



#3

CINÉ-TRACTS

A JOURNAL OF FILM AND CULTURAL STUDIES

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE CINEMA

Saul Landau: The Truth Lies on the Cutting Room Floor

Raymond Williams on Realism

John Berger on Jonah

Articles on Walter

Benjamin &

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MARTIN WALSH 1947-1977

The many different journals to which Martin Walsh actively contributed have commented about his unfortunate accidental death. As he was a founding editor of CINE-TRACTS we feel this loss very deeply. He contributed positive energy, many ideas and many practical suggestions to the CINE-TRACTS project. His concern for developing a politicized Canadian film journal was going to be realized in its most complete way by a series of articles he was working on for us on Canadian Cinema. His accident came days before he was to leave for England and an appointment at the University of Kent. His contribution to film studies in Canada will be with us for many years to come.

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EDITORIAL

As this journal moves towards completing its first full year of publication we feel that it is important to specify at least in part, what the project called Cine-Tracts is about.

First and foremost, Ciné-Tracts is not solely or simply a publishing venture. One of our main purposes is to open up a series of debates (especially in Canada) on what we feel are the major theoretical and practical issues surrounding culture and cultural studies (and our bias is towards the investigation of cinema, television, the media as cultural objects). Our exploration of ideology and the 'ideological effect' (see Ciné-Tracts Nos. 1 and 2) leads us necessarily towards various critical methodologies that can be used to 'break apart' and 'reconstruct' the cultural objects such that their 'modes of communication' — their particular articulation of a certain set of meanings — can be recontextualized by analysis — rereadable as a result of reconstruction.

The forms of analysis we choose are premised on historical materialism — but we must make clear that we see these premises as being in a state of crisis and we feel that that crisis as manifested by the shifts in theoretical thinking from Althusser, through Lacan, to Heath, Derrida, Barthes and Williams has led to major innovations and politically crucial changes in Marxist thought on culture.

Cultural criticism must, we feel, 'decode' with the intention of unmasking — not in a mechanical, absolutist, or closed fashion — not from a position of superiority or academic professionalism or pseudo-scientism — but in order to bring out the 'multiple' sets of meaning operating in a text — to render the signifying process 'visible' as structure — a structure contextualized, saturated by and saturating other structures, socio-economic, political, linguistic, and psychological.

The meaning of a cinematic text, for example, is not 'fixed' but exists as evidence of a relation — a relation between signification and 'subject', between desire and its realization through the processes of representation and through the subject's placement within a particular symbolic order and within a particular social or political system.

Meaning and meaning production are not 'neutral' processes. They are constructed by and bound to, particular institutions, particular ideologies, particular contexts. Tracing the inter-relationship between meaning production and material reality is only possible if we recognize the constitutive nature of signifying systems. "Signification, the social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs, is then a practical material activity; it is indeed, literally a means of production. It is a specific form of the practical consciousness which is inseparable from all social material activity. It is not, as formalism would make it, and as the idealist theory of expression had from the beginning assumed, an operation of and within 'consciousness', which then becomes a state or a process separated *a priori* from social material activity. It is on the contrary, at once a distinctive material process — the making of signs — and, in the central quality of its distinctiveness as practical consciousness, is involved from the beginning in all other human, social and material activity." (Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p.38.)

Our use of the word unmasking does not mean that we conceive of ourselves as the bearers of truth in the face of a wall of false consciousness. The notion of false consciousness is not only simplistic but it leads to a dangerously reductionist attitude that pre-supposes an inactive subject 'directed' from outside himself, incapable of responding to, let alone changing, the historical moment which he occupies.

We are deeply concerned with elaborating a theory of the 'subject' in relation to ideology that will creatively move cultural theory towards an active relationship with political practice.

Cultural objects, particularly film, must be confronted as signifying systems, in order to make readable that which 'memory' in the process of viewing (reading) is naturally denied by the logic of narrative, by the particular placement of the subject in narrative. Determining 'how' the subject places (situates) himself has to be at the center of a theory of ideology and language — of psychoanalysis — (See Rosalind Coward and John Ellis' new book, *Language and Materialism*, RKP, 1977.) and it is this broad area that we are trying to explore.

It is our firm belief that a journal like *Ciné-Tracts* can be most effective by raising questions and questioning both its own theory production and the work of others. Generally speaking this issue reflects that philosophy.

RON BURNETT

REALISM, NATURALISM and their ALTERNATIVES

raymond williams

Some very important questions about television drama are currently being discussed around the focal terms 'realism' and 'naturalism'. In trying to follow the discussion what has most struck me is the extraordinary looseness and shallowness with which these terms are commonly used. They are both, in any case, very difficult and complicated terms, and each has a long and complex history. The problems at which they are directed are also, obviously complicated and difficult. But the first intervention that I can usefully make is on the terms themselves. And before this is diagnosed as the pedantry of a professor who is also a writer, may I say that it is not only the confused and myopic terminology that has provoked me, but that through and past this some of the crucial creative and and productive issues are being missed or displaced: the issues that interest me practically, as a writer who also happens to be a professor.

I will state some propositions about the terms realism and naturalism and refer those who wish to see them more fully argued to some things that I have written previously which are noted in the appendix.

1. The terms realism and naturalism did not originally refer to conventions and technical methods in art, literature, and drama, but to changed attitudes towards 'reality' itself, towards man and society and towards the character of all relationships. Thus naturalism was a conscious alternative to supernaturalism and proposed the conscious presentation of human actions in exclusively human and secular terms, as distinct from earlier kinds of drama, fiction and art which had included, as a commanding or at least referential dimension, a superhuman or extra-human power. 'Realism' is more complicated but in its decisive modern development made the same emphasis, and at this level was often interchangeable with naturalism and with materialism.

2. This is not a separable philosophical development, but was the basis for the making of new conventions and methods in art, fiction, and drama. Thus naturalism, specifically associated with the new scientific natural history proposed as a matter of principle that it is necessary to describe (present, embody, realise) an environment if we wish to understand a character, since character and environment are indissolubly linked. Thus naturalist dramatists did not include detailed physical and social settings because it was technically possible with new theatrical technology and resources, or because it was one kind of formal method as against others, but because they insisted that it was impossible to understand character and action unless the full physical and social environment which shaped character and action was directly presented, indeed as a kind of character and action in itself.

3. 'Realism' in its nineteenth century artistic sense was similarly an emphasis on the 'real world' as against the characteristic presentation of the world in romance and myth — seen as including extra-human, supernatural and in these terms irrational (non-comprehensible) forces. It was also an emphasis against theatricality and fictionality and against the presentation of substitute worlds. These substitute worlds were seen as based on earlier writings and on the past; on the separation of 'fancy' from 'fact'; and crucially on the interests and evasions of a bourgeoisie which wanted to avoid looking at the social and human world which it had created and now controlled.

4. Naturalism certainly, and realism to a lesser extent, became confined to certain particular conventions and methods, which, in effect, became separated from the original impulse which had provoked them. There is then a necessary distinction between 'high naturalism' and the 'naturalist habit'. It is the established confidence of the naturalist habit — a naturalized assumption of an immediately negotiable everyday world, presented through conventions which are not seen as conventions — which has since been so powerfully attacked, but usually under the loose title of realism. At the same time in reaction against the naturalist habit conventions have been developed *to take more account of reality, to include psychological as well as external reality, and to show the social and physical world as a dynamic rather than a merely passive and determining environment. These innovations are often described as moves beyond realism and naturalism* but the confusing irony is that most of them are attempts to realise more deeply and adequately the original impulses of the realist and naturalist movements. They must for this reason be distinguished from those other methods and conventions which are based on attempts to restore the world views which realism and naturalism

had attacked: the deliberate reintroduction of supernatural or metaphysical forces and dimensions controlling or influencing human action and character; and the less easily recognisable introduction of forces above and beyond human history in timeless archetypes and myths. For these later methods see the plays of Eliot, Yeats, some Beckett. For the former, see the expressionists and Brecht.

5. In drama, realism is inextricable from new social forces and new versions of social relationships. The crucial moment is the development of realism as a whole form; this must be distinguished from earlier realistic scenes, episodes and insertions. The break to the new whole form is in eighteenth century bourgeois drama, which made three innovations: that the actions of drama should be *contemporary* (almost all earlier drama, by convention, had been set in a historical or legendary past); that the actions and resolutions of drama should be *secular* (conceived and worked through in solely human terms, without reference to a supernatural or metaphysical dimension); and that the actions of drama should move beyond their conventional social exclusiveness (tragedy as confined to princes) and include the lives of all men ('let not your equals move your pity less'). This movement was not completed until the late nineteenth century; it is still predominant. Whatever immediate conventions and methods of presentation are employed the great majority of plays have become, within the terms of this movement, contemporary, secular and socially extended (inclusive).

6. This movement was begun by the bourgeoisie, but in these critical respects — contemporaneity, secularity, social inclusiveness — was at once shared and taken further by the new opponents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class and socialist movements. At this level the diagnosis of 'realism' as a bourgeois form is cant. It makes sense backwards, as a diagnosis of bourgeois realism against feudal and aristocratic forms and assumptions. But in its forward reference, to the crisis within bourgeois culture — that crisis which has produced, as bourgeois forms, many of the anti-realist experiments, at the same time that it has produced anti-bourgeois forms which make the emphasis on contemporaneity, scholarship and social extension more radical and more critical — the diagnosis of 'realism' as simply and epochally 'bourgeois' merely begs the question.

7. Central to all these developments in world view and form is the actual extension and eventually qualitative change, in audiences. Drama had moved out of dependence on court, church or state to post-commercial and commercial institutions which in their essential social composition were also contemporary, secular and socially extended. At the same time there were many contradictions between this general process and particular class affiliations and exclusions in certain institutions (cf. the split between 'West End' and 'popular' theaters in the nineteenth century; the social breaks involved in the new 'free' and 'independent' theaters, all over Europe, in the 1890s, or in the post 1930 'community' theaters and travelling companies. This process with its contradictions, is very evident in theater history. Broadcasting, first in radio (but with internal specialisations; compare, in Britain, Saturday Night Theater and the old Third Programme drama) and then decisively in television, transformed even this general transforming change. Drama was for the first time ever regularly available to a total audience, and was in fact used at a much higher level of frequency than had ever been previously imagined.

Application to problems of television drama.

What then are the main issues in creation and production, in relation to this historical perspective, and to the actual complexity, as distinct from the short term repetitions, of the terms we use to try and interpret it?

a.) The most important general fact about television drama is that it is in qualitatively new social relations with its audiences. It includes, potentially and actually, an incomparably wider social range than any earlier medieval drama, and by comparison with medieval and earlier drama it has moved the popular audience out of drama as structured occasion and into everyday access. As a social movement this is the culmination of a process historically associated with realism.

b.) This qualitative change has occurred within class societies with contradictory results. Access has been negotiated as exposure; and spectacle the new popular audience as a 'mass market'. Yet compare literacy. This was propagated as a way of enabling working people to read the scriptures and simple instructions. But there was, fortunately, no way of teaching people to read the Bible and official notices which did not also enable them to read the radical press or anything else that they chose. The problems shifted to questions of ownership of the means of production and of control at the point of production. Many contemporary arguments about form are displaced versions of these arguments (compare the last part of John McGrath's *The Case Against Naturalism*).

c.) Within the shifting complexities of the institutions the battle for popular drama has been and still is being unevenly and confusingly fought. As in the press, the popular tendency cannot be avoided; there is an imperative to produce popular work including reproduction of wide areas of majority life in one or other mode. This has included every kind of reproductive evasion or displacement, and these forms of the naturalist habit usually tied to a class reproduction ideology, need to be constantly analysed and demystified. At the same time and perhaps especially in Britain the popular tendency has included (usually with internal struggles) dramatisation, in several different ways, of areas of working class life and history which had never before come into any comparably distributed production and which also (quite apart from the size of the audiences) had never in such numbers been previously produced in any cultural form. This important current work has then first to be seen in the historical perspective of the development of realism as a phase of developing class consciousness (the demand to include hitherto excluded experience).

d.) The problems of immediate form have always to be considered in relation to content and to the nature of the audience. Form, theoretically, is always the fusion of specific methods of presentation, specifically selected experience, and specific relations between producer and audience. It is misleading to abstract 'form' (methods of presentation) from these mutually determining relations. That, strictly, is formalism, which assumes that the choice of a method of presentation is purely technical. Formalism in this sense has been reinforced by a fetishism of the medium. The actual production process is a complex of material properties; of processes of signification within these; of social relations between producers and between producers and audiences; and then the inherent and consequent selection of content. To reduce this complex to the 'medium', with supposed objective properties governing all these processes and relations is strictly a fetishism.

e.) Form must then not be deduced from the 'medium' but from the production process as a whole. In this difficult kind of analysis we must avoid the importation of terms which attempt to cover the problems of the whole process but which are at best shorthand, at worst simple expletives. Moreover, since the production process is specific, we should avoid the unthinking repetition of terms from another specific process, which short circuit the argument. (cf. Troy Kennedy Martin, quoted by John McGrath: 'the common denominator in all naturalist plays is that they tell a story by means of dialogue' . To the extent that this is true of all naturalist plays it is true of all written plays from Aeschylus onwards. To call all theater drama naturalist is absurd. The recurrent and variably solved problem, in all drama, including television drama, is the relation between speech and other forms of signification. Naturalism actually used speech less than most other dramatic forms, because it relied, as a matter of principle, on including physical environment as signifying. If we are to get on with the argument, we have to drop use of relatively meaningful historical descriptions as catchwords for all the varying things that we are against. The other supposed specifying factor of naturalism — natural time is in fact a well known dogma of the neo-classical theater.)

f.) In the actual historical development there was eventually a distinction between 'naturalism' and 'realism', which may still be relevant. Naturalism as a doctrine of character formed by environment could emerge — in part of the movement did emerge — as a passive form: people were stuck where they were; compare "the room as trap" within the late bourgeois version of "the stage as room." A counter sense of realism, mainly with Marxism, insisted on the dynamic quality of all 'environments', and on the possibility of intervention to change them, within the forms of this inherent movement. In this sense many of the new 'non-naturalist' conventions — showing character and environment not as fixed forms but as processes of formation, crisis, breakdown, and re-formation — have to be seen not as formal 'anti-realist' innovations but as attempts to signify and realise this new sense of dynamic reality. In the period of the invention and application of the motion-picture camera (e.g., in late Strindberg) attempts were already being made to signify mobility, discontinuity and alternation on the stage. Obviously the technical possibilities of all these new kinds of signification were radically extended by the double (photographed and photographing) mobility of the camera and by processes of film and videotape cutting and editing. Thus television like film, can, in the simple terms of technical possibility move comparatively easily into this 'post-naturalist' world.

g.) Yet mobility, discontinuity and alternation were, in any case of the significant new drama, tied, consciously, to the perspectives on reality which formed them. If they are abstracted as technicalities, they can be used, or apparently used, in quite different perspectives. Ironically they are now within bourgeois culture, most frequently used to communicate unconnected and inconsequent impressions of a mind or a world that is mobile and dynamic at its surface only, the larger world view which contains them being again and again the static properties of the "human condition" or the symbolic or archetypal permanences of a universalist psychology or a permanently alienated civilisation. Just as we could distinguish 'high naturalism' from the 'naturalist habit', so we can now distinguish dynamic realism from a naturalist or non-realist habit: the mere assumption, as isolated conventions and techniques, of a confused or disinterpreted as distinct from a moving world. Yet formalist analysis cannot normally distinguish between these radically different uses of the same apparent techniques.

h.) The general opportunities for realism in television drama would then seem to be:

(1.) altered, potentially altered and alterable relations between dramatic creators and audiences;

(2.) inclusion, within the contradictions of a necessarily "popular" medium, of historically excluded or subordinated areas of social experience, at many different levels from the reproductive (because it has hitherto been excluded) to the disruptive and the reconstitutive;

(3.) access, within the production process, to actions of the most public kind beyond the scale of the stage or set as room;

(4.) access, within the immediate signifying process to procedures of mobility, discontinuity, alternation of viewpoint, within the terms of altered social relations, and thus the deliberate innovation of dramatic processes of formation, crisis, breakdown and re-formation, within a consciously contemporary, secular and socially transforming perspective. This will include in our own terms, radical opposition to the contemporary forms, naturalist and non-naturalist alike, of 'theatricality' and 'fictionality'; a conscious adhesion to a contemporary, secular and socially transforming world-view; and, crucially, political affiliation to majority experience and its accessible futures.

Within an expanding culture, all kinds of work tend to expand. I think the most interesting new work will be in the area of public actions and mobility and alternation of signification and viewpoint. But given the continuing and massive reproduction of a resigned, displaced and self-cancelling version of majority experience (the naturalist habit deprived of the most significant naturalist intentions, and miscalled realism) there is plenty of room also for the mobility and alternation of viewpoint which is simply the positive insertion, even by the most direct reproductive methods, of a hitherto excluded or subordinated experience. The battles which even this now so often provokes are part of the whole process of changing the culture, which is the only possible perspective for changing its forms. ●

This article is a revised version of a presentation made by Raymond Williams at the Edinburgh Television Event in Aug. of 1977.

APPENDIX

1. For the terms "naturalism" and "realism" see *Keywords* (1976); 181-4 and 216-221.
2. For "high naturalism" and the "naturalist habit" see *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1968), 332-346. See also *The Case of English Naturalism, in English Drama: Forms and Development* (ed. Axton and Williams; 1977).
3. For drama and its contemporary audiences and uses see *Drama in a Dramatised Society* (1975).
4. For television drama see *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1975); 55-61 and *A Lecture on Realism in Screen*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1; 61-75.

JONAH who will be 25 in the year 2000

john
berger



Introduction

There has been a lot of positive feedback on the two letters by John Berger published in Ciné-Tracts number 1. Our readers seem to have related to them in a very positive way.

We are reproducing, here, a portion of the script of the Swiss film *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000* (*Jonah who will be 25 in the year 2000*) co-scripted with director Alain Tanner. Without detailing the plot to any extent — and because the scene basically stands so well on its own the following notes are offered as a means of contextualizing the film.

Marco is one of eight main characters: The year is 1975.

No two characters in the film are quite alike, in terms of class, work, desires, temperament — but the general frame of reference for them all are the events of May 1968 in France. In addition, many are concerned with the future, with work, with the growth and development of their awareness, with a fear of compromising with the status-quo. There is a fair amount of self-conscious questioning on the character's parts — questioning their abilities and inabilities to relate to others, questioning their politics, their lifestyles, the education of their children....

Some seek to concretize their ideological/philosophical positions. This is especially true of Marco, the protagonist of the following scene.

The film deals on one level with "dream life". "Dream life" as a state of mind in which the frustrations of everyday life are diminished by a process of fantasy. Fantasy makes survival somewhat easier, more bearable. For example, in the film the head of a bank is a "pig" and the fantasy-film process has him change into a 'live' pig. Fantasy becomes a means of imagined transcendence, a means through which the characters repress the reality of the contradictions that they are in.

It is the interplay between their fantasies and their reality which is the focus of the film's struggle. Neither reality nor fantasy can be divorced from the on-going daily attempt to develop a relationship with an alienated and alienating social context. Jonah (a child about to be born) is both the projection of a fantasy and the realization of its impossibility. The understanding of this contradiction is the necessary premise on which a more creative form of practice can be generated.

The film leaves open the question of growth, change, political action. Rather, it tries to point out the false scenarios that can be followed, scenarios which confuse the issues rather than clarify them.

In this extract, Marco, short, plumpish, with dark curly hair, enters a very traditional classroom and proceeds to bombard the students with a metaphoric statement on history, in a totally unconventional way. The "lesson" has as its focal point a long uncooked piece of blood pudding. The essence of his talk is about the rise of capitalism and how it transformed pre-existent notions of time, progress, etc. The situation appears contradictory. A conventional classroom, an unconventional teacher. Marco's attempted resolution of this contradiction is to create the kind of metaphors which will fire the student's imaginations. In one sense "giving" the lesson is as important to Marco as giving the students an anti-capitalist analysis of history.

We are presenting the scene in both English and French.

M.A.B.

Scene 12

A college class. The students, male and female, are about sixteen to seventeen years old. The director of the college introduces Marco, the new history professor.

The director

I'd like to introduce you to your new history teacher, Mr. Marco Perly, who will be replacing Mr. Genthod, who, as you know has retired. I'd like you to make him feel at home.

The director leaves. Marco takes the suitcase that he has been holding and puts it on top of his desk. He opens it and takes out a long piece of blood pudding, a small cutting board, a butcher's knife and a metronome. The students look both surprised and amused.

Marco

Don't forget that my father is a butcher and that my mother sings light opera very well.

Laughter. He lays out the blood pudding, brandishes the knife and turns on the metronome.

Marco

Does someone want to cut the blood pudding in time to the metronome?

A young man volunteers and starts to cut the blood pudding. Laughter and shouts in the class.

Marco

O. K. you can stop now.

The young man stops and Marco takes a few pieces of the pudding in his hands.

Marco

Here are some pieces of history! What names can we give to them? What are we going to call them? Hours? Decades? Centuries?

It wouldn't matter what we called them, since, ultimately, each never ends. Blood pudding is eaten with apple sauce on top of it. Is time a blood pudding? Darwin believed that it was although the kind of meat changes from one end of the sausage to the other. Marx thought that one day everybody would stop eating blood pudding. Einstein and Max Planck peeled the skin off theirs, and it then lost all its shape. What is the skin of the blood pudding made of anyway?

A girl

It's made out of a pig's bladder.

Marco

Very good.

Marco slows down the metronome. The young man begins to cut again. Marco stops him.

Marco

*O.K. We can stop playing butcher now. And cut out the laughing, kids. Let's look at the piece of sausage which hasn't been cut yet. We can see the way it bends and winds, meanders. **I want to talk about the forms the blood pudding assumes.** What constitutes a 'bend' or a 'fold' in time? In agrarian societies people believed that time was cyclical, which accounted for the passage of the seasons. Each winter solstice represented the same moment in time. The individual aged, of course, but mainly because he was wearing himself out. He was the fuel that kept the machinery of each season working. Capitalism brought with it the idea of time as a 'high way' — the road to the sun, the road of progress etc. The notion of progress was not simply regarded as one in which 'conquerors' overcame obstacles, winning battles, but rather one in which the 'oppressors' were specifically chosen for their intrinsically superior qualities. This superiority could cross the boundaries of cycles and seasons.*

Superiority transformed cycles and seasons into a corkscrew — the 'conquerors' became the sharp end point of this instrument — the imperialists.

