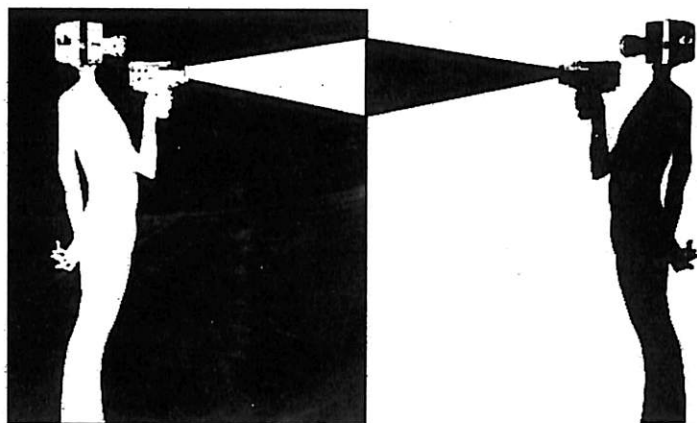


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The Language of Film: Signs and Syntax

(From *How to Read A Film*)

JAMES MONACO

THE LANGUAGE OF FILM: SIGNS AND SYNTAX

JAMES MONACO

SIGNS

Film is not a language in the sense that English, French, or mathematics is. First of all, it's impossible to be ungrammatical in film. And it is not necessary to learn a vocabulary. Infants appear to understand television images, for example, months before they begin to develop any facility with spoken language. Even cats watch television. Clearly, it is not necessary to acquire an intellectual understanding of film in order to appreciate it—at least on the most basic level.

But film is very much *like* language. People who are highly experienced in film—highly literate visually (or should we say “cinemate”?)—see more and hear more than people who seldom go to the movies. An education in the quasi-language of film opens up greater potential meaning for the observer, so it is useful to use the metaphor of language to describe the phenomenon of film.

In fact, no extensive scientific investigation of our ability to comprehend artificial sounds and images has yet been performed, but nevertheless we do know through research that while children are able to recognize objects in pictures long before they are able to read, they are eight or ten years of age before they can comprehend a film image the way most adults do. Moreover, there are cultural differences in the perception of images. In one famous 1920s test, anthropologist William Hudson set out to examine whether rural Africans who had had little contact with Western culture perceived depth in two-dimensional images the same way that Europeans do. He found, unequivocally, that they do

not. Results varied—there were some individuals who responded in the Western manner to the test—but they were uniform over a broad cultural and sociological range.

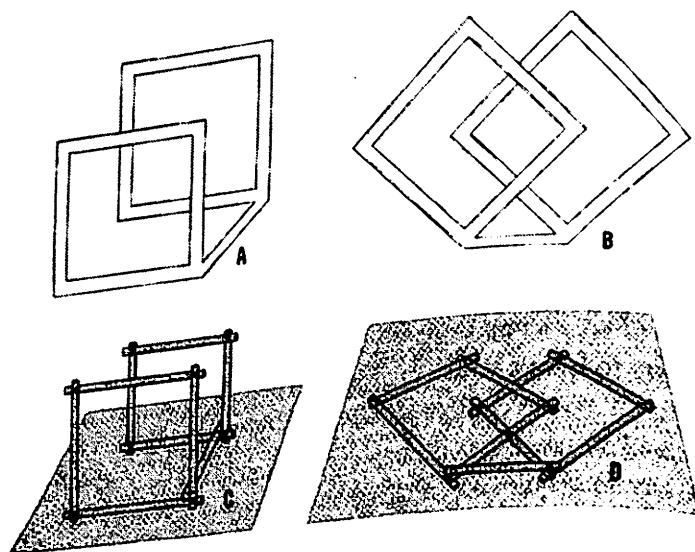


Figure 3-1. CONSTRUCTION-TASK FIGURES. Subjects asked to reconstruct these figures in three dimensions using sticks or rods, respond in different ways. People from Western cultures, trained in the codes and conventions that artists use to convey three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional drawing, see A as three-dimensional and B as two-dimensional. The operating code for three-dimensionality here insists that the dimension of depth be portrayed along the 45° oblique line. This works well enough in A, but not in B, where the oblique lines are not in the depth plane. Subjects from old African cultures tend to see both figures as two-dimensional, since they are not familiar with this Western three-dimensional code. Figures C and D illustrate the models of A constructed by Western and African observers, respectively. (From "Pictorial Perception and Culture," Jan B. Deregowski. ©1972 by Scientific American, Inc. All rights reserved.)

