In his *Playboy* interview Peckinpah says of the protagonists of *The Wild Bunch:* "They play their string out to the end," a remark that occurs almost verbatim in that film when Dutch tries to rationalize his desertion of Angel in Aqua Verde. Benny's conspicuously one-handed piano-playing might be a symptom of his brokenness, if the following statement by Peckinpah has a firm basis in some mental image: "True pacifism is manly. In fact, it's the finest form of manliness. But if a man comes up to you and cuts your hand off, you don't offer him the other one. Not if you want to go on playing the piano, you don't." (*Playboy,* p. 70).

10. *Ibid.,* p. 192.

11. *Ibid.,* p. 192.

CONTRIBUTORS, cont'd.

teaches and supervises the film programs at Johns Hopkins University. BILL NICHOLS, who has written previously for *FQ* and contributes to many other journals, teaches film at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. ALAN WILLIAMS is our Paris Editor.

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MARK CRISPIN MILLER

In Defense of Sam Peckinpah

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia is at once the subtlest and strangest of Sam Peckinpah's films. It is what we must call his "most mature," because it presents what he sees less compromisingly than ever before, and because he relies on his last spectacular abilities to deliver its tremendous impact. It is not anywhere near as bloody as his most commercial pictures, yet it has died a swift and violent death. Distrustful of Peckinpah, the critics (the *New York Times* summarized the response as "generally unfavorable") saw a difficult and disturbing film and immediately pounced. Part of this reaction is the result of snobbishness: Bergman, for instance, can be as difficult and disturbing, but few critics would admit bafflement or revulsion after watching *Cries and Whispers*. But Peckinpah is fair game. If Orson Welles is right in declaring that no Hollywood director whose star has dipped can ever make a comeback, then we can assume that no Peckinpah film after the shredded, incoherent *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* will ever be suitably publicized, widely distributed, or intelligently reviewed. After years of crude censorship and glib categorization, Peckinpah has a right to be angry.

This anger is a part of the latest film's story. The rumpled, broken protagonist and his insidiously smooth, well-heeled employers bring to mind Peckinpah's own plight in Hollywood, but this is only one allusive structure among many. *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* subsumes the director's dilemma into wider, more important conflicts, the ones dramatized in earlier films but with an unprecedented directness. Rather than rub the audience's collective nose in spectacular gore, Peckinpah has used the powers of his craft to make this film deliberately unprepossessing, but without, even here, abandoning the context of heroism that he knows so well.

It seems necessary to point out at the start that Peckinpah understands every aspect of heroism: its rarity, its loneliness, its tenuousness, its superficial attractiveness, the ease with which it's commonly misinterpreted or overlooked or mistaken for something else. He knows the difference between heroism and mere heroics, and he knows that his audience is generally not sensitive to this difference. More often than not, people admire General Patton's lust for battle and applaud Michael Corleone's squalid initiation through murder as vigorously as they approve of Dirty Harry Callahan's inhuman ruthlessness. No matter that *Patton* and *The Godfather* subvert the tough gestures of their protagonists with innumerable subtle ironies, quietly fighting the viewers' endorsement,[1] while *Dirty Harry* plainly (and successfully) strives to bring out the beast and make it cheer. While it may not be easy to get an audience stomping and whistling for slaughter, it's a limited and questionable talent: Don Siegel, Michael Winner, Sergio Leone and too many other directors possess and exploit it. Peckinpah too possesses and uses this talent, but only *begins* with the hollow splendor of revenge. His is a complex, highly moral intelligence.

His two biggest money-makers, *The Wild Bunch* and *Straw Dogs,* happen to be his bloodiest films, each one building up to a devastating catharsis that probably just excites most viewers. But this need not prove that Peckinpah wants a lot of people to jump up and down in bloodthirsty glee and then go home and kick the dog; nor does it mean that he wants them to work out their frustrations in the theater and then go to bed mellowed. Like Buñuel, Peckinpah wants to worry his audience—if they hoot happily at suffering, that's their problem, they're beyond his help. His excesses, like Swift's, derive from a sane, passionate, old-fashioned set

Joel McCrea and Randolph Scott in Peckinpah's RIDE THE HIGH COUNTRY

of values confronted by insane, uncompassionate new horrors. And unfortunately for Peckinpah, the comparison with Swift does not end there: those most agitated by his films are not his general audience but the critics and producers who have done him so much harm in the last decade. His excesses have redounded to his own disadvantage. He is called a fascist, a sensationalist, a celebrant of machismo—guilty of glorifying the very consequences of repression which his films consistently expose and derogate.

He cherishes the things we call life-affirming. The man who directed *Ride the High Country* is much angrier than he was in 1962, but still believes in the same things. Steve Judd's heroism is especially winning for its understated purposefulness; indeed, our first image of Judd (Joel McCrae), cantering paunchily and absently down the bustling street of a prim young town, blocking traffic, is hardly heroic. Impatient villagers shout "Get out of the way, old man!" Their impatience is somehow analogous to our readiness to consider him quaint, amusing, incapable of heroism as we have learned to recognize it from watching television. Like Quixote, he appears clownish, and yet his ultimate self-sacrifice provides one of the most moving moments in the genre's history. He dies with dignity, so that the young couple whom he has protected, and for whom he has set a worthy example in a world of cheats and rascals, can live, marry, and have a family.

Not once since the too quiet release of *Ride the High Country* has a Peckinpah film repeated so even a moral and dramatic balance. Goodness and the good things of life have diminished, not in importance, but in accessibility; the bad things have proliferated, the destructive impulse burgeoning everywhere. Peckinpah's films still imply what is worthwhile, what must be preserved, even if what we see much more vividly than goodness is the multifarious complex of hateful urges which menaces that goodness. Judd's quiet heroism has become almost imperceptible. Peckinpah believes in "outdated codes like courage, loyalty, friendship, grace under pressure, all the simple virtues that have become clichés,"[2] fugitive virtues that the protagonists in *The Wild Bunch* keep trying desperately to define, quasi-knightly virtues of honor and restraint that packs of degenerates are always violating. The brutal Hammond brothers in *Ride the High Country* are the corrupt forebears of the bounty-hunters and *federales* (and the pro-

tagonists themselves, to a troubling extent) in *The Wild Bunch,* of David Sumner's hulking nemeses in *Straw Dogs,* of Chisholm's men (and Billy's own gang) in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid.* They rove in packs to have their way; they bully, overpower, surround. And their power has multiplied within each succeeding film.

The "outdated code" of "all the simple virtues that have become clichés," which Peckinpah might call the code of true manliness, comprises only a part of what he believes in. There is a complementary code of "feminine" values, virtues exemplified and propagated by women (this division of values by gender inheres in Peckinpah's conservatism). The feminine quality animates the furtive good of Peckinpah's world, and it is no less threatened than the old code of authentic manhood. Just before marching off to demand Angel's release in *The Wild Bunch,* Pike Bishop (William Holden) sits in helpless sadness looking at the Mexican girl to whom he has just made love. He hears a baby cry, and turns to see the infant lying on the other side of the cot. The camera zooms in slightly, accentuating the infant in a sequence otherwise made up of lingering stationary shots. The room is close and dark; Bishop's aging face is troubled, weary, full of regret. He is present at something that could have made him a different person. In the next room the Gorch brothers (Ben Johnson and Warren Oates), sated after having shared the same girl, argue with her over rates. Bishop watches this squalid altercation, then turns away in disgust and looks again at his own woman, his face full of guilt, grief, self-hate. "Let's go," he says to Lyle (Oates), who realizes that this exhortation, which we have heard again and again in moments of gunplay and escape, is suddenly full of meaning. "Why not?" he finally responds. It is not a declaration of nihilism, but an expression of realization. The quiet bordello scene with its rude contrasts and painful symbols suggests what might have been, what could have been fulfilling in a way that gold cannot.

Angel (Jaime Sanchez), purposely so named, has been the only protagonist capable of acting on ideals, and of proclaiming his ideas in an uncompromising, unbewildered way. He believes in his village, his people, those impoverished multitudes whom Mapache ravages. Angel sounds off regularly in populistic outrage, but the victimized Mexicans are not figures in a political allegory,[3] but figments of a spiritual idyll. Mexico unspoiled by machismo and greed is a paradise of simple domesticity and young love. Angel's village is a garden, built in a sunny extended glade. Despite the fact that this village was supposedly just ransacked by Mapache, it appears as fresh and Edenic as an oasis in the hot, rocky wasteland of a dangerous world. The women cook, babies play, young girls flirt with the grizzled Gorch brothers. The streets of Starbuck, the American town in which the film's opening massacre takes place, are full of grim-faced women swathed from head to toe in suffocating black, marching for temperance.

Peckinpah's Mexico is a land of innocent domestic bliss. "In Mexico it's all out front—the color, the life, the warmth. If a Mexican likes you, he'll touch you. It's direct. It's real. Whatever it is, they don't confuse it with anything else. Here in this country, everybody is worried about stopping the war and saving the forests and all that, but these same crusaders go out the door in the morning forgetting to kiss their wives and water the flowers. In Mexico they don't worry so goddamn much about saving the human race or about the wheeling and dealing that's killing us. In Mexico they don't forget to kiss each other and water the flowers."[4] Peace, love, fertility, friendship: the basic, life-nourishing things that are threatened from all sides. In Aqua Verde, where Mapache reigns like an emperor, the women give suck wearing bandoleers; they sport military caps as they tend their children and cook. Their husbands carry loaves of bread and loads of firewood, but wear bulky holsters and huge cruel boots. Images of love have been distorted by the accoutrements of aggression.

The knightly code and its complementary idyll of domesticity combine into a set of values that is not easily categorized. It contains something of the solid belief in family and place that informs such films as John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* and *The Searchers,* but celebrates

sexual union and freedom in a way that the conventional Western never has. Yet it is defensive and fatalistic because it is predicated on the assumption that whoever adheres to its tenets will not survive. We might say, in this sense, that Sam Peckinpah suggests Ford in a black mood, reading a lot of Blake.

This brings us back to heroism, which Peckinpah knows so well. He thinks of himself as a story-teller[5] first and foremost, and even his bitterest detractors would have to admit that his narratives (those, unlike *Major Dundee* and *Pat Garrett,* left largely unviolated by skittish producers) move quickly and grippingly, that his protagonists are complex, credible, unusual people, that he has a sophisticated sense of irony and always demonstrates masterful facility with all the elements of crisis. But beyond this, Peckinpah understands the large persuasiveness of his medium, and so is adept at grappling with the largely anachronistic issue of heroism. He can establish a heroic context, and make us uneasy by introducing into it a heroism that fails or is misplaced, or that is not real heroism but a mere series of postures. The protagonists in *The Wild Bunch* automatically claim some of our sympathy at first simply because they are the threatened ones (their criminality making no immediate dramatic difference, as Hitchcock knows so well) and because they are more appealing than their bestial opponents. Peckinpah intensifies our yearning to sympathize by establishing a glorious frame, a heroic context with those outlines we are familiar because we are familiar with the genre. The protagonists ride handsomely at a gallop across a gorgeous gold and scarlet terrain, to "thundering hooves" and a stirring score—a Remington scene come to life. So far, so good. But Deke Thornton's odious bounty-hunters, filthy, brutal, and faintly epicene, pursue the protagonists with the benefit of the same romanticizing touches, the same dash and verve. The result is unsettling, and takes some of our pleasure out of championing the eponymous wild bunch.

Peckinpah knows how to toy with all the assumptions and expectations that cinema has instilled within us, and he does this so unostentatiously that we can mistake his subtleties for excess, his ironic deflations and amplifications of types and clichés for a lack of artistic control.[6] Often this distortion of convention goes unnoticed or is condemned for being improbable, when its improbability is intentional. The archetype of the cavalry coming to the rescue, established by Ford's *Stagecoach* in 1939, recurs distorted in *The Wild Bunch,* wherein American troops, most of them teen-agers, come to the inadvertent rescue of the gun-running protagonists by mistakenly opening fire on the pursuing bounty-hunters. The end of *The Getaway* is as "happy" as the end of *The Wild Bunch* is appalling. But it is a tongue-in-cheek happiness, contrived to startle us out of our expectation—dictated by a venerable genre that includes Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937) and Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)—that the young couple guilty of offending a heartless society will be torn apart by death. After stalking Doc (Steve McQueen) for most of the film, the slouching heavy takes aim at his prey from about twelve feet away, and misses. This is an outrageous "device"; it seems to demand loud groans of incredulousness. And, suitably, the conclusion is impossibly rosy: the young couple ride off (into Mexico, of course) in a battered pick-up truck purchased from amiable Slim Pickens, who gets enough money from them to retire. We are not prepared for this. What we expect is capture, ambush, beautiful primitives annihilated by the sagging and embittered enforcers of a decadent legality. We expect *The Sugarland Express* and *Thieves Like Us* to end as they do. Therefore Peckinpah makes *The Getaway* end differently, but the getaway itself is so unlikely that it's almost sinister, as if its excessive cheeriness suggests what would really happen to such "outlaws" in the real world, much less what should happen to generic convention. And if we consider Peckinpah's cynicism, we must allow for the possibility that the ending of *The Getaway* might be intended to disappoint the demon within, whose demands for generic propriety are not altogether ingenuous.

It is this cynicism that lies behind Peckinpah's

highly stylized (and heavily publicized) treatment of violence. His obsessive rendering of violence into gross lethargic ballet heightens our vicarious experience of it, makes it less of a kick and more of an indulgence, wherein the reluctant eye will linger and thereby learn: "Most people don't even know what a bullet hole in a human body looks like. I want them to see what it looks like. The only way I can do that is by not letting them gloss over the looks of it, as if it were the seven-o'clock news from the DMZ."[7]

This is the most straightforward kind of directional confrontation. But its directness is easily misinterpreted as the large enthusiastic audiences and critical ambivalence suggest. No one who has a craving for violence will fail to enjoy films that demonstrate how horrible it is, while those who loathe violence in the first place will cover their eyes or walk out. This problem besets all moral rhetoricians, whether they proselytize, propagandize, or satirize. Of course, the ideal viewer, who has always taken violence for granted without delighting in it and who will watch *Straw Dogs* objectively and unflinchingly and be properly appalled, is not a mythical creature; but graphic depiction of the unpleasant will sooner evoke a visceral response than a more enlightened one. People will turn away and assume that Peckinpah's presentation implies celebration, or at least endorsement, and that the brutal approval of an audience applauding massacre accords perfectly with the director's intentions. Many critics, who ought to know better, make these fallacious assumptions. Their condemnation may be silly, but it is not Peckinpah's responsibility to lash out at this silliness. What he must do, intent as he is on edifying his viewers, is find a less blatant method of attack.

With *Alfredo Garcia* Peckinpah demonstrates his discovery of such a method: manipulation of sympathies, assumptions, and expectations, but manipulation that does not reduce characters to devices, as Kubrick does so transparently in his cartoonish *A Clockwork Orange*. In his latest film Peckinpah sustains the possibility of heroism by presenting a perversion of it. He expands, intensifies, we might say "bloats" the figments of cinematic convention, not in the direction of camp or caricature, but naturalistically, making irresistibly believable and arresting the types and reactions we have come complacently to look for and accept. He translates back into ungainliness what Hollywood has portrayed romantically, but without any correlative diminution of vividness. Never before has he used his familiarity with audience response to such great effect, nor has he ever presented with such tenderness the things in which he so desperately believes. What the audience responds to approvingly is just what threatens the objects of this tenderness.

It is a bold and honest tenderness dogged everywhere by bullying machismo and dauntless greed. Its precarious little life struggles to endure in the relationship of Benny (Warren Oates) and Elisa (Isela Vega). But before the viewer sees these characters for the first time, befor coming to the plot proper, he can see their ruin in preparation. The film is so heavily and suggestively allusive that even a mere synopsis will provide much more than the elements of plot.

A pregnant young girl sits at the edge of a pond, sheltered by great curving trees, dangling her feet in the water, smiling with a quiet blissfulness. Swans glide by; the air is calm with the heat of broad day. Another girl approaches and warns her (in Spanish) that her father wants to see her. Her answer is full of brave contempt, and she stays right where she is. Two bullet-festooned hirelings slouch upon the scene. They have come to fetch her from her idyll.

The patriarch (Emilio Fernandez) who owns all—pond, swans, girls, hirelings, and everything else in sight—sits behind a vast desk in a polished, funereal study. He reads from the Bible to an austere crowd of weary-looking women, grouped before him like a chorus in black. When his daughter enters the room his subdued Bible-reading voice gives way to an abrasive inquisitorial bark. He demands to know the name of her child's father. She refuses, until the fatal name is forced out of her by two of the beefy hombres: "Alfredo Garcia."

And so the film begins with a call for vengeance. The patriarch makes the eponymous demand. He will pay one million dollars for this dire castration. After her ritual of humiliation, the girl kneels in pain and shame in the middle of the room, her dress torn to expose her breasts, her arm broken. A dapper gringo in faultless business suit steps forward and approaches the girl, bends toward her, searching her face, perhaps to say something comforting—his is the reassuring professional bearing of a doctor. Abruptly he yanks off her locket (inside it is a grinning snapshot of Garcia), then strides out.

An astonishing mechanism of well-oiled and expensive organization now kicks into high gear: motors roar, cars accelerate, horses whinny and gallop away in clouds of dust. Airplanes take off, limousines arrive at terminal doors. All of civilization's engines of force seem to be erupting at once. Peckinpah establishes a gigantic mercenary machine made up of hot pistons, brute sinew, and impeccable unsmiling aides. A handful of corporate types, guarded by innumerable spiffy thugs, financed by a remote tyrant who hates his grandchild's father, tackle an assignment. The tyrant's atavistic cry for vengeance evokes the oldest and most repressive codes of "family" and "honor"; the tyrant's elegant employees are very chic, slick and smart and eminently untroubled: the tie that binds old to new, tyrant to agent, gringo to Mexican, the heartless to the bloodless, is money.

This money can do anything. Its great power, which ultimately destroys the immense mechanism, informs an elaborate parody of a recent popular genre (along with, throughout the film's opening sequence, several disquieting reminders of other films). Emilio Fernandez's brutal patriarch is clean-shaven, carefully pomaded, neatly dressed; and in his inner sanctum of somber mahogany he suggests Don Corleone, a resemblance made explicit toward the end of the film, when the patriarch jubilantly oversees the baptism of Garcia's infant son, a celebration of life taking place in a murderous atmosphere, like the wedding and baptism sequences that begin and end *The Godfather.*

The very first shots recall Angel's idyllic village in *The Wild Bunch:* youthful fertility and erotic innocence in a green, peaceful garden. And as Mapache's presence perverts the Mexican idyll in the earlier film, so here the Fernandez character, although more "respectable" than the slovenly bandit general, detests spontaneous erotic love and yearns to punish it. Once again, Mexico the domestic paradise is in danger. The patriarch's villa swarms with hired killers, but all the legitimate inhabitants seem to be women.

BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA *(Studio-retouched still)*

In presenting these women Peckinpah's composition recalls Cacoyannis's *Elektra:* they stand back, immobile grief-stricken spectators of the girl's ordeal, swathed from head to toe in black; their faces suggest the weariness of constant dreadful anticipations; by their bearing they seem to have repressed everything. Their presence imbues this sequence, a grim bit of "wheeling and dealing," with tragic intonations. What happens in this male world happens despite and against these women.

This implicit misogyny is a central theme in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia.* The well-heeled middlemen who catalyze the plot proper act out a popular stereotype, ubiquitous in recent cinema and television, but their style and motivation preclude one of the stereotype's major elements. These polished killers demonstrate neither sexual charm nor desire. There are no analogues, in their world, to Emma Peel or Pussy Galore. There are women present at their hotel headquarters, but theirs is a sexless function: they burlesque the passive subservience of the female props that abound in male-oriented advertising. At one point an agent sits, fully dressed as ever from chin to shin, having his feet bathed and toenails clipped by two of these bosomy, expressionless emanations. One of the women accidentally nips his toe. He swats her on the head with a rolled-up magazine.

Half of the stereotype is missing. Taking the place of the suave spy's sexual charisma is mere ownership.

Peckinpah likes to play with our naive preconceptions. When the dapper agent breaks off the girl's locket he frustrates our expectation, incited by his good looks and seeming debonair restraint, that he will somehow mitigate her suffering. What he does is directly opposed to what we hope and believe he will do. Later in the film, two more stylish, dead-faced agents (Robert Webber and Gig Young, looking remarkably alike) are asking Benny the usual questions ("Ever seen this man?" and so forth), when a prostitute sidles up to Webber and starts fondling his groin. Without warning he decks her with as deft an elbow as any special operative ever shot into an enemy's guts.

Peckinpah implies that the only difference between the suave expert in intrigue and the slug-laden ruffian is style: both are violent, life-denying whores. Webber and Young recall dozens of suave, capable, tasteful murderers, the heroes of many a film and television drama, "the professionals," those "who get the job done." Peckinpah subverts the attractiveness of their glossy world, begotten by Ian Fleming on the man who drinks Dewar's, wears Arrow shirts, reads *Playboy* and has everything. He caricatures the dacron fantasy of 007 with a parodic version of the jaded, self-conscious world projected by *Oceans 11, Mission: Impossible, It Takes a Thief,* etc. The tasteful trappings of the corporate bounty-hunters in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* are grotesque. Like the American scientists in *Kubrick's 2001,* they all look alike; in their obsessive tastefulness they seem narcissistic. And in this sameness, this sterility, there is necessarily a strong strain of misogyny: the man who has everything has no need for women. When a Mexico City pimp displays his prize girls, the agent passes them by to shake hands warmly with his waiting colleagues, all of them mere repetitions of himself.

Peckinpah detests mercenaries, those whose lives are devoted to "the wheeling and dealing that's killing us." The loathsome bounty-hunters in *The Wild Bunch* also seem somehow emasculated, whining and giggling like pre-adolescents between bouts of ecstatic gunplay. But the differences between them and the protagonists are, it seems, largely external ones. This is one of the things that makes *The Wild Bunch* unusual—the implicit question, "When everyone is on the payroll, who's any better than anyone else?" The payroll is life-denying, sterilizing, dehumanizing. The encroachment of civilization is deadening because it's devoted to gain and love of gain is inimical to love—not just because it's bossy and boring and won't tolerate the outlaw's life of freedom, as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* a film that borrows abundantly but superficially from *The Wild Bunch,* seems to imply. Money incites violence, whether overtly physical or emotionally destructive, in any context, at any time: "When you're

dealing in millions, you're dealing with people at their meanest. Christ, a showdown in the old West is nothing compared with the infighting that goes on over money."[8]

The bounty-hunters find Benny playing the piano in a squalid dive. Benny knows that Garcia had been spending time with Elisa, his sometime lover. Once he finds out from Elisa that Garcia is already dead, having been killed a week before in a car accident, he decides to fetch Garcia's head, falling back on the cliché of the Big Chance. His motives, however, are doubly impure. Not only is he blind to the impossibility of the Big Break, but in craving that vengeful desecration he is repeating the jealous sin of the patriarch—demanding punishment, a symbolic castration, for the crime of love-making.

Benny is already crippled when we first see him, in the dingy cellar bar where he plays "Guantanamera" in a monotonous progression of one-handed poundings,[9] skeletal, unshaven, rumpled. Here is a real anti-hero—not a pretty-boy who talks dirty but a genuinely ungainly misfit. Jack Nicholson's Bobby Dupea and Warren Beatty's Frady are too charismatic, too artfully tousled to be authentic anti-heroes. We feel comfortable championing or sympathizing with them: Peckinpah knows and dislikes this comfortableness. We must struggle to feel for Benny at first. His messiness is as extreme as his employers' neatness, his want as blatant as their affluence. He suggests a revivified Bogart, a nastier and more complex version of the cynical expatriate who does whatever he can to get by.

Here the reverberations become richer. After talking around the subject of Garcia's whereabouts, the two glossy lackeys head for the door. Benny asks the Gig Young character his name: "Dobbs," he answers with a smirk, "Fred C. Dobbs." The allusion to *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* provides a signal to the audience that Benny misses. Benny himself is a reincarnation of Dobbs, the gringo prowling Mexico for quick riches. But the lackey is another Dobbs too, another prospector, another man ready and willing to do anything for gold. Young figures forth all that Benny would like to become, but both, being sell-outs, are really in the same predica-

Menace in Mexico

ment. When the real "good things" in life are ignored, when we forget to water the flowers and kiss each other, we have nothing to look forward to but more of what we know already: "This was going to be my last. I was going to pull back after this one," broods Pike Bishop after the abortive bank robbery. "Pull back to what?" asks Dutch. When the killer instinct prevails, there is nothing to pull back to, no safe harbor, no guiding light. At the end of *Straw Dogs,* David Sumner is, like the idiot whom he's protected at such a cost, thoroughly uprooted.

But Benny is not entirely antipathetic. If he were, the film would be nothing more than the gratuitous and eccentric display it has been called. True, he is a deluded, desperate, unprepossessing figure, a whore lost in a world of whores. But we side with him because of his residual humanity (no trace of which can be discerned in his employers) and, more importantly, because within him hides the possibility of great tenderness. This is partly to Warren Oates's credit and partly to Peckinpah's, because Peckinpah knows how to use this artless actor.

Like Ben Johnson, Slim Pickens, and William Holden, Oates is one of those aging actors who

Isela Vega: source of life's potential

plays a part entirely straightforwardly, never striving to dredge from his own depths the makings of a character too different from himself. He is an eminently American actor, with great versatility, but always within an unmistakably American context. Peckinpah has always emphasized Oates's rashness, his temper, his uncontrollable side: he is the most explosive of the wild bunch, always arguing and looking for a slight; the most striking of the Hammond brothers, he has an unforgettable moment during the final shoot-out in *Ride the High Country*, when he explodes with frustrated malice (having failed to hit anybody with a bullet) and shoots at a bunch of cooped-up hens. He always seems potentially dangerous, but there is within him a frail, weary gentleness that lends some of his performances unexpected intimations of brave love.