Once in possession of this point, the imperialists opened bottle after bottle of the less developed cultures. They drank until their thirst had been quenched and then threw out the bottles, assuming that they would break. This was a new form of violence this oppression. The sword and the arrow had been used to kill before, but now, the weapon doing the killing was the 'verdict of history'.

The history of Imperialism, to be sure.

This new form of violence brought with it a new type of fear — fear of the past, fear of the peoples who had been oppressed, thrown away like so many broken bottles. If the past could catch up to the oppressors, the oppressed would shed few tears in pity. In the 19th century this fear of the past rationally transformed itself into a system of scientific laws. Time became a road with no curves. The length of the road was frighteningly abstract but but then, abstractions do not seek revenge. From this point on 19th century thinkers chose a fear of abstract thought over a fear of the savage and his arrows. And their roads had signposts. Very regularly situated. Millions of years divided into eras, dates, days and work hours, clocked in on the punch clock. Like blood pudding. To-day at last, we can see that the road, the 'highway' of capitalism is collapsing. . . for more reasons than I can explain with this piece of sausage which has served us so well in this first lesson.

An oak tree, knotted, twisted, meandering, is capable of producing an acorn.. What you are, each one of you, existed in chromosome form at the moment of my conception. Excuse me at the moment of your conception. (laughter) I am not a determinist, but your first cell contained a message, which you are now reading/completing.

There are things which create 'holes' in time.

He goes to the blackboard and makes a drawing.

Marco

The 'holes' are perfectly aligned. (he draws on) One could pass a skewer through them. Don't forget, my father is a butcher. Time 'bends' in order that the holes coincide. And why is it that a prophet is without honour in own country? Because prophets exist between times — they only reach the midpoint in these holes.

Nobody understood Diderot until the moment when an entire generation screamed that Freud was a monster. One needs this kind of time span to get through a hole. The holes made by prophets to look into the future are the same ones through which historians ogle monuments of the past/past achievements.

Look at them ogling the holes dug by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to explain the 18th century to us!

You are looking at your watches. Good. it's time.

We'll finish off with a binary rhythm — heartbeats and banging.

He begins to bang rhythmically on his desk.

Marco

Between each beat there is an interval. Time means recognizing that the second beat is not the first.

Time is created by a process of opposition.

He bangs the desk and several students take up his lead.

Laughter and shouts in the class.

Marco

Time diminishes through a process of synthesis.

The banging intensifies. By now everyone is banging. Marco has to shout to be heard.

Marco

The human embryo transcends evolution.

The banging becomes louder and louder. The class is delirious. More Laughter. Marco roars.

Marco

Time disappears through a total synthesis.

The bell sounds. The class is over.

Scène I2

Classe du collège de X. Les élèves, garçons et filles, ont environ seize ou dix-sept ans. Le directeur du collège présente Marco, le nouveau professeur d'histoire.

Le Directeur

Je vous présente votre nouveau professeur d'histoire, Monsieur Marco Perly, qui remplace des aujourd'hui Monsieur Genthod, qui, comme vous le savez, vient de prendre sa retraite. Je vous prie de lui faire bon accueil.

Le directeur sort. Marco, qui tenait une valise à la main, la dépose sur son pupitre et l'ouvre. Il en sort un long morceau de boudin, un petit étal de une hachette de boucher et un métronome, qu'il montre aux élèves amusés et surpris.

Marco

N'oubliez jamais que mon père est boucher, et que ma mère chante très bien l'opérette.

Rires. Il étale le boudin sur le bois et brandit la hachette, puis met en marche le métronome.

Marco

Est-ce que quelqu'un veut venir couper le boudin. Rires et cris dans la classe.

Marco

Bon, ça va pour le moment.

Le garçon s'arrête. Marco prend quelques morceaux du boudin coupé.

Marco

Voilà les morceaux d'histoire. Comment va-t-on les appeler? des heures? des décades? des siècles? c'est la même chose et ça ne s'arrête jamais. Le boudin se mange avec de la purée de pommes. Est-ce que le temps est du boudin? Darwin le croyait, quoique la nature de la viande changeait d'un bout à l'autre de la saucisse. Marx lui pensait qu'un jour tout le monde s'arrêterait de manger du boudin. Einstein et Max Plank arrachèrent la peau du boudin qui perdit dès lors sa forme. De quoi la peau du boudin est-elle faite?

Une Fille

C'est une vessie de cochon.

Marco

Très bien.

Marco ralentit le métronome. Le garçon se remet à couper en mesure. Marco l'arrête.

Marco

Bon arrêtons la boucherie maintenant. Les rires aussi s'arrêtent, jeunes gens. Regardons maintenant le boudin qui n'est pas encore coupé. On y voit des plis, des méandres. Et c'est de cela que je veux vous parler. De quoi sont faits des plis du temps? Dans les sociétés agricoles les hommes croyaient que le temps consistait simplement en cycles, en saisons. Chaque solstice d'hiver contenait le même moment. L'individu devenait vieux, bien entendu mais c'était simplement parce qu'il s'usait: Il était le combustible qui faisait marcher la machine des saisons. Le capitalisme apportera l'idée du temps-autoroute. L'autoroute du soleil, l'autoroute du progrès. L'idée du progrès c'était que les conquérants n'avaient pas simplement gagné une bataille, mais qu'ils avaient été choisis et désignés en tant qu'êtres intrinsèquement supérieurs. Leur supériorité devait forcément traverser les cycles et les saisons. Elle les transforma en tire-bouchon dont eux, les conquérants, étaient la pointe.

Et avec cette pointe ils ouvrirent les unes après les autres les bouteilles des cultures inférieures. Ils burent jusqu'à étancher leur soif et jetèrent les bouteilles en s'assurant bien qu'elles se cassent. Ceci était une nouvelle forme de violence. La flèche ou l'épée avaient déjà tué, mais ce qui tuait maintenant c'était le verdict de l'histoire. De l'histoire des conquérants, bien sûr. Avec cette nouvelle violence arriva une peur nouvelle chez les conquérants: la peur du passé, la peur des inférieurs dans leurs bouteilles cassées. Ah! si le passé pouvait un jour rattrapper les conquérants, il montrerait certainement aussi peu de pitié qu'ils n'en avaient montré eux. Au dix-neuvième siècle, cette peur du passé fut rationnellement transformée en loi scientifique. Le temps devint alors une route sans virages. La longueur de la route était une abstraction terrifiante, mais les abstractions ne se vengent pas. Dès lors les penseurs du dix-neuvième siècle choisirent la peur de la pensée en éliminant la peur du sauvage et de ses flèches. Et leurs routes avaient des bournes. Absolument régulières. Des millions d'années divisées en ères, en dates, en jours et en heures de travail à pointer sur la machine à pointer. Comme du boudin.

Aujourd'hui, enfin, on voit que l'autoroute, l'autoroute du capitalisme, s'effondre. Pour plus de raisons que je ne peux vous en dire dans le petit bout de boudin qu'est cette leçon inaugurale. Dans un gland il y a déjà les méandres qui donneront la forme du chêne. Ce que vous êtes chacun de vous, était déjà là dans les chromosomes au moment de ma conception. Je vous demande pardon, de votre conception. Je ne suis pas un déterministe, dans votre première cellule il y avait un message, que vous êtes maintenant en train de lire. Il y a des choses qui font des trous dans le temps.

Il va au tableau noir et fait un dessin.

Marco

Et les trous s'alignent parfaitement. (il dessine)

On peut y faire passer une brochette. N'oubliez pas que mon père est boucher. Le temps se plie pour que les trous coïncident. Et pourquoi n'est-on jamais prophète en son propre pays? Parce que les prophètes n'arrivent qu'à la moitié des trous, comme ça. (il mime) Ils sont entre les temps. Personne ne comprit grand chose à Diderot jusqu'au moment où une génération entière cria "Monstre!" à Freud. Il fallait ce temps-là pour passer au travers du trou. Les trous qui font les prophètes pour regarder le futur sont les mêmes par lesquels les historiens lorgnent ensuite vers les vieux

meubles du passé. Regardez-les lorgner à travers les trous creusés par Jean-Jacques Rousseau pour nous expliquer le dix-huitième siècle!

Vous regardez vos montres. Bon. C'est l'heure. On va terminer avec le rythme binaire, celui du coeur et des batteurs.

Il se met à battre en rythme sur son pupitre.

Marco

Entre chaque coup il y a du temps. Le temps c'est le fait de reconnaître que le deuxième coup n'est pas le premier. Le temps est créé par l'opposition.

Il bat le pupitre, une partie des élèves lui emboitent le pas. Rires et cris dans la classe.

Marco

En synthèse le temps se réduit.

Le rythme des battements s'intensifie. Toute la classe tape sur le pupitre. Marco est obligé de crier.

Marco

L'embryon humain siffle au travers de l'évolution !

Les battements sont toujours plus rapides et plus fortes la classe délire. Cris et rires. Marco hurle.

Marco

Dans une synthèse totale, le temps disparaît.

La sonnerie de l'école retentit, qui indique la fin de la leçon. ●

Towards a Psychoanalytic Reading of the System(s) of a Contemporary American Film

Barbara Leaming

The following analysis of Brian De Palma's film, *SISTERS*, does not aim to reveal the hidden meaning of the text. Instead, certain methodological strategies introduced by Sigmund Freud, particularly those procedures which he developed in his work on dream analysis, have led us to break down the linear structures of the narrative in question, *SISTERS*. It is, of course, the linear trajectory of the narrative which leads towards *the* meaning of a filmic text. This aspiration to assigning a singular meaning to a text which we locate in conservative film analyses is shared by conservative readings of Freud. By now it has become clear, however, that this conservative "Freud" — the Freud who would be useful in tracing linear trajectories — is not the only "Freud" available. There is another "Freud" who does not seek to resolve ambiguities but rather to intensify them. The "new Freud" is useless as an instrument of control or mastery. The conservative critic too often invokes his "Freud" in order to further control the text in question, to master the unconscious elements of a text — so that even what might seem least subject to control, the unconscious, will itself be effectively limited. This sort of conservative Freudian criticism might be called "the psychoanalytic critic as aesthetic detective." This is the sort of Freud who appears, for example, in Nicholas Meyer's novel, *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*. In Meyer's book Freud joins with Sherlock Holmes, the world's greatest detective, in the solution of a crime. The two men find their strategies complementary to

one another. Just as Holmes' aim as a detective is to put together the clues he uncovers to provide a rational solution to a crime, so too Freud, as he is depicted in Meyer's book, is pointedly shown as having simply another way of getting to the same goal as the detective — a practical resolution. Both the psychoanalyst and the detective then are presumed to be dedicated to the preservation of the prevailing reality which has been temporarily disrupted or called into question. Clues for both men are significant only in so far as they lead to a solution which will result in the effacement of these clues/symptoms. In this scheme of things, when properly interpreted, by a detective or a psychoanalyst, clues will yield an unequivocal meaning — a singular and unambiguous signification.

It is this "Freud" who functions much like a Sherlock Homes of the unconscious that has generally been invoked by those analysts who attempt to apply the insights of psychoanalysis to the reading of a film.¹ Such an analyst desires to prove the organic nature of a text, to efface its complexity. Recently however in Europe and the United States a "new Freud" has begun to influence the way in which filmic texts are analyzed. This "new" Freudian analyst does not aspire to close the text, to locate a sense which rules the film, which *explains* it in the manner of the detective. Even a classic Hollywood narrative film which is dominated by an impetus towards closure loses its linear trajectory towards an end when it is submitted to a radical Freudian analysis. Rather than focusing on the forward movement, the psychoanalytically oriented critic we have in mind focuses on the paradigmatic relations within the text: repetitions are stressed, as well as differences. This Freudian analyst seeks to intensify the sense of contradiction and ambiguity within the filmic text which it is the aim of the "textual detective" and the "old Freudian" to dispel. There is then a basic difference between the methods of the "new Freudian" and the detective: the detective searches for clues in order to efface them with a solution; the "new Freud" looks for clues in order to open the situation yet further, to render a final solution impossible. Jean-Louis Baudry, the French critic, has said that "What the manifest text of the dream dissimulates is primarily the work of dissimulation whose aim is to make the dream appear a superfluous, useless and unreadable phenomenon."² In other words, the "work" of the dream has been effaced. It is the aim of the dream analyst to restore the sense of work/process which will thus make the dream meaningful/readable. So too, this restoration of a felt sense of process, the sense of the work of the film, is the aim of the filmic analyst here. As Baudry has noted, in textual analysis, "No longer is it meaningful to refer to some primary, withheld utterance, which stands always at a distance from the text that manifests and betrays it; rather is the task to make writing bring to light what is already there, evident but blotted out, the materiality of the text . . . But the decision to read reveals a writing, a mark already made, a text already proffered, an inscription. An inscription which becomes readable only when redoubled by an act of writing which offers it to be read. Reading is therefore shown to be an act of writing just as writing is revealed as an act of reading — reading and writing being merely simultaneous moments in a single process of production."³ Thus the analyst who writes the reading/reads the writing of the filmic text is quite different from the critic as detective. For the detective works with a corpse, a crime that is already done, and his work is simply passive reconstruction of a work which is already closed. The detective works to remove chaos by reading the clues, to erase disorder first of all by assigning guilt, by limiting the range of its infective possibilities. The psychoanalyst cannot assign guilt for the crime is only being written in the analysis. As the psychoanalyst analyses, guilt is constantly shifting — the act is not closed. For example, in the Oedipal

1 This is true of the other arts as well.

2 Jean-Louis Baudry, "Writing, Fiction, Ideology," *After-image*, No. 5, Spring 1974, p. 25.

3 Baudry, p. 25.

triangle we watch guilt move from father to son — even as the son becomes the father himself. In simplified form, the sharing and shifting of guilt which structures the Oedipal relations is as follows: the son is guilty for desiring the mother; the father is guilty for desiring to castrate the son; the son will one day become the father himself and hence be both the injured party and the active avenger, but from a different position in the triangle. Guilt is thus not stable — and the detective would not be of much help here. Guilt cannot be contained by the psychoanalyst, and this is not his aim. When the analyst has worked through a dream it is never rendered less complex, nor is the interpretation ever complete. Each of the elements in the manifest content of the dream is found to be linked to multiple elements of the dream thoughts in an intricate web of over determination. Hence the movement of the analyst is never the tracking of a linear trajectory to a solution. In a sense, each tentative reading of a dream fragment is a gratuitous act: the selection of a fragment; the sum of these fragments can never add up to a unified whole. The dream is violated at each step by the analyst; it can never again be restored to an organic shape once the interpretation has begun. The same thing is true of the film analyst who uses certain methods of Freud in working through a filmic text. His aspiration is not to assign the film a meaning — to reduce the complexity of a text. Quite the opposite is, in fact, what happens when linearity is disrupted. A multiplicity of meanings emerges, a multiplicity without hierarchy. Moreover, the meaning is not *in* the text; the text *is* the meaning.



Not only does this writing of the reading/reading of the writing break down the apparent linear relations of the text, but when "We take theoretical activity as consisting in the elucidation of the mechanisms at work in every piece of writing [film]; as such it grounds that writing [film] in its textual existence and calls for a reading which is subversive in that it ignores the characteristics of expressivity and representation in favour of the text itself (and in that it can, moreover, be a locus of cross-connections with other texts)." ⁴ Stressing thus the notion of the open text, one finds that all one is dealing with are fragments, fragments combinable in an infinite series of permeable combinations and re-combinations. Thus in addition to the breakdown of the linear relations *within* the text, one is led beyond to the realm of intertextuality — of intertextual relations. In a film like *SISTERS*, which will be the focus of our scrutiny here, intertextual relations are not at all effaced. De Palma quotes filmically, and he quotes extensively. He does not, of course, simply quote in terms of content or dialogue, but also in terms of camera movement, cutting, and so forth. In De Palma's films the impulse is out from the boundaries of the individual text of a film towards other texts. The filmic object — the three or more reels of celluloid — does not limit or constitute the inviolable text that is *SISTERS*. This breakdown of the film as object has the effect, as Baudry has pointed out in the study of literary texts, of forcing the spectator into an active relation to the filmic text. There is no meaning there for the viewer *to find* — rather he must construct it in the realm of intertextual space. One constitutes a meaning — outside the text, as well as inside — rather than recovering it. One *makes* the meanings. *SISTERS* then has no center, it has been deprived of a center. It constantly is referring to the shadows of other films which constitute an intertextual matrix — films like *PSYCHO*, *FREAKS*, *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI*, *REAR WINDOW* and so forth. While one watches *SISTERS*, the viewer has the sense that this film does not exist by itself, that it is not at all complete. The possibility of the film's existence in isolation and hence the possibility of giving it a linear reading is severely constricted. *SISTERS* then redoubles the doubling of the films that precede it. There is no single subject in *SISTERS*, rather there is an infinity of subjects. Within the context of intertextuality this film exists as both subject and object. Within the film there is a mirror image of this shifting subject-object relationship: the split-screen sequences. *SISTERS* is then a mirror structure. There are many films within the film. *SISTERS* is part of a general text, a text which extends into infinity. Potentially it encompasses all films of the past and all those to come in the future. Confronted with this infinite text, the viewer loses the sense of control which he has when a text has clearly defined limits and an assignable meaning. In the realm of intertextuality — of the infinite text — one can never make *the* analysis. All one can do is what Baudry recommends: "Strike a blow."

To "strike a blow" is to do violence, to arbitrarily rip out a fragment of the text. Baudry compares this violation of a text to an unmotivated killing. It is an act of violence because one is in a sense shattering the body apart — the body of the text. The three reels and the celluloid wrapped around them constitute the body of *SISTERS'* filmic text. That body is going to be consistently hacked apart by the analyst, even despite himself, for the film does not exist as a whole, by itself. *So just as Danielle Breton hacks the body apart in the film's diegesis, so one must hack the body of the text apart in order to read the film.* To write the reading/read the writing of the film one must kill its organicity. One must arbitrarily separate it from all of the other texts which one does not analyze in relation to it — just as the Siamese twins in *SISTERS* are violently separated. *Within* the text — in the *intra-textual*

relations as well — one necessarily performs a similar act of violence when one strikes the blow which initiates the individual writing of the reading of SISTERS.

If one looks at SISTERS as a fragment in a larger general text, then, there is no beginning of the film and no end. The film SISTERS began in other texts, in other places, and will end in other films and places. Even in De Palma's own later work, he reworks his own texts and the texts of others reworked within them. The concept of authorship obviously becomes ludicrous as an issue in such a situation. De Palma's own film becomes part of the general text, subject to re-creation. A mirror text is constructed which mirrors other texts.

There is no beginning or end to SISTERS because the film is itself a double of other films and is itself a film about doubling — in much more than a superficial sense. While SISTERS is "about" Siamese twins, it is also the Siamese twin of many other films. Moreover, *within* the text of SISTERS, the film could be "written" in an infinite number of ways. Therefore, since this metatext — which is, in a sense, what an analysis of SISTERS must be — cannot be of infinite length, it is necessary to begin to "write" the film with the requisite metatextual act of violence. The blow which is struck in the interest of this analysis does not repress or deny the fact that it is an act of violence, a hacking apart of the filmic body. One is prohibited from being a detective by committing a crime — one moves from the passive to the active. The blow here consists in focusing our attention by writing only that portion of the film which exists in the intra-textual space of SISTERS and, moreover, only those sequences which structure the diegetic acts of violence in SISTERS.

Jeffrey Mehlman has usefully called Jacques Lacan's "Seminar on 'the Purloined Letter'," "A psychoanalysis indifferent to deep meanings, concerned more with a latent organization of the manifest than a latent meaning beneath it."⁵ Thus Mehlman precisely characterizes what we have in mind when we propose a psychoanalytic reading of SISTERS. We are concerned with the play of repetition in the structure of SISTERS. Lacan has called this "repetition automatism."⁶ We intend to write the "repetition automatism" which is there in the text of SISTERS but is effaced. As our analysis will show, there is work in the film, work which we can write into our reading. One of the structures of SISTERS is the automatically repeated — unfelt repetitions — of certain triangular structures which we shall discuss in much greater detail. The repetition is effaced by its seeming automaticity. The active viewer of SISTERS will note that the initial impetus for the unfolding of the mechanism of the "repetition automatism" in SISTERS is the TV *game* show with which the film opens. On this TV show, "Peeping Toms," the panel and the viewers at home are asked to predict the behavior of unsuspecting subjects who find themselves unexpectedly in a voyeuristic situation. The ability of the panel and ourselves to correctly predict the voyeurs' response will depend on the "chance" of their repeating automatically the patterns of behaviour which we expect from previous actions.⁷ Hence, SISTERS immediately locates itself in a structured system — the interests is focused on the "symbolic": that "symbolic" order which Lacan differentiates from the "real" and the "imaginary." In the "symbolic" order, a signifier is not existentially bound to the signified. Perhaps the concept of the "symbolic" understood here is most simply defined by the following from LaPlanche and Pontalis' *The Language of Psychoanalysis*:

5 Jeffrey Mehlman, "Introductory Note to Jacques Lacan's 'Seminar on The Purloined Letter,'" *Yale French Studies*, Number 48, 1972, p. 38.

6 Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman, *Yale French Studies*, Number 48, 1972, p. 39.

7 See Lacan on prediction in the game of even or odd, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'."

8 Jean Laplante and J.-B. Pontalis, "Symbolic," trans. by Peter Kussell and Jeffrey Mehlman, *Yale French Studies*, Number 48, p. 201.

Any attempt to confine the meaning of the term 'symbolic' to a strict definition would be contrary to the very spirit of Lacan's thought, which refrains from establishing a fixed relationship between signifier and signified. Thus we will note only that Lacan uses the term with two different and complementary meanings: (a) in order to designate a *structure* whose discrete elements function as signifiers (linguistic model) or, more generally, in reference to the register encompassing such structures (the symbolic order); (b) to designate the *law* which grounds the symbolic order . . .⁸

The signifiers of repeated scenes in *SISTERS*, then, may seem similar, but their meanings emerge only from their differences. They are part of a structure whose organization must be uncovered by the analyst of the filmic text.