The conclusions that can be drawn from this seminal experiment and others that have followed are two: first, that every normal human being can perceive and identify a visual image; second, that even the simplest visual images are interpreted differently in different cultures. So we know that people must be "reading" these images. There is a process of intellection occurring—not necessarily consciously—when we observe an image, and it follows that we must, at some point, have learned how to do this.

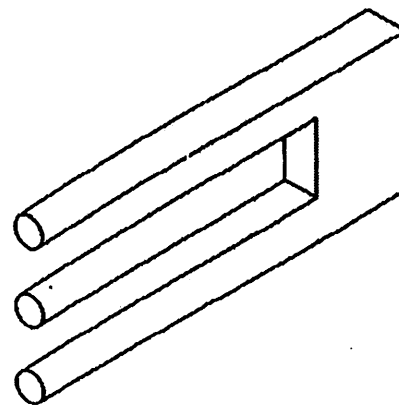


Figure 3-2.

THE AMBIGUOUS TRIDENT. The illusion is intriguing only because we are trained in Western codes of perspective. The psychological effect is powerful: our minds insist that we see the object in space rather than the drawing on a plane.

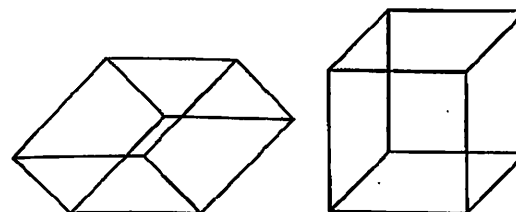


Figure 3-3.

THE NECKER CUBE. Devised in 1832 by L. A. Necker, a Swiss naturalist. The illusion depends, once again, on cultural training.



Figure 3-4. "My Wife and My Mother-in-law," by cartoonist W. E. Hill, was published in *Puck* in 1915. It has since become a famous example of the phenomenon known as the multistable figure. The young woman's chin is the old woman's nose. The old woman's chin is the young woman's chest (New York Public Library.)

The "ambiguous trident," a well-known "optical illusion," provides an easy test of this ability. It's safe to say that the level of visual literacy of anyone reading this book is such that observation of the trident will be confusing to all of us. It would not be for someone not trained in Western conventions of three-dimensionality.

Similarly, the well-known optical illusions in Figures 3-3 and 3-4 demonstrate that the process of perception and comprehension involves the brain: it is a mental experience as well as a physical one. Whether we "see" the Necker Cube from the top or the bottom or whether we perceive the drawing in Figure 3-4 as either a young girl or an old woman depends not on the physiological function of our eyes but on what the brain does with the information received. The word "image," indeed, has two conjoined meanings: an image is an optical pattern; it is also a mental experience, which is probably why we use the word "imagine" to describe the mental creation of pictures.

So there is a strong element of our ability to observe images, whether still or moving, that depends on learning. This is, interestingly, not true to a significant extent with auditory phenomena. If the machines are sophisticated enough, we can produce recorded sounds that are technically indistinguishable from their originals. The result of this difference in mode of the two systems of perception—visual and auditory—is that whatever education our ears undergo in order to perceive reality is sufficient to perceive recorded sound, whereas there is a subtle but significant difference between the education necessary for our eyes to perceive (and our brain to understand) recorded images and that which is necessary simply to comprehend the reality that surrounds us. It would serve no purpose to consider phonography as a language, but it is useful to speak of photography (and cinematography) as a language, because a learning process is involved.

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF PERCEPTION

Another way to describe this difference between the two senses is in terms of the function of the sensory organs: ears hear whatever is available for them to hear; eyes choose what to see. This is true not only in the conscious sense (choosing to redirect attention from point A to point B or to ignore the sight altogether by closing our eyes), but in the

unconscious as well. Since the receptor organs that permit visual acuity are concentrated (and properly arranged) only in the "fovea" of the retina, it's necessary for us to stare directly at an object in order to have a clear image of it. You can demonstrate this to yourself by staring at the dot in the center of this page. Only the area immediately surrounding it would be clear. The result of this foveated vision is that the eyes must move constantly in order to perceive an object of any size. These semiconscious movements are called "saccades" and take approximately 1/20 second each, just about the interval of persistence of vision, the phenomenon that makes film possible.