In this, he is a microcosm of the world that *Alfredo Garcia* projects. He explodes in rage time and again, fumes and curses almost to the point of ludicrousness, but consistently pulls back and restrains himself until the end. If his restraint were greater, if his need for love, for the domestic idyll, were more powerful than his instincts to possess and destroy, he might survive, might truly live. Elisa offers him a kind of fulfillment that his quest for Garcia's head makes impossible. She is the center of potential, the source in the film of all that Peckinpah holds dear.

It is ironic that she too is a whore, because her prostitution is not, as is Benny's and the bounty-hunters', the complete prostitution of all moral potential. But her prostitution at first takes something away from her splendid energy and magnificent abundance, the attributes of an erotic goddess which will be revealed later, outside the posh confines of the bordello. The first shot of Elisa is peculiar: we see her from behind in an elegant little whorehouse parlor. Facing her (and us) are a bunch of formally-dressed musicians who accompany her singing, and a customer, looking into her eyes with a delighted smile. This is a deliberately tantalizing shot. We want to see her, we want to be in the customer's place. Peckinpah excites a wish (or exploits a corrupt, long-standing urge) to engage in the vicarious enjoyment of Elisa, the spectator's desexualized gaping at a high-priced commodity. She sits motionless, her voice streaming out sweetly, artificially from somewhere in front of her (and later she refers to the possibility of doing "a few more commercials" to help set up a nest egg). In the lavish context of this whorehouse, which at first glance might be some famous restaurant in New York, Elisa's womanly splendor is diminished into the same hollow glamor exuded by the bounty-hunters, whose cold stylishness also depends on display.

But from this point on her power begins to reveal itself. After spending the night together in Benny's shabby room, the two of them embark on their quest. More precisely, the quest is Benny's; Elisa disapproves of the project, harboring feelings for the dead Garcia that will not accept Benny's premises. Repeatedly he justifies fetching the head by evoking the myth of the Last Big Chance, but really what smolders inside him is jealousy of the dead man. He hates that weekend Elisa had spent with Garcia. He regards the corpse as a rival. Indeed, like the patriarch whose hatred has begun this sad story, Benny is full of demons. He seems, in his angry possessiveness, to equate sex with death.

As they drive deeper into Mexico the color of the landscape becomes increasingly brackish, monochromatic, nightmarish: hillocks of darkened beige, or spreading fields of blue-green with an occasional stiff tree. Their progress into this landscape signifies their closeness to death. And yet Elisa tries to assert the potential in them both, begging Benny to cancel this pilgrimage so they can go home together. The notion of a family is something new to both of them, but it exists, if only as a fragile possibility. At times they leave the road, and in these moments of rest the great affirmation wells up, despite the omnipresent pitiable morass of anger and whoredom.

They sit beneath a tree, on a blanket, a picnic basket beside them. Elisa lies with her head cradled in Benny's lap. Their fundamental configuration is full of peace: a family picnic, a Sunday excursion, a luncheon in the grass. And

yet the details of the image are askew. We see not a beaming plasticated pair enjoying this or that product in a commercially idealized landscape (as their positions and expressions evoke such a billboard tableau) but two broken, confused people trying to realize a happy union. Benny's troubled, aging face, his receding hairline, his wrinkled shirt, Elisa's slight lines around the eyes: such things throw us off because they conflict with the scene's general outline of harmonious togetherness. What Benny and Elisa cannot effect together finds expression in the raggediness of this image. It is in this scene that Benny tells Elisa that he loves her, that they belong together and will marry. Elisa bursts into tears. There is an exquisite pathos in this placement of sad naturalistic details within a poor man's American dream. Elisa cries as if she knows that love in this violent, greedy world is a fugitive essence. It fills this quiet scene with sudden beauty, despite the painful awkwardness of these two desperate losers playing at hopefulness and decency. As in *The Ballad of Cable Hogue,* a sad, unglamorous man and a worldly prostitute briefly make up a good thing together.

But at every moment their effort is in danger. Male couples stalk them, aping their tender relationship, at once bringing out and standing for the worst within Benny. Aside from the automata Webber and Young, there are two porcine Mexicans in a station wagon, and two hairy bikers right out of a Roger Corman picture. At every resting-place, at every moment of calm, it seems, Benny and Elisa are watched, threatened, parodied by some pair of men. Peckinpah seems not only to have noticed the recent criticism of Hollywood's penchant for male protagonists in pairs, but to have dramatized this misogynistic preference, giving it, for once, the blatant ugliness of menace.

After the initial montage of cars, horses and airplanes, the sound of roaring motors acquires a threatening undertone. When Webber and Young show Benny the photograph of Garcia, the close-up of the dead man is accompanied by a distant sound of acceleration, screeching tires and metallic impact. And every time Benny and Elisa have concluded a conversation, there erupts from someplace nearby the rumble of approaching engines. Wherever they stop, those two fat Mexicans seem to be driving around them, keeping an eye on Benny for the corporation men back in Mexico City. As the protagonists drive along, Elisa sings Mexican songs to Benny, sweetly, lovingly, lulling us into hope because this image is persuasive and provokes us to believe that the two will make it after all. Peckinpah then cuts to the interior of the following car, whose driver, boozily waving a bottle of whiskey back and forth, sings the same song with mock tenderness to his jowly, expressionless partner (who, to make the similitude complete, always wears sunglasses as Benny does).

A male partnership invades the idyll itself one night after Benny and Elisa have finished an outdoor supper. That rumble once again violates the soft sounds of the land: two hulking, bearded bikers ride into the protagonists' lives. One of them is Kris Kristofferson. He "asks" Elisa to sing and then, after singing a few words in response, says he intends to "borrow" her, dragging her off into the bushes for some fun. Benny tries to prevent him, but the other biker pulls a gun on him. Elisa tells Benny to stay out of it, and sorrowfully goes off with Kristofferson. The other biker picks up her guitar and taunts Benny with an extemporaneous song about how "He's got her on her back now," and so forth. This is outrageous—this is not to be borne. We recall the Hammond brothers surrounding their new sister-in-law on her wedding night; the wild bunch clucking in admiration at the sight of Teresa licking Mapache's ear while Angel, who had been her betrothed, sits and watches; the Cornish hoodlums raping Sumner's wife as the myopic cuckold awaits them in the woods. In Peckinpah's world there is a sizable segment of the population called "trash": Kristofferson's sidekick is plainly a member of that stratum, and as he goads Benny into a frenzy with his leering impudence he goads his viewer as well. Peckinpah knows that the viewer wants blood.

Meanwhile, the "rape" itself proceeds in an unusual manner. Kristofferson rips open Elisa's shirt as the patriarch's heavies had ripped open the young girl's. Elisa is only more beautiful

for this ill treatment, for she is too strong to be degraded so easily. She slaps her molester; she slaps him again. He then hauls off and smacks her very hard. Unlike Amy in *Straw Dogs,* who is "conquered," although she only gets what she secretly wants, Elisa does not give in or crumple up. Surprisingly, Kristofferson turns away, hangdog and mortified, and withdraws, sitting beside a dark boulder.

This takes the steam out of our rage, but not out of Benny's. While Benny sits helpless, stymied by the lewd punk, Elisa approaches her downcast attacker and takes a dominant role, bending almost forgivingly down toward him, freely intiating love-making that had seemed a moment before to be inevitable assault, coercion, and shame. Now Elisa and Kristofferson seem transformed; their coupling is equal and passionate, not fearful, not bestial. Among the large dark plants that might have come from a Rousseau painting the two entwine like creatures of legend.

Was this as it had been between Alfredo Garcia and his young lover? We suddenly seem to be glimpsing the forbidden interior of an erotic paradise, unknown to any but the bravest and most honest. Benny overwhelms his guard and bursts into this paradise waving a pistol: "You're *dead!*" he screams, and shoots Kristofferson. The couple then rush away in fear and desperation, from a battlefield which had been a paradise which had been a domestic idyll.

Elisa's reproach posits the new possibility that Benny had no right to commit murder out of jealousy, or to avenge "dishonor." Angel's crime of passion in *The Wild Bunch* is not only a strategic blunder (it leads to his death in the long run) but perhaps the indication of a human failing as well. Restraint is not always an incontrovertible virtue (in some cases, as in David Sumner's, it is a questionable one), but in matters of blind jealous hate it evinces spiritual superiority. Sexual pleasure between others, no matter who those others are, should not lead to violence. This kind of possessiveness equates sex with death, whereas the erotic impulse is life-affirming, life-enhancing. This understanding inheres in Peckinpah's advice to a world rapidly becoming mechanized: "We have to water the flowers—and screw a lot."[10] Benny repeats the patriarch's inhuman mistake when, out of sexual fury, he bellows for blood.

This equation of sex with death culminates in Elisa's death, which provides what is perhaps the grisliest moment in any Peckinpah film. It is the film's turning-point, its structural center and moral climax. Benny's great loss dictates all that happens thereafter, and reflects back on preceding events, giving new significance to presumably casual occurrences. Peckinpah's build-up to this moment is meticulously worked out, fraught with dark suggestive echoes.

Awaiting the middle of the night, when the decapitation might go unobserved, the couple check in to a room at the back of a filthy bar. Benny is jumpy, irascible, almost defensive as the time for the act approaches; Elisa broods. Peckinpah shoots their entry into the room just as he had shot their last morning together in Benny's room before their departure: medium shot of the room, establishing a claustrophobic proscenium with the bed dominating the right of the frame. But the composition, suggesting something happier (the roughhousing in Benny's Mexico City apartment), once again struggles with pictorial details, which project an atmosphere of decay. Just as the picnic idyll seemed always about to fly apart, so the general outline of this last bedroom projects a memory of earlier, safer times, a vestigial aura of spontaneous good humor which breaks up against the visible squalor of the room, the desperate sadness of its inhabitants, and a noticeably altered camera angle: Benny's room had been shot straight on, but this last room is shot from a much higher angle, trapping the protagonists down inside a grimy dungeon of a room. The place of love-making has been transformed into a waiting-room, a place where Benny can ready himself to go out and punish his dead rival.

And this only begins the film's retrospective darkening. Elisa's death comes as a shock to viewer and lover alike. Once in the graveyard, with Garcia's coffin exposed, Benny raises his machete to commit the strange deed as Elisa wanders despondently off to spare herself the spectacle. From out of the blackness a shovel smashes against Benny's head, and he falls. For

a moment there is nothing: darkness. Then we make out, gradually, like visitors rushing into an unexpectedly blackened room, mounds of dirt from which a human hand pokes limply through. With a groan of terror and disgust, like one tearing himself from a bad dream, Benny sits up, forcing himself out of the soil heaped over him. He has been buried and left for dead; and Elisa is buried beside him. Neither we nor he are fully aware that she is dead. He holds her in his arms, shakes her, muttering, shouting "Get up!," trying to disentangle her from the grave. As he realizes that she will stay with Garcia forever, Benny becomes hysterical, turning her body over so that it will lie face-to-face with the thing underneath. He shouts crazed accusations. His jealousy seems to increase and at the same time he seems to hate himself for it. Understanding that Elisa too is now dead, Benny explodes with a rage that is basically sexual. He cannot escape the equation of *eros* with *thanatos*. This equation has killed Elisa, and now that all potential, all affirmation has been annihilated, Benny can only become a scourge, an avenger, a champion of denial.

And so the earlier horseplay recurs, transmogrified by obsession. All the good that has taken place is repeated in hideous parody. The fat Mexican singing Elisa's song in the pursuing vehicle is a metaphor for the second half of the film: all the destructive things, having won both within and outside of Benny, sharpen the sense of loss which they have incurred by constantly evoking the thing lost. Although the film becomes, in its broadest outlines, a sort of revenge tragedy, its avenger can do nothing truly effective. Benny persists in exacting bloody payment, and after Elisa's death, this is just what we want to see; but, as in *The Wild Bunch,* the cathartic holocaust goes on just slightly too long, until its dubious pleasure starts to turn flat. Benny cannot be whole-heartedly applauded because he has become a dead man. Now that his only mission is vengeance, he will play his string out to the end, but it's the wrong string: only Elisa knew what was right.

The rest of the film sees the victory of destruction. Benny finds and murders the two fat Mexicans—they are the ones who have murdered Elisa—and retrieves the head. Standing over one Mexican's body, Benny shoots it again and again. "Why?" he asks aloud. "Because it feels so *God-damned good!*" The act itself is joyless, even for the biggest sadist in the audience, because the Mexican is already dead; and Peckinpah distances us from it by keeping us behind and away: we see none of this meaningless punishment. It feels good to Benny, but his savage explanation really betrays no pleasure whatsoever. Benny's new quest, once he has the

head in his possession, is to destroy the destroyers, to wipe out the patriarch and his hirelings, and in so doing to make final his suicide.

More reminders of the earlier possibilities recur as Benny feverishly drives back north. The head, wrapped in stinking linen, bounces around on the front seat beside Benny as if it still retained some life. Flies hover around it. Later, in his apartment, he will put the head in his shower and run water on it. Before setting out in the first place, Benny had found Elisa sitting in the shower, the water running down all over her. Benny talks to the head, talks about Elisa in a delirium of guilt as if to another "living" suitor. The three of them have become irreversibly involved now that they all three have death in common.

Benny is ambushed by Garcia's peasant family, who take the head back and hold the protagonist at gunpoint while he offers them money for it. Just then, Webber and Young drive up, posing as tourists, and interrupt this tense roadside confrontation with a blithe friendliness which is almost comic. They ask for directions, pretending to ignore the rifles and the set faces and the obvious thick air of menace. Webber asks if anyone knows where "the cut-off" is. Benny replies: "It's here, but you'll have to take it." "He says it's here, but we'll have to take it," shouts Webber to Young, who, while his partner asked for euphemistic directions, lounged against the side of their dazzling Chevy, a fine raincoat draped over his shoulders. Just before a tourist bus had lumbered by, the camera momentarily taking the point-of-view of those riding inside. Hands waved imbecilically through the window, hands that might be our own, suggesting a hostile caricature of us viewers. But this is not as arbitrary a bit of mockery as it initially seems. The bus (which had been at the terminal in the early montage of acceleration) also functions to delay a face-off between two dapper Americans and a bent, wizened clan of Mexicans. The Americans want the head; the Mexicans have it. The Americans are better-looking, better-dressed, and have about them an attitude of smartness which the Mexicans can't see, for they are ignorant, defensive people, stodgy in their backwardness and have no idea of what's coming. And corroborating what Peckinpah feels is an automatic American sympathy for these American agents is the presence of Benny, who, despite his eccentric frenzy, still claims our greatest sympathy: he also wants the head, and we want the Mexicans to give it up.

We are tricked into admiring, just for a moment, the slickness and ingenuity of the hireling. The tourist bus constitutes a metaphor for our place in the audience, our status as sheltered onlookers and our deluded, unthinking sympathies. We too are Americans, engaging in this confrontation with feeble vicarious energy: "The country has no attention span. We're television oriented now."[11]

After the bus goes by, Webber and Young reenact what the wild bunch accomplished after Angel's death: a few well-armed *gringo* professionals wipe out a lot of Mexicans. Young sprays Garcia's relatives with a machine-gun which he has been hiding under his raincoat. He holds the weapon at crotch level, vibrating all over as he fires, with a look of hideous manic glee. This image (shot frontally, at medium range) is as uncomfortable as the quick shift to the point of view inside the tourist bus: Young's machine-gun and expression of homicidal euphoria are trained on *us*, although the Mexicans are the ones who actually fall. After this massacre seems to have ended (all lie dead, except for one white-haired elder, holding trembling hands in the air), Webber ask a terse question: "Who are they?" "Just a family," says Benny, casually and unknowingly revealing the extent of this mercenary corruption. The line is so matter-of-fact after the pyrotechnics of the previous moment that the audience is bound to miss its terrible irony. So unthinking a dismissal of the lives of "just a family" is nothing to wonder at in the sterile context of this professionalism; but what makes the callousness more terrible is the likelihood that the viewer will not see it for what it is, but will revel in the action, admire the deft brutality of the big successful employees on the screen.

And so Peckinpah places us in his characters' sights. The bloodshed we enjoy so much seems

to come ever closer and closer to its celebrants. The further in the past the idyll of domestic possibilities recedes, the more blatantly is violence associated with the viewer. And that dead idyll is persistently aped by what destroyed it. One other Mexican, having survived Webber and Young's attack, pops up from atop a nearby hill and shoots Young. Webber kills the Mexican. Benny asks if he's going to get paid, but Webber is in tears over the death of his natty likeness. He bends over Young's corpse, fighting back sobs, and then slowly reaches for his pistol: "Yeah . . . yeah . . . you'll get paid . . . " He wheels around to kill Benny, but Benny shoots first. Staggering with the wound, Webber turns to Young: "Jimmy?" he pleads, his voice full of anxiety and tenderness; Benny shoots again. This affection comes out of nowhere, and there is nothing noble about it, nothing of the great love we sense in the last conversation between Steve Judd and Gil Westrom in *Ride the High Country*. It more closely resembles the anguish with which Dutch calls out Pike Bishop's name over and over as Bishop falls at the trigger of a machine-gun, saying that name over and over as the two of them weaken, bullet-riddled and bereft of all purpose, and drop into death side by side like two lovers after orgasm, surrounded by vast carnage.

Benny then moves up the corporate ladder, returning to the hotel room where he had first been "hired" and killing the two executives who had interviewed him. These two men (one of whom was the clean-shaven agent at the villa in the very beginning) sit behind mahogany desks: in killing them Benny seems to be killing spectators, and at the same time to be killing the remote wheeler-dealers, the power-players who, like Harrigan in *The Wild Bunch* or Ben Johnson's prison official in *The Getaway*, "represent the law," succeed from afar without getting their hands dirty. It is this vicariousness that relates the indifferent viewer of films to the unthinking producer of films: sedentary, inexperienced, materialistic and quick to judge. The viewer values professionalism, slickness, expertise, and the big buck. So does the producer. Benny has become Peckinpah's own hit man, but only by forfeit. His destructiveness is not lovable, not the only alternative to a dead society. Many films lionize characters whom they portray as at once degenerate and heroic, heroic because degenerate, because that degeneracy is energetic and "alive" in the midst of a world of automata. Benny already lost his life back in the primitive graveyard. What he does afterwards is not meant to be applauded.

But his heroic stance is nonetheless rousing. We too hate his over-meticulous ice-blooded employers, and we too hate the oppressive patriarch who has catalyzed the whole tragic mechanism. But, although Benny shoots righteously, his rage is purely destructive. Again Peckinpah evokes the outline of something positive while fleshing it out with disconcerting ugly details. Mere applause, like mere repulsion, would be too easy. In a Freudian context Benny's vengeful quest for the life of the patriarch is necessary: it is a rite of passage, and so forth. But the mythic outline provides an easy way out, and Peckinpah will not permit simple exits from disturbing situations.

Peckinpah reanimates his allusion to *The Godfather* in returning to the villa where everything began. The patriarch celebrates the baptism of his grandson as Benny arrives with the father's head. All around the villa slouch the same killers; all throughout it sit the same weary women. The patriarch supervises a ritual of life within a context of destruction: the reverberations of Michael Corleone's gruesome baptismal service are unmistakable. Benny presents the head in its gory bag. The old man, sitting behind his desk, peremptorily orders that Benny be paid, then asks him to leave. The briefcase full of fresh stacks of bright crisp bills looks foolish now. Once more we think of Fred C. Dobbs, of the ultimate ludicrousness of wealth at such a price. The reason for it all is not merely irrelevant—it's now become offensive. So much blood has been shed, so much love lost, so many possibilities destroyed. The massacre ending *The Wild Bunch* was also doubly gratuitous: the money, once Angel's life was at stake, suddenly meant nothing; and once Angel's life was needlessly lost, the heroic invasion became a mock-

ery. The defense of the imbecile in *Straw Dogs* was no real reason for the sickening holocaust at the end; and Amy's "rape" could not justify so bestial and long-drawn-out a battle.

And now Benny, once the greedy travail has ended, strides into the potent presence of the cash monster, the weighty, oppressive source of all this woe, and perceives the paltriness and squalor of the reward. The Big Break, the Last Chance, the One More Job: all such delusions dissipate in the harsh glow of blood money, and the powerful tyrant appears as he really is: a cruel and complacent, dead and sedentary bully. Benny tries to explain the enormity of this huge mistake, but all the bully sees is a demented loser overstaying his welcome. In a final explosion of hate, Benny shoots the gunmen at either end of the room. The shoot-out is deliberately unrealistic; no one could stand in the middle of a room and kill four armed men surrounding him. But it is not bullets that kill the men: it is denial.

Benny pivots and takes aim with the speed and accuracy of the best sharpshooter the world has ever known, but the gunmen take their bloody balletic falls not because they have been struck by bullets, but by volleys of uncompromising negation. The fast editing might look clumsy, but in fact the last gunman's death does *not* correspond to any gunshot, but follows a savage close-up of Benny's face, contorted with rage, screaming "NO!!," a scream recalling Pat Garrett's when the Railroad's unctuous employee stoops to cut off Billy's trigger finger. The scream of denial is a scream of guilt, of protesting the final indignity after too much toleration and shame.

Benny turns to the patriarch, who grips his desk, his financial barrier, in new terror. He is the last spectator, the biggest and guiltiest wheeler-dealer of them all. Benny hesitates. The daughter, the first victim, she in whom all possibilities exist, stands at Benny's side and commands him to kill the patriarch. He shoots. Looking at the dead godfather, he says, presumably of Garcia, presumably to explain and apologize for his possession of the grisly bounty, "The first time I saw him—he was dead." But it isn't clear to whom or of whom Benny says this: he might say it to anyone, including himself; it might apply to any man in the movie, and this, because he was unable to embrace what Elisa offered, includes himself.

And so he goes off to his own death, bearing the head as if it were an old friend. "We're going home," he says to it, and the line would sound stagey and silly if there were any "home" to go to. But after murdering the patriarch, death is unavoidable, and home must mean just that. After rejecting real life and functioning as an avenging angel in a world of zombies, death is the only course left. Unlike David Sumner at the end of *Straw Dogs,* Benny knows where he's going, where he has been headed all along. He drives recklessly for the gates, the camera taking his point of view and thereby forcing us into the doomed driver's seat, recalling the end of *Bonnie and Clyde,* Angel's abortive flight from Mapache in *The Wild Bunch* (as well as the explosive finale of that picture), the murder of Sonny in *The Godfather,* and so on. The bullet-riddled car crashes into a tree; the listless homicides converge on it, pumping, pumping bullets into the driver, strolling towards the ruined vehicle, loosing a rain of death upon and into him. This ends with a freeze-frame of an enormous gun barrel pointing directly at the audience. Such is the fruit of what we have preferred to the mature and difficult joy of honest love and its threatened possibilities.

Such, also, is part of the meaning of a film which has been called "witless," "boring," and "sick," among many other hostile things. That benefit of the doubt which literary critics have learned to afford a worrisome writer, that willingness to believe that the artist can adopt many voices without permanently becoming every speaker, must be learned by the appraisers of film. What Peckinpah reveals is indeed strange and horrifying; but, like the messenger who brings bad news, his reception is irrational and violent. The viewer should forget whatever he's read in the newspapers, all that he has heard from the squeamish and opinionated, all the deluded cheering in the audience, all the lurid, wrong-headed publicity, and trust to his own reactions without assuming that he is somehow

morally superior to the director. In short, he must make more of an effort to watch, and learn not to rely on the easiest, most superficial reactions, the reactions of a feeble spectator for whom all experience is vicarious. This kind of spectatorship worries Peckinpah. It is a primary source of woe in the sad world of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia.*

NOTES

1. Perhaps it's no coincidence that both films owe a great deal to Francis Ford Coppola, one of the few directors working in America whose work Peckinpah admires. His expression of this admiration is, as usual, disconcerting: "I don't want any other son of a bitch making good movies." ("Playboy Interview: Sam Peckinpah," *Playboy,* March, 1972, p. 192).

2. *Playboy,* p. 72.

3. As Philip French blithely asserts when he says that "now one views *The Wild Bunch* as a new-style, soured Kennedy Western and a rather obvious and bitter allegory about Vietnam . . . "(*Westerns* [New York, 1973], p. 32).

4. *Playboy,* p. 192.

5. *Ibid.,* p. 72.

6. Peckinpah has always been acutely aware of the problem of pretentiousness. See the conclusion of Ernest Callenbach's interview with Peckinpah in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1963–64), and this remark: "I'm not going to get between my audience and the story. I hate the feeling in a theater of being more aware of what the director's doing than of what's actually up there on the screen." (*Playboy,* p. 72).

7. *Playboy,* p. 62.

8. *Ibid.,* p. 74.

9. There is a striking consonance between Peckinpah's own pet phrases and some of the most memorable lines in his films. Steve Judd's exquisite "All I want is to enter my house justified" was a favorite saying of Peckinpah's father. In his *Playboy* interview Peckinpah says of the protagonists of *The Wild Bunch:* "They play their string out to the end," a remark that occurs almost verbatim in that film when Dutch tries to rationalize his desertion of Angel in Aqua Verde. Benny's conspicuously one-handed piano-playing might be a symptom of his brokenness, if the following statement by Peckinpah has a firm basis in some mental image: "True pacifism is manly. In fact, it's the finest form of manliness. But if a man comes up to you and cuts your hand off, you don't offer him the other one. Not if you want to go on playing the piano, you don't." (*Playboy,* p. 70).

10. *Ibid.,* p. 192.

11. *Ibid.,* p. 192.

CONTRIBUTORS, cont'd.

teaches and supervises the film programs at Johns Hopkins University. BILL NICHOLS, who has written previously for *FQ* and contributes to many other journals, teaches film at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. ALAN WILLIAMS is our Paris Editor.

BRIAN HENDERSON

Metz: Essais I And Film Theory

"Semiotics as we now understand it must always rest on a double support: On the one hand, upon linguistics, and, on the other hand, upon the theory peculiar to the field under consideration."

—C. Metz, *Essais I* (1968), p. 121f.