The "repetition automatism" operating in *SISTERS* is organized around the shifting position of the "pure signifier"⁹ — the phallus (or the knife or scissors which displace the phallus). In a complicated series of repeated scenes, it is the shifts in the position of the phallus/knife/scissors which determines the relations of the textual fragments. At least eight times in the course of *SISTERS* a complex and shifting geometry is traced on the screen. It is the system of these shifting figures which is the focus of our present analysis. Each of the eight scenes may be read as a displaced double or repetition of the Oedipal triangle of mother, father and watching child. Each of the eight scenes repeats — but does not duplicate — the ones which precedes it. But recall that meaning proceeds from difference, and hence, in each repetition it is the differences from the scenes which precede and follow which determine the meaning(s) of the scene. Those differences in each case are predicated on the shifting possession of the phallus/knife/scissors — the "floating signifier". In every case, the subject of the scene is located by noting who is in possession of the phallus/knife/scissors. The eight scenes are thus marked by a "plurality of subjects."¹⁰

9 Lacan, p. 45.

10 Lacan, p. 44.

In order to follow the eight figured series, we must first summarize the relevant plot of *SISTERS*. *SISTERS* opens with a TV game show, "Peeping Toms." On the show the panel and the viewers must guess how an unsuspecting subject will react when given the opportunity to "peep" at a beautiful girl undressing. We watch as a young Black man, Phillip Wood, finally decides to turn away gallantly from the sight of what he believes is a blind girl undressing. After the show, Phillip takes the model/actress who played the blind girl, Danielle Breton, to share his prize dinner. At dinner they are confronted by a strange older man, Dr. Emil Breton, who claims to be Danielle's husband and tries to take her home. Danielle objects saying they have been divorced for a year. Emil is ejected from the restaurant and Phillip takes Danielle home to Staten Island where she lives. He takes her upstairs only to look out the window and discover Emil outside watching. Also outside the window, across the way, is another woman whom we later learn is Grace Collier, a young newspaper reporter for the local paper. Phillip pulls down the shades and then pretends to leave to fool Emil. He soon returns and he and Danielle make love. In the morning Danielle awakes and seems very ill. She goes into the bathroom and takes out the few remaining pills from a vial. Then she is shown in shadow, seemingly having a conversation with someone who is angry about the man sleeping on the living room sofa. Phillip hears and is dressing to leave — after accidentally knocking the last pills down the drain — but Danielle says it is her twin sister Dominique who has come to visit for her birthday. Phillip is sent out to buy more medicine and he also stops to buy a cake and have it decorated for the twins' birthday. He

11 Each time the device of split screen is used the simultaneous subject-object relationship of viewer and viewed is foregrounded — the shifting nature of signifier and signified.

returns to find Danielle asleep and when he presents her with the cake, she grabs the knife he has given her to cut it with. She stabs him viciously in the groin, then the face, and finally, as he tries to crawl away, in the back. Danielle (who we later learn has assumed the personality of her dead sister Dominique in the attack) collapses on the bathroom floor, and Phillip, dying, drags himself over to the window. As Grace Collier watches, in split screen, Phillip traces the word "help" with his blood on the window pane and then collapses on the floor. Grace calls the police and after much delay gets them to come to the apartment. But before they arrive Emil has appeared in response to Danielle's earlier call that she needs more pills. He finds the scene of horror and Danielle tells him that Dominique has been there. Together they hide Phillip's body in the convertible sofa and clean up all traces of the murder. By the time the police arrive — again the sequence is shown in split screen¹¹ — Danielle is herself again and prepared to meet them. She shows them and the suspicious Grace around the apartment and they, of course, find nothing. Suddenly discovers the cake with both twins' names on it in the refrigerator but slips and falls just as she is about to show it to the police. Unable to find a body, the police attribute it all to Grace's overactive imagination and leave. Grace launches her own investigation, complete with private detective. She and the detective discover a file which reveals that Danielle is one of a famous pair of Siamese twins, the Blanchions. This leads Grace to a *Life* magazine reporter who shows her a videotape of the twins and tells her that the twins were separated and that it is rumored that Dominique died on the operating table. The detective meanwhile has gone on, like a good detective, to trace the body. But here the tracing of the body is itself not the aim. To find the body is to locate a meaning for the filmic text. For while the detective is off on the chase, Grace follows Emil and Danielle to a private mental hospital on Staten Island, Grace is caught and put under hypnosis by Emil. In the hypnotic state, Grace takes the place of Dominique by Danielle's side and we learn the story — or a version of it — of the Blanchions. The twins, who had been orphaned as babies, were raised in a hospital. Dominique grew up to be as difficult as Danielle was sunny and sweet. Eventually Danielle entered into a sexual relationship with their doctor, Emil Breton, and when she became pregnant, Dominique reacted with fury. She stabbed the unborn child of her sister with garden shears thus necessitating an immediate operation, but Dominique's personality was kept alive through Danielle. Whenever Emil, or another man, attempted to make love to Danielle the personality of Dominique took over and she would attempt to murder the man, just as we saw happen with Phillip. While Grace lies half asleep, Emil again tries to make love to Danielle on the hospital bed and "Dominique" takes over. Dominique/Danielle brutally stabs Emil and he dies locked in an embrace with Danielle, fallen across Grace's legs. As they are taking Emil's body away, the police arrive and arrest Danielle. Grace is taken home by her parents where, sitting up in her childhood bed, she now answers the questions of the police about Phillip's body by repeating what was suggested to her by Emil under hypnosis: "There was no body because there was no murder." The film ends with a shot without signification — a shot which decisively undermines the closure of the film: we see the detective, disguised as a linesman, up a telephone pole watching the sofa with the body in it to see who will pick it up at the depot in the middle of nowhere where it has been deposited.

Now we turn to the system of SISTERS. The eight "repeated" scenes which constitute the system which we are analyzing occur through SISTERS in several ways: 1) they are presented directly in the fictional world, 2) they are

shown through a distorted dream sequence, 3) they are narrated by one of the fictional characters, 4) they are not actually shown on the screen, but appear in a displaced form. Analysis of the eight triangular actions reveals a continually shifting, at times rhythmically alternating, possession of the signifier (the phallus/knife/scissors). The active and passive figures in the triad are not stable, but shift in a constantly altering geometry. The original or primal scene has been almost totally repressed by the series of eight repetitions: for it is clear that the stress on the triangular figures displaces the original Oedipal triad. It is significant then, in terms of this repression, that we learn that the Blanchion twins were orphaned soon after birth. The repetition through displacement which marks the course of the film then seeks to recapture (while repressing — fetishizing) the earlier lost Oedipal relation. The obsession with the Oedipal triangle which determines the structure of this filmic system underlines the scenic quality of sexuality which dominates the film. The Freudian primal scene is explicitly evoked — the scene in which the child looks through a keyhole which masks part of the film screen during the "Peeping Toms" TV show with which the film begins directly locates the viewers in the position of the child in the primal scene. When the camera pulls back to enlarge the space, the keyhole is reintegrated into the diegesis — but not effaced — when it is revealed as part of the set design of the TV show. Moreover, at this point it is significant that Danielle Breton emerges on to the TV stage from the other side of the keyhole — just like the child caught on the other side of the parents' door who is then brought into the room. This drawing of the watching child into the space of the primal scene will be repeated later in *SISTERS* when Grace Collier enters the apartment, the scene of the crime, after voyeuristically witnessing the murder/sex from outside the frame of the window. The violation of a tabooed space at this later point in the film is marked by the otherwise unexplained violation of spatial verisimilitude as the camera tracks right through a "wall" of Danielle's apartment during Grace's search for the body of Phillip. This action of the camera also recalls the position of the audience in film as it is permitted to do the unthinkable — both be in the bed of the parents and not be there.

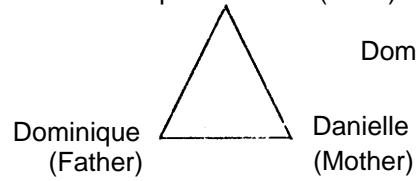


Moreover, the scenic aspect of sexuality here is foregrounded when we note that for Dominique sex was a purely specular event. Joined to her Siamese twin, sex was a scene which she watched. Therefore her sexuality — like that of the child and the film viewers — was displaced from the genitals to the eye: the eye that watched. Note that she was always there, as Danielle points out, seeing as Emil made love to her twin. (Indeed her look itself marks the threat of castration.) Dominique's position then stands in a clear metaphoric relation to the child's jealous projection of himself into the primal scene which he watches through the keyhole. Moreover, Dominique's relation to her linked twin is a realized version of the totally "other," but rather, at least initially, as simply part of the child itself. Hence the traces of this identification of child/mother allow an imaginative paradigmatic substitution of child for mother in the sexual act with the father. Imaginatively the child enters the room and takes the mother's place in bed to be penetrated by the father. Since Danielle is at the same time Dominique and not Dominique — they are literally of one flesh — her paradigmatic substitution for her sister in the arms of Emil is not just a fantasy. It is then in the specular quality of Dominique's relationship to Danielle and Emil's intercourse that we are able to trace its paradigms in the larger filmic text which is *SISTERS*.

In addition, just as it is Dominique's function to watch, so it is Danielle's function *to be looked at*. First of all, of course, Danielle is there to be looked at by us just as she was formerly there to be looked at by Dominique. We the viewers double Dominique. Interestingly, Danielle is also looked at on television by the fictional television audience, as *they* watch her being looked at by Phillip. But Phillip refuses to look at her during the "Peeping Toms" show, just as he will later be unable to look *at her* — or will not see her in a spectacular act of "méconnaissance" when she opens her robe to reveal a hideous scar — a scar which marks her as a danger, as a threat. In Freud, of course, the child's first glimpse of the naked woman is a moment of crisis. Finding that she lacks a penis, the child feels itself threatened by castration. Phillip, however, will see, but not see. When Danielle welcomes Phillip into her arms she opens her robe to "show herself" to Phillip. What is beneath the robe is, of course, a woman. The viewer and Phillip are assaulted by the sight of the female as threat — the female as lack/want in Lacanian terms. The scar, which we see in extreme close-up, doubly marks Danielle as the realization of the childish fantasy of the woman as castrated male. The scar, which is indeed the brutal mark of a severing, here is left unexplained — and can be read as the realization of castration. Danielle is the "other" — which recalls her function as a "Freak" in her years at the hospital. But we may not recognize this because of the false lead of Phillip's Blackness. It is Danielle, not Phillip, who is "the other". His failure to recognize her "otherness," her lack/want, marks a critical instance of "méconnaissance."

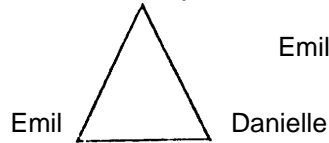
Moreover, Danielle's status as an object of vision was underlined when TV announcer asked what she did "in real life." She responded that she was studying to be an actress and model. That is, she was studying to play the role of another and to be looked at. Thus both of her chosen professions are displacements of her primary experience — that of the Freak. As a Freak she was there to be looked at. She was a Freak because she was not just herself but was also literally another — Dominique — Siamese twins. Thus she had realized the the experience of the model and actress. After Dominique's death, Danielle plays the role of Dominique when she murders — she is an actress. In this play of repetition and displacement, the instincts display their vicissitudes. The aim of the instincts is mobile; it shifts.

1. Dominique/Danielle (Child)



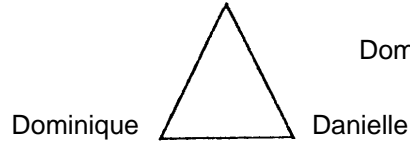
Dominique is joined to Danielle

2. Dominique



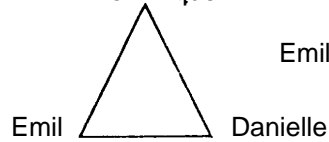
Emil has sexual intercourse with Danielle.

3. Child



Dominique stabs Danielle

4. Dominique



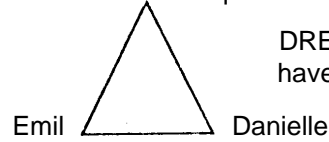
Emil separates the twins

5. Grace



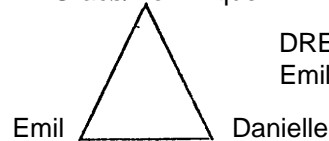
Dominique kills / castrates Phillip

6. Grace/Dominique



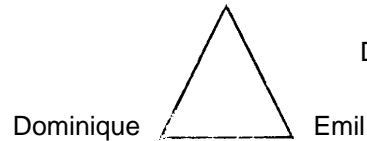
DREAM — Emil begins to have sexual intercourse with Danielle

7. Grace/Dominique



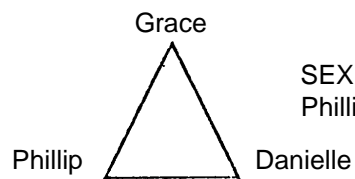
DREAM
Emil separates the twins

8. Grace



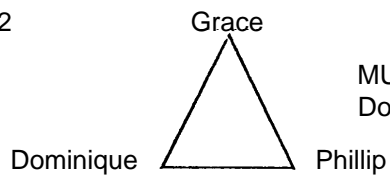
Dominique kills / castrates Emil

A.1



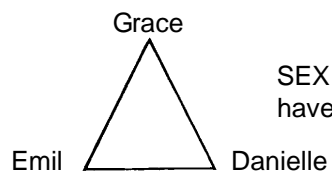
SEX
Phillip has sexual intercourse with Danielle

A.2



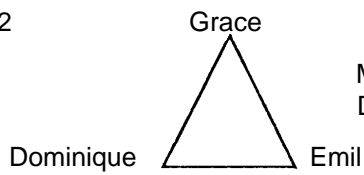
MURDER / CASTRATION
Dominique kills / castrates Phillip

B.1



SEX — Emil begins to
have sexual intercourse with Danielle.

B.2



MURDER / CASTRATION
Dominique kills / castrates Emil

The preoccupation with voyeurism which is an overdetermined element in the system of SISTERS provides a connecting link between two of the dominant structures of the film: the Oedipal relation and the relation of Narcissism. Just as the relation of mother and child in the Oedipus complex is similar in some respects to the structure of Narcissism — the love of the self for other self — these two structures are intertwined in SISTERS.

12 This is a similar to Melanie Klein's notion of the child's fantasy of the "combined parent-figure."

13 It should be stressed that the phallus is a symbolic figure, not to be confused with the actual penis.

To return to the series of eight figures which we are analyzing, note that the parents of the twins died very early and that the series may be said to launch its obsessive repetitions with the strange narcissistic displacement of the Oedipal figure which is the linked twin.¹² In figure no. 1, Dominique occupies the position of the father and Danielle that of the mother. The two twins are joined by the fleshy penis substitute that connects them at the base of the spine. The third position in this triangle is the single being formed of Dominique and Danielle who jealously watches the "parents" unseen. Dominique then has the signifier — the phallus¹³ — as the chain begins to unfold. In figure no. 2, the triangle has altered somewhat: because of his sexual relation with Danielle, Emil Breton (the doctor-the father) has replaced Dominique. Emil has the phallus/penis and is joined to Danielle who continued to occupy the position of the mother. Dominique is now relegated alone to the position of the observer, the child. In figure no. 3, Dominique regains the active position, displacing Emil's penis/phallus with her garden scissors/phallus as she stabs/penetrates Danielle, killing the unborn child (the third passive participant who is actually within the mother). One might here trace the number of childish wishes which this actualizes: to blow up the body of the mother and destroy the hidden penis of the father which is imagined to be within; to kill the rival child — recall that Dominique sometimes occupies the position of child — before birth; or finally the child's confusion of sexual intercourse with the act of violence/stabbing. Emil here has lost his dominance; he has been castrated. Figure no. 4, however, sees Emil regain his dominant position as he recaptures the symbolic phallus, here shown to be more important "symbolically" than in reality for Emil too, despite his possession of a real penis, gets back the signifying position via a displaced phallus — the knife. In the fourth figure Emil returns the gesture of Dominique in no. 3 as he uses a knife to castrate her: that is, he cuts the flesh/phallus which links Dominique to Danielle. At this point it must also be noted that Dominique doubles the position of her own mother and father who are also dead but not "gone", as we see from the obsessive repetition of the Oedipal course which we are now tracing. In the fifth triangle, Dominique (although she now acts through the medium of Danielle) has the phallus/knife again and she kills/castrates Phillip Wood (who is as Emil explicitly points out later, simply a substitute for Emil). The triad in number five places Dominique with the phallus/knife in the active position of the signifying father, killing the rival for the mother (Danielle) who was Emil in the person of Phillip. One begins to glimpse the bisexual nature of the position of the child, so eloquently articulated by Freud in his own discussions. Dominique, in the position of the child has and doesn't have the phallus. At this point in the film, after figure no. 5, the rhythmic alternation of active and passive which we have seen go back and forth between Dominique and Emil is shattered and we move to another order of *reality* in the film in which the repetitions are acted out on the level of the dream. Figures no. 6 and 7, both shown through the medium of Grace Collier's dream (note that Grace is the double of Dominique). Each of these figures places Emil in the active or signifying position and they repeat earlier figures which have taken place on another level of *reality* in the film, no. 3 and 4, but they are not divided by the repetition of no. 3 in which Dominique is dominant. Similarly

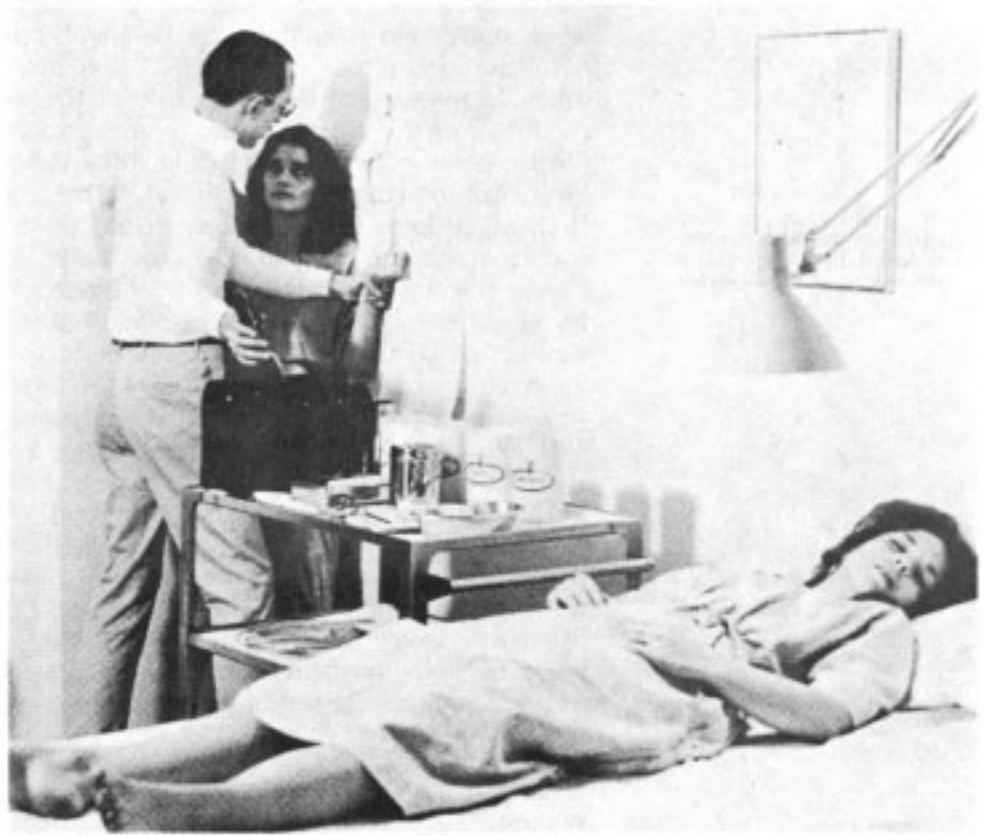
14 In the dream sequence Grace has taken the place formerly occupied by Dominique in the videotape shown earlier.

when the dream is completed, the eighth triangle places Dominique in the dominant position — which means that no. 5 and no. 8 which follow each other on the level of *reality* also break the pattern of repetition, but repeat the break of the dream. In figure no. 6, part of Grace's dream, Emil has the phallus/penis as he kisses Danielle while Grace/Dominique watches. In no. 7, Emil again has the phallus/knife as, in the dream, he cuts/kills/castrates the flesh which joins the twins Grace/Dominique¹⁴ and Danielle. Thus in nos. 6 and 7, which are repetitions of repetitions (of 2 and 4), Dominique/Grace is always the object, always the passive figure who is without the phallus/knife. In no. 8, when we return to the first level *reality*, Dominique, (through the medium of Danielle) has the phallus/knife, as she did in number 5 before the interruption of the dream, and she kills/castrates Emil. In a sense then the figure which concludes the series is the repetition of the Oedipal drama — the murder of the father and his castration. But a single meaning cannot be assigned here anymore than it could be elsewhere, for the castration of Emil, the transformation of him into a woman (the child's fantasy that the woman is a castrated male), may also be read as the actualization of the creation of the mother. It is a death which is also a birth. And it is at this point, when we begin to realize how closely death and birth are linked, that we must begin to analyze another aspect of this series of eight figures. That is one must begin to analyze the four figures, or readings of figures, which emphasize Grace Collier's relation to the two murder scenes and her relation to Dominique.

Again we are dealing with repetitions. There are two murders which Grace witnesses — they double one another. There are also two sex scenes which she witnesses (either directly or by displacing them onto murder). Thus here we are working with a four part figure — the two halves of which mirror each other as repetitions. In part A the triad is Phillip/Danielle(Dominique)/Grace. Part A may be read in two ways: 1) sex between Phillip and Dominique/Danielle which is witnessed (by fantasizing murder as sex) by Grace; and 2) murder of Phillip by Dominique/Danielle which is witnessed by Grace. In part 5 the triad is Emil/Danielle/Grace(Dominique). In the first part of B there is sex between Emil and Danielle in the hospital on Staten Island and Grace lies watching in the position once occupied by Dominique. Again, in the eight part figure discussed above, the two groups at issue here, A and B, may be distinguished from each other by the level of reality which they occupy: A is more *real* than the events in which B take place with Grace in a dreamlike state. In the first part of B then Grace and Danielle occupy the same positions in the triad that they did in A (1), but Emil has replaced Phillip in the position of the father. In the second part of B we may read the triangle of Emil/Dominique(Danielle)/Grace as a murder/castration. Thus the doubling of parts A(1) and (2) with parts B(1) and (2). And furthermore, there is the doubling of this series of figures with the other series of triangles which constitute the eight part series. There is, of course, an additional complication which involves the analysis of no. 3 and no. 8 from the first series and another triangle which we have not yet mentioned which involves Emil/Danielle.

In the first series, no. 3 and no. 8 each involve a stabbing, a castration. Dominique first stabs Emil. In both cases the stabbing displaces the desire to get into the body of the mother¹⁵ and explode out the concealed penis/child of the father. Thus the stabbing in both cases reduplicates the child's imagined castration of a woman. Emil is clearly and explicitly castrated with the knife which rips an "x" across his groin. Danielle is stabbed, in a repetition of an imagined castration which constitutes her being as a woman. In the child's fantasy.

15 For another development of this idea see Pascal Kané, "Note sur le cinema de Brian de Palma," *Cahiers du Cinema*, No. 277, 1977, pp. 59-60.



The final triangular image referred to here, is a most peculiar one, marked off from the others which we have just discussed, for in a sense it may be read as a birth scene — perhaps the birth of the child which never had a chance to grow in Danielle's womb. After Dominique/Danielle has stabbed Emil we are shown a new and terrifying triad as Danielle seems to come back to herself and lies in a bloody embrace with the castrated and dying Emil across the legs of Grace who lies on the bed looking in horror. What has happened here seems to be that Emil has finally become the double of Dominique (with whom we have seen him vie for the possession of the phallus) as he is linked like a Siamese twin with Danielle. Again, as Dominique's double, Emil is the twin who is to die and Danielle the one to live, but at this moment they are joined together once more, smeared with blood. It is as if Grace has just given birth to them, as their own mothers once did. For we must recall that we have seen the act of their creation imaginatively portrayed at the very outset of the film as the credits come up over an image first of a single foetus, then of twins in the womb immediately followed by a headless shot of a man pulling up his trousers. It is as if, as so often happens, in dreams when effect precedes cause, the man has just finished conceiving the twins. So the film which begins with a conception, witnesses a birth just before the end. But it is a strange kind of double birth for, after the sequence in the hospital, Grace is seen back in her childhood room, in her child's bed, a child denying that there was any body, "because there was no murder." The child has succeeded in repressing what the film has as well. It is only through analysis that we have brought it to consciousness again.

Freud has noted that "that our mental life as a whole is governed by *three polarities*, namely the following antitheses:

Subject (ego) — Object (external world)

Pleasure—Pain

Active — Passive."¹⁶

16 Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," in *General Psychological Theory*, edited by Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 97.

17 Freud, p. 96.

We have seen how these polarities operated in terms of the shifting triangular figures just examined, but they operate on other levels in *SISTERS* as well. One of the principle manifestations of the antithetical polarities which dominates the structure of *SISTERS* is the shifting filmic representations of the paired instincts which Freud calls "scotophilia — exhibitionism."¹⁷ Because *SISTERS* is structured around Siamese twins, the "ambivalence" of the paired instincts is realized simultaneously in the film. Dominique personifies the voyeuristic instincts while her Siamese twin, because of the perpetual presence of Dominique before their separation, is the personification of exhibitionism. In addition of course, Danielle has watched Dominique watching and vice versa. The twins, because they are not quite separate beings for most of their life, occupy a relationship which might almost be termed "auto-erotic." This *auto-eroticism* is perhaps displaced into the final shifting triangle which we have already described. When Emil is castrated/stabbed by Dominique/Danielle, this last substitution of knife for phallus has a strange result. Emil, castrated and bloody, falls in a final embrace with his hands interlocked with Danielle's. As we have noted, the two of them thus double the earlier Siamese twin relation of Dominique and Danielle as they seem almost to be born as linked twins smeared with natal blood lying across the thighs of Grace Collier. Since Grace has functioned through much of the film as the double of Dominique,¹⁸ in a sense what we witness in the final stabbing/birth sequence is a scene of self-generation. The twins have given birth to themselves. There is no longer any difference between sexes: that difference has been effaced in the castrations. There is then only repetition. There is no progress, only sameness — death. This then seems to imply that the Siamese twins, locked as one, are a displaced form of the mother and father locked in intercourse as the child imagines them. who has cut the tie which connects the twins/castrates them, may then be said at this point to fulfill the fantasy of the child who desires to drive the parents apart, to separate them.

18 Both Dominique and Grace are watchers; both reject marriage; and, finally, Grace physically takes the former place of Dominique in the hospital dream scenes.

This analysis, however, does not serve to *explain* the text of *SISTERS*: it only examines one of the systems which structures it. We have not found a meaning *in* the text, but have shown how the text *is* the meaning. We have merely "written" a "reading" of *SISTERS*. ●

Culture, History and Ambivalence: On the subject of Walter Benjamin

John Fekete

There are several Walter Benjamins, not one. Put more precisely, his work is emblematic of his affirmed methodological bias towards a multiplex collage of aspects (rather than say, a powerfully controlled montage): its theoretical parameters intrinsically embody ambivalence (rather than coherence), tension (rather than identity). There is the apocalyptic Benjamin of Talmudic and cabbalistic inspiration; the libertarian Benjamin, claimed by the Frankfurt school whose thinking juxtaposes micrological insights in defense of particulars against the usurpations of universalizing systems; and the politicizing Benjamin, associated with Bertolt Brecht, whose thought runs in macrological channels and explores orthodox strategies that surface most explicitly in those two essays of the 1930s ('The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' and 'Author as Producer') that are most dear to today's neo-Marxist cultural orthodoxy. Each of these strains facilitates brilliant insights in dimensions ranging from aesthetics to social theory to philosophy of history; each is also caught within the dead ends of its contexts

1 Charles Baudelaire: *A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973); *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: HB&W, 1968); *Understanding Brecht*, intro. Stanley Mitchell, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1973).

2 Letter to F.C. Rang, December 9, 1923.

3 *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), p. 239.

4 See Bernd Witte, "Benjamin and Lukacs, Historical Notes on the Relationship between their Political and Aesthetic Theories," *New German Critique* 5 (Spring 1975), 16-17.

After a generation of relative neglect, and on the basis of a growing (if still small) volume of translations,¹ Benjamin's writing is beginning to find its proper international audience, although it is still the case that one has to read German to have access to the main body of discussion that has developed around his work in the last decade. We are only at the beginning of gaining an entry into Benjamin's world; the work and pleasure and reward of appropriation and full scale theoretical inquiry and dialogue lie ahead. What we can sketch is a preliminary map of some of the co-ordinates, especially from the sides of aesthetic theory and philosophy of history and some central motifs involved with questions of aura, information, film, and a democratic or mass art.

In method, Benjamin sought to become a semiologist of far-ranging exegetical scope who would decipher the coded meanings of objects at all levels of signification and social structure, from times past and present. "All human knowledge must take the form of interpretation," he wrote in 1923² and his devotion to that principle brings him close to the broad circle of modern hermeneutics, the New Critical tradition (including Ezra Pound's ideogrammatic and Marshall McLuhan's paratactic exegetical approaches), structuralism. At a time when the great realist tradition in art and interpretation lay in ruins and the gap between the individual subject of action or perception and the larger social movement grew wider, and their links more tenuous, Benjamin like Joyce, was troubled by the increasingly problematic locus of the individual observer and tried to redefine the authorial subjectivity out of existence, to yield the fullness of epistemological space to the presence of the object. Theodor Adorno notes³ that the epistemological intentions that developed along with Benjamin's massive *Arcades* project from the 1920s — thousands of pages of which exist as fragments of a plan to decode the nineteenth century historically and philosophically — call for the elimination of all overt commentary from the presentation of disparate materials. Benjamin's dream was to compose his major work, as the culmination of his anti-subjectivism, in the form entirely of citations.

Moreover, his collage was to be protected from the rationalist fiction of unitary cohesion through an adherence to a principle of fragmentariness which Benjamin adopted even as he moved towards the sensory depths of the particular objects of his attention. In one sense, this philosophy of fragments, surely one of the most important features of Benjamin's work, provides a critical challenge to the dominant tendencies of the inter-war period which were totalitarian on both theoretical and practical levels. For emancipatory discourse, it may remain a valuable contribution to the attempt to constitute a viable alternative syntax to the totalitarian grammar of our rationalist traditions. In some aspects, in line with Ernest Bloch's search for the utopian dimension of all manifestations, Benjamin's methodological principle points to the ultimate libertarian frame for those manifestations, free of authorial/authoritarian intervention. Yet the position is historically ambivalent (as I shall argue later) and methodologically as well: the aspiration to an objective collage of objective fragments has close points of contact with both a crippling positivism and dogmatic structuralist pretensions to metonymically exhaustive apprehension.

Benjamin never wrote his major work; but the heterogeneous fragments that enter his field of observation are given organization in his own writings by a messianic hope for an end of history. In effect, it has been noted⁴ Benjamin

adopts a radical critique of the 'belief in progress' in the name of which the ideologues both of administered society and of socialism (which took on the credo of progress as the heritage of the bourgeois Enlightenment) have cravenly legitimated technocratic rule and the sacrifice of the present to an abstract future. Correspondingly the notion of a *radical rupture* (in what he calls messianic time) that would explode the undesirable continuum of history becomes a touchstone of his thought. Again, this philosophy of history hides a problematic doubleness (to which I shall return later). In one respect, it is a powerful antidote to abject craven evolutionism, to the belief in the progression of universal history through homogenous empty time; yet the antidote is purchased at a high price.

The despair at seeing no way forward is also projected backward. The categorical structure of the enlightenment is projected back from the present to cover the entire terrain of historical time, to exhaust the entire continuity of human history. The consequence of such ontologization of the enlightenment (which was typical of the Frankfurt School's brand of critical theory)⁵ is translated into the aspiration at the heart of Benjamin's historical conception to be liberated, not only from a transitional phase of social life but from the very continuum of history. The distortion, necessarily, is pervasive: by correlation with the eruption of homogenized otherness that is expected in an indeterminate 'then' in the future, the 'not then' of present and past homogenized. For example, Benjamin comments: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore disassociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain."⁶

5 See Paul Piccone, "Introduction in *The Frankfurt Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Urizen, 1977).

6 "Theses on the Philosophy of History," No. 7, *Illuminations*, p. 258.

7 See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* (Boston, 1973), passim.

Benjamin's unusual position within Marxism can be seen to have evolved in connection with and out of several different and conflicting ideological patterns. A Jewish mystical strain is generally recognized in the early work and in the 1922 project for a literary journal, *Angelus Novus* but also in the final 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. Later he was strongly drawn to Brecht's Marxism, to his professed 'materialist crudity', to the possibility of uniting artistic/political integrity with urgent, concrete political focus. At the same time, Benjamin shared philosophical and sociological interests and approaches with members of the Frankfurt school, for example with respects to the culture industry, and indeed received financial aid from them after 1935⁷. In addition Benjamin's orientation to Marxism in the 1920s and thereafter bears the mark of Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* though not necessarily in terms of Lukacs's most creative aspects. The resultant formulaic confidence in a determinate collective subjectivity (sharply separating Benjamin's outlook from that typical in the Frankfurt school) enters decisively into his provocative and stimulating (but pseudo-aesthetic) considerations of film as I will shortly suggest.

A portrait of Benjamin's unique intellectual physiognomy needs to take account, as well, of his unwillingness to attach himself solely to a given identifiable ideological pattern. Some elements of this are now well known. He did not follow his friend Gersholm Scholem to Jerusalem, nor Adorno & Horkheimer to the U.S. In Parisien isolation he suffered Scholem's criticism that he was losing himself in a crippling Marxism. Benjamin endured Adorno's skepticism of his friendship with Brecht, and the refusal to publish a section

of his work in the journal of the Institute for Social Research on the grounds that the connections he drew between different social levels were too direct and immediate and theoretically incoherent. He put up with Brecht's criticism that his style was too diaristic, and he patiently observed the limitations of Brecht's sensibility and Marxian categories in relation to Kafka and the problems of parable and allegory, of linguistic strategy. And in opposition to Lukacs's stress on continuity, in history and in culture, Benjamin emphasized discontinuity; where Lukacs saw revolution as the consummation of the historical process, and articulated a persisting cultural concern with the preservation of the great bourgeois tradition of critical realism, Benjamin saw revolution as a radical break with the entire development up to the present, and sought to mobilize language to explode reality, not to evoke its totality. He came, eventually, to abandon the bourgeois tradition altogether, as indeed his experience told him that bourgeois society has repressed its own ties with tradition through an excess of topical information.⁸

⁸ See Bernd Witte, "Benjamin and Lukacs," 16-17.

In seeking to account for this experience, Benjamin began to formulate a historical/political communications theory out of a pool of rich insights. The work is uneven. I shall return to the more enduring aspects later, noting for the moment only that what rises to the surface, under the Brechtian influence in the two essays that date from the mid-1930s, "The Author as Producer" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", is a militant attitude addressed directly to the producers of art and calling special attention to the practices of workers who write. In this way, Bernd Witte argues, Benjamin takes up the literary practices of the German Union of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers — a group whose members attempted to expand reportage and correspondence into the proletarian novel — as the only examples of the positive transformation of art through a revolution in its production techniques. Lukacs, by contrast, always attacked this kind of position, prominent in pre-Stalinist Russian cultural politics, as an aesthetically ineffective type of literary spontaneity, thereby anticipating Adorno's similar criticism of the Mechanical Reproduction essay because of what Adorno called the anarchist romanticism of Benjamin's "blind confidence in proletarian spontaneity" which reduces art to political utility.⁹

⁹ See "Correspondence with Benjamin", *New Left Review* 81 (September-October 1973), 55-80.

In and through and perhaps in spite of these controversies and the unsympathetic theoretical climate, Benjamin tenaciously seemed to find in Marxism the promise of a rational poetic of history and mythology of social relations. His writings abound in lyrical comments about print and causality, messages and media, dramatic images and social forms, anticipating work on a terrain that Marshall McLuhan has more recently made his own, and doing so with a scruple and subtlety foreign to McLuhan's purpose and without McLuhan's peculiarly incongenial premises and assumptions. Perhaps Benjamin owes to Marxism his understanding of the work of literature as a determinate product of a given society, and consequently his notion that the modern city is the defining locus of imaginative life, that the industrial city has literally restructured our inner landscape.¹⁰ But his specific type of Marxism seeks to embrace a multiplicity of related structures from diverse spheres of social and cultural life, and to apprehend the general basic principles that connect them together. Benjamin tries to read the landscape of the nineteenth century — including its artistic, economic, political, and other contours as though it were a language whose appropriation depends on the articulation of its grammar through a collection of specific speech acts. In all this, as in the predisposition towards discontinuity, the subordination (even tendential elimination) of subjectivity, and the mythomorphic or poetic

¹⁰ "Walter Benjamin: towards a philosophy of language," *Times Literary Supplement* (22 Aug. 1968), 887.

rhetorical cast of his writing, Benjamin becomes visible to us as a forerunner of some variations of modern structuralism. Indeed, this methodological point of contact with an ascendent intellectual movement accounts, at least in part, for the attention that his writing has begun to receive in the last decade, a generation after his death.

Unavoidably, his work shares in the weaknesses of structural methodology, most notably the inability to develop an adequate conception of the subject and of the growth of the human substance. (Arguably, it was precisely this inability in the face of the times that prepared his susceptibility to the solicitations of structural method.) In any case, his resonant prose yearns to respond fully to the autonomous body of any specific object of his perception, in its singularity, and in this he differs from the scientific structuralism of our day (and from Lukacs as well). We need to recall here that Benjamin did not aspire to a systematic theory of literature and distrusted systems. His style incorporates the interval; he leaves spaces between one item and another, vacancies providing opportunity for a reflection. Indeed, this form which his writing tends to take, aphoristic fragment, testifies to his methodological hostility to systems period. He recognized and feared the tendency in his time for any observation of systems to become in its turn systematic. The aphoristic fragment, however, as experience shows,¹¹ sets its own horizons. It does not develop — it is patient, opaque, and mysterious — a pillar of an epistemology of discontinuity. As a way of seeing the world, a way of processing information, the aphorism both implies a greater whole and yet is complete as a fragment.

11 See Maurice Blanchot, "Walter Benjamin: Reprises," *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, No. 93, (1960), 475-83.

Indeed, the aphorism became a characteristic literary/philosophical device employed not only by Benjamin but by the Frankfurt School critical theorists generally, in their attempt to resist the spread of totalitarian discourse. The first World War essentially closed the books on entrepreneurial capitalism and equally on its most radical negation, classical Marxism. The inter-war period convulsively produced the frame and the vectors for a global social transition to systems of collective, controlled, and coded bureaucratic domination characterized, *mutatis mutandis*, by the extension of the power of collective capital over all facets of life, the politicization of the economy, and the colonization of consciousness. The rise of fascism and the collapse of potential proletarian opposition meant conceptually not only having to lay to rest the fairy tale of an inevitably emancipatory socialist future, but also having to do without the Lukacsian tendential totalizing subject-object of history, indeed without any totalizing social agency through which could be constituted the Hegelian/Marxian dream of an emancipated collective subjectivity. Totalizing macrological social theory itself had to be ruled out owing to the absence of appropriate collective epistemological grounding.

In this predicament, where the dominant transformative tendencies (which Herbert Marcuse accurately characterizes as tendencies of one-dimensionality) sought to destroy all otherness in order to make possible the restructuring of capitalism, Adorno and Frankfurt theorists tried to reconstitute critical theory so as to preserve particularity and non-identity. In Paul Piccone's reconstruction, in order to salvage revolutionary subjectivity at all (and deprived of a normative mediational function), Adorno's social theory retreated to micrological levels where "analyses of the particular aphoristically provide glimpses of that *false totality* no longer immediately apprehensible through discredited traditionally conceptual means. The aphorism retains its critical edge by escaping into a poetic mode of discourse."¹²

12 Piccone, "Introduction," *The Frankfurt Reader*.

Yet here again we have a problematic response, in Benjamin as in the others. Although the aphoristic defense of non-identity may have been, under the circumstances, a necessary response, yet it was a necessary evil. The relative protection that the micrological fragment enjoys from the dangers of instrumentalization is also translated in the long run into a relative impotence and incapacity at counter-normative mediation. In addition, although the retreat of critical theory into a micrological sanctuary can be seen as an effective counter-move to an allegedly totally administered society, yet it becomes obsolete and ineffectual once, as in our own time, the merciless transition to advanced capitalism is achieved, over bureaucratization becomes counterproductive and the logic of one-dimensionality is slowly reversed in order artificially to generate institutional free spaces for the recreation of the spontaneity/negativity/otherness/non-identity that administered society needs as internal control mechanisms for stable growth (and which it had destroyed in the transition period).¹³ The aphoristic fragments that once carried critical protest (Benjamin) today carry reconciliation (McLuhan).

In Benjamin's case, this problem is only compounded by the unresolved coexistence in his outlook and writings of what can today be regarded as unregenerated macrological junk derived (via Brecht especially) from traditional Marxist doctrine. To "prefer Benjamin's politics to that of the Frankfurt School" is to introduce sectarian premises into an otherwise illuminating discussion.¹⁴ At the same time, through his concern with class politics, Benjamin is prepared to make some of his best known and most valuable contributions in the area of political communications theory, specifically around questions of aesthetic *information* and aesthetic *democratization*. Benjamin is one of the very few Marxist intellectuals who have entered perceptively into that realm of cultural media where Marshall McLuhan has gained such commanding stature. His approach, unlike that of either conservative or radical critics of media, is to look on mass communications as new languages whose collectively appropriated grammar may hold great positive potentialities for human culture.

Benjamin's chief aesthetic problem is the impact of the work of art, its effect in the world. Thus at the center of his philosophy stands the question of aesthetic reception, *of the function* of art. It is this approach that opens the work into the world; and it is the deep ambivalence in the situation of aesthetic reception today in the world that is at the root of a fundamental ambivalence in Benjamin's aesthetic.¹⁵ Benjamin recognizes that aesthetic theory can only give up the principle of a work's autonomy and integrity; yet this is in danger within the frame of contemporary reception. Benjamin attempts two kinds of solution to this dilemma. In the first model, that even problematic (distracted or entertained) reception becomes a formulative principle of art so that the integrity of the work is preserved in changes in the conditions of reception. It is in this crucial respect that Benjamin's aesthetic theory can be distinguished from conventional sociologies of art. He does not simply inquire into the *sociological fate* of an achieved work; the effect of the work, its function, the reception it will get, fall, in Benjamin's view, among the deepest and most basic *formative* principles in the very composition of the work of art. In the case of Baudelaire, Benjamin cites the inattentive audience that the poet can expect as one of the fundamental formal problems of his art, and he demonstrates that precisely this unfavourable atmosphere for poetic creation becomes the material basis for great poetry.¹⁶ In other words, Benjamin deals with the conflict between integrity and reception by incorporating the end point of aesthetic communication with the starting point of aesthetic intention.

13 Ibid.

14 Fredric Jameson, "Benjamin as Historian, or How to Write a Marxist Literary History" *Minnesota Review* N.S.3 (Fall 1974), 116.

15 Sándor Radnóti, in an excellent Hungarian article entitled "A Filmhatás Ertelmezése Walter Benjamin Esztétikájában" ("On the Interpretation of the Impact of Film in Walter Benjamin's Aesthetic Theory") has stressed this point. My comments below on Benjamin's film aesthetic follow closely a part of Radnóti's argument.

16 See "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, pp. 157-202.

17 "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, p. 227.

Benjamin's second model follows the inverse strategy; here he finds aesthetic integrity exhausted within the novelties of reception. In the case of film, regarded as a new art form that has no tradition and is totally at the mercy of modern forms of reception and autonomy, as traditionally conceived, and does not try at all to inquire into the possibilities and conditions of artistically great films. In this sense, strictly speaking, he is not developing a film aesthetic at all — he is not conceiving of the film as an aesthetic form. On the contrary he explicitly argues that, in the period of mechanical reproduction of works of art, "the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental."¹⁷ In this process the work of art is relativized.