Two of Christian Metz's three books have appeared for the first time in English this year, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma,* Vol. I (Klincksieck, Paris, 1968) and *Langage et cinéma* (Larousse, Paris, 1971). The latter is translated straightforwardly as *Language and Cinema* (Mouton, The Hague, 1974). The former becomes *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (Oxford, New York, 1974). Not yet available in translation is *Essais,* Vol. II (Klincksieck, Paris, 1972).

Essais I (1968) is already an historical book. It collects essays written between 1964 and 1968 (the English edition omits the bibliographical details of the original). Thus some of its contents have taken ten years to reach these shores. Since 1964, of course, research has advanced and theoretical structures have changed greatly. The book itself has been critiqued and commented on by many writers. Scarcely a line has escaped deconstructive examination.*

Metz's own later writings appear to question many of the positions of *Essais I,* though both subsequent books defend the principal theoretical effort of the first, the analysis of the *grande syntagmatique* of the image-track. It is reported that Metz's current lectures are pursuing lines of inquiry quite different from those of all his writings to date, focussing especially on materialist and psychoanalytic approaches to cinema. This is welcome news indeed, though an author's change of mind does not affect the need to read important books. The first attempt to construct a semiotics of the cinema is one of these.

Essais I can be read in two kinds of ways. Since the book contains discussions of many particular questions in semiotics and in film theory, such topics may be discussed apart from the book as a whole and their place in it. When the question of analogy in cinema is discussed, Metz's position is one of those which may be reviewed and critiqued. On the other hand, the book as a whole weaves its positions on various questions into a single, overall argument, in this case that leading to presentation of the *grande syntagmatique.* Our interest is in the latter operation, partly because most critiques have tended to deal with Metz's positions one-by-one. Perhaps the best of these, Michel Cegarra's in *Cinéthique,* is virtually a line-by-line critique. Such analyses are useful though, of course, they are not exhaustive. Attention to this level misses relations, operations, and configurations at other levels, particularly the larger patterns of discursive interaction and the relationship of questions posed to questions omitted or suppressed which constitutes the problematic of a text.

Nor does our attention to the book's overall argument claim to be exhaustive. We are most interested in the book's claim to inaugurate a semiotics of the cinema and with its claims, explicit and implicit, that this constitutes a break with previous discourses on film. Thus we are concerned with examining Metz's deployment of the discourses of linguistics and semiology. But we are equally interested in the other large discourses which mix with these in the book, particularly those of phenomenology, film theory, and the structural analysis of narrative (itself a

*See, among others: Emilio Garroni, *Semiotica ed Estetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1968); Umberto Eco, *La Structure Absente* (Mercure de France, 1972), "Articulations of the Cinematic Code," *Cinemantics,* No. 1 (Jan., 1970); Kristeva, Cegarra, *Cinéthique,* Heath pieces in *Screen,* Vol. 14/1–2 (Spring–Summer 1973); Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. XXVIII/2 (Winter 1974–75); Brian Henderson, "Critique of Cine-Structuralism, I & II," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. XXVII/1 & 2 (Fall 1973; Winter 1973–74).

branch of semiology). We are interested in differentiating the places of these discourses in the structure of the argument; in tracing their dynamic interaction, i.e., the mutual pressures they exert; and in charting what might be called the general economy of the *Essais I* text as it unfolds by virtue of now one, now another of these discourses, or now a certain conjunction of them, now another.

We begin with certain positions of Metz which have been much discussed: the methodological centrality of the narrative film to a semiology of the cinema, the problem of analogy in cinema, and whether or not, and if so, in what sense, cinema is a language. We do not propose to review in detail Metz's positions on these questions, let alone critiques by others. But minimal review of these positions is necessary to indicate

WHO IS CHRISTIAN METZ AND WHY IS EVERYBODY SAYING THESE AWFUL THINGS ABOUT HIM?

For some years the specter of a possible new film theory has haunted film journals. Semiotics, structuralism, Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis: such systems of thought have been put forward as possible keys to a theoretical breakthrough. We would all, no doubt, like to see new theoretical work of real power and originality; it is high time to get past where Bazin left film theory in the late fifties. As I argued in the last issue, however, for the most part the would-be theoretical activity to date has been so abstract as to be vacuous. Thus **FQ** has devoted space to it grudgingly, preferring to wait for ideas more rigorously developed, and with more visibly productive application to actual films. Metz's semiological texts, however, have now become widely enough accessible in English that some discussion of them seems obligatory. (Metz is a professor in the 6e Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris. He is part of a working group including Barthes, Todorov, and Greimas which is in the Centre d'Etudes de Communications de Masse. He is in his forties and holds the world's first and doubtless only **doctorat** in semiology.)

We present here two articles which should reduce further discussion of Metz, at least, to low priority. In the first article, Brian Henderson relates Metz's work to earlier film theory and dissects the basic Metzian concepts from inside. He shows how, even in Metz's own terms, the doctrine is (in the technical sense) incoherent; it cannot, thus, really be discussed further since it does not properly exist. In the second article, Bill Nichols attacks not only Metz's semiology but other structural-linguistic approaches to cinema, arguing that the digital concepts of linguistics have inherently limited application to a medium where communication takes place partly in analog dimensions. Readers may also be curious about a third attack on Metz, focusing on his ideological evasiveness, which has been written by James Roy MacBean using a Marxist approach; this will appear in his book **Film and Politics** (soon to be published by Indiana University Press), and we may be able to publish a shorter version of it in our next issue.

For the future, **FQ** intends to hew to the line laid down in the last issue, and exemplified by the Nichols article in this issue: theoretical work must constantly link theory and practice, which means producing useful understandings of real films and not theoretical simulacra of them. — E. C.

the overall plan of the argument, specifically to show how they prepare the presentation of the *grande syntagmatique*.

Several passages of *Essais I* argue the historical supremacy of the narrative film. It was not unavoidable that film develop along narrative lines, but this is what happened. Going to the movies has long meant going to see a filmed story. Narrative was the demand of audiences, but cinema's "inner semiological mechanism" made it especially well suited to tell stories in any case: "Narrativity and logomorphism. It is as if a kind of induction current were linking images among themselves, whatever one did, as if the human mind (the spectator's as well as the film-maker's) were incapable of not making a connection between two successive images." (p. 46) Thus Metz's reinterpretation of Kuleshov. Not scientific montage alone, *any* cinematic construction (however random) will be read narratively by viewers.

These historical and mediumistic questions give way to the methodological questions which they mask: what body of films is the semiologist to study and why? Metz grants that the answer depends upon what one wants to study, but he does not leave it at that: "Nevertheless, there is a hierarchy of concerns (or, better yet, a methodological urgency) that favors—in the beginning at least—the study of narrative film." (p. 93) Again Metz mentions the "historical and social fact" of "the merging of the cinema and of narrativity." The feature-length film of novelistic fiction (which is simply called a film) has traced more and more clearly the king's highway of filmic expression. Moreover, nonnarrative films are different principally by virtue of their content, not by their language processes: "It is by no means certain that an independent semiotics of the nonnarrative genres is possible other than in the form of a series of discontinuous remarks on the points of difference between these films and 'ordinary' films. To examine fiction films is to proceed more directly and more rapidly to the heart of the problem." (p. 94)

Moreover, historically speaking, it was by virtue of confronting the problems of narration that it came to produce a body of specific signifying procedures. "Thus, it was in a single motion that the cinema became narrative and took over some of the attributes of a language." (p. 96).

Metz seems somewhat embarrassed by these arguments today, and for good reason. They are not only specious, but needless. The narrative film is merely one of many possible objects of film semiotics. If one chooses to study it rather than something else that choice cannot be justified. Metz's argument serves to enhance his own project and his own choice: "to move to the heart of the problem." This is a delusion which is no longer possible. (Better to say with Barthes: "The text I have chosen . . . is Balzac's *Sarrasine*.") If Metz can provide the groundwork for a semiotics of the narrative film, that is quite enough. To claim (in advance, yet) that this is the semiotics of film itself is ideological in several senses. Cegarra argues that Metz's centralizing the narrative film in his studies is complicit in that cinema's social and economic domination of the world's production and consumption.

Metz's position on the problem of analogy or iconicity is also fundamental to his overall argument. Each image is unique *because* it reproduces some object or view of the world directly. That is, it does not encode the world, as language does, by translating it into some system other than its own. The diversity of images in cinema is the world's diversity. Metz's subscription to the theory of analogy in cinema and in photographic *duplication* more generally founds his theory of filmic discourse. Speaking of Méliès, Porter, Griffith, the pioneers of "cinematographic language," he says: "Men of denotation rather than of connotation, they wanted above all to tell a story; they were not content unless they could subject the continuous, analogical material of photographic duplication to the *articulations*—however rudimentary—of a narrative discourse." (p. 95)

It is important here to introduce Umberto Eco's critique of the notion of analogy, in "Articulations of the Cinematic Code." Eco concludes: "Thus we can say that everything which in images appears to us still as analogical,

continuous, non-concrete, motivated, natural, and therefore 'irrational,' is simply something which, in our present state of knowledge and operational capacities, we have not yet succeded in reducing to the discrete, the digital, the purely differential. As for the mysterious phenomenon of the image which 'resembles,' it may be enough for the moment to have recognized processes of codification concealed in the mechanisms of perception themselves."

It seems from the footnotes to *Essais I*, written after the original essays, that Metz accepts Eco's critique. This acceptance does not, however, lead to substantial revision of Metz's position. There seem to be two related points or principles which permit Metz to accept this change at one level without corresponding changes at other levels: "Contrary to what I believed four years ago, it does not seem at all impossible to me, today, to assume that analogy is itself coded without however ceasing to function authentically as analogy in relation to the codes of the superior level—which are brought into play only on the basis of this first assumption." (p. 111–112)

The other assumption is that of the first essay in the book, "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in which Metz argues in a phenomenological manner that the correspondence between image and reality in cinema is less important than that viewers perceive or *intend* the images of cinema as reality. Not reality but a certain impression of reality is the basis of Metz's argument.

Thus Metz seeks to "contain" the potentially disruptive effect of Eco's critique. The efficacy of his attempt cannot be considered here. In any case, the structure of Metz's system does not change.

Metz devotes considerably more attention to the problem of whether film is a language. He argues that the early film theorists—Eisenstein, Bazin, and most others—spoke of film as a language, but in fact knew nothing of linguistics. Metz then proceeds to draw upon linguistic science in order to answer the question precisely and authoritatively. He proceeds slowly, carefully, apparently exhaustively through a detailed comparison between the linguistic and the cinematic media, determining point by point what is like and what is unlike between them and what the consequences of these similarities and dissimilaries are. The method is indirect but, he argues,

> To understand what film is not is to gain time, rather than to lose it, in the attempt to grasp what film is. I call one of them the "first stage" because it benefits from the capital of linguistics, which encourages one to begin with it. The "second stage" is properly semiotic and translinguistic; it is less able to depend on previously acquired knowledge, so that, far from being helped, it must, on the contrary, participate—if it is able—in work that is new. Thus it is condemned to suffer the present discomfort of semiotics. (p. 61)

Metz comes immediately to a fundamental dissimilarity: cinema has nothing corresponding to the double articuluation of natural language. In the latter, phonemes are distinctive units without proper signification, signifiers without corresponding signifieds. It is only when phonemes are articulated at a second level, by combination into monemes or words, that signification occurs. Only at the second level do phonemes (in combination) acquire signifieds. But in cinema every shot involves signification; every shot has a signified. What is missing is the first articulation. Thus in film, unlike natural language, "it is impossible to break up the signifier without getting isomorphic segments of the signified." (p. 63) A consequence of double articulation is a great distance between content and expression in natural language; in cinema the distance is "too short."

Not only does the cinema have no phonemes —it has no words either. The image or shot corresponds instead to one or more sentences; the sequence is a complex segment of discourse (i.e., a paragraph or chapter, a unit composed *of* several sentences). A shot has nothing incomplete about it; it is "a completed assertive statement." The image is *always actualized*. Even a close-up of a revolver, which would seem equivalent to the word "revolver," signifies at the very least "Here is a revolver!" Thus the image is always speech, never a unit of language.

From this, Metz moves to a related point. While the combinatory or syntagmatic possibili-

ties of cinema are very rich, its paradigmatic resources are surprisingly poor. This is another way of saying that every image is unique, therefore, strictly speaking, unsubstitutable. "Every image is a hapax (a unique determination)." (p. 69) Thus images do not (or only very generally) assume their meaning from paradigmatic opposition to other images; whereas words are always more or less embedded in paradigmatic networks of meaning and indeed create meaning by virtue of such systems. But this poverty of the paradigm in film is the counterpart of a wealth distributed elsewhere: the film-maker can express himself by showing us directly the diversity of the world. Certain camera movements (rear and forward dolly) and techniques of punctuation (dissolve or cut) have the character of low-level paradigms, but their leverage on the total expression is not strong.

Thus the cinema is not a language system (it is a language of art) because it contradicts three important characteristics of the linguistic fact: a language is a *system* of *signs* used for *intercommunication.* Like all the arts, cinema is a one-way communication. It is only partly a system. Finally, it uses only very few true signs. The image is first and always an image. Therefore the nerve center of the film-semiological process lies elsewhere.

This elsewhere is the large syntagmatic organization of the image-track. Here Metz discovers an unusual fact.

> Although each image is a free creation, the arrangement of these images into an intelligible sequence—cutting and montage—brings us to the heart of the semiological dimension of film. It is a rather paradoxical situation: Those proliferating (and not very discrete!) units—the *images*—when it is a matter of composing a film, suddenly accept with reasonably good grace the constraint of a few large syntagmatic structures. While no image ever entirely resembles another image, the great majority of narrative films resemble each other in their principal syntagmatic figures. (p. 101)

This regularity is due, historically and structurally, to the narrative function of cinema. It was by confronting the problem of narrativity that cinema became a language, historically; and it is by this function that regularity is sustained. The key fact here is that in cinema the denotation itself must be organized. "In still photography this is not so. A photo of a house denotes the house by virtue of its automatic reproduction of its subject. In the cinema, on the other hand, a whole semiotics of denotation is possible and necessary, for a film is composed of *many* photographs (the concept of montage, with its myriad consequences)—photographs that give us mostly only partial views of the diegetic referent."

> Thus a kind of filmic *articulation* appears, which has no equivalent in photography: It is the denotation itself that is being constructed, organized, and to a certain extent codified (codified, not necessarily *encoded*). Lacking absolute laws, filmic intelligibility nevertheless depends on a certain number of dominant habits: A film put together haphazardly would not be understood. (p. 99)

Thus, Metz summarizes, "cinematographic language" is first of all the literalness of a plot. Artistic effects, even when they are substantially inseparable from the semic act by which the film tells us its story, nevertheless constitute another level of signification, which from the methodological point of view must come later.

Thus filmic narrativity gradually shaped itself into forms that are more or less fixed, but not immutable. They are a "synchronic state" (that of the present cinema), which can change only through gradual evolution. With Saussure one can say that the large syntagmatic category of the narrative film *can change,* but no single person can make it change over night.

From this point, Metz proceeds to present and analyze the principal types of large filmic syntagma, which organize filmic denotation. Before doing so, he summarizes:

> The cinema is certainly not a language system *(langue).* It can, however, be considered as a *language,* to the extent that it orders signifying elements within ordered arrangements different from those of spoken idioms—and to the extent that these elements are not traced on the perceptual configurations of reality itself (which does not tell stories). Filmic manipulation transforms what might have been a mere visual transfer of reality into discourse. Derived from a kind of signification that is purely analagous and continuous—animated photography, cinematography—the cinema gradually shaped, in

the course of its diachronic maturation, some elements of a proper semiotics, which remain scattered and fragmentary within the open field of simple visual duplication." (p. 105)

Besides preparing the way for the *grande syntagmatique,* Metz uses his various points to refute once and for all the metaphor of film-as-language. There is no arguing with Metz here. Eisenstein, Bazin, etc., were wrong. Far less certain is how important this point is. Metz seems to think it very important, one of the chief achievements of his work. To establish this, however, one would have to show the precise operational effect that this metaphor had within each theory concerned: show not only that Eisenstein or Bazin used the metaphor but what they used it to think or theorize. Our sense is that the metaphor was in both theories relatively non-operative. Change the word and you do not fundamentally alter the theoretical position of each or the rhetoric of filmic figures that each adumbrated. If this is the center of Metz's achievement, it is an empty center.

After further preliminaries, Metz's text is prepared to present its own system. ("The time has come for a semiotics of the cinema.") This occurs in Ch 5, Sec. 5, "The Large Syntagmatic Category of the Image Track."*

The first four paragraphs inaugurate the project:

So far, I have examined only the status of "cinematographic grammar," and I have said nothing about its *content.* I have not given the table of the codified orderings of various kinds used in film.

It is not possible here to give this table in its complete form, with all the explanations required by each one of the indicated orderings, and with the *principles of commutation* between them (and consequently to enumerate them).

Let us content ourselves, then, with the almost unpolished "result,"—the table itself in a summarized form—and only that part of it that outlines the large syntagmatic category of the image track (i.e., the codified and signifying orderings on the level of the *large* units of the film, and ignoring the elements of sound and speech). Naturally this problem constitutes only one of the chapters of "cinematographic syntax."

In order to determine the number and the nature of the main syntagmatic *types* used in current films, one must start from common observation (existence of the "scene," the "sequence," "alternate montage," etc.) as well as on certain "presemiotic" analyses by critics, historians, and theoreticians of the cinema ("tables of montage," various classifications, etc.).† This preliminary work must account for several points of importance—that is why it in no way precludes the viewing of numerous films—and it must then be organized into a coherent body—that is to say, into a list of all the main types of image-orderings occurring in films under the various headings

*Every page (but one) of this 15-page passage has at least one footnote, sometimes two, often longer than the page itself. The first four paragraphs, those which inaugurate the system ("The time has come . . . ") contain four footnotes, three of which contain important theoretical material, crucial to Metz's project. This does not include the material set off in four sets of parentheses and three sets of dashes, let alone that in the many parentheses and dashes in the footnotes themselves. These graphic/discursive signifiers indicate a text under extreme pressure, in which the smooth surface of discourse is broken again and again by exceptions, doubts, alternative formulations, background information, anticipations of objections, promises of future refinement and development, etc. No other portion of the book exhibits anything like this degree of textual stress. We consider why this is so below.

†Among the authors who have devised tables of montage, or classifications of various kinds—or who have studied separately a specific type of montage—I am indebted to Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov, Timochenko, Bela Balázs, Rudolf Arnheim, André Bazin, Edgar Morin, Gilbert Cohen-Séat, Jean Mitry, Marcel Martin, Henri Agel, Francois Chevassu, Anne Souriau . . . and one or two others perhaps whom I have unintentionally overlooked.

Because there is not enough room here, I will not (at least in this text) indicate how the various classifications of these authors are distributed in relation to each specific point of my chart. But it must not be forgotten that, among the various "image constructions" identifiable in films, some were defined and analyzed (very ingeniously at times) before the appearance of an actual semiological method. There were also larger attempts at classification, which are extremely instructive even in their failings. Semiotics as we now understand it must always rest on a double support: On the one hand, upon linguistics, and, on the other hand, upon the theory peculiar to the field under consideration. (pp. 119–121)

into which they are naturally classified. (pp. 120–121)

One thus arrives at a first "tabulation" of the syntagmatic components of films—a chart remaining fairly close to the concrete filmic material, but which, from the point of view of semiological theory, is as yet insufficiently developed. (p. 121)

The balance of Section 5 presents Metz's *"la grande syntagmatique,"* the large syntagmatic category of the image-track. Presented finally in the form of a chart or general table (p. 145–146), this is "the table of the codified orderings of various kinds used in film." (p. 119) Metz expounds the *grande syntagmatique* by describing each syntagmatic type in turn, opposing those that might seem similar through example and conceptual distinction. He notes several versions of his table and the crucial difference between the first and the second beyond the addition of two types:

It appears that the different types and subtypes that composed the first table, where they were presented in the purely enumerative form of a list, can be redistributed into a system of successive dichotomies, according to a procedure commonly used in linguistics. This scheme gives us a better outline of the *deep structure* of the choices that confront the film-maker for each one of the "sequences" of his film. In this way, an empirical and purely inductive classification was later able to be converted into a deductive system; in other words, a factual situation, initially ascertained and clarified, later showed itself to be more logical than one might have predicted (see table). (p. 123)

Reorganized, the table presents a series of seven binary oppositions or rather a system of binary oppositions at six different levels. These are: among autonomous segments, autonomous shots vs. syntagmas; among syntagmas, chronological and achronological syntagmas; among achronological syntagmas, parallel and bracket syntagmas; among chronological syntagmas, narrative and descriptive syntagmas; among narrative syntagmas, alternative narrative and linear narrative syntagmas; among linear narrative syntagmas, scenes and sequences; among sequences, episodic and ordinary sequences.

Metz defines the autonomous segment in general as "a subdivision of the first order in film; it is therefore a part of a film, and not a part of a part of a film" (p. 123). "It is clear nevertheless that the 'autonomy' of the autonomous segments themselves is not an *independence,* since each autonomous segment derives its final meaning in relation to the film as a whole, the latter being the *maximum syntagma* of the cinema." (p. 123) The first and primary division among autonomous segments is that between autonomous shots and syntagmas. The former contain one shot, the latter (including seven subclassifications) all contain several shots. In the unique case of the autonomous plot, a single shot presents an episode of the plot. It is therefore the only instance where a single shot constitutes a primary, and not a secondary, subdivision of the film. The autonomous shot is by definition not a syntagma, but it *is* a syntagmatic type, since it is one of the types that occur in the global syntagmatic structure of the film. "More generally speaking, syntagmatic analysis is a part of semiotics in which one is *initially* confronted with 'discourses' that are always syntagmas of different magnitudes, but in which the units one *isolates as one proceeds* are not necessarily all syntagmas—for some of them may not be divisible in every case." (p. 124)

Among syntagmas, a second criterion allows the distinction between nonchronological syntagmas and chronological syntagmas. In the first, the temporal relationship between the facts presented in the different images is not defined by the film; in the second kind it is. Of nonchronological syntagmas, there is the parallel syntagma, in which montage interweaves two or more alternating motifs, but no precise relationship, whether temporal or spatial, is assigned to them, at least on the level of denotation. This kind of montage has a direct symbolic value. There is also the bracket syntagma, in which a series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical samples of a same order of reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other, in order to emphasize their presumed kinship within a category of facts that the film-maker wants to describe in visual terms. Each little scene is taken as an element in a system of allusions, and therefore it is the series, rather than the individual, that the film takes into account. This con-

struction suggests that among the occurrences it groups together, there is the same relationship as that between words in a typographic bracket. Frequently the different successive evocations are strung together through optical effects.

In the chronological syntagmas, the temporal relationships between the facts that successive images show us are defined on the level of denotation. But these precise relationships are not necessarily those of consecutiveness; they may also be relations of simultaneity. In the descriptive syntagma, the relationship between *all* the motifs successively presented on the screen is one of simultaneity. It is the only case of consecutiveness on the screen that does not correspond to any diegetic consciousness. Objects in a descriptive syntagma have a relation of spatial coexistence, not any temporal relation.

Chronological syntagmas other than the descriptive are narrative syntagmas, i.e., those in which the temporal relationship between the objects seen in the images contains elements of consecutiveness and not only of simultaneity. Among narrative syntagmas, the alternate syntagma interweaves several temporal progressions (the old "parallel montage"). The montage presents alternately two or more series of events in such a way that within each series the temporal relationships are consecutive, but that, between the series taken as wholes, the temporal relationship is one of simultaneity.

The linear narrative syntagma presents a single succession linking together all the acts seen in the images. Succession may be continuous or discontinuous. When succession is continuous, i.e., with no diegetic breaks, we have a scene, a spatio-temporal integrality experienced as being without flaws. (This was the only construction known to early film-makers; it exists as a type among others today.) Here the signifier is fragmentary—a number of shots—but the signifieds are unified and continuous.

Opposed to the scene are the various kinds of linear narrative syntagma in which the temporal order of acts presented is discontinuous: the sequences. These include the ordinary sequence, in which the temporal discontinuity is unorganized (as though scattered). Or the discontinuity may be ordered, and may therefore be the principle of structure and intelligibility in the sequence—the episodic sequence. Little scenes are strung together, usually separated by optical devices, and they succeed each other in chronological order. The scenes must not be taken as separate instances but only in their totality. This construction can be used to condense gradual progressions. In both there is the concept of a single concatenation plus the concept of discontinuity. In the episodic sequence, each of the images appears distinctly as the symbolic summary of one stage in the fairly long evolution condensed by the total sequence. In the ordinary sequence, each one of the units in the narrative simply presents one of the unskipped moments of the action. In the former, each image stands for more than itself and is perceived as taken from a group of other possible images representing a single phase of a progression. In the ordinary sequence each image represents only what it shows.

The *grande syntagmatique* concerns the syntagmatic ordering of the denotative meanings of the image track. Though Metz's semiotics of film does not concern the paradigmatic dimensions of filmic communication he argues also that the system of eight syntagmatic segment-types constitutes itself a paradigm of filmic construction: each segment of a film may be constructed in at least eight ways. Metz's semiotics also excludes connotation. It is concerned with "the literal temporality of the plot, the first message of the film." (p. 117) This is why "filmic orderings that are codified and significant constitute a grammar —because they organize not only filmic connotation, but also, and *primarily*, denotation." (p. 117) Metz defends this exclusion in several ways. First, connotation is more difficult to determine than denotation and always itself builds on denotation as secondary meaning (cf. Barthes, *Mythologies*). Since film semiotics is just beginning and since denotation must be determined first in any case, it is advisable to take on the system of denotation in cinema as a separate topic. Secondly, in cinema even more than in other semiotic systems, connotation is nothing other than a form of denotation (p. 118): "[F]ilms are able to connote without generally requiring *special* (i.e., separate) connotors

because they have the most essential signifiers of connotation at their permanent disposal: the choice between several ways of structuring denotation." (p. 119)

We note the important consequences of Metz's double choice here. As Cegarra says, citing Barthes, ideology is the signified of connotation. Metz's exclusion of connotation eliminates the study of ideology in cinema from his semiotics.* (This is just one of the points on which Metz, apparently following Baudry and other critics, has changed his mind.)

These are the bare bones of Metz's argument. Let us now examine more carefully the theoretical operations which produce the system of the *grande syntagmatique,* looking especially to the interplay of those discourses which we identified topographically at the outset: linguistics and semiology, phenomenology, film theory, and the structural analysis of narrative.

We begin with a review of film theory and one version of its constituent errors and shortcomings. This will help us to identify the discourse of film theory as it operates in the *Essais I* text, but it will also help to sharpen our principal question: Does the book constitute a semiotics of cinema? Does it break decisively (or at all) with film theory? For classical film theory, its problematic, its concepts, and its structure, constitutes an important part of the background against which the discursive formation of *Essais I* must be traced.

In "Two Types of Film Theory," we characterized the classical film theories of Eisenstein, Bazin, and others as theories of cinematic parts. Both defined the basic filmic unit as the shot and considered different ways of combining these units to form larger units called sequences. Their treatment of this problem mixed descriptive, normative, historical, and philosophic discourses. Neither worked out a theory of cinematic wholes, therefore neither considered problems of part-whole relations in cinema. This was seen as a crippling defect in both theories and in classical film theory generally. Symptomatic of the theoretical problem involved is each theorist's formulation of the concept of the cinematic whole, on the few and incidental occasions on which the problem was treated. Both used genre categories borrowed principally from literary studies. Eisenstein's essay on organic unity and pathos in the composition of *Potemkin* defines the formal organization of the film as a whole as a tragedy in five acts. Bazin wrote of those cinematic genres such as gangster film, horror film, comedy, western, which organize the whole film and hence determine the content of each sequence. Bazin's theory concerns various visual treatments of the sequence; its content and its relation to the film as a whole is taken as a "given" which is not inquired into.

We noted a crucial disjunction in both theories. After detailed, technical analyses of cinematic parts and *their* internal relations, both resort to literary discourse to treat formal organization of the whole film. Why narrative should emerge as the sole category of analysis at

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*Note that Barthes too has changed his mind; in *S/Z* he says that the primacy or centrality of denotation in relation to connotation is itself an ideological illusion, hence the notion of their separability also. "There is no reason to make this system (denotation) the privileged one, to make it the locus and the norm of a primary, original meaning, the scale for all associated meanings; if we base denotation on truth, on objectivity, on law, it is because we are still in awe of the prestige of linguistics . . . The endeavor of this hierarchy is a serious one: it is to return to the closure of Western discourse (scientific, critical, or philosophical), to its centralized organization, to arrange all the meanings of a text around the hearth of denotation (the hearth: center, guardian, refuge, light of truth)." (p. 7)

"Structurally, the existence of two supposedly different systems—denotation and connotation—enables the text to operate like a game, each system referring to the other according to the requirements of a certain *illusion.* Ideologically, finally, this game has the advantage of affording the classic text a certain *innocence:* of the two systems, denotative and connotative, one turns back on itself and indicates its own existence: the system of denotation; denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature . . . " (p. 9)

the level of the whole, when it has not been a category at all at lower levels, is not explained. Eisenstein and Bazin shift ground at this point. They turn to another problem as though it were the continuation of the first, as though treating a single problem from start to finish. They write as though visual parts added up to a narrative whole.

This is not Metz's critique. He criticizes classical film theory in passages here and there but never questions its foundations, fundamental assumptions, and problematic, a failure which has important consequences for his own theory. Nevertheless Metz's argument promises at several points to overcome or to bypass the difficulties noted above. First of all, Metz's book seems to derive from those modern theoretical discourses which insist on the multiplicity of levels in any system or text and on the methodological necessity of specifying the level at which a particular analysis is working. Such insistence exposes the error of theories such as the classical film theories, whose one-level epistemological model treats complex objects either by excluding important aspects or by forcing them all within a single plane, as classical film theory did with narrative and visual form. Not only were the latter forged in a false relation but important aspects of the problem were excluded altogether: those of visual wholes and of narrative parts, among others.

Secondly, Metz refers several times to that large body of work on the structural analysis of the narrative which appeared in the sixties (see *Communications,* #8, 1966) and is called by some narratology. This work posits and takes for its object the system of narrative in general, regardless of the medium of its realization. It is treacherous to generalize about this work, as Propp's analysis of narrative functions differs from Lévi-Strauss's paradigmatic analysis of mythic narratives, Greimas's narrative grammar seeks to integrate and improve on both, etc. At the least, however, each is concerned with analyzing the relations between narrative parts and wholes within a system that generates both.

On both of these grounds, Metz's text seems to promise a reconstruction of classical film theory.

> "There are therefore two distinct enterprises, neither of which can replace the other: On the one hand there is the semiotics of the narrative film, such as the one I am attempting to develop; on the other hand, there is the structural analysis of actual narrativity—that is to say, of the narrative taken *independently from the vehicles carrying it* (the film, the book, etc.)." "Bremond [studies] . . . that very precise 'layer of signification' that a narrative constitutes before the intervention of the narrative 'props.' I agree entirely with this author as to the autonomy of the narrative layer itself: The *narrated event,* which is a signified in the semiotics of narrative vehicles (and notably of the cinema), becomes a signifier in the semiotics of narrativity." (pp. 144–145)

Note that Metz emphasizes here the separation and autonomy of the levels involved and of their study. What is implied here is true of the argument as a whole: Metz does not himself take up the analysis of the narrative layer of the cinematic complex. He does not analyze narrative wholes and parts and their relations. His work is to study another layer of signification, that of cinematic expression. He introduces the structural analysis of narrative not for its own sake, but to define his project in relation to it. It permits him to define his object of study more precisely.

Thus Metz does not propose a model of filmic signification in general, including identification and definition of constituent levels and a plan of their interaction. Metz instead defines two levels, only one of which he will address, and says nothing about their interaction. In doing this, he is attempting to define a level without a model of the overall field. This is a fundamental theoretical failure, for every designation of "a level" or "a layer" must presuppose some model of the whole. Where the model is not explicitly and consciously constructed by the text, it is implicit and unconscious. Of course the latter condition creates confusions and ambiguities since fundamentals of the argument are swallowed and hidden. More generally, the definition of an object of analysis without a model defining the field in which this object is constituted commits the complex of errors called empiricism, in which it is assumed that the object exists prior to the analysis and can therefore be apprehended and

analyzed directly. On the other hand, discourses such as psychoanalysis and historical materialism stipulate that theory must construct its object and the field which defines it. Exemplary here is Freud's metapsychology, which organizes the multiple levels of its object simultaneously from three standpoints, the topographical, the economic, and the dynamic.

Despite his emphasis on the autonomy and separation of the two layers, defining the narrative layer in order to specify the level of expression, other passages in Metz suggest that the units of expression will be defined in relation to the narrative level.

> The reader will perhaps have observed in the course of this article (and especially in the definition of different types of autonomous segment) that it is no easy matter to decide whether the large syntagmatic category in film involves the *cinema* or the cinematographic *narrative*. For all the units I have isolated are located *in* the film but in *relation* to the plot. This perpetual see-saw between the screen instance (which signifies) and the diegetic instance (which is signified) must be accepted and even erected into a methodological principle, for it, and only it, renders commutation possible, and thus identification of the units (in this case, the autonomous segments).
>
> One will never be able to analyze film by speaking *directly* about the diegesis (as in some of the film societies, *cinéclubs,* in France and elsewhere, where the discussion is centered around the plot and the human problems it implies), because that is equivalent to examining the signifieds without taking the signifiers into consideration. On the other hand, isolating the units without considering the diegesis *as a whole* (as in the "montage tables" of some of the theoreticians of the silent cinema) is to study the signifiers without the signifieds—since the nature of narrative film is to narrate.
>
> The autonomous segments of film correspond to as many diegetic *elements,* but not to the "diegesis" itself. The latter is the *distant signified* of the film taken as a whole: Thus a certain film will be described as "the story of an unhappy love affair set against the background of provincial bourgeois French society toward the end of the nineteenth century," etc. The partial elements of the diegesis constitute, on the contrary, the *immediate signifieds* of each filmic segment. The immediate signified is linked to the segment itself by insoluble ties of semiological reciprocity, which form the basis of the principle of commutation. (pp. 143–144)

This zone of discrepancy requires investigation, an assertion of autonomy and separation and an assertion of relation and reciprocity. Also, if Metz defines the visual part in relation to the narrative part, then there might be an advance over classical film theory, which did not do this, even if Metz fails of those other relations: narrative whole/narrative part; visual whole/visual part; narrative whole/visual part; visual whole/narrative part, etc.

The issue arises first in Chapter 2, "Notes Toward a Phenomenology of the Narrative." Metz refers to several theorists of narrativity but he does not discuss the differences in their models, let alone choose one as superior to the others or as most appropriate to the needs of his work. Instead he seems to enlist narratology in general in behalf of his work. As in the passage quoted above, he seems to require only the idea of the narrative plane as autonomous layer, in order to found his own study by differentiation. But, since he does not define this other by specifying the differences among narratological systems, his own system has an insecure foundation. To overcome this problem, he seeks more aggressively to reduce the divergent systems of narrative to a usable core. "Although several different methods have been proposed for structurally breaking down the narrated events (which do not initially constitute discrete units), the event is still and always the basic unit of the narrative." (p. 24)

Metz herein collapses the various systems into a single concept, that of the division of the narrative into "events." In fact, each system defines the units of narrative differently and none calls its basic unit the event. Even more important, Metz takes only the concept of unit identification and discards the other elements of the theories involved. Thus each not only defines units but propounds a syntax (or syntagmatics) governing the combination of narrative units into larger units, as well as an overall model of the operation of the narrative system as a whole. Of course each system determines its own breakdown of units and syntagmatics, which means, among other things, that the set of units and the rules governing their combination are strictly correlative. Thus to extract the unit designations of a narrative system without the syntagmatics and the overall model that go with them is meaningless. It indicates a fundamental misunder-

standing of the nature of theory construction. As noted, Metz performs not only this extraction but also a reduction and assimilation of the decontexted unit designations into the general category of "the event."

Even Propp, the most empirical and syntagmatic of the group, whom Lévi-Strauss critiqued for ignoring the semantic dimension, is not at all the atomizing theorist that Metz is. Propp defined the basic units of the narrative as functions, each of which is designated by its relation to "the general economy of the tale." It is precisely this overall economic model of the whole that Metz's semiotics of the narrative film lacks. This is true not only of the narrative layer, which he does not take as object of his analysis, but of the expressive layer, which he does take. Metz attempts a syntagmatics of the part, determined empirically, i.e., without reference to an overall theoretical model.

Metz provides a justification for his reductive seizure of concepts in Chapter 2. This derives from his phenomenological theoretical base. Since the latter influences his argument decisively at several points, its operation here must be examined closely.

> It is my intention in the following paragraphs not to advance still another model, but rather, to invite the reader to reflect on what has brought about all the attempts already presented. It seems to me, indeed, that the narrative lends itself to structural analysis because it is primarily, in some way, a real object, which even the naive listener clearly recognizes and never confuses with what it is not.
>
> It might be said that the main interest of structural analysis is only in being able to find what was already there, of accounting with more precision for what naive consciousness had "picked up" without analysis.
>
> Let us say, therefore—perhaps a little cavalierly—that structural analysis always assumes, by virtue of an implicit or explicit prior stage, something like a phenomenology of its subject, or, again, that *signification* which is constructed and discontinuous) renders explicit what had first been experienced only as a perception (which is continuous and spontaneous). It is from this point of view that I would like to explore some answers to the question: How is a narrative recognized, prior to any analyses? (pp. 16–17)

The rest of the essay constructs this "narrative recognized, prior to any analysis." It is his phenomenological method, his appeal to experience, which permits Metz to bracket or to bypass the specifics of the different methods for breaking down narratives into units, in favor of a generalized notion of event. The site of this notion, which Metz admits cannot be found in any narratological system, is apparently located in the general experience of viewers. In Metz's epistemology, the experiential, phenomenological order underlies, indeed *founds* systems of narrative analysis, and all theoretical work. Hence it may be appealed to beyond the particular systems for a more general and more basic, a more originary truth. As he says toward the end of the article, "My intention is simply to remind the reader that if the narrative can be structurally analyzed into a series of predications it is because phenomenally it is a series of events." (p. 26)

Instances of Metz's phenomenological method are too numerous to collect. Note that Chapter 1 of the book, "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," is also phenomenological in its orientation. Chapters 1 and 2 form Part I of the book's four parts which is called "Phenomenological Approaches to Film." They operate explicitly as the book's theoretical and methodological foundation. This fact is obscured, however, for several reasons: first, because most of the book that follows is cast as a search for a method, as a long, slow inquiry into linguistics, semiology, and structuralism, in order to determine principles for film analysis. The book's *own* method is often hidden beneath this overt search for a method. It is nevertheless operative, governing questions posed as well as answers produced. After Chapters 1 and 2, it is mostly an invisible text, easily dismissible as holdovers from Metz's early thinking and from the phenomenological period in France. But it is not separable from the book's principal positions. Its phenomenological assumptions operate unseen much of the time but also emerge at certain points into the text's surface. These tend to be textual stress points, at which resort to another level of discourse becomes imperative due to conflicts at the surface level.

Among other emergences is Metz's statement at the end of his long exploration of linguistics and semiology, just before he applies his method to a filmic text: *"The fact that must be under-*

stood is that films are understood." (p. 145) And:

> Movie *spectators* in turn constitute a group of users. That is why the semiotics of cinema must frequently consider things from the point of view of the spectator rather than of the film-maker. (p. 101)
>
> (The cinema) uses only very few true signs. Some film images, through long previous use in speech, have been solidified so that they acquire stable and conventional meanings, become kinds of signs. But really vital films avoid them and are still understood. Therefore the nerve center of the semiological process lies elsewhere.
>
> The image is first and always an image. In its perceptual literalness it reproduces the signified spectacle whose signifier it is; and thus it becomes what it shows, to the extent that it does not have to *signify it* (if we take the word in the sense of *signum facere,* the special making of a sign). (pp. 75–76)

Thus the book does not make a journey from phenomenology to semiology in the course of its argument. The phenomenological text is always there. It founds the semiological inquiry or text by providing the base level of theorization on which that inquiry proceeds as well as determining the method of inquiry and the standard of judgment of its findings. Instead of a replacement, there is a continuity, which is phenomenology's definition of semiology: a set of tools for clarifying what is given in experience, for understanding experience. Semiology builds on and works with ordinary perception. It permits us to formulate the structures of experience more precisely. It does so, however, only by virtue of that basis and by virtue of its continuity with and true relation to experience. Thus are asserted continuities on the one hand between experience and knowledge in general and between phenomenology and semiology as specific disciplines, i.e., at both levels of world and of theory.

On the contrary, psychoanalysis and historical materialism require a break with ordinary experience in order to construct its concept, in order to construct a model of that system which produces ordinary experience either at the psychological or the political level. So, at the level of theory, materialism stipulates an epistemological break with phenomenology as the latter-most stage of empiricism, the large ideological complex of several centuries' duration in philosophy and in theory generally. Even a structuralist like Lévi-Strauss affirmed the necessity of such a break.

> Phenomenology I found unacceptable, in so far as it postulated a continuity between experience and reality. That the latter enveloped and explained the former I was quite willing to agree, but I had learnt from my three mistresses (Freud, Marx, Geology) that there is no continuity in the passage between the two and that to reach reality we must first repudiate experience, even though we may later reintegrate it in an objective synthesis in which sentimentality plays no part. As for the trend of thought which was to find fulfillment in existentialism, it seemed to me to be the exact opposite of true thought, by reason of its indulgent attitude towards the illusions of subjectivity. To promote private preoccupations to the rank of philosophical problems is dangerous, and may end in a kind of shop-girl's philosophy—excusable as an element in teaching procedure, but perilous in the extreme if it leads the philosopher to turn his back on his mission. That mission (which he holds only until science is strong enough to take over from philosophy) is to understand Being in relation to itself, and not in relation to oneself. Phenomenology and existentialism did not abolish metaphysics: they merely introduced new ways of finding alibis for metaphysics. (*Tristes Tropques,* p. 50)

We have previously discussed the error of Metz's attempt to make narrative film methodologically primary. We must, however, distinguish this point from a very different one. Once one chooses to study the narrative film, a study which has no priority or greater importance than any other kind of film study, then within that study, narrativity is centrally important. Some of Metz's critics lump these two points together, saying that Metz is wrongly concerned with narrativity in film, neglecting other aspects or values. In our view he is wrongly centered on narrative film in relation to a general semiology of film; but, given his study of narrative film, as one among many, he is too little concerned with narrativity itself.

From the topographical standpoint, the narratological and the phenomenological are equally important systems or discourses in *Essais I.* But their operation in the text is neither equal nor parallel. Seen from the dynamic standpoint, these discourses exert pressure on each other

(and others) throughout; this conflictual interaction produces different resolutions at particular points. In Chapter 2, as we've seen, phenomenology rewrites narratology. This transformation seems determinative of the rest of the argument, at least in that an unreduced narratology never asserts itself subsequently. Two later sections on narrative, "A Non-System Language: Film Narrativity" (Ch. 3, 44–49) and "Cinema and Narrativity" (Ch. 4, 93–96), argue a point already discussed, the primacy of narrativity in film, experientially and historically.

A textual stress point at which all of the large discourses are operative is Ch. 5, Sec. 5, summarized in detail above, in which Metz presents the system of the *grande syntagmatique*. It is here that the discourses at work in the text as a while are arranged and fixed in positions of dominance and subordination, within an overall theoretical conjunction. The first four paragraphs of the section, quoted above, are worth examining in detail, as are the numerous footnotes, parentheses, etc., which indicate a text under stress from within.

Paragraph four is particularly interesting. The parallel construction of its first sentence designates the double support of the system about to unfold: phenomenology ("one must start from common observation") and film theory ("as well as on certain 'presemiotic' analyses by critics, historians and theoreticians of the cinema . . . "). Note the crucial operation of the phenomenological method here:

Common observation is thus to validate theoretical concepts; there is no need to retheorize them or to define them or to justify them theoretically. They are existents. They are real. They are located in the world. (Alain Badiou: "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.") Why one must rest on common observation is not stated. It is an imperative that requires/allows no questioning.

The other half of the imperative which launches Metz's system is important also: "As well as on certain 'presemiotic' analyses by critics, historians and theoreticians of the cinema . . . " It is notable that in this inaugural sentence of the first semiotics of the cinema classical film theory, previously absent except in the form of particular opinions on particular points, makes such a prominent and surprising appearance. Conspicuously absent at the initiation is the structural analysis of the narrative, whether as a starting point for the semiotic analysis of filmic expression or as *a* reference point for that project or as a parallel inquiry or even as an ingredient to be included in the inquiry at its point of impact. This double marking, the absence of narratology and the sudden emergence of classical film theory—possibly the submerging or replacement of narrative analysis *by* classical film theory—determines the course and the limits of Metz's theoretical enterprise. It inscribes that project as a combinatoire of parts within larger parts, but cut off from any connection with the whole. The reliance on classical film theory rather than narrative analysis inscribes the entirety of Metz's system within the problematic of the former rather than the latter; i.e., locks it into a part-oriented, local analysis, cutting it off from that global systemic analysis which is needed.

It is easy to show that Metz's double theoretical foundation of phenomenology (continuity with ordinary experience and terminology) and classical film theory commands the concepts and execution of the *grande syntagmatique* and how they, in conjunction with the elimination of narratological analysis, determine the limitations and inadequacies of the latter. As noted, the *grande syntagmatique* says nothing about narrative parts and wholes and their relation, but it says nothing about the visual or image-track whole either. This level is not theorized as a whole, let alone related to other levels within an overall systemic model. Metz merely defines as untheorized givens, i.e., empirical entities, a number of different kinds of segments. The taxonomy that results identifies certain patterns and gives various labels to these, but it says little or nothing about them, neither why these patterns exist nor what is important about them. Metz clearly does not know what to do with the regularities he finds at the segment level. He does not know how to interpret his own findings,

so he says merely: these facts are *there*. He has produced a little clump of facts, but he has no theoretical model to fit them into, so as to make use of them, interpret them, declare their importance. And, since there was no theoretical model which launched the inquiry, he cannot account for what led to the collection of these data in the first place. Empirical studies often exhibit this doubly isolated condition.

We asked at the outset whether *Essais I* broke with film theory and established a new semiological discourse.

It is evident that the *grande syntagmatique* does not differ fundamentally from classical film theory itself. Like Eisenstein and Bazin, Metz takes from ordinary experience or from previous discourse a basic unit—the shot—and defines several modes of its combination into the next larger unit, the sequence (which Metz calls the segment). In neither classical film theory nor Metz is there an overall model or economy of sequences within the whole. Like them also, he does not analyze narrative parts and wholes nor the system of narrative and image-track relations. The difference is that narrativity theory permits Metz (or anyone now) to analyze the general economy of the narrative layer, including definition of units and part-whole relations. This theoretical work, unavailable to Eisenstein and Bazin, might also permit theorization of the image-track, *its* parts and wholes and general economy, but Metz turns away from this possibility. In Chapter 2, he eliminates the syntagmatic *and* general systemic dimensions of narrativity theory and also lumps its various and differential definitions of unit into the vague and boundary-less "event."

Given the limitation of Metz's semiotics to the level of the image-track sequence or segment, does it do something new or different here, in relation to classical film theory? Possibly there are two things it does differently. First, classical film theory only discussed ways of combining shots into sequences, i.e., quasi-syntactic or rhetorical plans, strategies. It did not discuss or *name* or define the resulting or emergent units themselves. Thus we could say in "Two Types" that, strictly speaking, neither produced a theory of the sequence. Perhaps, with his taxonomy and conceptual distinctions among sequence types, Metz *does* achieve a theory of the sequence, even if an inadequate, falsely based one because empirical, lacking a model of the whole, etc. Secondly, and harder to determine precisely, Metz's *grande syntagmatique* has at least a narratological flavor, because it seems to deal, however inadequately, with the time-and-space relations signified by various shot groupings. This Eisenstein and Bazin did not do, attempting some purely formal definition of shot relations. This difference may be the theoretical basis for Metz's ability to produce a theory of the sequence and a plan of sequence types.

But even this operation is rather vague and somewhat suspect for several reasons. First of all, time and space relations are only one aspect of narrativity study. Other aspects, correlative with and determinative of time and space relations, such as actantiality, Metz excises. Also, again, it is doubtful that time and space organization can be theorized or studied adequately at the level of the segment alone. The narrative as a whole, both particular narrative texts and the system of narrativity which commands such texts, disposes of time and space relations in the narrative text as a whole. The time and space relations between and among sequences or segments themselves (not just within sequences among shots) Metz says nothing about; his model cannot deal with this level, which determines time and space orderings within each segment, even if in standarized ways along the lines that Metz's taxonomy suggests.

Secondly, the imprecision of Metz's one narratological concept of "event" merges with the imprecision of his phenomenological method to prevent any theoretical or systemic rigor, even in the *grande syntagmatique*. Thus, in Section 11, quoted above, Metz speaks of the ambivalent locus of the GS categories in the film or in its narrative and of the "perpetual see-saw" between the screen instance which signifies and the diegetic instance which is signified. He says this must be accepted and even erected into a methodological principle (for it makes commutation possible). Given the initial vagueness of the narrative side of this see-saw, "the event," it is clear that nothing nearly as precise as linguistic commutation is achieved here. This vagueness and the see-saw instead permit Metz to define

cinematic units as he pleases, often making up *ad hoc* principles of a narratological sort to differentiate units.

This is evident especially in Chapters 6 and 7 where Metz applies his system to a film text, *Adieu Phillipine* (1962) by Jacques Rozier. In addition to, and probably because of, its theoretical failings, Metz's *grande syntagmatique* proves to be quite troublesome in application. Any sort of experimentation in film, even narrative experimentation, creates an immediate gap, but there are also substantial problems even with conventional narrative. Critics in France have noted many discrepancies or misapplications in the *Adieu Phillipine* reading. Indeed, Metz's own text raises a large number of doubtful cases, regarding which GS category applies to a segment, or even more fundamentally, *how* the borders of "a segment" are to be determind in a particular case—since Metz's phenomenological base assumes that segments are given, i.e., that they come already identified in viewer experience of the film. As noted, he resolves these difficulties by appeals to various, utterly heterogeneous principles and criteria. Gödel says that every system generates contradictions at its higher levels; Metz's system generates a large number of conflicts even at its first level.

BILL NICHOLS

Style, Grammar, and the Movies

Let's begin with a slogan and orientation: "A film is stylistic before it is grammatical." The ramifications of this simple assertion are what I want to examine. In due course it should become apparent that virtually all semiologically and structurally flavored writing on the cinema is founded upon incorrect assertions and false epistomology, that the privileged model for film theory cannot be the linguistics of verbal language and that, ironically, film critics usually dismissed for their Romantic aesthetics and conservative politics (like V. F. Perkins and Andrew Sarris) may be in a better position to provide the tools necessary for the development of a Marxist film theory and criticism than those openly leftist but ultimately formalist writers who have set the stage for so many of the recent controversies in film theory and criticism.

The ultimate goal of the orientation begun here is to bring about a merger of Freud and Marx—the personal and the political, the "language of the unconscious" and the structure of society—to link up visual/formal analysis with scientific, ideological analysis, to demonstrate, in fact, that the latter can and must be derived from the former and *not* from the privileged model of verbal language.