In a derivation from Lukacs's conception, art may be said to function as humanity's *time-consciousness*, an independent sphere of life crucial to the species' identity sense. It is both memory and future/hypothesis, the kind of consciousness of self that recalls and refers to mankind's most important values and intentions. At the same time, art always speaks for those small communities (not the whole of society) that feel the radical need for such aesthetic function; and consequently art is always a demand for an extended consensus, for a community that will assert validity.

In Benjamin's conception, art no longer functions as such an autonomous sphere of life. It is said to lose its autonomy, its aura; it becomes naked information available for political appropriation. Adorno had said that the deaestheticization of art may be a sign of its development, in that it may conquer new territories, but only provided that it genuinely creates *form*. Benjamin takes a different route. He gives up on aesthetic form, in favour of a preoccupation with the utilization of aesthetic content. Put differently, he shifts levels and turns his attention to the technical medium as a political form in a social arena. In this context, the two points he raises, concerning cinematic technique designed for mass reception, and the effect of this technique on masses of people, both became very important.

Now, the reason that film is important for Benjamin is precisely because of its democratic character — in the sense of his claim that film is universally accessible and sensorially direct, that everyone is an expert, and that criticism of film is one with enjoyment of film. Today we know that the art film and the mass entertainment film have separated into different categories, and, although the art film remains to an extent popular, it is no longer a democratic genre. Nevertheless Benjamin's question can be said to remain just and significant: how is a democratic, collective reception of art possible? Benjamin's hopes are pinned on mass agitational film, and his answer is formulated in terms of reception tied to entertainment. He discovers a fundamental characteristic of modern reception: distracted appreciation. Concentration would lead into the work of art; the distracted mass consumes, absorbs, assimilates the work of art.

Architecture is the art that Benjamin offers as the prototype for this kind of reception. The analogy is revealing and opens Benjamin to the Adorno type criticism that he reduces art to a political utility. For architecture is uniquely that form of art whose practical utility is completely independent and separable from the aesthetic. Aesthetic formation by contrast, cannot break away from the practical point of view. This principle remains creative in architecture, but it is destructive of form in every other art. But Benjamin,

having chosen the effect of art, often interpreted as direct and immediate, as the key problem in his aesthetic, stylizes this effect into pure utility and instrumentality as far as his theory of film is concerned. As it happens contrary to the utopian hopes of the film and aesthetic avant-garde it was precisely the manipulative film industry with its offerings of pseudo-, or substitute-art, that was able to make the most of this characteristic of film; namely that film is able to have an immediately useable, instrumental impact on everyday life.

The whole question of aura hangs in the balance on this problem of utility and immediacy. It may be said, in any case, that Benjamin develops his point of view of modern media too narrowly out of the visual arts where aura may be tied to the material uniqueness of the object. More importantly, Benjamin fails to consider the forms of mass communication to be aesthetic forms, and consequently surrenders them to his naive political assumption that the mass movement which he expects to mobilize (with the help of film) to defeat fascism will also mean the end of the bourgeois world and hence open up a world of higher creative immediacy. But the world of domination has remained, while even the former audiences of the Brechtian epic theater are gone. In such a context, it would seem to be disastrous to embrace the disintegration of all aesthetic distance and plenitude and aura, and to permit the reduction of all autonomous aesthetic transcendence to the topical immediacies of politically manipulable information.

But the paradoxes of the problematic of aura cut even deeper than that in the new world of advanced capitalism a generation after Benjamin. Aura is now reproduced systematically at the level of the social code. Benjamin speaks of changes in aesthetics since the appearance of the new photo-mechanical procedures for transmitting cultural messages. He argues that the loss of aura, of that distance that guaranteed originality and authenticity, alters aesthetic meaning — indeed that through the camera and the cinema art becomes information, de-ritualized, manipulable, and accessible to all. We have to add that the volume of information increases dramatically to the point where the production, movement, and appropriation of information become our dominant social preoccupation and the proliferation through our new cultural media of a virtual infinity of signs constitutes a multiplex in information environment that becomes internalized as our primary social experience. One thing that this situation is not accessible to in any creative fashion is an intervention conceived simply on the level of the political mass — such homogenized collectivist fictions are best left to the hallucinations of political orthodoxy.

Three kinds of comments can be made here. Firstly, we are not at all in adequate touch with this process and are very poorly oriented with respect to its creative possibilities; in fact, we may decay in the face of challenge, owing to the malignancy of our favoured social forms and mythologies. Secondly, in the multi-dimensional symbolic universes that we have come to inhabit, there exist vast human possibilities for artists; moreover, all of us are willy-nilly, bound to live (more or less talented or successful) artists. In other words, with the aid of our new technologies we may achieve richer freedoms, provided we create adequate forms.

Thirdly, (and this is the socio-cultural centre of gravity of our contemporary auratic problematic), in symbolic space-time the interface of art and information creates a systematic code of signifiers, separated from what each

18 See especially, Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation* (Paris: S.G.P.P., 1970); *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

might signify on the basis of a one-to-one correspondence, and endowed with a tremendous social power attached (more or less) to the basic logic of the continuum of domination. The very meaning of an object — as we have recently begun to thematize¹⁸ is no longer in relation to a need (a utility) to be satisfied; it has become arbitrary, indifferent to this need. Its meaning resides in its abstract and systematic relation with all other object-signs. It can then be consumed in its specificity along with all other object-signs in the framework of the systematic code that is formed by the system of abstract relations that the object-signs entertain among themselves. Aura is reborn on a system wide level, in the distance between the phenomenological level of individual need and desire and the epistemological level of the codification of the signs. The solid "reality" of 19th Century rationalizing yields to the hyperreality of the code and of simulations, models and facsimilies. Significance congeals into the false aura of the false structural totality of the generalized code. Autonomous subjectivity retreats and declines.

No structural or technical view can help us see our way clear of this dilemma: the prolonged cybernetic coordination of information, in and of itself, can only contribute to an overbureaucratized stagnation, or drift, or decay. As everything is absorbed into the code, like light into a black hole, the resultant closed system becomes entropic and enters into crisis. (I have already described the process in other terms above, in connection with the Frankfurt School's response to the one-dimensional transitional period between entrepreneurial and state regulated capitalism.) Free spaces must open up, crevices in the falsely auratic code, necessary for the survival and recreation of the code itself. The false aura that grew, sustained, and objectified itself by a usurpation of collective subjectivity may begin to yield — not to collective instrumental utility — but to the spontaneity of autonomous (inter) subjective power. We are now on uncharted land though it is recognizable as the terrain of philosophy of history. And here we can return to Benjamin and conclude with a final sweep along this ground.

John Berger suggests that the awakened interest in Benjamin coincides with the current period of re-examination of Marxism occurring all over the world. Concerning this interregnum, he writes: "The interregnum is anti-deterministic, both as regards the present being determined by the past and the future by the present. It is skeptical of so-called historical laws, as it is also skeptical of an supra-historical value implied by the notion of overall Progress or Civilization. It is aware that excessive personal political power always depends for its survival upon appeals to an impersonal destiny: that every true revolutionary act must derive from a personal hope of being able to contest in that act the world as it is. The interregnum exists in an indivisible world, where time is short, and where the immorality of the conviction that ends justify means lies in the arrogance of the assumption that time is always on one's side and that, therefore, the present moment — the time of the Now as Walter Benjamin called it — can be compromised or forgotten or denied."¹⁹

19 "Antiquarian and Revolutionary," *New Society* (18 June 1970), 1067.

Berger is undoubtedly right to identify these dimensions as relevant to Benjamin's importance and growing reputation. At the same time, as I have earlier suggested, Benjamin's philosophy of history is problematic, as is most evident from the "Theses on the Philosophy of History". In rejecting the homogenous empty time of social democratic evolutionary theory, Benjamin has recourse to the revolutionary explosion of Messianic time that ruptures the fabric of history. "For every second of time (is) the straight gate through which the Messiah might enter."²⁰ This conception carries two thoughts:

20 "Theses on the Philosophy of History," No. 18, *Illuminations*, p. 266.

unpredictably and at any-time/any-place, the great event may occur; and thereupon *everything* will be instantly different from before, transfigured and redeemed.

This indeed appears to be non-deterministic in its first aspect. But in order to protect the future from the syllogisms of rationalist deductivism, and the Now from the imposition of the sterile claims of abstractly deduced future the future is closed off from any scrutiny at all, indeed from any projected, intended, or speculated connection with Now. This attempt to sustain the future as pure Negativity, as a radical value alternative whose further determination is denied in order to keep it free, unsoiled by the past, and un-instrumentalized, produces ultimately too radical a discontinuity and becomes a transcendent conception that altogether occludes the question of historical subjectivity. For no future can be a human future, our future, if it is not conceived in the form of a "from now to the not-yet-now", that is in a form that includes a transition, some moments of continuity, some links between memory and intention. Thus in backing away from immanent determinism, in the end the conception falls through the trap door into the unknowns of transcendent determinations.

The second aspect, likewise, in the allusion to instantaneous correlation and transformation of all aspects of human life (if only to blow everything out of the continuum of history) in the image of messianic redemption, reintroduces at the transcendent level that supra-historical logic of homogeneity that was to be cast out. The event magnetizes the entire human field.

Curiously, Benjamin's critique of the transparent, homogenous, empty time of rationalism arrives at its mirror image, the opaque, homogenous, saturated time of irrationalism. This, too, is part of its appeal for a certain audience. Both conceptions are tendentially equally totalitarian in their references to both future and past. What they share is a belief in the rationality of the present system of domination, whose continuation they either affirm or deny. Both permit the actual to usurp and exhaust the notion of the rational. To cut it off, to end the continuum, then, Benjamin abandons the dialogue with the future (in the sense of 'from now to the not-yet-now') and points only an apocalyptic future (eschatological rupture). Correspondingly he abandons dialogue with the past; the future is to be an absolute *novum*. It is this same dynamic that we found on the micrological level in his libertarian/objectivist conception of a composition of citations that denied the authority of the present (that present that has no continuable future) to dialogue with the past and interrogate it according to its own rationality (structure of needs, desires, codes) and sense of continuity. The method here indicates a wish to withdraw into particulars that are not dominated by the concept, that are not rational. On the level of the philosophy of history and on the level of epistemology, an inability to experience and conceive of the prevailing totalitarian social rationality as only transitionally one-dimensional and not in permanent exhaustive command of the entire field of reason entices the theorist into the mysticism of unreason.

There is no easy solution to this; as long as the structures of the capitalist domination occupy most of the social field, its antinomies will have continuing play. The drama of rationalism and irrationalism that Lukacs explored in *History and Class Consciousness* evidently proceeds to unfold.

Walter Benjamin could not so totally transcend his time — the most barbaric of this century — as to leave us with a complete viable cultural model. Yet

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF FILM STUDIES

ON JACQUES RIVETTE

Peter Harcourt

Unlike Godard whose work has always enjoyed a fashionable prestige amongst specialized audiences, Rivette's output has been so slender and its reception so precarious that he has become at least until recently, the cineaste maudite of modern times. Yet Rivette's films are exemplary because in their great tentativeness and open-ended quality, they are films that we can learn from. They are films that might inspire other filmmakers to go their different ways towards discovering equally challenging forms. One of the discouraging qualities about works so prodigiously, so intellectually structured as those of Godard is that they seem to use up the very forms that they discover. As he kept implying before his Dziga-Vertov period, Godard tended to bring each of his films to an absolute end: FIN — du cinema, as the closing title in *Weekend* has it. *Fin du cinema bourgeois*, is no doubt the correct political reading of this kind of *blague* — the end of bourgeois illusionist cinema, the end of a cinema of entertainment. Nevertheless there is the feeling in so much of Godard's work of progress towards a closure, towards a world, both aesthetic and political, that is really devoid of viable alternatives. In my reading of Rivette, his films are very different from this.

His three major films all involve some kind of search, within which is built the struggle to put on a performance — a performance of a classical text that belongs to the past. Pervading these twin ingredients is also the sense of inescapable paranoia, of a kind of conspiracy that interferes both with the search and with the performance and which makes all the characters uncertain about their relationship to one another. More than this, the films end in non-achievement: The performances don't take place and the sense of conspiracy remains an unsolvable riddle. As Ken Kelman has put it, talking about *Paris Nous Appartient* the film 'expresses the fatalism and doubt of our time as no other film has done.'¹ And yet in all Rivette's films there is also the feeling that this search will continue, that some sort of struggle will carry on.

Though extremely drab visually and depressed and lifeless in many of its aspects,² *Paris Nous Appartient* (1960) was a challenging beginning. Even while making it, Rivette knew that he was making a difficult film, one that would 'please only one person in ten'; but he had no intention of idealizing his characters or even of taking them as especially 'typical': They are all tragic puppets, taking themselves too seriously, living in a sort of dream-world and sickened by the real world which they can't reform.³ Yet with hindsight, we must be excused if we see the characters in *Paris Nous Appartient* as rather more typical than Rivette intended. They seem typical both of the alienation endemic to the sensitive intellectual living within the consumer values of contemporary society and more particularly, of the Parisian intellectual's sense of personal responsibility, nurtured as they were on the existential philosophies of Camus and Sartre that were so much a part of the thinking of that time.

As Rivette's films are so long and as they build up their structure of implication as much from a network of interwoven representational gestures as from more deliberately formal elements, it is impossible to take one or two representative moments as standing for the film as a whole; furthermore, as each of his three major works seems like a refinement of the film that preceded it, it is difficult even to talk about one film as a separate entity. However certain questions can be asked.

First of all why do all of his films center around a theatrical representation? Rivette has offered a number of explanations. On the simplest level: *Its always exciting and effective to film someone who is working, who is making something; and theatrical work is easier to film than the work of a writer or a musician.*⁴ But there are more demanding explanations. Theatrical representations are important for Rivette ... *because they are about truth and falsehood, and the cinema is the same. Films are necessarily an enquiry about truth by means that are necessarily false — the subject of the performance. And to confront this element straightforwardly as the subject of a film — that's frankness, so you have to do it.*⁵

In other words, Rivette's theatrical representations within his films enable us to witness an artistic work in progress and to remind us of the means by which theatrical illusion is created as Rivette himself is creating a cinematic illusion. But unlike what Truffaut is pretending to do in *La Nuit Americaine* and Godard is genuinely doing in films like *Deux ou Trois Choses que Je Sais d'Elle* and *Vent d'Est* Rivette's frank declaration of the falsehoods necessary for achieving 'truth' is not simply theoretical: It is not just a 'demystification of illusionist practice'; for in Rivette, this examination of the conventions of illusionism serves other purposes as well.

1 Ken Kelman, 'Swan Song, 1960', in *Moviegoer* (New York) No. 2., Sum-Aut. '64 p.61

2 As Rivette himself is well aware. See *Cahiers du Cinema* (Paris) No. 204, Sept. '68, p. 15.

3 Louis Marcorelles, 'Paris Nous Appartient', in *Sight & Sound* (London), Vol. 28 No. 1, Winter '58-'59, p. 34.

4 In *Cahiers du Cinema* No. 204, p. 7.

5 *Ibid*, p. 15.

These purposes seem contradictory. On the one hand, the plays — all derived from the traditions of classical theater — seem irrelevant to the lives these people lead. Perhaps this is why the innumerable rehearsals that we see throughout the films never seem to progress. In *Paris Nous Appartient*, it is the same scene from *Pericles* that we witness over and over again; and in *l'Amour Fou*, while the framing shots in the dressing rooms at both the opening and closing of the film imply that some kind of performance is about to take place, in the rehearsals we see, the actors never make more than the most fragmentary progress, not even to the point of memorizing their lines. Finally, in the fragment of *Spectre* which is available to us, neither of the plays gets beyond the most preliminary, improvisational stage.

At the same time, a more extended essay could easily establish the thematic relevance of each play for the film that contains it — *Pericles*, for *Paris Nous Appartient*; *Andromaque*, for *l'Amour Fou*; and both *Prometheus Bound* and *Seven Against Thebes* for *Out One: Spectre*. Moreover to move from the thematic to the metaphoric level, there is the sense in all these films that those who have a secure role in the plays have a relatively secure role in their lives.

In *Paris Nous Appartient* when Anne loses her role as Marina in *Pericles*, her life becomes even more alienated than it was previously; and in *l'Amour Fou* when Claire walks out of her role in *Andromaque*, she walks out of the security of her relationship with Sebastien who is simultaneously director of the play, leading actor, and her husband. She is then replaced by Marta — Sebastien's former wife. For a while, Claire continues to attend rehearsals, whether out of interest or out of an increasingly paranoid desire to spy on the others is not made clear; but what is made clear is that she becomes more and more separated from the others, especially from Sebastien. She begins rehearsing her part alone at home into a tape recorder, before moving on to assemble evidence against Sebastien in her gradual move towards a nervous breakdown, towards the isolation of madness.

Sebastien too seems dependent for his stability upon his confidence with the play. The more domestic matters worry him, the less attention he can bring to his work and the more distraught he becomes. Finally, after his extended attempt at a reconciliation with his wife comes to nothing, we see him utterly defeated — alone in his devastated apartment, too passive now even to answer the telephone. He seems to have lost all sense of purpose, all interest in his play, and all sense of relationship to the outside world.

The films ends with the same shots that had opened it, with the sense of separation and emptiness — Claire travelling away on a train; Sebastien as if defeated, in his apartment; the characters of the play, in costume and make-up, as if ready for a performance; and then that slow tilt down from those few spectators in that huge arena onto an empty stage as we hear, as if from some other space, a baby crying — as we had heard as well at the opening of the film.

The form of *l'Amour Fou* is thus entirely circular, its pre-determined end inscribed in its beginning. Within this circle of defeat, the attention given to *Andromaque* might seem to represent the need for some sort of collective activity, some certainty of social existence that might free the participants from too great a dependence upon their merely private selves.

For instance, in *l'Amour Fou* the attempted reconciliation between Claire and Sebastien itself takes the form of a kind of guerrilla theatre — seeming at times to anticipate *Themroc* in its sense of reversion to a more primitive state of existence, breaking down the walls that artificially divide people in modern, civilized, Parisien apartment living; at other times anticipating *Last Tango in Paris* in its sense of a couple trying to work out all their identity and existential dilemmas through an extraordinarily concentrated and isolated sexual exploration of one another (although in *l'Amour Fou* within a much more complex structure than we find in Bertolucci's film). In *l'Amour Fou* what they do during this extended weekend together is to act little dramas, paint pictures on one another and on the walls, change their living room into a kind of African Safari, and dress up as hillbillies — all this in between more tender moments and bouts of making love.

This is an extraordinary scene in the film, very physical and very violent, in strange and in many ways undecipherable contrast with the rest of the film. Yet the point about such a private drama must be finally that it leads to nothing — to Sebastien's separation from his play and to the separation from one another. 'We've played too much. I don't want to see you anymore,' Claire finally explains, with tears in her eyes. 'Go away.' It is as if in a quite different way from Godard and Gorin in *Tout Va Bien* Rivette realizes that a couple cannot work out their problems all alone, isolated from the world outside. They have to be at the same time related to other people, other activities — in Rivette, invariably, to some kind of art.

In this context, what 'art' seems to imply is a set of ground-rules, a series of 'codes' which one can transform as one wishes in the process of the appropriation but which are necessary to begin with to hold people together. 'What is theatre?' asks Sebastien at one point in *l'Amour Fou*: 'A Game of masks.' By extension the idea of masks might also refer to the security given to us by definable social roles.

Throughout *l'Amour Fou* with its jumbled time sequence, there are a series of café shots of the theatre group — drinking talking and laughing together. These appear to have been shot with non-synchronous sound, the actual words somewhat indistinct, as if the sound of one such gathering has been laid over the images of another. This effect has of course, no single interpretation; but for me personally it emphasizes the impersonality, and contradictions of collective cultural work. Like the African drum beats that form the in-sync rhythmic basis for some of the improvisations of the *Seven Against Thebes* play in *Out One: Spectre* and which carry over on the soundtrack to accompany a very different kind of balletic miming for the *Prometheus* rehearsals, there is the sense of something beyond the merely individual, beyond the single moment at work here.

By these speculations, I don't mean to imply a transcendent ideality. It is just that culture, — which involves art but also sports — sustains and makes meaningful the lives of the people who partake in it, that make the effort to become part of such a group endeavour. Collective activity of whatever kind, liberates the individual from the merely existential self. It involves him in ritual, in some sort of play.⁶ In Rivette's world, this activity seems more meaningful when there is a text to work from — no matter how irrelevant its own cultural values may seem to be to those of the world that his characters inhabit, no matter how little progress they make in realizing their project. As Lilli one of the actresses in the *Seven Against Thebes* group in *Spectre* explains at one point in the film: She left the *Prometheus* group because she

⁶ See 'Entretien avec Jacques Rivette' in *La Nouvelle Critique* (Paris), No. 63 (244), April '73, p. 70.

didn't want to present it. She simply wanted to work on it with Thomas — 'so we'll be whole', as she explains. Similarly (to stay with *Spectre* for a moment), Thomas explains to the ever enquiring Colin that there are no particular parallels between *Prometheus* as a play and Balzac's *L'Histoire des Treize* — which is yet another text that plays an important part in the film. But later on, to someone else Thomas suggests that these texts, while not in themselves important, Supply the energy *pour faire bouger les choses* — to get things moving.

For Godard/Gorin, the small hope that emerges for the couple at the end of *Tout Va Bien* rests in their ability to 're-think themselves historically'. For Rivette the hope seems to lie with an attachment to something outside of oneself. This something is always associated with the past, with the classical text. This text can then be transformed, even primitivized; for theatre is often given a tribal feeling in Rivette. This is essentially true of *Spectre*; but even in *L'Amour Fou*, the gongs and costumes and the two black actresses give the performance of *Andromaque* a strongly African, third-world flavour as it in reference to a past even more distant than the time of Racine.

I don't think that it is tradition that Rivette is concerned with here — certainly not tradition as Eliot or Leavis might define it; but not unlike Godard/Gorin, it is a concern with 'history', as if the past might contain the key to our confusions. This statement leads me to the other element that is central to all of Rivette's work, even to *La Religieuse* — the sense of the quest.

Like the theatrical performances, the fact of the quest, the activity it provokes may be more important than the object sought after. In *Paris Nous Appartient*, Anne spends the bulk of the film trying to locate the music that the vanished Juan had recorded for the performance of *Pericles*; but when she finally finds it she scarcely listens to it. Similarly in *L'Amour Fou*, Claire's conviction at one point in the film that she must have a particular kind of dog — an Artesian Basset — sends her into a fury of ludicrous enquiries; but when Sebastien presents her with a little kitten, she completely ignores it and finally, in a moment of fury, throws it out of the apartment.

But in *L'Amour Fou*, the real quest relates to Claire and Sebastien's search for a meaningful relationship together — a relationship that they never achieve. For Claire personally, the quest might have been for a meaningful role in life, which nevertheless ends in flight — all those shots throughout the film of her train ride away from Sebastien, away from Paris. For Sebastien it might have been his play, which by the end of the film he seems to have abandoned.

In *Out One: Spectre*, the central questing presence is lodged in Colin, the character created by Jean-Pierre Léaud. Like Anne in *Paris Nous Appartient*, 'the little girl has no ideas of her own', as she describes herself to her brother towards the opening of the film, Colin is the 'neutral' observer, the 'innocent' enquirer. He has no practice of his own, apparently, other than the desire to understand. He is not involved in either of the theatrical productions nor with the conspiratorial group which, in Colin's mind, is somehow related to Balzac's story, *L'Histoire des Treize* and which becomes further entangled in the undecipherable riddles of Lewis Carroll, hinting at a meaning that cannot quite be grasped. He is so neutral in fact, so removed from direct involvement in his own investigations that, throughout the first

third of the film — in the four hour, twenty minute fragment that is available to us — he presents himself, even when alone, as a deaf mute, as if trying to avoid the intellectual self-deceptions of language.

In this film there is so much 'doubling' of the action, where complimentary texts are presented simultaneously yet with very little narrative relationship between them, Colin's role is somewhat paralleled by that of Frédérique (Juliet Berto), the amateurish con girl whose quest seems simply to survive, by whatever means she can. Yet by the end of the film, she is left alone in her *chambre de bonne*, apparently contemplating suicide; while Colin has given up his interviews and his attempts to form a relationship with the enigmatic Pauline/Emile (played in this film by Bulle Ogier, who also played Claire in *l'Amour Fou*) and is like Frédérique, alone in his room. He seems to have given up language again, or at any rate words. He has abandoned his attempts to articulate meaning as he sits on his bed, in classic lotus position, flicking his little Eiffel Tower key-chain back and forth, counting out again and again a series of numbers, trying to persuade his trinket to come to rest on the apparently magical *treize*.

Like the theatrical performances, the quests in Rivette's films seem less important in themselves than in the way that they provide energy *pour faire bouger les choses*. They are often ridiculous or else seem irrelevant and they generally fail. Is this the source of the paranoia that pervades all Rivette's films? Why is there this sense of conspiracy governing these people's lives, as if acting upon them in ways that they cannot understand? This is the third crucial question that we must consider when we contemplate Rivette's films.

* * * * *

Once again, any attempt to answer this question must, at this stage, be both tentative and speculative. Perhaps it can best be attempted by dealing with another characteristic that Rivette's films have increasingly revealed — the multiplicity of texts that make up their structure.

l'Amour Fou, for instance, is not one film but two,. There is Rivette's film, shot on 35mm with a standard French wide screen aspect ratio, employing for the most part within any individual scene the conventional codes of illusionist cinema.

Conversations between Claire and Sebastien are shot very conventionally. Medium close-up, one-shot, action/reaction shots make up the bulk of their first meal together — a scene that culminates with a long shot of the two of them from the side of the table; while another meal is photographed largely in units of two-shot, action/reaction shots — again in a conventional way. A more extended analysis of the film could, I am sure, make something of the stylistic difference between these two meals. My point here, however, is that these scenes are handled with the standard cinematic syntax of conventional cinema — clear, authoritative, self-effacing (as in Rohmer), focusing our attention on the apparent reality of these two people's lives.

Within this film, however, making us aware of its traditional conventions, is another film, shot on 16mm with the standard 16mm aspect ratio — hand held probings in the movement of hands and the expression of faces, grainy, inquisitive, — minutely examining the rehearsal of the play. In narrative terms, it is a documentary being made on Sebastien's staging of

Andromaque; but in terms of our response to the totality of *l'Amour Fou*, this footage has a more complex effect.

The different conventions of these two films which are, throughout *l'Amour Fou*, freely and significantly intercut with one another, making us aware that there are, in fact, conventions being used, that there is indeed, a film being made. As Sebastien explains about the conventional Alexandrines that form the basic metric unit of Racine's play: 'You have to speak them as if they don't exist. Then they will have a force of their own.' Unlike Godard who questions his conventions directly, either by drawing attention to them on the sound track (as in *Deux ou Trois Choses*) or by subverting them (as in *Vent d'Est*), Rivette simply interweaves two totally different conventions, using them unself-consciously to create his two types of different illusion, leaving them to interact with one another like two separate characters, allowing them to acquire a force of their own.

In this way the intercutting is used to emphasize the similarities (and differences) between the theatrical presentation — the declared illusion that we see being created — and the narrative text of the film — the 'submerged' illusion, the story of Claire and Sebastien, which is presented to us more directly (as in Rohmer) as if really there. For instance, at one point within the submerged illusion (the 35mm footage) we see Claire with her recorder, recording the part that she has decided to drop: 'Where am I? What have I done?' This question while derived from *Andromaque*, obviously at this moment relates to Claire's own life, to her relationship to her acting, to the future with her husband. But when we cut from this moment, to the hand-held 16mm rehearsal of the play and hear Marta saying the same lines, we are faced with a complex response.

This response can involve us in a series of conceptual questions, questions that relate to the conventions of the classical theatrical act, to the 16mm conventions of *cinéma-vérité*, to classical illusionist cinema, and finally, to reality itself. For Rivette is questioning both art and reality. To what extent is the way we voice our thoughts dictated by the linguistic culture which we have absorbed? How do we relate to one another, even in real life, unless our culture assigns acceptable roles to us, unless it provides us with a language, unless it helps us find the words we have to speak. (Rivette intends these questions to be asked in as unmechanical a fashion as possible).

7 For a helpfully descriptive account of the film, see Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Work and Play in the House of Fiction', in *Sight & Sound* (London), Vol. 43 No. 4, Aut. '74, pp. 190-194.

These epistemological questions are taken even further in *Out One: Spectre*.⁷ This film is supposedly a collective creation, the various characters devising their own roles based on ideas supplied by Rivette. Originally designed with the hope of a television transmission consisting of eight parts, its total length runs for almost thirteen hours! Meanwhile the four hour *spectre* of the original that was prepared for theatrical release consists of four separate stories, bits of which intersect at various points in the film. These four stories are linked together by the ever-enquiring Colin, whose quest for comprehension (never achieved) leads him to go about like a journalist (or like a *vérité* filmmaker, if we wish to establish a link with Rivette's previous film), interviewing everyone, trying to find things out. *Vous êtes vraiment partout* as Thomas (Michael Lonsdale) says to him at one moment in the film.

Basic amongst the stories (as I have already implied) are two separate attempts to stage two different Aeschylus tragedies, each apparently in highly improvisational ways. In fact the *Prometheus Unbound* productions, controlled by Thomas, seems to have more in common with a kind of

therapy session than it does with conventional drama. There is a lot of mime and two or three extraordinary scenes in which the characters seem to be striving to invent a primitive pre-language. They seem to be struggling to free themselves from the conventional meanings that the passing of time has laid over certain words, in order to understand more completely a particular line from the *Prometheus* play. These pre-language exercises move through an extraordinary escalation of word shouting and wrestling on the floor — again as if attempting some sort of inner freedom from the exercise. 'Don't think my silence is from pride,' is the line that they are finally shouting — a line which a fuller analysis of this film could establish as far from arbitrary. Then this moment of improvised violence is followed by a completely silent, touching session — the actors sitting on the floor, stroking one another's cheek.

Of course this sequence is not continuous in the film but is intercut, and therefore affected by the other stories in the film, especially by the other theatrical group. The sound of one rehearsal as I have said, frequently overlaps with the visuals of another, rather like intercutting of the 35mm and the 16mm sound in *l'Amour Fou*.

There is thus a kind of Makavejev quality in Rivette's sense of theater, by which I mean a recognition that we have to revert to more primitive, cognitive forms of expression in order to free ourselves, if only partially, from the repressions and false notions that our civilized expectations have forced upon us. Colin's quest also seems just as rigorously an interrogation of words.

What are the conventions that make words meaningful? Is Lewis Carroll's nonsense any more nonsensical than the ordered rationality of Balzac? Does the linear rationality of words mystify and exclude experience as much as it clarifies and reveals it? This seems to be the question indirectly asked by all Colin's scribbles on his blackboard in his room, the sub-text of his quest, so-to-speak. It also seems to be the basic question asked by the entire film.

A Balzacian (symptomatically played by Eric Rohmer!) seems to have all the answers to all the questions that Colin poses to him about the inapplicability of Balzac's story concerning a conspiratorial group of thirteen people in relation to the complex society of today. His answers all make sense in relation to the upright, uptight professorial tradition from which such answers spring — the man who knows, explaining his 'knowledge' to the man who doesn't, in the best (and worst!) professorial tradition. But his answers make no sense at all in relation to the totality of *Out One: Spectre*.

Throughout this film, Rivette frustrates our need for understanding by playing tricks with the conventional cinematic codes. Just as he cuts between the 35mm and 16mm footage in *l'Amour Fou*, so in *Spectre* he combines and contrasts his four stories in a variety of unsettling ways.

Jonathan Rosenbaum has commented on the wide range of acting styles that Rivette manages to contain within his film: *Spectre's surface is dictated by accommodations, combinations and clashes brought about by contrasting styles of 'playing'*.⁸ But there are also extraordinarily varied styles of shooting, linked together in a most disorientating way.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 191.

For instance, some of the domestic scenes — principally Thomas' visit to Sarah (Bernadette Lafonte) at Obade on the sea and his visit to Pauline and her family when he brings them the tortoise — these scenes are shot with virtually a static camera, in long sustained takes. It is as if they are simply recording the 'theatrical' improvisation that the characters are creating for us, the film itself creating nothing on its own. Other scenes — principally Thomas' rehearsal scenes — are shot very much in a *cinéma-vérité* style, like the 16mm footage in *l'Amour Fou* — hand-held, working in close to the characters, following their movements, selecting from them the details that Rivette wants us to see.

Finally, there are other sequences that are shot and cut in a quite conventional way, according to the time-honoured techniques of 'invisible' continuity editing. Except with one recurring difference: In *Spectre*, with his four interwoven stories, Rivette will take (for instance) a glance right from one of his characters in the midst of a conversation and match it perfectly with a glance left from another character — except that it is a character from a different story! Thus while employing at times conventional cutting, Rivette subverts it by dislocating us in this way. Furthermore, the continuity of cutting when it is used in this way implies a relationship between the characters that the narrative itself denies. Thus this device, amongst others, reinforces the feeling that we have throughout the film of an urgency of motivation, even though its origins are unclear.

Out One: Spectre is interspersed, one could even say, punctuated, with sequences of black-and-white stills, sequences that are accompanied by an electronic hum which sounds a bit like a censorial bleep. These are the 'scars' that I referred to earlier, caused by cutting down the original version to the version we know now. They are even somewhat described as such by Rivette himself, as an aid to continuity in the shortened version: . . . *in the four-hour version we made use of black-and-white stills, either as a recall or an ellipse, a connection or a pause; in some cases the stills match with moments already seen, in others with scenes to come, occasionally with sequences that have been removed from this version entirely*⁹ Like the plaster-of-Paris statues in Godard's *Le Mépris*, the only valid signs that remain now of Homer's vanished world, it is as if Rivette's stills suggest the traces of the original, unavailable film — that 'invisible, legendary work', as Rosenbaum has called it.¹⁰ Furthermore, by an odd irony that Rivette could not have intended, the stills within *Spectre* seem to build within the film's structure hints of its own ruins, the sense of moments frozen and dead, of (indeed) the illustrations that will appear in all the books and film magazines which will be read by all the people who will never see the film. Thus it is as if in *Spectre*, throughout its complex and challenging and many-styled form, the progress of the film is repeatedly interrupted by these reminders of the only way that for most of the world the film will be known.

* * *

In the films of Jacques Rivette, from where does their pervasive sense of conspiracy spring? This is the question which I began with a few pages ago. I think I am now approaching an answer, provisional and speculative though it necessarily must be.¹¹ It springs, it seems to me, from the inadequacy nowadays of the answers to all the questions that we ask ourselves, to the recognition — sometimes conscious, sometimes only dimly felt — that the cultural forms that we have inherited, the forms of our language, of our art, of our social relationships, are inadequate to enable us to become the kind of people that we might want to be.

9 'Jacques Rivette, interviewed by Carlos Clarens and Edgardo Cozarinsky', in *Sight & Sound* (London) Vol. 43 No. 4, Aut. '74, p. 196.

10 Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Work and Play', in *Sight & Sound*, p. 191.

11 Rivette would appear to attach very little conscious importance to it himself. He sees the idea of a 'complot' chiefly as a fictional convenience, 'to connect all the elements'. See 'Phantom Interviews over Rivette', by Jonathan Rosenbaum, Lauren Sedofsky, & Gilbert Adair, in *Film Comment* (New York), Vol. 10 No. 5, Sept./Oct. '74, pp. 18-24.

Culture is now too multiple, the texts available to us too numerous and too arbitrary, the class implications of our inheritance too obvious, for anyone to feel at ease within his own environment, to be at ease with his fellows. In his early work, Godard attempted to deal with the incomprehensibility of the world through the projection of his own wit and through the transcendence of romantic love — giving his films a lyrical quality which his growing political awareness has obliged him to reject. Rivette, on the other hand, faced with the same problems has been attracted instead (initially somewhat dreadingly) to the sense of some form of world conspiracy — a Langian view of Paris as a huge Metropolis, managed by a handful of technocrats and madmen. This might be a political issue as, arguably, it is; but in Rivette's films, it is never named as such. His view has been more Kafkaesque, more cosmic. 'The real masters have no names,' as Phillip explained to Anne in *Paris Nous Appartient*.

Helped immeasurably, I am sure, by Gorin, Godard's later work has dealt in increasingly political terms — with the problems of contemporary capitalism via a Marxist analysis. He uses the Marxist concept of alienation, to define our society as made up of individuals who are emotionally unrelated to the work they do, to the high-rise structures of society that contain them, to the social, sexual, political roles that they are expected to play.

Inhabiting the same world, Rivette has taken another route. Less political on the surface, I think his films could be seen in the same political way, certainly as part of the same thrust of protest. Rivette's early work (and there is only one film to put against a dozen by Godard) seemed unsatisfactory because of its addiction to riddles, because of its irrational capitulation to the source of evil as a mystery, a mystery without solution. While a similar charge could be brought against his later work, I think the effect is very different — far more unsettling in what I have called an exemplary way.

What *Spectre* represents, finally, in terms of the thinking that we have come to engage in to come to grips with the film is a most disturbing examination of our classical epistemology, an attack on the confidence with which we assume we know. This attack tends to undermine the very basis of language. It raises questions about the way language is used as a weapon by the class that controls it to impose an ordering of existence upon another class who are kept in their place by being failed out of the system if they do not master the literary codes by which 'intelligence' is measured.

This analysis makes even more sense in international terms. It is even more sharply relevant to the way that Europe (now Europe and America) has dominated third world peoples, by means of their mastery of the apparent rationality of language and its handmaiden, technology. Thus, Eurocentric cultural values have become the standard by which a country is considered 'developed' or 'underdeveloped'. And these values with all their art and scientific capabilities provide the consolation prize for the political imperialism by which they have been enforced.

Thus in Western thinking the sanctity of individual consciousness, so valued in humanistic art, has gone hand-in-hand with monopolistic capitalism — the obverse of the same individualism so valued in our culture. Though never stated directly in his films, it is as if Rivette realizes that the old fashioned individual notions of inwardness, the purely personal existential quest, leads one to no effective knowledge but simply to ever increasingly multiplied images of oneself — like the room with mirrors that Pauline eventually finds

herself in towards the end of *Out One: Spectre* where all she finds are multiple reflections of herself.

Through the collectivity of its creation, through the multiplicity of its stories it interweaves, through its explicit examination of the nature of language — simultaneously verbal, theatrical, and cinematic — *Out One: Spectre* seems to be contesting many of the cultural values by which many of us have lived. It contains especially that innocent confidence in the value of this cultural inheritance — our non-ideological reading of the classical texts of the past.

Spectre presents us with attempted re-readings of two dramatic texts — re-readings which (as I have said) involve aspects of primitive, pre-classical conventions. It also presents us with a number of separate yet randomly interlinking narrative structures which challenge our sense of the conventional linear plot (Pauline's bookshop is called, in fact, *l'Angle du Hasard*). Furthermore, both through Thomas' rehearsals and Colin's insistent enquiries, it offers a rigorous interrogation of the nature of language. On a single viewing the film might seem inscrutable. But it isn't really. As Anna says of *Pericles* in *Paris Nous Appartient*: "It's a bit loose, but it all ties together on another plane."

On what plane? On the plane of epistemological enquiry, it seems to me: The plane on which we attempt to 'read' the signs of our civilization and attempt to relate them to the traces of other signs left over from civilizations of the past. Hence the relevance of all the texts that we find throughout Rivette's work — with a force similar to the texts we find scattered throughout Godard. What do all these signs signify? What did they signify for another age? What can they really mean to us now? What work must we do to make them meaningful? This is the problem of all the theatre directors in all of Rivette's films, as it was the problem for Fritz Lang when trying to bring to life the values of Homer in Godard's *Le Mépris*.

In Jonathan Rosenbaum's helpful account of the film, he refers to Colin's closing comments as 'expressing an anguished agnosticism towards *all* fiction directing a stare into the face of an intractable reality.'¹² But it is not just fiction involved here: It is epistemology itself. As Rivette has said about the title of the film: "There are so many readings possible that finally there's none."¹³ Except that that itself is a reading. Things simply make no sense. They don't cohere. We don't really feel in control of our own lives. It is as if there *is* some exterior force acting upon us, as if there is some kind of conspiracy. Yet the film is not without coherence, any more than our lives are not without explanations for the way that they have become.

Once we have reached the stage where we see the world as inscrutable, where we begin to question those elements of our culture that we have been encouraged to accept as 'natural', we are on the way to thinking about it analytically which (I have come to realize) must mean politically, historically, materialistically — that is to say, if we are interested in change and in working towards a feeling of increased control. Similarly, once we have a feeling of increased control. Similarly, once we have ceased to accept all the narrative conventions that a saturation viewing of Hollywood films have trained us to 'read' so easily that we think of them as 'natural', we might be on the way towards experiencing new forms. By reducing the fragments of his fiction to a series of unfamiliar hieroglyphs that have to be puzzled out as if a foreign language, Jacques Rivette confronts us directly with this kind of problem.

¹² Rosenbaum, 'Work and Play', in *Sight & Sound*, p. 192.

¹³ 'Phantom Interviews', in *Film Comment*, p. 22.

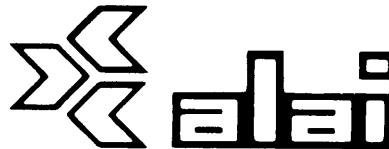
Rivette's films are thus challenging in unexpected ways. So many of the individual scenes might seem to be conventional and the style transparent, yet the films themselves are not at all so. It is as if Rivette has successfully combined the gestural qualities of Renoir's cinema — the cinema of *spectacle* — with the structural complexities of Eisenstein's cinema — the cinema of *écriture*. As he himself said back in 1968: *I truly believe that the cinema's only role is to disturb the audience, to contradict all ready-made ideas but even more those established patterns of thought that underlie those ideas. We have to stop the cinema being re-assuring.*¹⁴ At the same time, unlike the theoretical implications of so much radical thought about the cinema today, Rivette is not content simply to overthrow the notion of spectacle. This is why, for all his concern with innovation and with disturbing the audience, he can conclude that *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview with the statement that . . . *Renoir is the person who has best understood the cinema, even more than Rossellini, even than Godard — more than anyone.*¹⁵ Rivette's own quest has been, to quote again from that extended *Cahiers* interview, . . . *to find an equivalent for the cinema of the recent experiments by Stockhausen — a mixture of constructed and accidental elements which necessarily implies time, duration.*¹⁶ This quest has been, to my mind, supremely realized in *Out One: Spectre*, not only in the way the film has been presented to us but in the way we are invited to respond to it. The leisurely pace of many of its sequences, plus its extended length (even in the shortened version) necessitates a lot of work on the part of the audience, a constant attempt to correlate conflicting elements and to combine them together on our own, personal reading of the film. As one French reviewer put it: *Out One is without a doubt the first film that requires participation in its own development (even of the story) simultaneously from the actors, from the director, and from the audience as well.*¹⁷ ●

14 In *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 204, p. 20.

15 *Ibid*, p. 20.

16 *Ibid*, p.20.

17 *Ibid*, p.20.



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the spectacle of negativity

david ehrenstein

"Another objection I take more to heart: that this film (Beyond a reasonable doubt) is purely negative, and so effective in its destructive aspects that it ends ultimately by destroying itself. This is not unreasonable."

—Jacques Rivette, "The Hand", *Cahiers Du Cinéma*, no. 76, November 1967.

"What we need is to determine *in another way*, according to a differential system, the *effects* of ideality, of signification, of meaning and of reference."

—Jacques Derrida, *Positions*

The defense of certain forms of artistic/financial failure — the *misunderstood* or *neglected* film — is a firmly established critical enterprise. The work is discussed as if it were some unjustly maligned or slandered individual whose reputation as a good citizen must be restored. As in a court of law, evidence is brought forth to prove that this seeming slacker has something of value to offer the community, while other critical parties are sternly admonished for their inability to recognize this fact.

In short, traditional notions of artistic practice (e.g., intent, coherence, "creativity") bring potential non-conformity (lying behind the works' initial rejection by the system) back into line. But can all films be accommodated to such methods? What about artistic practice predicated on the destruction of concepts of *value*? The two completed segments of Jacques Rivette's projected four part *Scenes de la Vie Parallèle* — *Duelle* and *Noroit* — provide an example of this.