Formal, visual analysis, in turn, has two large components—style and narrative—both being meeting places for the analog and digital,* moti-

*These two forms are basic to all natural systems of communication. Analog communication involves continuous quantities with no significant gaps. There is no "not" nor any question of "either/or"; everything is "more or less" (for example, all nonconventionalized gestures, inflections, rhythms, and the context of communication itself). Digital communication involves discrete elements and discontinuities or gaps. It allows for saying "not" and "either/or" rather than "both/and" (as in all denotative, linguistic communication). In nature, the digital is the instrument of the analog (it is of a lower logical type and higher order of organization). In our culture the instrumental relationship is reversed. The two forms are not in opposition and the general function of the digital is to draw boundaries within the analog—as with the on/off switch of a thermostat operating within a temperature continuum, or phonemes arbitrarily carved from a sound continuum. On a broader level we might redefine the emergence of culture from nature as the "introduction of *digital communication and exchange.*"[1]

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vated and unmotivated sign systems, semiology broadly conceived and semiology as a branch of linguistics. We can no more hope to attain conceptual adequacy by resting our theories upon the latter set of categories than we can explain the motion of the planets by saying they revolve around the earth. Film is fundamentally and irreducibly a fusion of two basic modes of communication (the analog and the digital) and while I may overemphasize the former to help right the balance, they can no more be separated or opposed than the hydrogen and oxygen that make up water—without destroying the compound!

Gregory Bateson has provided us with a description of a schizophrenogenic episode that can be taken as a paradigm for interactions that include the analog and digital into one multileveled unit of communication:

"BATESON'S PARADIGM"

A young man who had fairly well recovered from an acute schizophrenic episode was visited in the hospital by his mother. He was glad to see her and impulsively put his arm around her shoulders, whereupon she stiffened. He withdrew his arm and she asked, "Don't you love me any more?" He then blushed, and she said, "Dear, you must not be so easily embarrassed and afraid of your feelings." The patient was able to stay with her only a few minutes more and following her departure he assaulted an aide and was put in the tubs.[2]

We will have more to say about this encounter later, but the point stressed by Bateson is that the young man lacks the tools to escape a double bind created by a communicational context. The inability to discriminate between communicational levels, or logical types (see below, and note 36) and to deal with the paradoxes they generate is symptomatic of schizophrenia. It also characterizes much recent film theory. There is no need to conclude the syllogism, for it is patently false, and yet the film theorist too gains from his blindness: he escapes the terror that lurks in epistemological upheaval. Film theorists socialized in a society valorizing the digital (for highly ideological purposes—namely exploitation in all its forms), in fact, as intellectuals often serve as high priests in that valorizing process even when presumably opposing present social values; they choose to suppress the errors of their epistemology rather than to fly to others they know not of. One result of this failure to understand communication has been idealist, schematic analyses (sometimes posing as meta-communication) with a flashy appearance—a kind of intellectual chrome-trim stuck on, in which methodology substitutes for performance.[3]

The slogan I began with derives from an essay by Pier Paolo Pasolini in which he argues that film lies closer to poetry than prose, that it can only be flattened onto the Procrustean bed of prose logic (grammar) by willful suppression of basic features unaccounted for by a linguistic model.[4] Cinema's instrumental base is of an irrational type, like dreams and memories (the functions of Freud's unconscious, primary process) since its basis lies with images. Like dreams the film image lacks tenses, it operates by metaphor without labels for the metaphor itself (such as the word "like,") and it lacks the word "not" which allows us to create the boundaries of digital communication—classically oppositions of the sort "A/not A." Furthermore, images are always motivated signs, bearing a relationship of similarity to their referent (of which Bazin made much) although, as some semiologists, especially Umberto Eco, have stressed, the reading of images must always be learned.[5]

Motivated signs are unlike verbal language, which has an instrumental base of a rational, arbitrary sort—the phonemes. Whereas we recognize the distinction between "pig" and "big" by the arbitrary, unmotivated difference between "p" and "b" (this in fact being the commutation test so important to linguistics), we distinguish between an image of a woman and an image of a man by non-arbitrary, motivated differences that have their analog in the referents—the visual image formed on the retina during everyday perception.[6]

As a consequence, there can be no double articulation in film: the standarized units of an arbitrary code are absent. Instead of arbitrary units (phonemes) with "nonsense" gaps (noise) that can be coupled to produce second-order units economically (26 letters yielding an infinity of words) with a grammar to govern the process

of coupling of these units (monemes) to yield syntagms, cinema has no alphabet of phonemes. It has no dictionary of monemes. Instead it has a continuum of images which it frames and punctuates with gaps (cuts, dissolves, fades, etc.) that are constantly shifting, with units that are limitless and with syntagms (or, in Eco's terminology, semes) that are subject to no determinate grammar or code. We cannot construct an ungrammatical sequence as we can write a nonsense sentence—unconventional perhaps but not ungrammatical. Pasolini argues that unlike the writer, the film-maker

> must first draw the im-sign (or image for Metz, icon for Eco) from chaos, make it possible and consider it classified in a dictionary of im-signs (gestures, environment, dreams, memory); he must then accomplish the very work of the writer, that is, enrich this purely morphological im-sign with his personal expression. While the writer's work is esthetic invention, that of the film-maker is first linguistic invention, then esthetic.[7]

Film can only be spoken in ideolects. Metz is right; there is no *langage,* but there is no *langue* either, only conventions.[8] To suppress this crucial distinction and hold out for a *langue,* to argue that there are in fact cinematic codes[9] or a code subject to linguistic operations and grammatical constraints, as Metz has done with his *Grande Syntagmatique* for narrative construction, demands of the theorist that he locate discrete arbitrary units as a foundation for his code. Metz has tried to do this with the image, treating it as an instrumental base capable of constituting a denotative level—his *Grande Syntagmatique* —but only at the price of denying the image's expressive nature.[10]

Pasolini denies articulations to cinema. Eco, as we'll see, tries to locate them within the image and single shot (one image through time). Metz wants to locate them beyond the image in the construction of narrative. He seems on firm footing at first. Isn't montage clearly a method of articulation, exploding cinema's potential for expression infinitely? Isn't it the lynchpin that allows for the insertion of structural linguistics into film theory in order to elaborate a film grammar and elucidate film narrative? The answer is short, simple and final: while montage effects discontinuity in the moving image strip, the units, or signs, so constituted are in *no* sense arbitrary, unlike the instrumental base of language (phonemes). Hence the single greatest act of mystification in all of Metz may well lie in his claim, "The film has symbols (motivated signs in this terminology) and not signs (arbitrary signs), it is true, but *it is precisely a characteristic of the semiology of film to allow these symbols to act as signs.*" (my italics)[11] Why is it a characteristic? Because Metz must make it so if he is to escape examining his own assumptions. It is flip-flop double-talk that can only be asserted since the attempt at proof would force Metz to face his own theoretical inadequacy and epistemological error.

Metz cannot escape deepening his *cul de sac.* Even the articles with the most helpful distinctions are also designed to buttress his gravest weaknesses. In his useful review of Mitry, for example, Metz fully subscribes to the notion of a "current of signification" or "semantic induction" that is nowhere ("not contained in any of the images") and yet everywhere. Why is it nowhere? Because if it were in the image, then the image would clearly not be the neutral base Metz seeks but contain meaning of its own. (Metz takes an example from a western: "We are shown a stagecoach going through a pass and then a group of Indians high up on the cliff, just watching. The idea of menace and imminent attack, which is not contained in any of the images, is nevertheless clearly communicated to the spectator through what Bela Balázs called the 'current of signification' circulating through the elements of the film, transforming the photographic analagon into a narrative."[12]

The menace of the Indians does not derive from an intangible ether "circulating" through the images or oozing into them from the cuts between; it is *in* them, in the composition and *mise en scène,* for clearly, it is possible to shoot the scene so that we experience the Indians as benign or even protective figures. Failure to recognize this may say a lot about our own stereotyping, or even racism, but says very little indeed about how meaning is communicated in film.

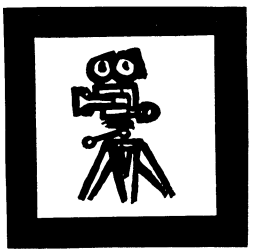
Only by treating his denotative level as matter, material for analysis, and connotation or meaning as energy, as a circulating vaguery, can Metz obscure his sleight of hand. Rather than recognize the moving image strip as information carried by both analog and digital means, Metz must mystify the former in order to reify the latter.

Likewise in "Methodological Propositions for the Analysis of Film,"[13] Metz makes a number of useful distinctions that become powerful tools against the kind of signifier/signified splitting in, for example, Wollen's identification of semantic themes outside style in Ford and Hawks, on the plane of content alone. Nevertheless, Metz's basic proposition is that the signifieds of "social" interest (what some call content) are only found among the filmic signifiers, that they are "recruited" to film. He also concedes that they may exist among the second-level cinematic signifiers —at the connotative level.

While not axiomatically elevated to superior status, the denotative level of the cinematic signifiers is still considered more primary by Metz. Yet their signifieds are purely denotative, yielding narrative signification and conveniently defining a niche for Metz's formalist talents. For example, the signified of the signifiers of alternating montage is "simultaneity."[14] "The human problems" that a film may refer to are only manifest at a connotative level, when this sign, alternating montage, becomes the signifier for a signified which "tells us something about the film-maker's style,"[15] a "something" Metz doesn't pursue. Style remains a separate bag of candy that he can take or leave, and usually leaves.

The essay then becomes at its base another strategy for establishing the primacy of denotation and the linguistic, verbal-language model in the guise of generously proffered methodological clarification. The denotative/connotative distinction would immediately collapse if Metz had his neutral base of analogous images taken away from him. "The form of the denotation is constructed" (or "invented" as Pasolini puts it), but what Metz doesn't say is that there is, therefore, no denotation apart from connotation—that, unlike the case of verbal language, in film the distinction makes no sense.

In contrast to Metz and his followers, Umberto Eco has taken much of Pasolini's writing quite seriously and has even tried to go him one better in demolishing the myth of mechanical duplication so dear to Metz, Bazin, and Eisenstein.[16] Eco's stress is on codes within the iconic sign, the area Metz quickly glosses over and which Pasolini asserts is subject to style but not coding, at least not coding like that of verbal language. Eco goes so far as to locate ten codes at work in the image, all subverting the simple notion of duplication and the ontological relationship. These range from codes of perception and recognition to strongly cultural codes of iconography and taste. Their exact formulation isn't worked out too fully in the Eco I've read (*La Struttura Assente,* Bompiano, Milano, 1968)[17] but the main contribution seems to lie in his destruction of the assumption about the "mechanical duplication" and transparent meaning of the image in favor of a learned, coded (though conventionalized seems a more apt word to me)[18] system of signification. Eco persuasively demonstrates that semiological tools are indeed relevant to non-linguistic systems of communication: these phenomena may be treated "like a language" (but not verbal language, a point Eco himself doesn't fully perceive).



Equally interesting, Eco introduces the notion of cinematic articulations at the level of the image rather than at the level of narrative. He argues, in effect, that visual perception is governed by a digital code like verbal language. In

his view iconic *figures* (the minimal units of the iconic code involving texture, shading, contrast, lines, etc.—units without significance in themselves, like phonemes) combine to form iconic *signs* (minimal units of recognition—an eye, boot, tree, etc.). These figures and their combination represent the first and second articulations of the cinematic code in a way similar to phonemes and monemes. They can be employed to develop more complex statements. Iconic signs are blended together within a film frame to form *semes*—a complex of many signs comparable to an utterance.[19] Hence the shot is *not* a word; it is at minimum a sentence.

Eco goes one step further in order to demonstrate a third articulation. This time he begins with the iconic signs that were originally formed by figures. He treats this one articulation as both a first and a second articulation, introducing an added economy into the cinematic code. In their capacity as the basic units of the third articulation the signs represent *kinesic figures*. That is, they are basic units of movement without significance in and of themselves. They are discrete but meaningless signs (sectioned from a gestural continuum at the rate of 24 per second): one image (in one frame) of a head does not tell us whether it is moving up and down or from side to side. Kinesic figures join together not in the frame this time but between frames, in the temporal flow of the *motion* picture to form *kinesic signs*. These kinesic signs are multiplied within the frame to form *kinemorphs* or *kinesic semes* —complex utterances made up of a number of movements, or kinesic signs.

In this way the film sections up a continuum —real-life, analog, perceptual experience—into the discrete units of a triply articulated language. This is so much richer than doubly articulated languages that it creates *"l'effet du réel"* and from this illusion is born the metaphysics of cinema.

Eco's work at the level of the image seems to me of great importance. Note that these articulations could all occur within a single take and in no way require montage for their construction. Note that denotation and connotation are simultaneous, that the distinction becomes meaningless and is, in fact, not employed, and, finally, that diachronic progression does not primarily constitute narrative. Eco locates a third articulation here in order to explain the richness of film communication. The richness is certainly there and while the presence of articulations is still in question, Eco's effort once again indicates the incredible impoverishment to which Metz must subject the cinema in order to achieve a "fit" with his ill-conceived model.

What remains at issue, though, is Eco's contention that *all* human communication is digital in nature:

> . . . the most natural phenomena, apparently analogical in their relationships, for example, perception, can be reduced today to digital processes.
> The structural skeleton which magically appears in two different things at once is not a problem of analogical resemblance defying analysis; it can be dealt with in terms of binary choices.[20]

I fully agree it doesn't defy analysis, contrary to what Metz's "circulating current" would have us believe, but I must strongly disagree with the notion that the analog can be reduced to the digital (see Wilden's *System and Structure*, pp. 157–161, on the functioning of the human nervous system, for example). And since this is the basis for Eco's triple articulation of the cinematic code, I must also disagree with the notion of articulations in cinema.

Some of the best evidence that processes like perception do not depend on binary choices is mustered in J. J. Gibson's *The Perception of the Visual World*.[21] In an extended discussion of the perception of depth, motion, slant and constancy of shape, Gibson acknowledges the usefulness of long-recognized cues like linear perspective, familiar size, overlap, etc. (which often involve binary choices) but adds another wholly analogical, continuously operative means of determination: depth gradients. Gibson argues that since equidistant points on a surface appear closer together on the retina the more distant they are on the surface, this establishes a gradient describing the density of the texture, which serves as an adequate cue for depth perception. Gradients are characteristic of analogical processes and often supplant codes in the transfer

of information. Depth in a Renaissance painting, for example, may *not* be due to "parallel" lines that converge at a vanishing point. It may be an inevitable side-effect of the algorithms which generate a texture gradient whose longitudinal elements are inversely proportional to the square of the distance.

Bateson pins this down still further in his essay "Style, Grace and Information in Primitive Art" when he refers to work done by Adalbert Ames demonstrating that "the conscious 3-D visual images which we make of that which we see, are made by processes involving mathematical premises of perception, of the use of which we are totally unconscious."[22] Bateson goes on to argue that style too is "linked to those levels of the mind where primary process holds sway," that it too operates according to precise algorithms "coded and organized in a manner totally different from the algorithms of language."[23] For Bateson, art is about the species of unconsciousness and their attachment to conscious messages. Verbal discourse about relationship, for example, "is commonly accompanied by a mass of semi-voluntary kinesic and autonomic signals which provide a more trustworthy comment on the verbal message" (than the words themselves, "I love you," for example).[24]

These findings, supported by others and striking in their implications as Bateson's work on schizophrenogenic environments and logical typing in communication indicates, send tremors through Eco's premises. Articulations cannot be created because there are no gaps that are truly noise (always and everywhere nonsense), no signs that are truly arbitrary. Eco's figures may have no intrinsic meaning but neither can they be classified: there can be no alphabet of iconic figures for there is no discrete difference between one shade and another, nor any neutrality: even the non-signifying figures are informed by the style apparent in the larger units—lighting or lens angle, for example. Eco's effort is indeed only a short remove from the madness generated by Zeno's paradoxes: quantitative diminutions of the image can never provide a neutral foundation for signs in the cinema, and it is useful to recall that Zeno attempted his reduction of the analog to the digital in order to dispute the reality of change and motion![25]

Eco, though, isn't the only one to make the fatal error of inserting binary choices and oppositions where they don't belong. Peter Wollen, in his *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema,* infiltrates via a structuralist bias many of the same errors. Brian Henderson, in his "Critique of Cine-Structuralism, Part I,"[26] correctly spots the asymmetry of Wollen's thrust vis-à-vis his model, Lévi-Strauss, namely the emergence of the subject/author (*auteur*) in Wollen when Lévi-Strauss's work is a ceaseless effort to deny the significance of the subject. Henderson does not take issue with the foundational premise that significance in film is constituted by sets of binary oppositions, however. For Lévi-Strauss, and presumably Wollen and Henderson, binary oppositions, as a timeless category in the structuration of the mind, derive from the universal observation that all verbal languages can be reduced to a relatively small number of oppositions between "distinctive features"—the phonemes.

This however is to fail to recognize a fundamental difference between phonemes (meaningless sounds if taken separately) and mythemes (the "gross constitutive elements" of myths, comparable to the seme in film or styleme in Pasolini's terms). The latter bundle of signs *always* carry significance since they only arise within a context. As an instrumental base, mythemes are *not* neutral. As Wilden argues, "It is an error to treat a context-free system of oppositions between the acoustic characteristics of "bits" of information (distinctive features) as if they were isomorphic with myth, which is a system with a context."[27] Myths aren't neutral combinations; they arise within a material context of human social reality. Wilden concludes, "The myth then ceases to serve the neutral function of organization pure and simple; it serves as the rationalization of a given form of social organization."[28]

Lévi-Strauss's and Wollen's work (and to a lesser degree, Henderson's) are mythopoetic endeavors in their own right, revealing to us not

only knowledge about the structure of myth or film or of the "mind," but also about the structure of ideology. Once again this involves a suppression of the analogical in favor of the digital. Wilden shows how Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the Oedipus myth does this by flattening different types of communication into one level of (phonemic) opposition. It must deny levels and context in order to produce its results, for to do otherwise would raise questions of how these levels are organized and controlled—the power of one part of a system to exploit other parts (the arena of ideology, the context of history). In our society this relates, among other things, to the power of the digital (crucial to exchange value) to exploit the analogical, a phenomenon that casts its massive penumbra over the (ideological) writings of Lévi-Strauss, Wollen, *et al.* A theory of logical typing in communication, of context, boundaries and their control, is a necessary (but not sufficient) tool for countering exploitation and its ideological rationalizations. Unfortunately, these are tools that Lévi-Strauss's form of structuralism has failed to develop.

Wollen's results are thus highly suspect. He arguest that in Ford there are oppositions between garden/wilderness, ploughshare/saber, nomadic life/domestic life, charismatic/rational-legal authority, etc. Wollen calls the first of these the "master antinomy." Why? Probably because of its importance to Henry Nash Smith —certainly not because he demonstrates its presence in the films. Wollen truncates Lévi-Strauss's method, though, and fails to show the bundles of relations that establish these categories. Wollen simply asserts them and then proceeds to erect an aesthetic valuing Ford over Hawks because of the "richness of the shifting relations between antinomies," making a prescriptive tool of an analytic method rather than seeking to extend it to an explanatory principle.

But Wollen can't explain himself. If he were to derive the oppositions he thinks exist, he would be forced to revert to *mise-en-scène,* which he himself admits involves graded communications that only adds "noise" to his "semantic" analysis.[29] For example, the shots through doorways or other openings in *The Searchers,* setting apart those inside and those outside (nomadic vs. settled, for Wollen) clearly involve the perception of depth, a quality communicated by gradients, not codes. But to have recourse to style would be to replace oppositions with gradients, his core category of "semantic meaning" with the peripheral categories (for Wollen) of "stylistic and expressive meaning." He would then lose the instrumental base that Pasolini argues doesn't exist: the arbitrary units comparable to phonemes that Wollen assumes exist but doesn't locate, the grounds for using verbal language as a privileged model in the first place.

Wollen goes so far as to eliminate style entirely from the terrain of significance or of interior meaning in the *auteur.* Oppositions are discovered by reading the film or text and finding an *ex post facto* "score," a structure like a composition that didn't pre-exist the film, that was composed into it by the *auteur.* This score does *not,* and here's the rub, include uses of style. The *auteur* does it with his hands tied behind his back: "There is no doubt that the greatest films will be not simply *auteur* films but marvellous expressively and stylistically as well . . . " (*Signs and Meaning,* p. 113). Style exists in the pre-text, the script, and is simply transposed to the film by the *auteur* and the *metteur-en-scène* alike. What distinguishes the *auteur* is the supplement of semantic meaning that he scores into the film by a process Wollen never does clarify (perhaps because no one can. As Lévi-Strauss says, the attempt of a myth to resolve a contradiction "is impossible, if, as it happens, the contradiction is real").

Lévi-Strauss's structuralism insists that myths have no author, no origin, no history (no diachronic structure linked inescapably to deep structure) and, for Derrida at least, mythopoetic thought is decentered with no core axis around which parts are substituted in rigid fashion. Instead it allows "free play" limited only by the shifting rules of the game. Myths pass the translation test, retaining their semantic, structural significance "even under the worst translations." These qualifications do not apply to Wollen's approach. *Auteur* films by definition have an

author and an origin and a diachronic moment that weighs into the meaning (the narrative chain is not simply a string for stylistic pearls; it is integral to the meaning). *Auteur* films can seldom pass a translation test: remakes seldom convey the same meaning (the same oppositions, for Wollen) simply because they lack the same style.

Wollen's effort is like that of thirties cinematographers trying to re-insert new technology (faster films) into an old aesthetic (soft focus, narrow depth of field). He wants his structuralism but he wants his proven method (*auteur* criticism) even more.

But to criticize one unnourishing theory after another is a bit like eating meals of decayed food then spending all our time coping with indigestion. Sometimes it is better to clear the pantry and start afresh. With the goal of expediting understanding and of providing an introduction to an alternative form of cine-textual reading, I have chosen to focus on two films by John Ford, *My Darling Clementine* and *Young Mr. Lincoln,* two films upon which many cine-structuralists have commented.[30] In looking at these two films, there are three points that seem particularly important: the actual form and function of the "oppositions" some critics uncover; the necessity for deriving our understanding of the presence or absence of oppositions, or other meaningful categories, from the style, from the signifier/signified chain as a coupled entity within an ideolect; and the absence in the cine-structuralist texts on these films of a mediation between film and history, film and social process, the most consistent omission in the work of those presently marching in the cine-structuralist parade.

Wollen argues that the barber-shop scene in *My Darling Clementine*[31] marks the transition of Wyatt Earp from "wandering cowboy, nomadic, savage, bent on personal revenge, unmarried to married man, settled, civilized, the sheriff who administers the law."[32] Furthermore, "[Earp's] progress is an uncomplicated passage from nature to culture, from the wilderness left in the past to the garden anticipated in the future."[33] Nothing could be further from the truth. Wollen's reductionist use of structural oppositions ironically leads him to see the opposite of what actually takes place, a virtual solarization of the cine-text.

My Darling Clementine is shot in a tableau style of relatively static, classically balanced, "frozen," full-face portraits that both point to an epic—a larger-than-life, larger-than-individual-destiny—tale, and to a defiance of time—a tale that doesn't "flow" but asserts itself as full-blown (there are no tracks, pans or zooms except perhaps in Earp's horseback chase after Doc). The prevalence of descriptive syntagms of a tableau-like nature asserts spatial continuity, integrating characters into the same kind of space, but also locks characters in time; it does not present a *narrative* discourse.

Ford is obliged to advance his story but his style already reflects an unwillingness: he is hesitant and perhaps brooding, preferring to reflect on a myth (the populist version of the charismatic hero) rather than tell it (knowing, perhaps, that the telling must mask irresolvable contradictions).[34] Fonda's Earp may thus be Ford's character pretext, another locus for his own vision and the long, dream-like center of the film (all that occurs between the killing and its revenge) may be Ford's and Earp's obsession with escape from doing what must be done, of pursuing the narrative, of taking revenge, of re-establishing the separation of the hero from the masses—a separation that is rampant in *Young Mr. Lincoln.* Tableau framings and low-angle heroic shots are Ford's stylistic ("poetic" in Pasolini's vocabulary) means of expressing his desire to linger, to preserve one element of his myth (the unity of Earp and town) at the expense of its resolution (the impossibility of maintaining that unity through time, through the strain of narrative function).

Earp's response to the death of his kid brother Jamie is a flight from the soil and blood relations to town, interiors, neatly constructed geometric spaces that he takes over. The town becomes a refuge, although the force that killed his brother also menaces the town: the Clantons live on its periphery as Earp had previously. The apparent reluctance to pursue the narrative (murder/re-

venge) then also masks a function the narrative would fulfill: hesitation masks Earp's function of bringing order-from-above; lingering allows Earp to integrate himself with the townspeople (never completely, however). The narrative masks Earp's mythic force (the identity between the interests of the solitary, charismatic hero and those of the common people in a Manichaean struggle against the forces of evil) by masking itself, by becoming the "structuring absence" of his ideological specificity.[35] Finally, however, the show must go on, the wayward actor must be brought back on stage, Earp must face the Clantons and in doing so the dream-like center is revealed as precisely that, a dream—and not the about-face transition Wollen thinks it is.

Town-lingering is a somewhat morbid state for Earp. Going to town is what led to Jamie's death. Staying is punishment as well as flight. Earp assumes the (formerly abandoned) role of sheriff ostensibly to legitimize his revenge, yet *abandons* it when the showdown comes. "It's a family affair." Hence he doesn't fully merge charismatic and rational law, not nearly as much as Ransom Stoddard in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*. Earp is the law where there is no law. He is the ready-made law of the morally strong (strong because of family ties), a law which, like Lincoln's, effects a vital mediation between values that threaten to tear the town asunder. Above all he is a super-family figure who mediates between good and bad blood, between the townsfolk and the Clantons, between culture and nature, law and charisma, town and earth, social roles and blood relations. As such he is banished from fully belonging to either set of terms. His mediation is as a non-possessable, symbolic agent, or sign, in an exchange that, by defining that exchange, operates as a higher logical type.[36] Contrary to Wollen, and, in fact, to Ford's apparent desire, Earp can never be one of the boys, at one with his world; he will always be the solitary mediator who by his (obviously ideologically informed) role must remain apart from that which he brings together.

Revenge restores Earp to his mythic, otherworldly proportions as mediator, guaranteeing the harmony of the town and banishing Earp from its bosom. The film does not advance a

Wyatt Earp in MY DARLING CLEMENTINE

series of either/or oppositions but a mediated continuum with distinct levels of operation.[37] The farewell scene is the fullest single confirmation of this mediating role of Earp and the best single refutation of Wollen's reading.