At first glance the narrative context of the two films — a "non-existent myth" of power struggles between goddesses of the Sun and Moon utilizing *film noir* (*Duelle*) and pirate adventure (*Noroit*) settings respectively — suggests a sort of "stylistic exercise" in the *fantastique* similar to that of Jean Cocteau (whose work is quoted extensively in *Duelle*). But if that were what was intended, the films would appear — for some — to have failed. Elliot Stein notes (of *Duelle*) "Myths, fairy tales are pointless even for children — unless a minimum of resonance is struck."¹

But even those who feel the film's fantasy premise "works" have found difficulty. Rivette's most eloquent supporter Jonathan Rosenbaum cites "...the increasing move away from any semblance of 'lived experience' in *Noroit*."²

1. "Hit-and-Myth", Film
Comment, Nov-Dec., 1976.
2. "Noroit", Sight and
Sound, Winter, 1976-77.
3. Reprinted in translation
by Tom Milne in Rivette:
Texts and Interviews,
BFI, 1977.

Rosenbaum is quite right to put quotes around "lived experience" as this concept — one to which all forms of representation must answer in the ideological demand of "realism" — is the basis of the resonance Stein cannot find. The *fantastique* is a "realistic" mode, not in so far as it corresponds to "lived experience" directly, but rather in the manner in which it establishes itself in the narrative through placement, emphasis and repetition. The sense of a coherent line to be traced through the work, as for example the vampire myth and the way in which numerous films seek to arrange its component parts (stake, coffin, cross, bat metamorphosis, etc.), strikes a sense of "real" (if only in the space of the narrative) by means of the logic of its economy. This process can then be played off against "lived experience" on another level, as for example the way in which *The Cat People* is seen to be about repressed sexual desire.

But in *Scènes* the goddess myth doesn't function with such thoroughness. Goddesses are capable of performing certain acts (e.g., Sun goddesses can be in two places at once) and operate within some specified limitations (e.g., Moon goddesses' power dissipates in direct light), but these facts are never displayed with any particular emphasis or urgency. In fact in *Noroit* the two leading players' (Geraldine Chaplin and Bernadette Laffont) status as goddesses doesn't become an issue until the film's last half hour, and then almost as an afterthought.

Despite fairly coherent plots, with no major gaps or inconsistencies other than would be usual for the genres to which the films *ostensibly* belong, a sense of overall purport seems to elude *Scènes*. As one shapeless enervated scene follows another, traditional criticism would turn to questions of intent. But intent in this context has no meaning. Rivette's analysis of *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* offers certain clues: "Destruction of the scene: since no scene is treated for its own sake, all that is retained is the mediatory aspect; anything that might determine or actualize them more concretely is not abstracted or suppressed — Lang is not Bresson — but devalued and reduced to the condition of pure spacio-temporal reference devoid of embodiment."³ This *could* be applicable to *Scènes* but if so only partially, for though the films involve "pure spacio-temporal reference devoid of embodiment", it cannot be equally said of them that "no scene is treated for its own sake."

Rivette has gone on record elsewhere⁴ as saying that "if one wishes to understand *Duelle* it is necessary to read Claude Gaignebet's *Le Carnival* and in particular Jean Markale's *La Femme Celte* ... each shot of the film is explained there." But such a project useful and illuminating though it may be is an *additional* operation in no way comparable to the primary one of seeing the film.

Rivette's statements pose problems rather than offer solutions. Traditional critical recourse to investigation of his other films equally is of little help. Examination of Rivette's past work in comparison to *Scènes* establishes little more than a mechanistic notation of superficial difference and similarity. At the same time, Rivette's involvement in the dissolution of the director's power through collaboration suggests the importance of the analysis of other forces at play in the work.

But how can the contribution of others be gauged in light of the film's methods of narrative generation by means of extant texts and references? Analysis begins to run into a series of dead ends. The texts utilized as central sources of quotation in *Scenes* — Cocteau's *Les Chevaliers du Table Ronde* in *Duelle*, Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* in *Noroi* — are merely pre-texts, having nothing to "say" about the films that enclose them, posed in the narrative as subjects for further research (like *Le Carnival* and *La Femme Celte*). Similarly the numerous references to other films do not serve to assist the work at hand in any direct manner — they're simply flatly stated with none of the reflexive snap of filmic cross-reference to be found in *Made in U.S.A.* by Godard.

To note this flatness, this limpidity, this unfixed drift, this lack of urgency, is to come to grips with the negativity that is *Scènes'* chief by-product. The films are devoted to methods that while seeming to reach representational specificity, do so in a manner designed to cancel all possible affectivity.

The settings and costumes of *Duelle* suggest their display in a reserved "theatrical" style, but the camera, while tracking smoothly, does so far too energetically, and when coupled with the film's nervous angular montage rhythms, disrupts the space it has spent so much time constructing. Likewise each setting (casino, hotel, aquarium, ballet school, race track, park, subway, dance hall, and greenhouse in *Duelle*, castle by the sea in *Noroi*) suggests the possibility of an atmosphere the *mise en scène* never seems directly to create (as in Resnais, Franju, Fellini, etc.).

Similarly acting styles clash with one another. Flip off-hand cool (Bulle Ogier, Bernadette Laffont) wars with highly stylized affectation (Hermine Karaheuz, Geraldine Chaplin) rather than the work holding to the latter mentioned category for an overall tone as would be logically demanded by a project of this sort.

This dual operation, this creation/dissolution, keeps every element in Jacques Derrida's phrase *sous rature* — under erasure. The film's essence is thus not reducible to a specific moment, but must be seen in the working through of its positive/negative gestures — unfixed points neither within nor without the films.

It is perhaps through the observation of the curious position occupied by women in the films that some sort of understanding of this operation might be seen. Women dominate *Scènes* — instigators, implementers, heroes of the

fiction. Clearly what must be avoided at all costs is the superficial application of Lacanian theory to this — the entire project simply seen as the expression of horror in the face of sexual difference coupled with the fear of possible castration. There can be little doubt that this fear and horror is involved in some way, but it would be wrong to jump to any quick conclusions as to the meaning of its functioning in light of the women's narrative status.

The degree of fetish involved in the manner of dress in *Duelle* suggests a means of making up for some lack (i.e., castration). But although Juliet Berto has more costume changes than Dietrich in her heyday, they never serve the spectator as anything other than part of the decor — a surface made "busy". Dietrich's manner of dress and bearing was always elaborately displayed to the spectator as to invite voyeuristic enjoyment of the fetish directly (e.g., the silk scarf in *The Scarlet Empress*). Likewise the female-led pirate band while suggesting the refusal of femininity Claire Johnson finds in Tourneur's *Anne of the Indies*⁵ can be seen as such in *Noroi* only if it is to be assumed that the film takes place in a period setting where Laffont's costume would denote transvestism. As no such assurances can be made (the film is set in no particular time) the sense of refusal becomes problematic.

5. "Femininity and the
Masquerade: Anne of the
Indies", Jacques Tourneur,
Edinburgh Festival Publi-
cation, 1975.

Similarly the implied castration of the few males in view (Jean Babilee in *Duelle*, Herbert Balsan and Larrio Ekson in *Noroi*) is never mentioned by the characters or underscored as a point of significance by the narrative (e.g., *3 Women*, *Seven Women*). Castration as an issue to confront the male in the face of the predatory female as it exists in virtually all the *film noirs* that *Duelle* cites (*Kiss Me Deadly*, *Lady From Shanghai*, etc.) seems to be displaced, forgotten by the film.

This aphasia in the face of sexual difference is a far cry from the knowing-yet-not-knowing of traditional films that transform the problem into the construction of narrative enigma the solution of which by the male characters will restore their power, banishing the female's supposed castrating threat (e.g., *The Maltese Falcon*). *Scènes* draws a huge question mark over all of this. The construction of three-dimensional entities is necessary for such a presentation and the resolute two-dimensionality that the characters of *Scènes* hold to cannot support it. What mystery is to be found in the spectacle of *actresses moving through* decor? Obviously the films cannot simply be read as feminist. But what are they?

Clearly it's a lot easier to describe what *Scènes* isn't than to suggest what it is or even *might* be. Where does a project of this kind lead — to what purpose? It is in no doubt in this question's refusal to be answered — its insistence on remaining a question — that *Scènes*' true power lies. Its unwillingness to make itself available for immediate "use" suggests the placement of its weight in direct opposition to the mechanical utilitarianism of most films. But should this opposition be pursued? It would seem unavoidable, as it cannot be denied that *Scènes* sits most oddly not only in relation to contemporary advanced filmmaking (Snow, etc.) but in contrast to dominant practice as well.

This dominant practice is in some sort of crisis at the moment in relation to certain aspects of spectacle brushed up against by *Scènes*. In a remarkably well thought out, elaborately detailed, though politically reactionary examination of the evolution of narrative film spectacle, "Pagents of Violence"⁶, Mark LeFanu notes the tendency of classical hollywood filmmaking to condense and flatten historical specificity by means of the creation of genre con-

6. *Monogram* No. 6, Oct.,
1975.

7. "Sylvia Scarlett:
Hollywood Cinema Re-
read", *Cahiers du Cinema*,
No., 239-40, May-June,
1972.

ventions (as for example the gangster films of the thirties depiction of events that took place only a few years before the films were made) emphasizing the individual at the expense of broader political contexts — what Pascal Kané calls "the obligation imposed on the hero to define himself differentially in relation to the entire community in order to exist qua hero."⁷ LeFanu argues that this process creates a far richer texture than that to be found in the dialectical tensions of the historically placed work of, for example, Eisenstein. This loss of historical focus is seen as being resolved on another level: "... the American cinema has never pretended to examine political events that lead up to a given confrontation. What it does and has always done in unsurpassed fashion is to give us the feeling of actually experiencing the conditions in question."

In other words intellectual clarity is once again sacrificed on the altar of superficial emotional response. Things have changed of course, and in Hollywood filmmaking today LeFanu notes: "The loss of confidence in the way things are going at present politically has spawned an era of doubt and pessimism — the Viet Nam era of *Bonnie and Clyde*, *They Shoot Horses Don't They?*, *Taxi Driver*, (none of course dealing directly with the war)."

The desire on the part of dominant film to reactivate spectacle, to turn from this pessimism and rescue the heroic gesture in some form, has taken the desperation of the "disaster" film — where the context of immanent death keeps the question of heroism's presence at bay. More recently films like *Jaws* and *Rocky* have been able to strike a balance by presenting the heroic in a casual matter-of-fact manner played off against an atmosphere of pessimism inherited from the sixties.

But an entirely new and truly positive direction has been discovered in *Star Wars* by means of setting the traditional spectacle in a context of elaborate cinematic cross-reference. Human history may be forgotten (Viet Nam, Watergate), but film history is just in the process of being remembered (That's Entertainment). *Star Wars* rewards its audience's knowledge of each citation (2001, *Flash Gordon*, various westerns and war films) by bracketing it in a sub-text, the functioning of which takes precedent over considerations of narrative and character. These older forms take a back seat to the creation of visual effects as the focus of spectacle, pushed along by the sub-text in a manner designed to keep the viewer in Christian Metz's words "alienated and happy."⁸ The audience believes that it knows something about the spectacle is wise to its tricks and traps. But the spectator is deluded as before — the sub-text's pseudo-knowledge serving to mask historical specificity all the better.

8. "History/Discourse",
Edinburgh '76 Magazine.

This new found ability to mine dead forms contrast sharply with *Scènes* play with the corpses of discarded genres — all play insisting on their status as dead, all generic political implications gaping open rather than smoothing over. Thus this interrogation of affectivity *can* be set in a purposeful context. The embarrassingly simple minded oedipal scenario of *Star Wars* sits oddly alongside the goddesses spectral sexuality. But in seeking a use for the useless have we not risked contradiction — finding a way to encapsulate or absorb that which would choose to escape classification?

Bernadette Laffont slitting a compatriot's throat after observing the enactment of a similar murder in the play-within-the film, cancelling the power of dramatic violence through anti-climax. Hermine Karahuez's sudden scream at the ominous approach of the croupier summoned by Bulle Ogier in

the casino in *Duelle* — her mouth opened, her body tensed. Juliet Berto's double annihilation of Jean Babilee (also in *Duelle*) — dragging him into the darkness of the corner of a hotel room in one scene, casually shooting him on a subway platform in another. These moments, and many others like them, present both visual and oral evidence of the "obtuse meaning" the "third sense" that Roland Barthes has found in certain film stills.

9. "Le Troisième Sens",
Cahiers du Cinema, No.,
222, July, 1970.

Of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* Barthes writes⁹ "Imagine following not Euphrosinia's machinations, nor even the character (as a diegetic entity or as a symbolic figure), nor even, further, the countenance of the wicked mother, but only, in this countenance, that grimace, that black veil, the heavy, ugly, dullness of the skin. You will have another temporality, neither diegetic nor oneric, you will have another film." It is this other film that *Scènes* constitutes — the initial one, whatever it might have been, having melted away. Can the effect much less the value of such procedure be measured? All reply — like the work itself — must remain suspended. ●

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saul landau

**the truth lies
on the cutting-
room floor**

The first completed film that I worked on, "O Dem Watermelons," cost us about \$100. Ronnie Davis and I, in the middle of writing and rehearsing *A Minstrel Show: Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrell*, decided that we needed a film to show during intermission. So Bob Nelson brought his camera, we bought about 25 watermelons (cheap during the summer) and the Mime Troupers worked two Saturdays cutting, shooting, chasing, fucking watermelons while Nelson filmed at various speeds. A couple of months later Nelson had finished editing the work, a sound track of Mime Troupers singing "O Dem Watermelons" had been laid in and "lamb o goodness " a film existed.

From the Mime Troupe to NET (public television) was like going from the economic margin, where one must use ingenuity and imagination — and one's own labour to do shit work — towards the center of waste. KQED, San Francisco's public television station, hired me to write and co-produce a one hour film about the ghetto. (Remember, in 1966 whites still held an exclusive on reporting and filmmaking for T.V.) And so an all white middle class crew descended into Oakland's ghetto to tell it like it is — in fifty-eight minutes and twelve seconds.

I interviewed poor black families until I found one that would appear both poor and photogenic — the documentary version of the screen test. NET granted us \$50,000 for the film and the actors (the members of the family) would receive \$10 more than most documentary filmmakers paid at the time. Filmmakers who see themselves as *artists* serving the public tend to overlook little things like paying actors. After all, a real documentary is about real people.

Robert, age 17, played the lead. His mother, Agnes, age 34, co-starred and the supporting cast consisted of Robert's younger brothers and sisters. To make the film we had to establish a relationship with the actors. This became my job. Almost immediately the mysteries and ironic contradictions of filmmaking began to reveal themselves to me, and to the lead actors as well.

Anyone being filmed becomes an actor, although a gap exists between the Hollywood professional and the ghetto amateur. Some amateurs see the chance for immortality, the permanent etching of their essence on celluloid. A black family on welfare, a mother and ten children, saw an opportunity to make a little money, unknown to the welfare department, and perhaps the chance to become famous T.V. stars.

So the truthful documentarians brought their rented car and expensive equipment into a neighbourhood where most of the houses could be bought for less than the cost of our 16mm Eclair movie camera. "Just be and act natural, try to pretend that the camera, tape recorder and four white men are not here." We whispered, "Roll," and the sound man responded, "Speed," and the actors acted (naturally?) and we became quiet.

We hung around the shack with the woman and her ten children day after day filming thousands of feet. We began to hate the thought of going into the dirty, poverty pit where we filmed reality, and of sitting and listening to unhappy grunts, the main form of communication between the mother and her sons. And we bristled at the thought of our equipment being eyed by all the poor people. Of course, when we finished a day's shooting we were entitled to eat a steak and drink expensive wine according to production rules for big time TV filmmakers. We adjusted to the contrast between the poverty we worked in and the affluence that we escaped to. We talked about how bad it made us feel, but we behaved like big time filmmakers — the contradictions were obvious but we negated them.

We had begun filming in June of 1966, about the time that Robert dropped out of school just before his term ended, and we followed him throughout that summer. Robert was labeled "retarded" in the records of his all-black high school and he could barely read; but he knew how to fight, fuck, dance, and dress and he learned how to operate the tape recorder in five minutes.

We had scripted so that Robert would appear characteristic of the "typical" black teenager: a victim of his environment, forced to drop out of school, fantasy prone, unequipped to work or succeed in any vocation or occupation approved of "by society." The film would show his admirable qualities — charm, good humour despite grim surroundings — and his human failings, the fantasies that choked off the vision of the inevitable, earthbound end of his teenage life as a jailbird. (According to our loose script, Robert would get arrested and go to jail.)

We filmed and pieced together sequences of Robert and his mother, showing her anxiety over his future, and scenes with the high school principle in which he declared that the only way Robert could succeed in holding down even the most rudimentary of unskilled jobs would be to give him a job and hold his hand during the break-in stages of employment. So we connived for Robert to get a job, filmed the phone call telling him to come for a job interview, and then filmed him doing janitor work in Al Duskin's factory. Robert would come to work in satin shirts and spangled trousers to mop the toilet and sweep the floor. He couldn't hold the job. In fact, he spent more money than he earned just getting to work and buying new clothes for the job. His mother at that point gave us the title for the film: "Don't seem to matter what Robert's doing," she said, "he always ends up *losing just the same*."

Then the San Francisco riots broke out. Robert who had not seemed to be influenced by the civil rights movement, raced to join the rioters. He looted but threw the booty away, claiming he felt angry and just wanted revenge. Our cameras rolled. Robert was happy, high, and almost trancelike. He described how good it felt to loot and said that he was going to succeed and someday he would give his mother a house in the hills.

To convey this fantasy we filmed in slow motion, with synthesizer sounds to indicate a movie dream. During the shooting a surgeon crashed into our rented car. I asked Robert's mother if she was hurt. Agnes laughed and said no. I told her she was lucky she was alright, and that sometimes people get little back injuries from accidents like that and they can collect some cash. "Oh," she wailed, "my back is killing me. It just started." She later collected enough money to move out of her small house in Vallejo. (This was not the only time that we realized a curious and uncanny coincidence of script and history, fantasy and reality.)

To the family, our activities were mysterious and increasingly irritating. As the film progressed, they demanded more money and more attention. And we began to resent them.

While our activities seemed mysterious to the family, a reverse process began to work for me. The mystification of filmmaking technology became clear to me when I handled the tools and found them easy to operate. I learned in the process of filming that to make the camera work meant pushing a button when you saw the frame you liked through the camera eyepiece. Up to this point, the camera mystified me and I could barely snap a photo with an Instamatic. But one day as a woman began to argue with Robert, Irving Saraf ran out of film. I was on location. As usual since I had no technical function, I was carrying something. "Shoot," Irving shouted. "What?" I responded. His anger reached me and I put the camera to my eye. In the frame I saw a woman shaking her fist. I pushed the button and heard the gentle whirr of the motor and saw the frames flash by. I felt the excitement of capturing a piece of life, of history, of human drama, of immortalizing a typical street

action. When I later saw that scene on the screen I was shocked.

The tape recorder that took sound synchronically with the camera also revealed itself as a simple object. As I explained to Robert how one records, I was struck again by the simplicity of the process — pushing a button or twisting a dial. The difficulty came not in operating the tools, but in using them in a meaningful way.

As we began final cutting of the film to meet our air deadline, Dick Moore was teaching me about film writing and Irving began to show me the tricks of editing — how to make cinematic meaning out of the juxtaposition of celluloid images. As our delivery date neared, we worked longer and longer hours. With our loose script we tried to figure out how to suggest, without having a narrator say it, that Robert would end up in jail.

By fall, the San Francisco riots had burned themselves out and the sober reality of ghetto life resumed for Robert and his family. Robert saw, that he had neither school nor job to occupy him. Late one night, Agnes called me at home. Sobbing, she told me that Robert had been arrested and charged with arson.

We went to the Oakland jail and filmed Robert's mother crying as the deputy ushered him into a caged van and took him away to the juvenile detention center. There we filmed an interview with Robert who told us he was not a loser. "I'm going to make it," he promised. "They're doing all they can to stop me, but some day I'm gonna make it." I felt tears forming as he talked. His processed hairdo, which we had paid for and recorded on celluloid, was uncombed; his jail uniform hung loosely. He had always dressed with care and style.

But what an ending! We had wondered how to end the film with the suggestion of Robert's inevitable future as a jailbird. And now instead of our script we had the real thing. It had happened. Or had we, in fact, suggested it to Robert? Had he, as a good actor trying his best to satisfy the directors, merely followed the script? At the time this thought did not occur to us. But experience taught us that the camera induces many people to behave differently — and to try to act out what they think their life role is supposed to be — and I began to wonder if, in some way, we had not suggested to Robert that his arrest was inevitable.

We recut the ending of the film. Robert remained in juvenile hall. We shipped the film to New York and watched our finished product on a prime time slot and read the favourable review in the *New York Times*. The NET executives, after reading the Times review, phoned to tell us that we had done a good job. The battles we had with them over whether or not our rendition of Robert's fantasy in slow motion (obviously acted by Robert and his mother) had lessened the credibility of the film, were forgotten in the glow of success. TV executives measure success by reviews or Neilson ratings. In those days, NET didn't have enough viewers even to show up on the Neilson, so the Times review served as the primary reality check. Other newspapers counted for little in the liberal-establishment-media-world. Robert said that he liked the film especially the parts that he appeared in. Needless to say, despite the interest shown in the movie by the press and the community, Robert received no film offers, nor did he get time off for good acting. We had used him for our own ends and had very little to give in return.

I had learned that some of the mysteries of cinema could be dispelled by button pushing. More important, during the course of making the film, we had all realized (some in the unit already knew it) that the intrusion of the camera appears to change the quality of most events, and may influence the events themselves. We had observed Robert and his family play family roles for the camera, and for the white men. We had also inadvertently provoked an incident in a night club in which someone pulled a gun.

As we made more films, I began to learn that the narrow boundaries defined by lenses and eyepieces became cinema reality, and that cinema could never hope to capture what the human eye absorbed and what the subjective mind synthesized. Cinema seemed real to those who watched what they thought was reality. But they had been trained and they had trained themselves to suspend belief. The documentary film was somehow to show the real thing—through a 12-120 zoom lens.

I had just learned about filming ratios: for every foot that we used in *Losing Just the Same*, we filmed about fifteen feet, and fourteen remained on the cutting room floor. The reality, the actions and words, contained in the 50,000 feet we threw away did not help us elaborate our theme — editing transformed our filming record into a statement about our experience. The reality that we were showing was a mediated one.