Earp is at frame left, his horse behind him, standing in the dirt road that runs to the far distant base of a mountain peak. A rail fence stands along the right side of the road, behind the stationary figure of Clementine Carter. Earp bids Clementine farewell; he rises above her (swings into his saddle) and prepares to follow the road leading to a peak above them both. The two figures are not simply in front of the fence. As a two-dimensional representation the image also places the fence *between* them. (The fence here punctuates the continuum culture/nature, but Earp will move above and beyond it.) The figures stand on common ground but only one will move along it. Clementine is now rooted to the soil (not isolated from it in the town's geometry) while Earp is clearly above it. Earp, though, doesn't exactly straddle two worlds; he exists apart from and above each. Charisma and the law remain apart but through his intervention, the space between them can be mediated.

A similar pattern operates in even more detail

in *Young Mr. Lincoln.* [38] The film presents Lincoln as a totally ideological (mythical) figure whose function is to represent the State, the Nation-Family, as the machine which secures the best interests of the people rather than as the repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie—although it is this latter function which the film ultimately exposes. To underscore his mythic proportions, and mediating role, Ford's film breaks with Lamar Trotti's script in stressing Lincoln's apartness, his lack of close comrades (only a marginal sidekick is offered), the sense of his being above, beyond, or outside emotions and social relations. He is distantiated, usually by visual means, from (1) crowds, (2) the dance —where his awkward movement in the opposite direction is conspicuous, (3) the celebration parade, (4) the law (to be explained below), (5) friendship, (6) love (sexual, male-female love), (7) God (in that he will use Divine injunctions to a higher end—the Family), (8) politics, as the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* demonstrate nicely in their article, (9) choice (refusing to choose up until he nearly forces Mrs. Clay to choose, a crucial moment), (10) color (he wears black throughout) and (11) the flesh (he is the visual manifestation of an absence, a unifying concept or function).

Lincoln is clearly not on the same level as the characters and events surrounding him. It is precisely this difference which signifies his mediating role between what might otherwise be irresolvable conflicts. He introduces a complexity into the film which the flattened analysis of *Cahiers'* editors cannot grasp, for there are present here levels, contexts, and boundaries which cannot be rolled out into a piecrust set of interactions, "Law/Woman/Nature," particularly, which *Cahiers* claims "will be articulated according to a system of complementarity and substitution-replacement."[39] *Cahiers'* errors can be linked to absolutely fundamental theoretical errors, namely the subscription to a structural linguistic model of arbitrary signs that can generate identities and oppositions (*"articulated* according to a system . . . "), the absence of a theory of logical typing in communication, and the absence of a theory of mediations within historical process. (Ironically, the incredible weakness and superficiality of their analysis of the film's historical context (sections 2-5) has not even been commented upon by presumably Marxist-oriented theorists like Brian Henderson!) In fact, examining *Cahiers'* methodology in terms of its antecedents and influences (as Henderson does) only repeats the error they make in their textual reading. The key to *Young Mr. Lincoln* lies in close visual-stylistic analysis of its distinct ideolect and the key to *Cahiers'* errors lies in the actual, particular results their reading generates.

Lincoln assumes a dual role, as Oudart notes, a duality that removes him from encounter but which also makes of his task an impossibility. Lincoln represents brotherhood, equality, unity, both-and relationships, even at the expense of subverting the law. For example, he equates a civil offense (debt) with a criminal one (assault and battery) in the case of two farmers. He also implores Mrs. Clay not to honor her Biblical and legal oath to "tell the whole truth" at the trial. In fact, one could argue that Lincoln never has anything to do with the law (it is always a pretext). From start to finish he transforms it in the name of the Family. Lincoln comes to assume the role of the Mother[40] but as an agent for the inscription of the Mother's values, Lincoln adopts the pretext of the Father (the law, inequality, primogeniture, either-or relationships, choice, repression, and prohibition). He accepts Blackstone (the law book) from the father-dominated family, in a matrix of debt and exchange, for example.[41] Lincoln walks into the foreground holding his first law book; the father is visually isolated from the rest of the family while the mother remains inside the wagon, behind and also *above* Lincoln and his law book. Her "gift" to Lincoln is yet to come.

Lincoln's subversion of the law, indicating his pretextual relationship to it, begins immediately. His verbalized study of Blackstone turns "the right to" (a social prerogative) into "right" (a moral good). Violations of "rights" become wrongs. Law becomes morality. Wrongs or evils become negations, denials or violations of rights —moral, sexual, and legal "rights." Already, *before* he meets Ann Rutledge by the river he has transformed the law into his own system, one

which reinforces his castrating/castrated interaction, and which refutes *Cahiers*' claim that "Ann Rutledge's death must be read as the real origin both of his castration and of his identification with the law."[42] There is no identification with the law and visual style suggests an unexplained, antecedent origin to his castration: a reaction shot of Lincoln as he talks to the still living Ann Rutledge by the river captures him from a low angle that conveys the impression of a stern, menacing, even castrating figure which totally belies his gentlemanly words. (Of course, if we attach primary significance to words. . . .) The shot is strikingly reminiscent of the first shot of Scar by the family grave in *The Searchers*, and *Cahiers* does notice a later shot of Lincoln during the quarrel between the farmers with this same threatening aspect. They comment that Lincoln has "an empty, icy, terrifying stare (that manifests Lincoln's) castrating power."[43]

Lincoln thus confounds the law's claim to total sovereignty and instead acts as the agent of a higher law, what *Cahiers* calls "Ideal Law" but which is so radically different from Blackstone's law that a better term for it might be "The Family." We can perhaps indicate some idea of the mediation Lincoln strives to effect in the name of the Family, the Mother above all, through the agency of the Father (Lincoln as phallus) by comparing Blackstone's law to the almanac—a book given in exchange for a debt by the father-dominated family to a book offered freely as a gift by the mother-centered family:

BLACKSTONE	ALMANAC
exchange, debt, reciprocity, roles, tit-for-tat, an enclosed either-or context linked to the father in one system, capitalism in another, and the digital in yet another.	gratuitousness, gifts, offerings, mutuality, kinship, harmony, in an open, both - and context approaching magic and charisma in one system, tribalism in another, and the analog in yet another.

Cahiers fails to see the radical distinction being made here (collapsing it into "law" and "truth") and Lincoln's profoundly ideological act of attempting to legitimize the former (Blackstone) in the name of the latter (Almanac). The family Lincoln represents, and which so preoccupies Ford throughout his career, is on one plane the mythical, super-family of rural populism: its "Ideal Law" is clearly not a higher, more ideal, more moral species of law but a fundamentally different order of social unity than that constituted by those real conditions underpinning law.

Lincoln by adopting the role of the father and the relations of the mother acts as a necessary mediation, doing for the family what the family cannot do for itself, thereby grounding the State in the Family. The nation becomes, through Lincoln, "above" politics and law and achieves a mythic unity. The identity "Law/Woman/Nature," though, flies apart. These and other terms have a mediated relationship and Lincoln, in the name of the Family, is the agent of their mediation.

The early scene of Lincoln on the river bank correlates nicely with this mediating pattern. When he is walking with Ann Rutledge they walk from right to left while the river behind them flows in the same direction. When the film dissolves to her grave, though, the river is flowing in the opposite direction, from left to right! This, however, is the same direction in which Lincoln also moves as he rides his mule into Springfield. It is the signifier of his mediation between earth and town, family and the social matrix. And finally at film's end Lincoln follows a country road into the distance, somewhat to the right but moving predominantly in a receding, upward direction (akin to the path awaiting Earp). Many of the shots of Lincoln throughout the film reinforce this upward motion by their low-angle placement and compositional isolation of Lincoln. (A notable exception is the high-angle shot at the Clay cabin when he realizes the mother is right not to choose between her sons.) The *mise-en-scène* of these shots taken together suggests some definite tensions: nature and woman "flowing" one way, town and law leading another, Abe walking to the left with Ann but Abe rising and backing off to the right when he "chooses" law (as the twig falls across her grave). Similarly, the visual composition locates Lincoln within these tensions and yet sets him apart. The water may flow in opposite directions but what we have at work here is surely more than a simple set of oppositions (or substitution-

replacements).

Lincoln's mediation also forces the film to crack open revealing the ideological function of his role. For example, Lincoln's seemingly benevolent representation of the Law actually originates in a terrible, castrated, castrating operation which produces Law "as a pure prohibition of violence whose result is only a permanent indictment of the castrating effects of its discourse,"[44] and which effectively restrains him from a full self-realization of the qualities he mediates (he is wholly other). Lincoln himself cannot be "had," possessed, known. He frames the context. He doesn't belong to it just as a class cannot be a member of itself. If we relate to him on the basis of the pretext—law, etc.—then we accept the either/or world of choice, repression, fundamental disjunction. If we relate to him as Abe-the-Mother—almanac, gift, etc.—then he effects an auto-repression ("castrated") in which he renounces the desire that would lead to relation. (Mary Todd, e.g., is compelled to withdraw from the balcony by Lincoln's own withdrawal.) The mythic level of his operation banishes him from the realm of real conditions and real relations (exploitation) and openly situates him at the level of ideology. His power is like that of the mother in Bateson's Paradigm: he frames and thereby controls encounters. *Cahiers,* unlike other commentators, realize that this occurs but cannot explain it in terms of the dynamics of communications, leading them to falsely claim the psychodynamics of his function as the controlling mechanism.

Obviously, this critique doesn't overthrow the entirety of *Cahiers'* analysis, the value of which over the now standardized forms of cultural commentary is well summarized by Brian Henderson elsewhere.[45] But their inability to deal with logical typing in communication—with how the context is defined and controlled and how this relates to patterns of social control, and the inability to apply mediation theory as an instrument of historical placement for cultural processes remain fundamental problems.[46] Neither can be overcome easily. Both problems point to the need for the application of extensive knowledge from other fields to film study—a delicate synthesis of the kind of communication theory developed by Wilden and Bateson, of the mediation theory of Sartre, Lukacs, and Marx, and the kind of visual analysis done by the best of the *auteur* critics, without their aesthetics: there is no place here for the reverence of wholeness, harmony and radiance, for the criteria of complexity and subtlety (V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film,* p. 118) as our most relevant measuring rods. The concepts of logical typing, context, system, structure, and history need to be used to ask questions such as who exploits whom, what parts of a message circuit control (or mediate between) other parts, how do frames generate paradox and who profits/suffers from it. Taking up the formal skills that *auteur* critics have already taught us, we must assimilate these other concepts so that we might advance toward a Marxist film theory (and practice) without becoming trapped in the hopeless oscillation of either/or opposition to neoromantic *auteurists* and pseudo-Marxist semio-structuralists.

Much remains to be done. The two lynchpins of style and narrative still require careful integration under the sign of an adequate theoretical model. Eco's specific example of the integration of the "iconic code" with the "code of narrative function" in the photographic enlargement sequence in *Blow-Up* demonstrates quite convincingly that the meaning we extract resides *between* these codes. (He concludes his analysis by stating, "The context acts as an ideolect assigning determinate values from the codes to signals that might otherwise seem pure noise," *La Struttura Assente,* p. 152.)

Unfortunately, most of the work being done in narrativity—by Metz and Greimas particularly—again falls under the sway of the structural-linguistic model I have been critiquing. The consequences of this for film criticism are most apparent in the work of Alan Williams who has applied Greimas to film. He claims, for example, that "meaning grows organically as part of the narrative structure,"[47] while "the object (of value, we might add) of the semiotic endeavor is not explanation, of course, but description."[48] "Of course," like Metz's claim that

the semiology of cinema can treat its symbols as signs, is far from a simple endorsement of universal truth. Its function is ideological, entirely, and the arid schematism of his articles in *Film Quarterly*[49] testifies to the absence of meaningfullness from work strangulating its own potential with coils of romantic and empirical rationalization. Worse yet, this form of narrative analysis offers very little opening to mediation theory and historical placement. In discussing *Metropolis,* Williams's essay is neatly truncated into narrative analysis and cultural placement. The phenomena of Hitler, Nazism, Weimar Germany, German Expressionism, even the words "German" and "Germany" do not appear at all or only in passing. Williams staples one ideological product to several ideological schemata ("human/mechanical" or "Christian/mystical-alchemical"), but as a materialist analysis of context, that is like starting out with both feet firmly planted in the air.

The problem of developing a thorough understanding of style and narrative in film remains, for me, part of a yet larger problem of understanding the function of art itself. To this broader problem, Gregory Bateson proposes an orientation that seems immediately relevant to an understanding of film (especially if we regard "grace" as a social category unattainable within an exploitative context, e.g., capitalism):

> I argue that art is a part of man's quest for grace; sometimes his ecstasy in partial success, sometimes his rage and agony at failure. . . . I shall argue that the problem of grace is fundamentally one of integration and that what is to be integrated is the diverse parts of the mind—especially those multiple levels of which one extreme is called "consciousness" and the other "the unconscious." For the attainment of grace, the reasons of the heart must be integrated with the reasons of the reason. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* p. 129.

These divergent forms of reason correspond to primary and secondary process, to the structures of the ego and id, to the Symbolic and Imaginary realms (in Lacan) and their integration to the goals of Marxism and feminism, not to mention some psychotherapy. (And other approaches as well although many such pathways—religion, drugs, etc.—ignore our proviso about grace as a social category.) Integration, or grace, or revolution seems impossible as long as we retain an epistemology that says "you" and "I" exist independent of the space between us—the dynamics of our interaction—and that further defines "I" principally by the ego, and, perhaps as a consequence of all this, elevates the core of the ego's secondary process, the model of verbal language, into a privileged position for *all* communication.

We need to circle back to Bateson's Paradigm —his description of a schizophrenogenic situation. In his analysis of that encounter the mother's graded, analog communication is fully recognized and inscribed within the context of a dominant/submissive, power relationship. The *full* meaning of her analog communication cannot be understood without referring to this context, a frame that establishes boundaries between logical types and within which paradoxical injunctions are rapidly generated (a precondition for schizophrenia—a "dis-ease" of people who cannot tell what kind of message a message, particularly a framing message, is). Within the frame the spoken and nonverbal communications do not form oppositions of a structural-linguistic type; rather they generate a set of paradoxical injunctions as messages-in-circuit: the paradoxes aren't in the words or the gestures, nor are they in the mother or the son. They are *between* all these relata; they are *in* the relationship, in the message plus environment, or context. (Bateson summarizes the son's perception of the paradoxical injunction that is generated as, "If I am to keep my tie to mother, I must not show her that I love her, but if I do not show that I love her, then I will lose her." *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* p. 218.)

Bateson's analysis also shows the son how to escape the double bind by saying, " 'Mother, it is obvious that you become uncomfortable when I put my arm around you, and that you have difficulty accepting a gesture of affection from me.' " (*Ibid.,* p. 217.) Bateson stresses the importance of the frame and who draws it: the mother's spoken comment, "Don't you love me anymore?" takes the place of her bodily stiffening when the son puts his arm around her shoulders (by denying it in favor of treating her

son's withdrawal as an initiatory signal rather than a response).

Confusion of logical types can lead to pathological communication (schizophrenia) but it is also integral to creativity—perhaps most obviously in humor, where a condensation of logical types occurs. Paradox is an inevitable result of establishing boundaries and cannot be wiped away without wiping away culture; it can only be transcended by moving to a higher logical type or accepted when it does not lead to pathology (e.g., through humor or the therapeutic double bind of the therapist that Bateson discusses). The model Bateson's Paradigm offers of metaphorical communication, of potentially therapeutic meta-communication, of logical levels of exchange that establish frames and context and create paradox, seems a more adequate model for understanding the dynamics of human interaction than a set of structural oppositions, synchronically arranged all on the same level. The importance of temporal sequence, or narrative in the broad sense, as a contributor to context, the creation of paradoxical injunctions by the manipulation of the framing, the question of who does the framing (where do we draw the line, who draws it and who profits from it—whites, men, culture?) are all crucial questions that pass straight through the leaky sieve of most film theorists' methodology. And of the contexts or frames within which film itself operates, ideology and history seem the most crucial. It is the urgent need to analyze these contexts that proposes the greatest challenge and the most promising direction for film theory and its critical application.

NOTES

1. More on this distinction can be found in Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure* (London, Tavistock, 1972), ch. 7, and in Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, Ballantine, 1972).

1. Among the materials I have referred to, the books by Wilden and Bateson are most helpful in clarifying this distinction.

2. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* p. 217.

3. Revealing one's own tools of production and stating what kind of intellectual product is in the making are not dishonorable aims; when coupled to an analysis itself radical, it is a necessary step toward a truly Marxist film theory. When used to mask the total inscription of an analysis within the ideology it ostensibly opposes, such declarations only become one more level of mystification.

4. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry," *Cahiers du Cinéma in English,* #6, pp. 35–43.

5. See his "Articulations of the Cinematic Code," *Cinemantics* (London), No. 1, January 1970; an overlapping selection is "Semiologie des messages visuels," *Communications* (Paris), No. 15, 1970.

6. One of Eco's errors lies here, as we'll see, in so far as he takes the referent to be the real world where he argues there is no analog to the outline presented by a visual image. He's right about the characteristics of the real world but wrong about the referent. It is the *visual field* of human perception where analogous outlines most certainly do exist. Our contact with a distal object is always mediated by a proximal stimulus.

7. Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry," p. 36.

8. Those of genre, movement, or film wave, and narrative are perhaps the most crucial.

9. By "cinematic" I am referring to Metz's distinction between cinematic and filmic codes, the former being unique to cinema (codes of montage), the latter being more widespread and recruited to film (codes of lighting or of dress).

10. The Metz texts to which I will be referring are early texts. Metz himself has altered many of his earlier positions; rightly, though, he has not destroyed these texts. They continue to exist and continue to challenge our own thinking. I get little sense that Metz would endorse the basic thrust of my argument.

11. Christian Metz, "Current Problems of Film Theory," *Screen,* Vol. 14, No. 1/2, p. 75.

12. *Ibid.,* p. 44.

13. Christian Metz, "Methodological Propositions for the Analysis of Flm," *Screen,* Vol. 14, No. 1/2, pp. 89–101.

14. The use of the word "levels" here may be confusing since it is not meant in the same sense as when discussing logical typing in communication and the existence of more than one level in the exchange of information. Levels in Metz are arbitrary categories of the analyst, having no relation to frames, context, and paradox.

15. Metz, "Methodological Propositions," p. 97.

16. In this context, Bazin and Eisenstein aren't so far apart. Both agree on the transparency of the image to reality: Bazin chooses to valorize this imprint effect

rather than "faith in the image" in order to celebrate reality (ideology), while Eisenstein chooses to valorize style in order to fulfill a socialist calling to transform reality.

17. Fragments of Eco's book have been translated into English in *Cinemantics* #1, London (January, 1970), "Articulations of the Cinematic Code," and an overlapping selection appears in French in *Communications* #15 (Paris, 1970), "Semiologie des Messages Visuels."

18. As Eco himself says, "Undoubtedly the iconic codes are weaker, more transitory, limited to restricted groups or to the choices of a single person (which is Pasolini's argument) in as much as they are not strong codes like those of verbal language; and in them the optional variants prevail over the truly pertinent features." *Cinemantics* #1, p. 6.

19. "Semes should therefore be considered—with respect to the signs permitting identification—as an ideolect." *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. James Jerome Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World,* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1950).

22. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* p. 135.

23. *Ibid.,* p. 139.

24. *Ibid.,* p. 137.

25. Zeno was among the first but far from the last to attempt this reduction, a reduction with massive implications under capitalist ideology, which depends for its survival upon the kinds of boundaries and the "integrity" of the units it carves from the analog: "The temptation to treat static ideas as absolute rather than as partial and provisional, proved irresistible to many western thinkers; the apparent clarity of such ideas seduces the mind into dismissing change or transformation as a trivial secondary effect of interactions between the "real" entities. Static concepts proved to be very effective intellectual tranquilizers." (Lancelot Law Whyte, *The Unconscious Before Freud* (Garden City, Anchor Books, 1962, p. 42.)

26. Henderson, *Film Quarterly,* Vol. 27, #1, p. 25.

27. Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure,* p. 8.

28. *Ibid.,* p. 10.

29. Wollen writes, "We need to develop much further a theory of performance [vs. composition, for Wollen], of the stylistic, of graded rather than coded modes of communication." (p. 113–115). The semantics he does advance here are somewhat befuddling and Wilden's comment on some of the sources for it seems apt: "[Structuralism, structural linguistics and information science] are all anti-semantic in that they substitute the supposed characteristics of a theoretically neutral *instrument of analysis* (the "bit") for the *use* to which it is put, as an *instrument of communication,* at given levels in a given goal seeking system, where no information is ever neutral. Meaning—the goal—becomes bounded not by the structure of the context in which it occurs, but by the structure of 'science.' As a result the methodology implicitly becomes an ontology." Wilden, *System and Structure,* p. 11. And, of course, it remains thoroughly ideological.

30. Wollen discusses *My Darling Clementine* in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema. Young Mr. Lincoln* is the subject of an extended essay by the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma,* translated in *Screen,* Vol. 13, #3 where Wollen also comments on this text, and additional commentaries on *Cahiers'* analysis can be found in *Screen,* Vol. 14, #3, (Ben Brewster, "Notes on the text *Young Mr. Lincoln* by the Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*") and in Henderson, "Critique of Cine-Structuralism, Part II," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. 27, #2.

31. Plot synopsis: Wyatt Earp (Fonda) becomes Marshal of Tombstone after his youngest brother, Jamie, is killed by the Clanton gang. He establishes a delicate camaraderie with Doc Holliday (Victor Mature), his woman Chihuahua, and the townspeople. Earp courts Clementine Carter who comes west in pursuit of Doc only to be rejected by him. Finally, gaining positive proof of the Clantons' crime (at the expense of Chihuahua's life) Earp resigns and wages the battle of OK Corral. Afterwards, he leaves town, alone, pausing to bid farewell to Clementine.

32. Wollen, *Signs and Meaning,* p. 96.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Ford's film appeared in the midst of the *film noir* style (1946) although there are clearly pockets of transcendence here that pure-bred *noir* would snuff out —the desert and its monuments, the daytime scenes, the pureness of Clementine, etc. The brooding quality, in fact, bears closer relation to Ford's earlier German Expressionist-tempered films (*The Informer,* 1935; *The Long Voyage Home,* 1940) while the undertone of reluctance, of lingering, is perhaps related to the cracks in his vision that Ford cannot repair, cracks that clearly inform *Young Mr. Lincoln* and that reveal the alternation a myth undergoes through its mediated relationship to changing social conditions. We don't need to wait until the bald dissillusionment of *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) to find Ford hesitant and, to a degree, unable to repeat an outmoded myth; nor do we need to wait for the effect of World War II as some historians argue (both *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *The Grapes of Wrath* predate the war). The same kind of transformation occurs in Hawk's trilogy *Rio Bravo, El Dorado,* and *Rio Lobo,* but it is so intimately rooted in stylistic nuance that the structural tools of Peter Wollen miss it altogether. (For an excellent analysis of Hawks's

shifting attitudes to similar material in these films see Greg Ford's "Mostly on Rio Lobo," *Film Heritage,* Vol. 7, # 1.)

35. By contrast a film like *Shane* flaunts the hero's otherness and traces a clear-cut narrative line. It is a far more unabashedly reactionary film.

36. A brief account of the theory of logical types and its application to communication theory can be found in Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* notably in the essay, "The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication." Applications occur throughout his work and Wilden's book as well.

37. Recognizing this mediation can radically alter our perception of the film. A similar alteration can occur in other seemingly oppositional categories that in fact function within a determining context. Thus Juliet Mitchell examines oppositional assumptions about bisexuality, or more properly, homo- and heterosexuality, and concludes that bisexuality is not a simple concept of "infantile unisex" but depends heavily upon psychology: "It is this dilemma, in which the subject is still resolving the precise point of the place he occupies in the world, in terms of his (and her) wish for it not to be the feminine place, which is the only, and ever-present alternative to where anyone really wants to be—in the male position within the patriarchal human order." Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism,* p. 65.

38. Plot synopsis: Abe Lincoln campaigns in backwoods Illinois. He meets the Clay family and receives a lawbook in exchange for supplies. Lincoln studies the law and courts Ann Rutledge. When she dies Lincoln decides to go to Springfield to practice law. A deputy is murdered and Lincoln defends the accused: Mrs. Clay's two sons. Lincoln finally demonstrates their innocence, exposes the guilty man and earns the respect of the citizens and his more sophisticated opponent, Douglass.

39. Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* collective text, "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln," Screen,* Vol. 13, #3, p. 21.

40. This is a crucial development which requires a learning process which culminates in his visit to the Clay's country cabin. Lincoln "adopts" the family and assumes the roles of Father and Mother. But which one will dominate? He asks the mother to choose, as Felder the lawyer will do, to tell which son is guilty. But he then backs down in the face of her resistance, recognizing that he has gone too far. He accedes to the mother's silence, her higher sense of unity and henceforth becomes the active agent of its mediation with town, law, justice, etc. When the mother dominates, after Lincoln has relented in his interrogation, he receives the Almanac.

41. *Cahiers* omit a crucial distinction through their reductive oppositions. They claim that "it is from the same family that Law and Truth originate: through the book (the carrier of the law) and the almanac." (p. 32.) Wrong. There is a key difference. The law is given by the father; the almanac by the mother. They are presented in markedly different contexts and represent wholly different values.

42. "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln," Screen,* Vol. 13, #3, p. 30.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.,* p. 43.