And there was always the fifty-eight minutes and twelve seconds requirement imposed by NET.

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CHAPTER TWO 1967

KQED hired me again, this time to write and produce a film on the movement. My qualifications included co-authorship with Paul Jacobs in 1966 of *The New Radicals*, 12 years of activism and *Losing Just the Same*. Together with the other members of the KQED film unit (Dick Moore as executive producer and Irving Saraf as photographer and editor), I set out to make another film. Throughout the project, we shared our concerns and thinking processes.

This time we decided to try our hands at a film essay. We would build the film around three movement leaders whose radicalism had taken root with the first seeds of the SNCC action in Mississippi, and whose later development had followed along the different paths of the movement itself: David Harris, the Stanford student body president who began his involvement as a SNCC volunteer and who later joined the pacifist anti-war movement; Mario Savio, also an early SNCC worker who moved to the University of California and to the student leadership during the Free Speech Movement; and Stokely Carmichael, a SNCC worker who cleared the path for the black power struggle.

From behind the camera, I began to feel more like the chronicler, observer and commentator than the historical actor and participant. Yet I had learned that films could influence the way history is understood and thought about

and could affect an individual's thinking. Somehow, my own thinking and the commitment I had felt as a student and post-student activist had been altered by the vocation of cinema. But how? I was not yet sure. The central question was not yet clear in my mind, nor had I been forced by others to confront it: What was the task of the radical filmmaker? In 1967, it was still possible to work for KQED and at the same time feel a part of the movement.

Within the film unit, we began tortuous discussions about how to capture on film the rapid changes occurring in the movement's activities and thinking. When we began filming however, the more theoretical issues became upstaged by immediate and mundane concerns. David Harris, for example, kept changing his hair style from one day to the next, making it difficult to intercut one day's shooting with another. This seems like a trivial problem that movie audiences seldom consider. Any budget for a fiction film with professional actors has to include salaries for make-up, script and continuity commissars whose job consists of making actors look identical in sequences that are intercut. In documentaries one has to rely on the amateur actor to remember or else, hire personnel that end up consuming the budget of a small film but also poses problems about giving the documentary film a spontaneous look.

In the spring of 1967, the film unit flew to Jackson, Mississippi to film Stokely Carmichael speaking to the Tougaloo college students.

As we pulled our rented car out of the Jackson airport the police began to tail us (we never did know whether they were from local, state, or federal agencies). We could only assume that the Delta Airlines agent had phoned the police just before he helped us retrieve our baggage. The same cop followed us over the next several days as we drove between Jackson and the Tougaloo campus. At times, FBI agents followed us, one car behind the policemen.

Stokely Carmichael's brilliance as a SNCC teacher was surpassed by his public speaking ability. Whether our cameras played a role in the energy and tempo of his speeches, we'll never know. But as we filmed him, Stokely went higher and higher, spurred by applause and by the ringing brilliance of his own oratory as he extolled the beauty and virtues of blacks and their culture. He summarized the history of the world in terms of the struggle between black and white races, and as he spoke, the camera picked up things that the naked eye never could. Carmichael's gestures were as important as his words. Our filming had to balance between the gestures and the words, between the applause of a captive audience and our own reactions to what he was saying.

During this period, 1966-69, the best in T.V. documentaries were presented by NET. But the ethical and aesthetic and political questions that had occurred to us in the process of making *Losing Just the Same* were still seldom raised among most filmmakers, especially at NET. I began to feel conflicted about my own role — was I a political actor, or the recorder of political acts? Stokely's line resounded in my mind: "Individualism is a luxury we can no longer afford."

In making the film about the movement, *From Protest to Resistance*, we filmed street action, dialogues between draft dodgers in Canada, and anti-war activists in various milieus and activities. I began to force myself to continue to participate, as well as to film the movement in action. During Stop the Draft Week in Oakland, I filmed the first day, participated the next, and

filmed again during the third. I discovered something about what others, throughout recent history have called magic shields. When I held the camera I felt that I possessed a tool of immortality, the news machine, marked KQED-TV. It gave me a sense of invulnerability as I filmed scenes of demonstrators lined up facing counter lines of police, youths overturning police cars and setting them afire, and police charging, clubs flailing at demonstrators' heads. Suddenly a cop slipped or was knocked over and demonstrators pummelled him. Reinforcements of police appeared and I saw a club raised between the frames of my camera lens. I watched in horror and fascination, hoping the exposure was right and wondering who the cop's club would strike. I couldn't locate the prospective victim in the camera's frame. Then I felt the impact on my head, then shuddering through my entire body. I had been clubbed — holding the magic shield!

At this stage in filming *From Protest to Resistance*, we received a positive reply from the Cuban government to a proposal we had made to them and we took off for a four week film trip through the island, shelving the movement film for the moment.

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CHAPTER THREE

I had visited Cuba in 1960 and in 1961, returning to the U.S. just before the Bay of Pigs invasion. By 1967 the revolution had extended to every part of the island; it had reached permanence. No Cuban could remain unaware of how his or her life had changed because of the revolution. Somehow we had to capture the changes on celluloid. A Yankee film crew had undertaken the assignment of making a film about the revolution, about a country in the process of radical change. Not until we began to try to film did the enormity of the task, and the underlying chutzpah of our attitude, become clear. In four weeks, we intended to film the crucial events, people and places of a revolutionary nation, then reduce it to fifty-eight minutes and twelve seconds and present it on national TV.

We had troubles almost from the first moment that we arrived. The Cubans who greeted us eyed our expensive equipment with awe. We smiled with false — and premature — humility. And we experienced the first in a series of technical breakdowns. The camera began to mysteriously malfunction. In preparation for filming, and in anticipation of the Cuban climate, the cameramen had sent the camera to the Eclair shop for weather fitting. However, instead of adjusting the camera and the magazines that hold the film for heat and humidity, the company adjusted them for cold weather. The embarrassing result was that the camera stopped running after ten seconds of on location filming in the sun. The Cuban repairmen, although they had never worked with that make of camera nonetheless knew how to adjust the proper parts so that we could at least film before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m., when the midday heat subsided. So much for western technology.

At one point, one of the camera operators threw away a screw belonging to the smaller camera. This resulted in light leaking onto the film which caused a flashing effect when developed. In all, several thousand feet of film came out streaked or unfocused. From the remaining footage, we pieced together the fifty eight minutes and twelve seconds — *Report from Cuba*.

Filmmakers attempting to make political points or statements often find that no visual material exists that will express or convey their message. A narrator's voice becomes the substitute. To the extent that the filmmaker resorts to narration he violates the medium itself. The intended message becomes distorted as sound and picture fight each other for the viewer's attention and what is heard often contradicts what is seen. For example try to imagine the pictures that would correspond to the following verbal narration: "Life in Cuba has changed a great deal in eight years. But Havana still looks the same. Only the posters have changed and English buses have replaced American ones."

The typical network documentary is narrated from beginning to end with crisp, but glib sentences read by professional voices and illustrated with whatever footage the editor has available. The editor cuts the picture more or less to fit the narration and no matter what he does with the picture, the narrator must follow a prescribed formula: The good guys can win, but only by a small margin in most cases — except when the film deals with a declared national enemy (any communist individual or country). The typical network documentary, let's say about Cuba, leaves the viewer feeling hopelessly confused not only from the many "on the one hands" and "on the others", (which serve to set up the false image of documentary objectivity) but also from the jarring lack of correspondence between the visual images and the narrative soundtrack

The combination of our own initial chutzpah and the series of technical breakdowns meant that we had to narrate *Report from Cuba* from beginning to end, breaking only for a few speeches and dialogue by Fidel. The cutting of the film followed an outline that I put together while I was recovering from culture shock. The finished film, with all cinematic gaps filled with narration, followed the outline. (When I recently had occasion to view *Report from Cuba* again I felt, aside from embarrassment, that a far more consistent and straight-forward medium would have been a pamphlet telling people that Cuba suffered from the twin evils of imperialism and underdevelopment.

Narration serves to distract the viewer from the message that a well edited combination of picture and sound can produce. Instead of allowing for the artistic potential of the documentary film by clarifying the visual images with essential facts and explanations, narration in TV documentaries is imposed between the viewer and film as The Voice of Truth. Narration accentuates the scoreboard approach to documentaries — otherwise known as 'balance' or 'objectivity' — which persuades the viewer not only that no Truth exists, but that no one side should ever possess more than 55 percent of it. Balancing our obligations as NET producers, our sympathies for Cuba and our desire that the film reach the air — we managed to win the truth equation in favor of Cuba by about 65 to 35. *Report from Cuba* emphasized underdevelopment and imperialism as the two major obstacles to Cuban development.

However the fact that we succeeded in presenting our point of view on one occasion does not make that kind of documentary form appropriate for political education. The "on the one hand-on the other hand" formula distracts the viewer so that he misses subtle visual messages which other sound would augment while believing that somehow balance means objectivity, means truth. So for example, "while Cuba under Castro has made achievements in education and health, she still faces rationing and a lack of freedom of

speech." "While the people support the Prime Minister, acute shortages exist and much disorganization prevails," etc. With NBC, CBS, or ABC the Cuban Revolution usually loses by a large margin.

During *Losing Just the Same*, we had argued with the NET executives about whether we could include our fantasy sequences. In the course of bargaining, we compromised and settled for two fantasy sequences instead of three. The main battle over *Report from Cuba* centered around the narrator's introduction of Wilfred Burchett. We interviewed Burchett, an Australian communist visiting Cuba. We also filmed James Reston, who was doing the "definitive" *Times* reportage on Cuba — despite the fact that he knew little about the country and didn't speak the language.

In the film, we introduced Burchett as an Australian journalist; then Burchett talks about guerilla war. Following him we introduced Reston of the *New York Times*. The NET executives said we had to introduce Burchett as an Australian communist journalist. We countered with, "OK, then we have to introduce James Reston as an imperialist journalist." "No," said the NET producers, "that's different. Reston writes for the *Times*, an objective newspaper."

We lost the fight. The *Times* gave us a rave review and no one listens to the narrator anyway, we rationalized later. So what was all the hassle about? Some Cuban exiles helped publicize the show by breaking the windows of the New York station and picketing in front of the Miami NET outlet. For me it proved to be both a sobering dose of TV realities (about censorship self-censorship, and intellectual compromise), as well as a launching pad that allowed us to return to Cuba less than a year later to make two films about Fidel — a sixty minute NET version and a 96 minute theatrical movie.

After finishing *Report From Cuba*, we returned to *From Protest to Resistance*. Using the now familiar balance formula, we made another tour de force, claiming that while 'on the one hand' the movement, as it calls itself, has raised the consciousness of many young people, 'on the other hand' it has not yet formulated a clear political position from which it can concretize its idealism into political power. Through a series of these "on the one hands" and "on the others", we did manage to present, as we had in the Cuba film, a deepening of the movement's point of view than had previously reached the TV screen.

What had changed in me was my own thinking process. I thought about any given phenomena in terms of filmmaking: how to film it; was it even filmable; how to make revolutionary action acceptable to U.S. TV audiences; how to use film to counter the propaganda of network TV and make the Cuban revolution look good and the Movement look like the coherent political force which it was.

From Protest to Resistance didn't get a *Times* review, although other metropolitan papers commented formally on it. It was shown once and slipped away into a film vault somewhere in Ann Arbor, Michigan or Bloomington, Indiana, and was never seen again. The budget had run to \$72,000. (Later we learned that some NET producers in New York budgeted about twice that for shorter films.)

With or without *Times* raves, our unit had established itself as a maker of controversial TV documentaries. My role reversal, from activist to TV producer, became easier to live with — given the good salary and working

conditions. I become used to NET budgeting and the privileges of office, however scuzzy — long distance telephone calls, steak dinners after filming, and the general affluence of a TV producer who had gotten a couple of *New York Times* reviews. The self-censorship, that I had felt uneasy about while working on the previous films became more acceptable as I began to accept my role. I now knew what would and what would not receive acceptance by the NET censors; the troublesome thought now was that I no longer thought much about it.

I had also learned that the secret of filmmaking came from having good ideas. Good ideas are born out of commitment — Hollywood possesses fine technicians, skilled cultural workers in every phase of movie production — but all the technique in the world can't make shit smell like a rose.

In January, 1968, Dick Moore and I returned to Cuba to attend the Cultural Congress. I wanted to ask Fidel if we could make a film with him, about Cuba and at the time did not intend to work with me on the film.

At the Cultural Congress, Fidel personally congratulated us on making *Report From Cuba*, "an intelligent and honest film." "What's your next project?" he asked. My brain and tongue felt paralyzed for what seemed several minutes. I finally managed to loosen my jaw muscles enough to say in Spanish that we wanted to make a film with him, about his life, how he works, how the revolution looks through his eyes. He responded modestly, saying that he was not all that interesting, but we insisted and he agreed to let us film him. It seemed too simple. We were ushered to seats on the platform where Fidel was to speak. I turned to Dick and asked if it were true that Fidel had agreed. Dick didn't speak Spanish but reminded me that Fidel's friend and personal physician, Dr. René Vallejo, had indeed confirmed Castro's consent to our request.

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CHAPTER FOUR

We returned to San Francisco and thought about how to do the film. Dick became involved in other projects; NET Journal, which had sponsored the 1967 Cuba film, as well as *Losing and Protest*, didn't want to sponsor the project, and I also thought about our controlling the finished product, and about a theatrical release, and about the horror of cutting a film for TV length and censorship demands. The other alternative: do it yourself. All one needs is money and confidence. To accumulate money for a product, which will appear in the future, one has to hustle tickets to heaven. To sell people shares in a film one needs an honest face and a promise-them-anything-approach.

Before leaving for Cuba I got my first taste of how to finance a film — or how to hustle future seats in the sky. With Alvin Duskin and Jack Edelson I set up a partnership and we began to sell shares. Most of the people who bought pieces of the film did so with the knowledge that they were making social investments. A few believed that they would make profits. At the time I had even convinced the skeptical part of myself that a feature length colour film on Fidel Castro would indeed make money. With Irving Saraf's help I made a budget based on six weeks of shooting time in Cuba. The figure came to

almost \$90,000. By the time that we were ready to leave for Cuba — our agreement having been confirmed by telephone with Fidel's doctor — we had raised less than \$40,000. I said the hell with it, Duskin backed me up and off we went.

The trip to Havana from Mexico City rates as one of life's more joyful airplane experiences, if such is possible. After hours of tension in the Mexico City airport, waiting to leave, posing for a photograph, receiving a large purple, LEFT FOR CUBA stamp in my passport, after waiting while one old bureaucrat fills out endless forms for each passenger, after walking half a mile to the plane at the farthest end of the runway, after waiting another thirty minutes on the hot stuffy Illyushin 18, while a Mexican official scratches his head and wonders if he has forgotten anything — after all this the flight sparkles with released laughter and cordiality. And only one class of service.

We looked forward to a busy but pleasurable six weeks. Excitement and fear combined inside of me. Somewhere in my mind the whole medium still retained its mysterious quality. By this time our unit had completed three full length TV films plus a shorter film on drugs. I had watched and studied other productions going on at KQED. I knew how to write a proposal, visualize a film in my mind (although the finished product always looked different), prepare a budget, organize a crew, push the proper buttons on a camera and tape recorder. I knew that somehow the film was placed in a solution at the laboratory and developed and printed, and then pieces were cut up, taped together, sound was cut, put onto separate tracks and mixed down to one, and then somehow prints were turned out of A&B rolls. Despite knowledge of this I felt that movies retained their mysterious qualities: who was I to attempt such a grandiose notion as making the first film about Fidel Castro, one of the most important revolutionaries and a personal hero of mine and presenting that film to an American audience. Such thoughts demoralized me but I snapped out of a short depressed trance. In six weeks, after all, the film would be made, in the lab, and then somehow we would put it all together. May, 1968.

Seven weeks later, Fidel's physician phoned at 2 a.m. "Sorry we didn't get in touch with you sooner. Be in the lobby at 6 a.m. with all your bags and equipment and don't be late." Click. It was now July.

I told the entire crew, Nina Serrano, Irving Saraf, Stan Kronquest and our Cuban assistant. No one slept for the remainder of the night. Neither did we feel tired at six a.m. when two uniformed lieutenants arrived in two old Mercedes and packed our gear and our bodies off to a military airport and onto a Soviet plane. We took off, destination unknown.

I forgot my anxiety and the crew, which had begun to get on each others nerves now waited in nervous anticipation. Irving and Stanley counted their equipment piece by piece making sure that they had not forgotten anything; and Arnoldo, the Cuban assistant checked and re-checked everything. He felt even more excitement than we did. We had forgiven him an indiscretion when he showed up in his military uniform to film a scene with Cubans applying for exit visas at the U.S. embassy, inhabited by the Swiss. They complained that a violation of territory had taken place, pointing to the uniformed Cuban and police had arrived with all panic buttons about to be pressed. I told the police that since technically the embassy belonged to the U.S. and I was a U.S. citizen the complaint seemed far fetched.

The plane landed a few minutes after take-off at Varadero airport, just in time to see a plane full of Cuban disaffected (gusanos or worms) take off towards Miami. As we watched the thinning jet trail into the sky two jeeps roared into the airport. Fidel got out, shook my hand and those of the crew and said: "I'm sorry it took so long, but I was busy writing the introduction to Che's diary. Well, what are we going to do. How are we going to do this? Let's get on board and we'll discuss it."

"The ground rules?" Fidel asked, "and how does this work," pointing to the tape recorder. We explained how camera and tape recorder work synchronically, as we flew above Matanzas province and Fidel with lines drawn in his cheeks, explained the details of Che's military operation, stressing the role of unfortunate decisions and unforeseen circumstances, unwilling to admit in July, 1968, that the policy, based on the guerrilla war theory, derived from the Cuban Sierras experience had any serious defects. Grief tremors strained his voice as he recapitulated the events leading to Che's death. When he finished his explanation, some of which he wrote in the introduction to Che's diary, Stanley began to place the lavalier microphone around Fidel's neck.

The mood changed when Fidel glanced in awe at the minute microphone and Stanley said "talk, habla".

"He has no interest in what I say," declared Fidel, "only in the technical quality of the sound. We could use technicians like Stanley." Stanley turned red, but found his sound level. The plane crossed Las Villas province as Fidel talked about racism in the U.S. and compared it to racism in Cuba prior to the revolution.

The filming began and I felt somewhat awestruck, conscious of the obligation of the filmmaker, chronicler, interpreter. I realized that Fidel was not just providing me with an opportunity to make an unusual film, but to do a definitive job. I had waited seven weeks, proving my determination and now what should a film director do with an actor who writes his own script and follows his own direction?

The plane landed in Halquin in Oriente province and our tour had begun. We rode to a farm house, then to a dam site, where Fidel spoke, our camera began to warm up, he inspected the dam and went on to the campsite, visited with peasant neighbours, Irving 'pushing' the film two F stops in the dimming light. He did not know then if anything would show in the developed film. His light meter did not register, but he tested the latitude of the film as Fidel joked with his peasant neighbours.

I tried to reflect after dinner about what we ought to do, what guidelines to follow. No thoughts came to mind and we had very little discussion amongst the crew. I had trouble falling asleep after we talked about details of synchronizing and other trivia. ●

TO BE CONTINUED IN CINE-TRACTS NO. 4

NOTES:

- Preparations are now being made for the *U.S. Conference for an Alternative Cinema*, week-long meeting designed to bring together from all over the US. people involved in the production, distribution and exhibition of social and political films. The Conference will consist of workshops, screenings, and panel discussions on areas of theoretical and practical concern to those engaged in the development of an alternative cinema. It is hoped that the Conference will encourage left film people to overcome their relative isolation define areas of coordination and mutual support, and help them to develop an historical and analytical framework for their work.
- The Ohio University Department of Film and the Athens International Film Festival will be posting in conference chaired by Andrew Sarris on Contemporary Film Comedy from April 21 through April 23 at the Athena Cinema and Ohio University Campus.
- A small group of contemporary artists are working on an art that deals with the social ordering of people's lives. Most of their work involves still photography and video; most relies heavily on written or spoken language. I'm talking about a representational art, an art that refers to something beyond itself. Form and mannerism are not ranging from the material and ideological space of the "self" to the dominant social realities of corporate spectacle and corporate power. The initial questions are these: "How do we invent our lives out of a limited range of possibilities, and how are our lives invented for us by those in power?" If these questions are asked only within the institutional boundaries of elite culture, only within the "art world," then the answers will be merely academic. Given a certain poverty of means, this art aims toward a wider audience, and toward considerations of concrete social transformation. — from an essay by Allan Sekula, explaining an exhibition to be held at the Whitney Museum on *The Health and Safety Game: Fictions Based on Fact*, February 6 to February 18.
- The Public information Library of the Georges Pompidou Center is organizing an International Meeting on *Cinema- Vérité* entitled *Man Looks at Man*. — for information write: "L'homme regarde l'homme" — Bibliothèque publique d'information, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, 75191 Paris, Cedex 04. — Date April 26 to April 30, 1978.
- *SCREEN READER No. 1* is now available and is an invaluable collection of major essays of hitherto out of print articles. (Screen, 29 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PL, England).
- *CRITIQUE OF ANTHROPOLOGY* — Double issue 9 and 10 — Women's Issue with some excellent essays, for example, Rayna Rieter, *The Search for Origins*, Peter Aaby, *Engels and Women* etc... (Critique of Anthropology, P.O. Box 178, London WC1 E 6BU, England).
- *LANGUAGE AND MATERIALISM: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (RKP 1977) by Rosalind Coward and John Ellis. This is an important new work with critiques of Structuralism, Semiology and Lacan as well as an analysis of Ideology.
- *OVO* is a photography magazine published in Montreal with theoretical articles and beautiful reproductions. (P.O. Box 1431 Station A, Montreal, Quebec H3C 2T9)
- *THIS IS WHERE WE CAME IN: The Career and Character of Canadian Film* by Martin Knelman. A severe disappointment. Interest lies in the fact that it is a model of what should not be done in film analysis and history. (Cine-Tracts No. 4 will carry an extensive review of it.)



"CROSS OF IRON"

In Cine-Tracts No. 4 a special review article of Peckinpah's major new film
Cross of Iron.