45. Henderson, "Critique of Cine-Structuralism, Part II," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. 27, #2.

46. Perhaps there is an added impediment rooted in the very texture of mediation theory. Compared to the hard edged, schematic, so-called scientific array of structural vertebrae (oppositions, identities, condensations, displacements, etc.) mediations may seem "soft," slippery, elusive like experiential reality itself. We need not consider it a transcendent mysticism however. Mediation theory can offer a model that is an approximation of the "immanent mind" that eludes static concepts, discrete units: "the elementary cybernetic system with its messages in circuit is, in fact, the simplest unit of mind; and the transform of a difference traveling in a circuit is the elementary idea." (Bateson, p. 459.) " . . . It means, you see, that I now localize something which I am calling 'Mind' immanent in the large biological system—the ecosystem." p. 460. The rigid structural backbone that some would propose for film quickly turns to jelly when we realize that it only exists at all as a result of the axioms of incorrect epistemology. Where, for example, do we "put" the space between us and the screen? A question crucial to Godard, it is answered by some structural linguistics by assuming a "reader inscribed in the text," another process of flattening, a racist, elitist process in some cases at that, while Oudart's extension of some Lacanian notions to posit an "absent-one" (the visual field of he who sees what appears on the screen—a field we sometimes have exposed to us in reverse shots) correlates interestingly with the ambiguous role of shifters in language and of the sub-film in Pasolini: the absent-one can be used stylistically to convey a meaning that remains integrally dependent on *context,* on the ideolect as in Hitchcock's treatment of suspense most notably. (I am indebted to Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of the Classical Cinema," *FQ,* Vol. 28, No. 1, for my understanding of the absent-one.)

47. Alan Williams, "Only Angels Have Wings," (unpublished paper).

48. Alan Williams, "Structures of Narrativity in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 4, p. 20.
49. See note 47, and also "Circles of Desire: Narrative and Repetition in *La Ronde*, *FQ*, Vol. 27, #1.

Special thanks to Siew Hwa Beh for helping me to grasp the implications of some of these ideas within and beyond the confines of film analysis. Much of the original stimulus to pursue this work came from seminars at UCLA participated in by Ron Abramson, Jacoba Atlas, Sylvia Harvey, Brian Henderson, Frank LaTourette, Joe McInerney, Janey Place, Bob Rosen, Eileen Rossi, Alain Silver, and Abe Wollock.

Reviews

THE GAMBLER

Director: Karel Reisz. Producers: Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff. Photography: Victor J. Kemper. Script: James Toback. Music: Jerry Fielding. Paramount.

Axel Freed of *The Gambler* lives in two worlds which seem to have nothing in common: the college classroom where he teaches English and the gambling tables where he plays dangerous games of chance. Basically indifferent to the thousands of dollars which he throws away, he bears little resemblance to the Amarillo Slim of *California Split*, a cool businessman who flashes a horse-choking wad of C notes, or to that movie's two lightweight heroes. Axel's goals are more intangible—and more complex than many have realized. In probing them, *The Gambler* is often schematic, often fuzzy; yet it is a commanding movie, far more interesting, far more involving than Robert Altman's weak mishmash.

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drawing us into their richness by refusing to impose interpretations of them on us, whereas carefully preplanned productions like *The Gambler* build structural machines, wind them up, and let them go, excluding us from their operation. I have not read James Toback's original script for the Karel Reisz film (as I have Joseph Walsh's for the Altman); but, judging from the film, it bears all the signs of tight, worked-out formalism. Axel's lectures and conversations carefully spell out his motives; so do neatly planted episodes like his furious tennis game with his doctor-mother, Naomi. Their relationship matches a Freudian model; another relationship, with his girlfriend Billie, allows Axel to compare desires she suppresses to desires he explicitly acknowledges. One of his students, black basketball star Spencer, pops up early and makes pointed comments so that we will anticipate his significant role in the climax. Scenes and details parallel each other precisely; a bonanza at the blackjack table, a moment of terror in a dark room, and the ending; a goon talking about college and a bookie talking about shorthand; the goon breaking a welsher's arm and Axel wringing a bank clerk's neck. All this symmetry risks turning Axel into a tidy case history, so totally explained that he couldn't possibly be disturbing. Yet he is, whereas Altman's vaudeville team can barely raise even a yawn.

One reason is that they are routine, small-time bettors who never show us their souls, only their behavior (which belongs more to their actors than to them). Axel is an intense, strutting Intellectual Star. In the classroom, he serves up choice morsels of Dostoyevsky and D. H. Lawrence: "Reason only satisfies man's rational requirements"; "Americans fear new experience more than they fear anything else." In his own life, maxims like these portray his mania for gambling as proof of fearlessness before risk, as a manifestation of "will," "secret connection," "magic powers." Like the Underground Man, he exults in flouting the restrictions of logic and ordinary perception, in making two plus two equal five. But he also uses these notions to dress up his glamorous intellectual machismo. He's a Mailerish mindfucker so hung up on affirming his manliness that he romanticizes Dostoyevsky's anti-hero, who is curdled and petty even when telling the truth with the keenest wit and insight. When Axel compares the poet to the athlete, we can sense his uneasiness, his guilty, insecure American intellectual's hopeless envy for the man of action. ("Those who can, do; those who can't, teach.") He tries to counter it by making star turns of his lectures and existential statements of his reckless bets.

So far, so neat—but gradually the film widens and deepens our perspective on Axel's drives. The way he uses his brain as a weapon, not to mention his smile at disaster, recalls David Sumner of *Straw Dogs,* but Axel flaunts his powers. Called on to deliver a speech at his grandfather's eightieth birthday party, he flexes his muscles by grandiloquently recounting the old man's rise from impoverished immigrant to mighty tycoon. The speech is a flashy piece of showing-off; but there is genuine admiration in it for the struggles and victories of an earlier era, whose depth and intensity Axel cannot find in his academic life. After skillfully ridiculing a thug's ignorance about college, and then witnessing his brutal attack on a welsher, Axel feels weak and petty. By contrast, when his bookie, Hips, drops in on him for the forty-four grand he owes and proceeds to terrorize another loser over the phone, he applauds ironically; words, even the most violent words, are a joke compared to the real thing.

Certain critics have accused the movie of claiming that all gamblers really want to lose. Actually, Hips is the one who tries out this hunk of pop psychology, but Axel derisively cuts him off. He himself describes gambling to Billie as "just something I like to do;" but, intentionally or not, the words have an inadequacy which recalls similar lines in racing movies like *Grand Prix.* Although his convoluted relationship with Naomi complicates the matter, the truth is that Axel wants to win, but only when by all odds and reason he should lose. Putting himself in peril, then triumphing over it and his fear of it makes him feel rapturously alive, even godlike; it juices him up. This is not just machismo. Like the canoers of *Deliverance,* but with far more

passion and self-awareness, Axel wants to find a richer kind of life. As they are beguiled by an obsolete primitivism, he is beguiled by obsolete heroes: his grandfather (who is secretly a partner in crime), the Underground Man (whose anti-heroism is a kind of heroic assertion), Buffalo Bill ("defunct" like all of his breed in a quoted e. e. cummings verse). Implicitly, he despises modern times for rendering the old heroes and their deeds irrelevant, incapable of making the difference which once was possible. In his unspoken yearning for a vanished world, Axel crosses paths with the fundamentalist eager to restore outmoded morality, the revolutionary thirsting to pick up the gun, even the new-style hip young Hollywood screenwriter who feeds off the old movies he wishes he could have made. In one scene, Reisz parodies Axel's decadent, artificial heroism by placing him in a barn-like theater where a B-Western flickers as he listens to a crucial NBA broadcast. But he also makes us respond to Axel's rage against the blandness of ordinary life; it makes contact with our discontents as well.

Axel makes two plus two equal five in a Vegas casino when, dealt eighteen at blackjack, he doubles his bet and successfully demands a three from the amazed dealer. Reisz's direction of this scene is absolutely breathtaking: an introductory pan shot across iridescent lights and fountains; a low angle on Axel with the camera slowly closing in on his face, utterly immobile, transfixed at rapture's flash point, crowned with a fiery halo from a chandelier overhead; the terse editing of the key moment, the dealing of the three, which teases and undercuts our anticipation of—and our *desire* for—a grand, corny, suspense-bursting, trumpet-blaring climax. Technically and emotionally, the scene has two dimensions: while the images capture the "blessed" state which Axel seeks, the editing expresses its transience, which he cannot accept. The passing of his ecstasy so shatters him that he must gamble more and more, as though he could abolish time by winning as often as possible. In this respect, he resembles the four gourmets of *La Grande Bouffe,* who try to create an endless present of pleasure through nonstop eating, and contrasts with the characters of most Ozu films, who accept the transience of life as its most beautiful mystery. Axel's Western spirit lacks this serenity; at bottom, he is protesting death and transience, as even Ozu does in *The End of Summer.* I can best indicate the fascination which Axel holds for me by adding that this is my favorite Ozu film, and for precisely this reason. Reisz's technique in this scene is masterful in its use of the transience inherent in film itself to embody Axel's struggle against the transience of his rapture.

In the context of a debate between formalism and spontaneity, Reisz is certainly a formalist who is very conscious of the themes and concerns which unite his films. "All my films—*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, Night Must Fall, Morgan, Isadora*—are about a central character who is in some way on the edge of sanity, seen partly from his or her own point of view, partly, none too sympathetically, from the outside," he has said (*Sight and Sound,* Spring 1974)—and quite accurately. There are times in *The Gambler* when this self-awareness does become too self-conscious. The worst scene in the movie, the tennis match between Axel and Naomi, jerks it to a screeching halt while we watch him blast the ball past her as if in revenge for needing her money to cover his losses. The scene racks up points as crudely as Axel does. By contrast, the preceding scene of Axel finding her on duty in her hospital ward and making funny faces against a pane of glass works because it is quick, amusing, and part of the narrative flow.

The Vegas episode comes off so brilliantly because it blends the virtues of formalism and spontaneity. It is just as preplanned as the tennis game; but, instead of pounding us with points, it pulls us into an experience and lets us discover its meaning. Nothing like it can be found in *California Split,* which despite its looseness utterly fails to capture the intensity of high-stakes gambling. In the end, it is the "open" Altman rather than the "structured" Reisz who tries to force an interpretation on us. Both depict the depressions which steal over their characters after a big win. But Reisz does it in the

middle of *The Gambler,* which makes it only one element of the gambling experience; Altman does it at the end of *California Split,* which makes it an eleventh-hour piece of attitudinizing. *The Gambler,* on whose script Reisz reportedly worked with Toback for two years, has an emotional force and a feeling for the mysteries of character which Altman's off-the-cuff movie entirely lacks. These qualities defeat the potential rigidity of its elaborate structure and give it a satisfying elegance. The schematic parts of the movie tend to be those devoted to Axel and Naomi; despite a subtle performance by Jacqueline Brookes, the development of their relationship, with its sexual undercurrent, becomes too dutiful and leads to confusion between gambling as compulsion and gambling as choice. Naturally, they are mingled and must be, but the second is the really important issue.

On the other hand, certain aspects of *The Gambler* are not worked-out enough. Floating through the movie is a vague fixation on blacks and their world as sources of potential danger, and on black athletic prowess. Folding after a night of cards, Axel comes upon some ghetto kids shooting baskets, plays the best of them one-on-one twenty dollars against a dime, and loses that, too, after which the boys tease him. Budding superstar Spencer gets in the sharpest retorts to his lectures, and the ending blends sports and danger as Axel helps fix a basketball game and then takes off on a self-destructive foray into Harlem. This unfocused element seems more Toback than Reisz because it is a pecularily white-American syndrome unlikely to engage a Czech-British director even if he were conscious of it.

In fact, despite their close collaboration, there seems to be a split in the movie between the writing and the direction. Andrew Sarris grazed this possibility by remarking (*Village Voice* Centerfold, Oct. 4–10, 1974) that "Reisz's dialectical montage seems too cool by far for the red-hot lyricism of Toback's fantasies." But Sarris's terms may be too simple. This kind of writer-director split need not be destructive, as it is in *The Exorcist,* where the writing wants to save the world with half-baked nostrums and the direction wants to pole-ax it with grotesque shockers. It seems to me that Reisz's precision rescues Toback from his tendency to over-identify with Axel. As he does in his other films, Reisz provides a more detached perspective on his protagonist, never permitting us to idealize him yet never becoming coldly analytical either. But perhaps inadequate fingertip knowledge of American life (evident in the American segments of *Isadora*) prevents him from coming to grips with this blurry aspect of the script. Occasional details betray this: for instance, the Harlem pimp whom Antonio Fargas plays with the same glib, silly mannerisms he used in *Across 110th Street, Believe in Me,* and *Cisco Pike;* by now they are too familiar to give the character the necessary aura of danger.

A similar oddity, Lauren Hutton's off-and-on Texas accent (which is erratic enough to sound like deliberate baby talk at first), points up another difficulty: blank Billie. A pennant on her apartment wall indicates that she went to college, but you'd never guess it otherwise. Why is she so impressed when Axel puts on a fancy performance in the classroom for her benefit? Hasn't she ever seen a grandstanding prof or been to one of Axel's lectures? She doesn't know who wrote "I Sing the Body Electric" or what "Buffalo Bill's defunct" means. Is she dumb, uninterested, or excluded from Axel's world? When Axel's grandfather asks her what she does, she mentions things like riding and dancing. She may be putting the old man on to indicate that she sees through Axel's reason for showing her to him. But later she tells Axel that she has her "own stuff" to do, without giving us a clue to what that means. She seems like the empty play-

girl the old man calls her. Yet we are supposed to accept her shrewd challenges to Axel's way of life. We can't because she is even more negligible than Jeanne in *Last Tango in Paris,* who also becomes involved in a male hero's obsession but not as his equal. Misogyny is not a feature of Reisz's previous work, so perhaps this perfunctory, sexist role is another, less beneficial result of the film's writer-director split or its elaborate structure. Whatever the case, it is no less disappointing.

Why does Axel see risk and danger in physical terms only? By neither answering nor even asking this question, *The Gambler* leaves a puzzling gap in Axel's characterization which prompts additional questions. What about artistic and intellectual risks? What about the fears which writers must sometimes face down? Running through the movie is what might be called a "foreign turf" motif: Harlem, Vegas, the old man's estate—and the classroom, the only one of the four which, by Axel's lights, cannot be called dangerous. It falls into this category by default because the movie does not make it clear whether the classroom is Axel's home turf or whether he is just a Guest Star. Nor does it make this ambiguity meaningful enough. We have every reason to wonder how and when he first got there and even whether or not he really loves literature. It would be a royal joke if Axel, who attacks American limitations, could be seen sharing one of them by valuing literature for purely utilitarian reasons. But we never learn enough about this side of him; we see the ego tripper but little else in the classroom.

I know nothing of Toback's real-life relationship to or feelings about Norman Mailer, but Mailer certainly seems to have been Axel's prototype. Early ads for the movie carried Mailer's praise for its portrayal of gambling's fevers and highs, but did he also see something of himself in it? In his writing and in support of his excursions into film-making, Mailer has often articulated an aesthetic founded upon improvisation and danger. In an article about *Last Tango* (*New York Review of Books,* May 17, 1973), he rhapsodizes:

> So murder is the first dramatic reality between two such lovers in a continuing film of improvisation. They progress towards an end which is frighteningly open . . . so the true improvisation which *Tango* called for should have moved forward each day on the actors' experience of the day before; it would thereby have offered more aesthetic excitement. Because of its danger!

Quoting these words in this context suggests that another aspect of the film's writer-director split may be a certain hero-worship of Mailer (the man or the type) to which Reisz does not seem the least bit susceptible. On the contrary, Mailer would make a good subject for one of his sympathetic-detached studies. *The Gambler* is not only based on Toback's script; it is also *about* it.

Axel also "improvises" in the sense of this quotation; there is a constant tension between his personality and the movie's non-improvised structure. Mailer's films take off in the opposite direction; and in them, too, he sought danger, physical as well as aesthetic. With a certain relish, he has described how Rip Torn attacked him during the shooting of *Maidstone,* thus providing it with a big scene. Axel is also supposed to be a writer; at any rate, his grandfather describes him, with no apparent irony, as a "future author of immortal books." How are we to take this? Axel doesn't even write a check during the movie; he certainly isn't a gambling George Plimpton. If we could see him collecting risky experiences for use in writing, we could observe how he uses them and how this changes their nature. As things stand, Axel is totally unbelievable as a writer, even in the publish-or-perish sense.

This may be the film's point; but, more likely, it is both a failure of characterization and an unintended result of casting James Caan in the role. The part of a star calls for a star, but Caan may be the wrong one. The old-time stars had simpler, more clearly defined personas than he and most of his contemporaries do, which is one reason why, by and large, he and they are better actors. But, in his movies, Caan tends to project a certain lassitude, an easy-going befuddlement, which seems at odds with Axel's obsession. His most characteristic roles thus far appear to have

been the brain-damaged football player in *The Rain People,* the puzzled ex-con in *Slither,* the Baptist sailor in *Cinderella Liberty,* and the unstable Sonny Corleone in *The Godfather.* Understanding intellectuals seems to lie outside the range of most American actors, whatever they may be offscreen; as a scholar, Caan makes an admirable try but doesn't quite succeed. Dustin Hoffman does in *Straw Dogs;* but David Sumner is closer than Axel to the traditional fussy, abstracted stereotype. Hoffman is believable at the blackboard but a bit uneasy amid violence; in *The Gambler,* Caan is almost exactly the opposite. However, Hoffman's uneasiness also comments on David Sumner because we know that Sumner is at home in front of a blackboard. Since we don't have the same certainty about where Axel is at home, Caan's uneasiness lacks this extra dimension.

Still, it is a tribute to him, Reisz, and Toback that even their failures are stimulating and that they do not detract from the climax of Axel's quest. When gangsters make him induce Spencer to shave points, Spencer readily agrees but accepts only the most minimal risk, and for money alone. Axel's ideals and pretensions crumble. Now others work their wills upon him; now his obsession consumes another, as Naomi unknowingly predicted when she described the "secret connection" between bookies and junkies. Yet Spencer's eagerness to be corrupted mocks even his guilt; his romantic quest has become a sordid, mindless cul-de-sac. Reisz shrewdly uses suspense over the outcome of the fixed game to make us experience his moral impotence. Afterwards, engulfed by self-disgust, Axel tries to commit suicide by taunting the pimp into cutting his throat. All along, he has been flirting more and more openly with death, the ultimate answer to his anguish over transience. Poised openly on the brink at last, bleeding from a vicious cheek slash, he gazes in wonderment at a mirror as another rush of ecstasy wells up and explodes in his spirit. But, despite its flaws, *The Gambler* has been structured and directed so well that, unlike *California Split,* it needs no pat conclusion to pull it together. Reisz is the one who has made a truly open film, for by fading out without moralizing on Axel's wounded, smiling face, he makes sure that we will be unable to do the same as we leave the theater. We know Axel in depth, yet he remains an enigma for our meditation.

—MICHAEL DEMPSEY

CALIFORNIA SPLIT

Split: champagne for two, a rather phallic dessert, a sudden departure, a lovers' quarrel, or the division of a sum of money—the title of Altman's latest film is already as cluttered and resonant as its disorderly but perfectly balanced widescreen images, its jerky, fits-and-starts editing, or the fugal composition of its sound track. The wonder of this film is, above all, that it remains tightly integrated while constantly threatening to explode, to split apart at its "seems." An apparently aimless plot, simple yet ideally supple, balances on a weird narrative tightrope, and one only knows where it is going and why after it has been there and gone. Two men meet at a poker club; one is an habitué, the other a novice. The film recounts, as a sort of "sentimental education" (and, indeed, with a forthrightly Flaubertian sense of irony) their plunge into the world of gambling: poker, horse racing, prize fighting, football betting, an orgy of games of chance in Vegas followed by the final "split."

In its manner of storytelling Altman's film most vividly recalls his own *Brewster McCloud* and Fellini's *Dolce Vita* or *Juliet of the Spirits. California Split* works through its rambling narrative in a disciplined way, producing integration at levels where most films merely support an already achieved structure of events. Charlie (Elliott Gould) and Bill (George Segal), teacher and student, wander through a series of adventures unified chiefly by a set of *leitmotifs* and complicated internal references. Detail meshes with detail: the crow which "never seen an elephant fly" which Bill refers to in his first conversation with Charlie will become the "blackbird" of the ending titles song and also the elephant whose trunk Bill strokes before going in to play poker in the last narrative seg-

been the brain-damaged football player in *The Rain People,* the puzzled ex-con in *Slither,* the Baptist sailor in *Cinderella Liberty,* and the unstable Sonny Corleone in *The Godfather.* Understanding intellectuals seems to lie outside the range of most American actors, whatever they may be offscreen; as a scholar, Caan makes an admirable try but doesn't quite succeed. Dustin Hoffman does in *Straw Dogs;* but David Sumner is closer than Axel to the traditional fussy, abstracted stereotype. Hoffman is believable at the blackboard but a bit uneasy amid violence; in *The Gambler,* Caan is almost exactly the opposite. However, Hoffman's uneasiness also comments on David Sumner because we know that Sumner is at home in front of a blackboard. Since we don't have the same certainty about where Axel is at home, Caan's uneasiness lacks this extra dimension.

Still, it is a tribute to him, Reisz, and Toback that even their failures are stimulating and that they do not detract from the climax of Axel's quest. When gangsters make him induce Spencer to shave points, Spencer readily agrees but accepts only the most minimal risk, and for money alone. Axel's ideals and pretensions crumble. Now others work their wills upon him; now his obsession consumes another, as Naomi unknowingly predicted when she described the "secret connection" between bookies and junkies. Yet Spencer's eagerness to be corrupted mocks even his guilt; his romantic quest has become a sordid, mindless cul-de-sac. Reisz shrewdly uses suspense over the outcome of the fixed game to make us experience his moral impotence. Afterwards, engulfed by self-disgust, Axel tries to commit suicide by taunting the pimp into cutting his throat. All along, he has been flirting more and more openly with death, the ultimate answer to his anguish over transience. Poised openly on the brink at last, bleeding from a vicious cheek slash, he gazes in wonderment at a mirror as another rush of ecstasy wells up and explodes in his spirit. But, despite its flaws, *The Gambler* has been structured and directed so well that, unlike *California Split,* it needs no pat conclusion to pull it together. Reisz is the one who has made a truly open film, for by fading out without moralizing on Axel's wounded, smiling face, he makes sure that we will be unable to do the same as we leave the theater. We know Axel in depth, yet he remains an enigma for our meditation.

—MICHAEL DEMPSEY

CALIFORNIA SPLIT

Split: champagne for two, a rather phallic dessert, a sudden departure, a lovers' quarrel, or the division of a sum of money—the title of Altman's latest film is already as cluttered and resonant as its disorderly but perfectly balanced widescreen images, its jerky, fits-and-starts editing, or the fugal composition of its sound track. The wonder of this film is, above all, that it remains tightly integrated while constantly threatening to explode, to split apart at its "seems." An apparently aimless plot, simple yet ideally supple, balances on a weird narrative tightrope, and one only knows where it is going and why after it has been there and gone. Two men meet at a poker club; one is an habitué, the other a novice. The film recounts, as a sort of "sentimental education" (and, indeed, with a forthrightly Flaubertian sense of irony) their plunge into the world of gambling: poker, horse racing, prize fighting, football betting, an orgy of games of chance in Vegas followed by the final "split."

In its manner of storytelling Altman's film most vividly recalls his own *Brewster McCloud* and Fellini's *Dolce Vita* or *Juliet of the Spirits. California Split* works through its rambling narrative in a disciplined way, producing integration at levels where most films merely support an already achieved structure of events. Charlie (Elliott Gould) and Bill (George Segal), teacher and student, wander through a series of adventures unified chiefly by a set of *leitmotifs* and complicated internal references. Detail meshes with detail: the crow which "never seen an elephant fly" which Bill refers to in his first conversation with Charlie will become the "blackbird" of the ending titles song and also the elephant whose trunk Bill strokes before going in to play poker in the last narrative seg-

ment of the film. Parallel to the extensive birds-and-animals series (the elephant, in turn, weighs less according to Charlie than the tongue of the sperm whale . . .) is another similar series of numbers: the seven dwarfs referred to, again in the men's first conversation, will become the seven which ends the final set of crap rolls, and so on.

Dwarfs, for that matter, are according to Jung symbols of disassociation of the self, and on many levels *California Split* is indeed a tale of coming apart, told in a fashion that mirrors this theme. The beautifully Felliniesque sound track gives several examples. At many points sound track and image are counterpointed rather than working in unison, most effectively in the opening credits. Often music is only identifiable as "on the sound track" or "in the story" in retrospect, forcing the viewer into a perplexing yet appropriate state of uncertainty. Sometimes they mix: walking down a street in Vegas Charlie sings in unison with a rendition of "Me and my Shadow" totally independent of the image and story situation. With the end credits (to "Bye, Bye Blackbird") this sort of impossible mixture occurs in an inverse and even more unsettling way.

This coming apart of appearances, of representatives, underlies the film's portrayal of sexuality also. At one level of reading, the movie is a traditional, heterosexual adventure tale with two women—"hookers with hearts of gold"—intervening marginally to sustain this aspect of the fiction. At another level the women's very independence underlies the profoundly homoerotic aspects of the story: Charlie and Bill become partners for the last time after the symbolic crossed phalli of the "one armed piccolo player" joke. The film's most prominent lip-to-lip kiss is between the men, and the only extensive physical intimacy between the women. But at the most fundamental stratum of meaning, *California Split* is almost totally asexual, and the final object of value is "value" itself, the value of cards and numbers, signs like the "ace in the hole" of one of the songs from the sound track.

But we should remember, to paraphrase Freud, that at times an ace is nothing but an ace, and the "hole" is simply the emptiness of systems of meaning exemplified in the film by games of chance. This emptiness itself is the final subject of *California Split*. Like other of Altman's films, it concerns people who try to cover over the essential vacuity of their lives with highly interesting personal wallpaper, becoming *papier maché*-like figures similar to the green parrot which Charlie brings back from Mexico: spiritually they "don't eat nothing, don't dirty nothing," because ultimately they already *are* "nothing." —ALAN WILLIAMS

ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANY MORE

Direction: Martin Scorsese. Script: Robert Getchell. Photography: Kent L. Wakeford. Warner.

The film opens oddly. Alice, as a young girl, wanders beside an obviously studio-built farmhouse while, on the sound track, Alice Faye sings "You'll Never Know." Then young Alice starts to sing it, declaring that she does it better. Suddenly the word "now" reverberates over and over as the image recedes into the distance. Cut to a real residential street in Socorro, N.M., with seventies rock music saturating the sound track.

At the time I saw only two reasons for this opening. First, Scorsese was offering an almost routine tribute to the old Hollywood which made him a film buff. Second, he couldn't resist the *coup de théâtre* of that leap from nostalgic past to gritty present. I missed a third and deeper reason, but that was understandable at the time.

My expectations of *Alice* were based mainly on Scorsese's previous feature, *Mean Streets*. Though "widely acclaimed," as the ads say, this left me cold. Oh yes, I admired the efficiency of its making. Dark, glinting interiors, edgy dialogue, strategic bursts of action, long takes with the camera immobile or slowly prowling like a hit man waiting to strike—sure, Scorsese knew what he wanted to put on the screen and how to get it there. You can see this ability taking shape in his short student films: the satirical *It's Not Just You, Murray* skips nimbly through space and time while the simple joke of *The Big Shave* comes out in a linear crescendo. Scorsese is not only efficient but versatile, matching different

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Scorsese's MEAN STREETS

means to different ends. But what was the end in *Mean Streets?*

It seemed to be little more than high-class melodrama—a display of hyped-up situations and attitudes. Although the action appeared to pivot around the most reflective character (Harvey Keitel), his reflectiveness turned out to be just another "dramatic contrast" in the general buildup of effect. I was conscious not only of exaggeration but of calculation—usually below the surface but sometimes showing itself clearly, as in the incidental outbursts of violence involving the Carradine brothers and the Vietnam returnee.

Was this all there was to *Mean Streets?* Scorsese told interviewers that the film distilled youthful memories of New York City's Little Italy—it really was like that, he said, referring to the general atmosphere of the film rather than to specific events. If so, I could give *Mean Streets* the benefit of the doubt and assume a cultural gap due to my own English background.

But with Scorsese's short documentary on his parents, *Italianamerican* (shown at the 1974 New York Film Festival as part of a program entitled ("Roots"), the presumed cultural gap failed to show. The film was accessible and enjoyable. Of course, it gives an objectified view of the New York Italian experience, quite unlike the subjective dramatization of *Mean Streets.* All the same, the parents' speech and gestures embody the culture that is being discussed and, having a spontaneity that goes beyond any of the improvisation in *Mean Streets,* plays an important part in shaping the film as a whole. In short, Scorsese's directorial hand rests on this film much more lightly than on *Mean Streets.* So the cultural gap is probably not at issue, and my case against the melodrama of *Mean Streets* must remain open. (Scorsese has made two other features, actually, which he would just as soon forget: *Who's That Knocking on My Door* and *Boxcar Bertha.*)

Now comes *Alice,* which marks a big break with Scorsese's recent film-making—and it is this break which gives the opening scene its further significance. With the leap from studio-made thirties to real seventies Scorsese is symbolically detaching himself from his own remembered past. He is turning from New York City to the desert states; from an exclusive and specific Italian milieu to a generalized Anglo-Saxon Protestantism (which can casually assimilate Lelia Goldoni, heroine of Cassavetes's *Shadows,* as Alice's neighbor); and from a predominantly male view of the world to the experience of a woman.

Alice (Ellen Burstyn) is married to Donald, a truck driver who continually clashes with their bright and bratty 12-year-old son, Tommy. With a handful of scenes which might have been torn out of a full-length study of this menage, a fictitious "American Family," Scorsese plunges the viewer straight into Alice's domestic life—or rather, predicament, since she exists mainly as a mediator between the two males, cajoling Tommy into a de-escalation of his warfare against Donald, placating Donald with sex, and of course clearing up the battlefield of spilled soup and broken dishes. Alice seems to take all this with superhuman patience, but then she has had years to gradually adjust. By stripping away all preparation and elaboration, Scorsese hits the viewer with the full nightmare of her married life.

Then Donald is killed in a highway accident. Alice finds herself thrown into a new role: *she* must make the decisions. Her first instinct is to take refuge in the past. She sells the house and sets off with Tommy for her childhood hometown, Monterey. She also plans to earn money by resuming her pre-marriage career as a singer.

Scorsese has already made it clear that the childhood home of her memory is unreal—this

is the more prosaic significance of the opening scene with its painted backcloths. Now, in the rest of the film, he shows how Alice's attempted flight into the past modulates into a journey forward.

First stop, Phoenix—and Alice herself rises from the ashes of her domesticity as she goes job hunting in a sexy new dress and hairdo. After a brief nervous crisis, she is hired as singer in a cocktail lounge. The ambivalence is effective: on the one hand, she is deliberately reverting to a sexist frame of reference; on the other hand, she is asserting her own abilities. It is a step backward and forward at the same time.

A customer at the lounge, Ben (Harvey Keitel), becomes her lover. He turns out to be married, and when his pathetic wife comes to see Alice, he storms in with supermacho violence, throws his wife out and insists that Alice go on seeing him. Instead, Alice and Tommy hastily take to the road again.

Next stop, Tucson. Unable to get a singing job, Alice becomes a waitress at an unpretentious café. Again, her progress is ambivalent. The work takes her a long way back to being a housewife, serving and clearing up after a predominantly male clientele. But it also takes her further away from unreality—from the attempt to relive her youthful past, and also from the fake gentility of the cocktail lounge (reflected in the quiet, smiling overtures with which Ben masked his sexist violence).

Alice embarks on another love affair. This, too, is with a customer, a bearded rancher named David (Kris Kristofferson), whose gentleness turns out to be secure. But a crisis develops. On Tommy's birthday, David gives a party for the three of them at his ranch. When Tommy be-

Ellen Burstyn and Diane Ladd in ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE

haves with unusual brattiness, David administers a spanking. Alice flies into a rage and storms out, saying she's through with David—presumably because his "attack" on Tommy, however well justified, falls into place in her mind alongside the violence of Ben and Donald.

Later, David comes to the café and tells Alice, simply and directly, that he wants to see her again. The customers watch with interest and break into applause when Alice finally consents. The film ends with the two of them walking away together down the street.

In this last scene the viewer can hardly fail to notice a motel whose sign dominates the frame: its name is "Monterey." This is surely no accident but a deliberate reminder of the opening scene: only now, instead of hoping for a childhood refuge, Alice has come to terms with the transience of things.

But that sign bothered me. Wasn't it too neat a symbol? And it called my attention to other, similar elements in the film. Alice's odyssey from Socorro (Spanish for "help") to Phoenix (rebirth) to Tucson resolved itself too easily into the schema analyzed above, with the two men appearing patly as the *diabolus* (Ben) and *deus* (David) *ex machina*. Ben's outburst of violence seemed to spring directly from the calculated melodrama of *Mean Streets*. And in the Tucson café, Alice fits too neatly in between the stereotypes of the other two waitresses: brassy good nature and wilting incompetence.

Still, viewed from another angle, these elements can be seen as attempts to achieve density, to compress a lot of information into a brief filmic time. They do not arouse a single ready-made response in the viewer (for example, as already shown, Alice's "rebirth" at Phoenix is ambivalent). But they do enable Scorsese to dispense with lengthy exposition and focus on essentials.

These essentials would include many scenes which, at first sight, resemble the "neat" elements but in fact go beyond them in complexity. One example is Alice's leavetaking from her neighbor Bea: as the two women weep, their sons exchange looks of tolerant contempt—a glimpse of sexual role-playing which is at the same time an integral part of the action, since Alice will spend much of the film learning how to let go of the familiar. Another, subtly related example is the tender scene between Alice and David after they first make love, when she reminisces about her older brother's attempts to pose as a kissing expert: here, for the first time in the film, she is able to treat her past not as a lost paradise to be yearned for but as an experience she can draw on in the present.

Scorsese spent a long time with Ellen Burstyn and writer Robert Getchell in working out the final details of Alice's character and experiences. In addition to its obvious advantages, this kind of collaboration involves risks—a possible loss of focus, a compromise rather than a reinforcement of creative ideas. Such weaknesses do seem to emerge toward the end of the film. David remains a curiously thin character: the viewer learns very little about his outlook on life, or for that matter his *way* of life (his ranching appears to be only a hobby). Yet he marks the culmination of Alice's odyssey: when last seen, she has given up another slice of her independence for this indefinite man. This ending looks like a retreat from sharper alternatives.

In other words, after trying to find fault with *Alice* for being too neat, I'm now suggesting that it isn't quite neat enough. But here, too, a shift of angle is possible. This isn't meant to be a conventional happy ending, with Alice finally in the arms of Mr. Right. It may be just a tentative halt in her odyssey. David remains "thin" because Alice herself doesn't know him yet, though she likes him well enough to find out more. As for independence—it wasn't that which sent her running in a panic from Phoenix. And she won't gain it by running away now.

The last scene of the film includes more than Alice, David, and the Monterey Motel. Taken with a telephoto lens, it also brings a distant mountain looming over the casual activities of the street—a confrontation of the permanent and the transient, of solidity and disorder, of Alice's dream and the reality she is learning to cope with.

Like the opening leap from past to present, this final image can also be applied to the film

itself. The vigor of *Alice* arises in large part from a similar confrontation—between the elements loosely described above as "too neat" and "not neat enough." I am referring here not to the simple oppositions between studio and location, planning and improvisation (since *Mean Streets,* which incorporated all of these, lacked the particular quality of *Alice*), but to a flexibility or unexpectedness in the matching of form and content (or language and message). It is the continual shifting of modality between the schematic and the diffuse which stimulates the viewer to adjust his/her mental focus, and thus discover fresh implications in Alice's odyssey.

My praise of flexibility is not meant to be normative. These criteria do not apply to films which present a closed world of their own, like *Marienbad* or *2001*. They *may* apply to other films which claim to present part of the real world. But I am using them here only to distinguish between *Mean Streets* and *Alice*. Of course, it may be argued that *Mean Streets* presents a closed world—literally, in being exclusive to one ethnic group in one neighborhood, and figuratively, in belonging to Scorsese's memory—and the critics who praised the film no doubt saw it that way. But I could see it only as a real world reduced to an *objet d'art,* impressive to look at but hermetic.

Alice is equally impressive to look at. It also opens up and lets you inside.

—WILLIAM JOHNSON

THE HOURGLASS*

(Sanatorium pod Klepsydra) Director: Wojciech Has. Photography: Witold Sobocinski. Script: Has, from writings by Bruno Schulz. Music: Jerzy Maksymiuk. Film Polski.

To talk about this dream-like picture one must first consider its source: the writings of Bruno Schulz. Has openly states that the sole *raison d'être* of the film, on which he worked for five

Has's THE HOURGLASS

years, is his fascination with the work of a man whose talent was of international rank, but is nonetheless one of the least known authors even in his home country. Born in 1892, Schulz was a provincial drawing teacher in Drohobycz, a small town in southeastern Poland. He wrote little, did not seem to attach much importance to the activity, and did not venture beyond short stories. All that he left behind can be contained in a single volume. He published two collections of stories (in 1934 and 1937), but they attracted comparatively little interest. To use an easy paradox, his prose was simply too good. It was related to surrealism and expressionism, bent on autobiographic introspection, tied very intimately to the personality of the author's father who is depicted in half-heroic and half-grotesque tones, and above all it was deeply rooted in small-town Galicia. Formerly an Austrian crown-land and after 1918 again a part of Poland, Galicia was a most curious country. Someone who does not have firsthand experience of this conglomeration of dignified poverty, vivid intellectual temperaments, Jewish enterprise, and picturesque handicrafts will not understand

*The film's Polish title, like that of the literary original, plays upon the double meaning of *klepsydra:* (i) hourglass, (ii) obituary notice. A full rendering as *The Hourglass Sanatorium* would seem more indicative of the spirit and connotations of the work.

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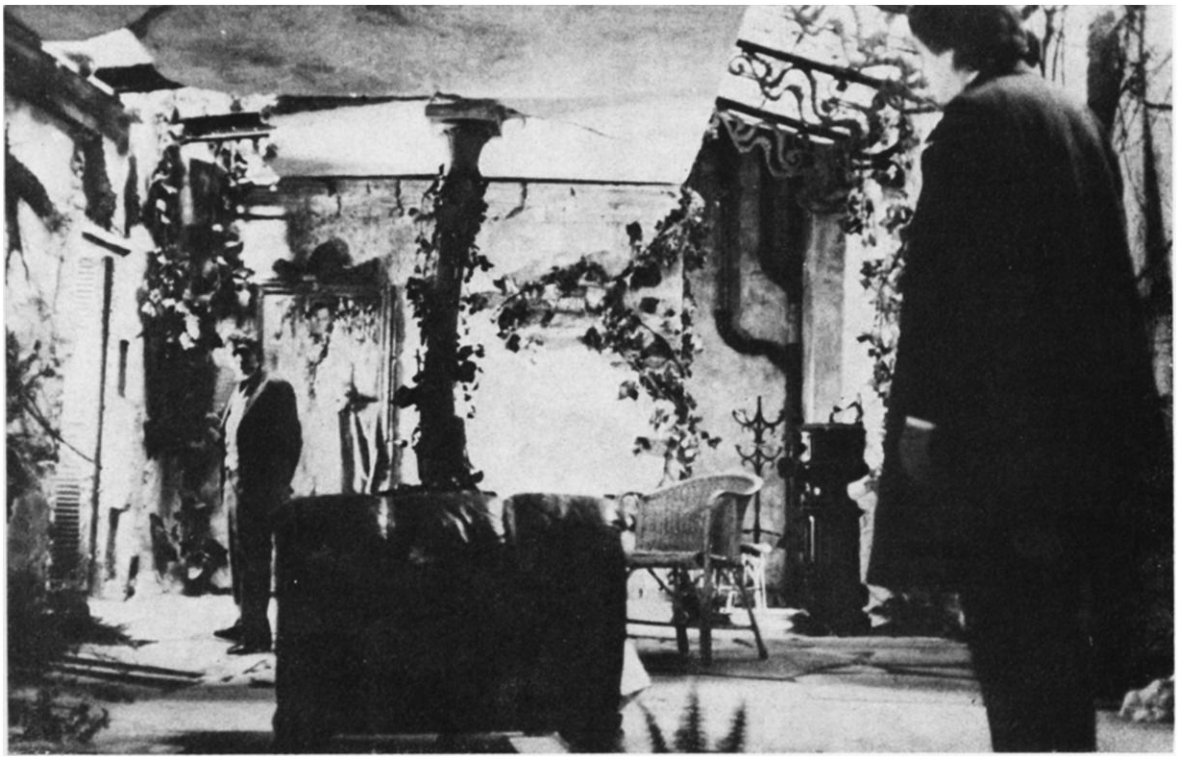

Has's curious Galician atmosphere

fully the Galician spirit—unless he penetrates through *The Hourglass*. For one value of the film is beyond question: the inspired accuracy of description of the writer's world, a world which was to vanish irrevocably during World War II. This aptness of description is not fortuitous. Has is a Galician by birth, by temperament, and by choice, and his tastes, particularly visual, have their roots in the *fin de siècle* artistic avantgarde of Cracow. The work of Schulz had fascinated him since early youth.

Surrealism and expressionism, autobiographic introspection, dramatic struggle against provincialism, close ties with a concrete and very specific milieu: does this make Schulz's writings comparable to those of Franz Kafka? They are in some respects comparable, but in others very different. Schulz (who as a matter of fact translated *The Trial* into Polish) covers a wider spectrum of moods and situations and does not allow himself to be overawed by the incomprehensible social machinery, but rambles freely through the labyrinth of his literary world, penetrating it with his space-time metamorphoses, brushing the dust from his shoulders with an indulgent smile —while Kafka appears to bow under the weight of his dust. Schulz seems more at ease, is more lyrical, full of specific magic and autumnal wit. The stigma of tragedy was added to this portrait only by history, on whose orders Schulz was shot in 1942 in the street of the Drohobycz ghetto. Has remembered this and his film is an elegy in which the memory of the destruction of Galician Jewry is an important element.

While talking about keys to the understanding of *The Hourglass* one must state that the immediate image on the screen is in a sense independent of the higher level of meaning—in other words the film defends itself well without help from symbolism, philosophical conclusions, or the literary original. The reasons for this will be found in the extraordinary lightness of direction. Has is very far from the all too common desire of directors to say everything in minute detail, to haul across the screen Hidden Meanings and make Important Points. His work is characterized by a sense of following the right path, the quality which allows the adoption of dancing pace and good humor. It is just in this

same mood that *The Hourglass* should be received—without jumping eagerly at the suspected metaphors, without pursuing the evasive logic of the narrative. One should simply subject oneself calmly to the film, *feel* it rather than *watch* it, float on the waves of its tracking and panning shots, relish its visual imagery which Has serves liberally, for example in the scenes of the Sabbath feast.

All this does not of course mean that, with all its sense of humor, the picture amounts to a fairground display, a visual toy like Has's *Saragossa Manuscript*—not that Schulz's writings are less amenable to such treatment than was Potocki's novel. The point is that *The Hourglass* is *not* a film adaptation of the short stories in question. It is rather an improvisation on literary themes, an elegiac vision of their world. The director himself describes the film as a dream about death. An attempt at a literal transfer to the screen of such literature would be doomed, at least in the present state of the language of the cinema, simply because the fabric of Schulz's surrealist imaginings is very often the language itself and not the images formed through its medium. If we come across in his work instances of thinking in images, it is almost always done in the form of phantasmagoric transformations of surrounding people and objects, visions attacking several senses at once, supplied in the first person singular. Take an example from the short story which lends its title to the film:

> A few days back I wrote to a book-dealer about a certain pornographic book. . . . I entered my father's shop. . . . The reply had arrived. I opened the letter and began to read in the weak light diffusing from the door. I was advised that the book I demanded was unfortunately not in stock. In the meantime the firm took the liberty to send me, without obligation, a certain article which was expected to arouse my undoubted interest. Then followed a description of a collapsible astronomical telescope of great light-power and multiple other virtues. Curious, I took the instrument out of the envelope . . . and began to assemble it. . . . It was something in the manner of an oblong automobile made of canvas, some theatrical prop which sought to imitate the solidity of the real world with a light fabric of paper and stiff tarpaulin. I looked into the black funnel of the eye-piece and saw in the bottom the barely looming outlines of the yard of the Sanatorium. My interest aroused, I squeezed myself deeper into the rear chamber of the instrument. Now I followed in the field of vision of the telescope a chambermaid walking along the half-dark corridor of the Sanatorium. She turned back and smiled. Can she see me? I wondered. Irresistible drowsiness veiled my eyes with mist. I was in fact seated in the rear chamber of the telescope, as if in a coach. A light touch of the lever and the instrument began to rustle and flutter like a paper butterfly; I felt it to move with me and turn towards the door. Like a big black caterpillar the telescope rode into the brightly lit shop—an enormous paper cockroach . . . The shop-assistants threw the doors to the street open and I drove out slowly in this paper automobile, through a double row of guests who with shocked glances followed this veritably scandalous exit.

The above passage explains why Schulz is not bodily transferable to the screen: literal filming would either be lost amid technical tricks or would repel with its hermetic strangeness. On the other hand, Has did not intend to make a cinematic essay-reminiscence, and so he based himself on fragments of the plots of many short stories, and condensed within the framework of the plot of one of them the most interesting and most characteristic motifs of Schulz's work, while providing his own directional comment in the film's sets. Not surprisingly so: the personal stamp of Has's films, their center of gravity, lies in their imagery, whose main elements are the characteristic post - expressionist lighting and ornamental sets. The latter are more often than not designed in close cooperation with Jerzy and Lidia Skarzynski. The impressive effects of the collaboration were seen in *The Saragossa Manuscript,* but there the main concern of the designers was with taste and brilliance. Here, the aim was to resurrect from the ashes a certain reality, as seen through the eyes of the fantasist. While the hero travels to the sanatorium where his father is re-animated, thanks to manipulations with Time, Has carries out a parallel cinematic journey whereby he brings back to life a vision of Galicia of the thirties, using the time-tricks the cinema has to offer. A friend who was five minutes late for the film later said he could not make head or tail of it. Indeed, without its frame Has's film loses its balance; but this is in

fact a proof of its coherence. On the other hand, any further metaphors and associations which may occur to one are not to be taken too seriously; Schulz did not care much for metaphors and Has follows him in this respect—references and hints are not of vital importance for the narrative, even the fact that the resurrected Galicia has the colors of a painted corpse, at once more vivid and more morbid than reality, like the flushed face of a consumptive.

Some might complain that the frame of the film, the train journey, is now a hackneyed device. True, among others it was used in an identical form in another Polish picture, Konwicki's *Salto* (1965). The point is, however, that the train journey was the idea of Schulz himself, as a journey to a different dimension of past reality. Moreover, in *The Hourglass* the opening train journey has associations with transport to a concentration camp, just as the final flight of the Jews from a deserted town brings to mind the Nazi ghettos.

Thus the screen replica of Schulz's work is very much a director's vision of his world, his motifs, and his magic transformations of a provincial landscape. Has rules over it according to his own dictatorial laws, setting in motion the logic of a dream and claiming total freedom of associations. Is not all that easy? Does it do justice to the literary material? In other words, does it deserve any particular credit?

It certainly deserves credit. If Schulz's work can be brought to life on the screen at all, it is hard to imagine this done in a fuller form. Similarly, having decided to make a *film onirique,* Has achieves an outstanding result within the loose framework of this genre. *The Hourglass* is not only faithful to a certain literary atmosphere and a certain bygone kingdom—it is also directed with mastery. Only perhaps not *constructed* with mastery: the coherence of the picture is somewhat disrupted by the frequent exotic inserts originating from "The Spring," another short story by Schulz. One can have some sympathy with Has who, while trying to convey the spirit of Schulz's work fully, could not deny himself these odd inclusions. All the same, these Caribbean fragments are something of an alien body. Apart from that there are in the picture certain lapses of dramatic tension which cannot be excused either by the character of the story or by visual considerations. The latter at least provide welcome relief for those viewers who are more resistant to Has's kaliedoscopic collection. Like Paradzhanov, he has a feel for a beautiful object; he knows, like Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky, how to invest objects with a bygone charm; like Visconti, he can create with objects a rich splendor. Perhaps Has cannot give the background a compulsive dynamic power, as Fellini can, but he still displays his wares with great fluency. On the other hand, this fluency is somewhat disrupted not so much by the editing, as by the characteristic manner of embarking on a shot which Has employs—setting the camera in panning or tracking motion at the very same instant in which the actor begins to move. This is a source of some stiffness, but then it can hardly be blamed on the actors.

The cast was chosen with care and insight; Gustaw Holoubek, the most intellectual of Polish actors, gives Doctor Gotard diabolical intelligence. Tadeusz Kondrat, whose face well suits the personality of the father metamorphosing on the pages of the book into a quasi-bird, delights with his croaky-voiced good nature and his ability to bear the onus of everyday commonplaces. Finally Jan Nowicki, ironic and relaxed but at the same time intimately involved in making the acquaintance of the mysteries of a magic world, plays the part of a guide, a medium, and an explorer who is being initiated. Nowicki's discreet affection towards the father, his brisk curiosity for the Sought and intelligent, melancholy surprise at the Found, contributes a good deal to the variety of moods of *The Hourglass.*

—ADAM GARBICZ

Books

[Following roughly the pattern of our previous book survey issues, we have prepared a huge round-up of book reviews and annotations, covering most of the film books of 1974. Unfortunately, space limitations have led us to hold over most of this material until the following issue.]

FILM AND THE NARRATIVE TRADITION

By John L. Fell. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1974. $9.95.

This is a scholarly book in the finest old tradition: it accumulates fascinating information, much of it quite esoteric, about nineteenth-century precursors of film in stage melodrama, popular fiction, lithography and photography, optical toys, comics, and other types of what we now call "popular culture." Fell has an admirable sense of history and a nose for the telling fact; and he writes everywhere with a vivid realization that film, as it came into existence, was part of a complex matrix of related entertainments from which it drew, naturally enough, most of its strength—contrary to the widely held notion that it sprang fullblown from a mechanical invention. He gives a supple account of the flowering, in Victorian literature, of the kind of sharp-visioned sensibility that fit in so well with the coming of film. He traces film-like movement in early comic strips, whose variation of perspectives exceeded that of their contemporary films. (Fell's enthusiasm carries him here into a digression, duly apologized for, on modern Marvel Comics, which carry framing and *mise en scène* beyond anything the feature film has managed.) He brings into his net dioramas, song-slide sequences from vaudeville, Impressionist painting. It is not that no one has ever before paid attention to these developments (as Fell's excellent bibliography would of course attest). But no one has previously tried seriously

to construct a documented overview of how film related to its predecessor and contemporary cultural forms. Fell's book is not "theoretical" in any ponderous way, but I think he quietly proves his central contention: that the elements of popular culture evidenced a common narrative direction which naturally culminated in early film forms. The precise upshot is indicated, fittingly, in a detailed survey of the narrative techniques deployed in the 1894–1912 films restored and indexed by Kemp Niver. —E. C.

JEAN RENOIR

By Raymond Durgnat. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974. $16.50.

Because the UC Press is also the publisher of FQ, we do not give normal reviews to Press books, as they might be taken as corrupt plugs. In this spirit of *caveat lector,* I will say only that I like Durgnat's *Renoir* very much; it seems to me that Durgnat's loose, associative style (here operating within a rigid film-by-film organization) explicates the artistic, cultural, and political ramifications of Renoir's films more richly than any other writer has managed. Doubtless no one will ever write a truly definitive Renoir book. This one is however a courageous try. It is, as they say in the book trade, copiously illustrated and the text is long; by current printing costs its price is actually modest.—E.C.

KULESHOV ON FILM

Translated and edited with an Introduction by Ron Levaco. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974. $10.00.

This is another UC Press book that we cannot actually review. Suffice it to say that Kuleshov, heretofore untranslated, was the first great theorist of film (as well as a practicing director) and has influenced Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and everybody since. Levaco's introduction points out that Kuleshov's ideas were in some ways precursors of current semiotic thinking. With this book Kuleshov appears on the shelf occupied by that tiny band of truly important film theorists; he should get, in classes and in commentaries, the attention he has long deserved.—E.C.

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