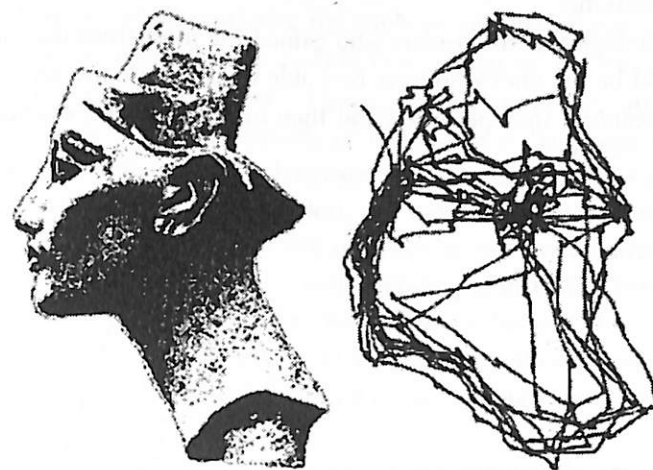
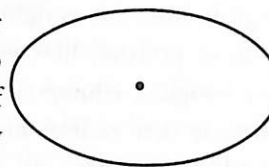


Figure 3-5. SACCADIC PATTERNS. At left, a drawing of a bust of Queen Nefertiti; at right, a diagram of the eye movements of a subject viewing the bust. Notice that the eye follows regular patterns rather than randomly surveying the image. The subject clearly concentrates on the face and shows little interest in the neck. The ear also seems to be a focus of attention, probably not because it is inherently interesting, but rather because it is located in a prominent place in this profile. The saccadic patterns are not continuous; the recording clearly shows that the eye jerks quickly from point to point (the "notches" in the continuous line), fixing on specific nodes rather than absorbing general information. The recording was made by Alfred L. Yarbus of the Institute for Problems of Information Transmission, Moscow. (From "Eye Movements and Visual Perception," by David Noton and Lawrence Stark, June 1971. Copyright © 1971 by Scientific American, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.)

The conclusion that can be drawn from the fact of foveated vision is that we do indeed read an image physically as well as mentally and psychologically, just as we read a page. The difference is that we know how to read a page—in English, from left to right and top to bottom—but we are seldom conscious of precisely how we read an image.

A complete set of physiological, ethnographic, and psychological experiments might demonstrate that various individuals read images more or less well in three different ways:

- physiologically: the best readers would have the most efficient and extensive saccadic patterns;
- ethnographically: the most literate readers would draw on the greatest experience and knowledge of a wide variety of cultural visual conventions;
- psychologically: the readers who gained the most from the material would be the ones who were best able to assimilate the various sets of meanings they perceived and then integrate the experience.

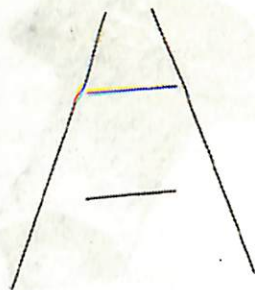


Figure 3-6. THE PONZO ILLUSION. The horizontal lines are of equal length, yet the line at the top appears to be longer than the line at the bottom. The diagonals suggest perspective, so that we interpret the picture in depth and conclude, therefore, that since the "top" line must be "behind" the "bottom" line, further away, it must thus be longer.

The irony here is that we know very well that we must learn to read before we can attempt to enjoy or understand literature, but we tend to believe, mistakenly, that anyone can read a film. Anyone can *see* a film, it's true. But some people have learned to comprehend visual images—physiologically, ethnographically, and psychologically—with far more sophistication than have others. This evidence confirms the validity of

the triangle of perception outlined in Chapter 1, uniting author, work, and observer. The observer is not simply a consumer, but an active—or potentially active—participant in the process.

Film is not a language, but is *like* language, and since it is like language, some of the methods that we use to study language might profitably be applied to a study of film.

Yet, since film is not a language, narrowly linguistic concepts can be misleading. Ever since the beginning of film history, theorists have been fond of comparing film with verbal language (partly to justify the serious study of film), but it wasn't until a new, larger category of thought developed in the fifties and early sixties—one that saw written and spoken language as just two among many systems of communication—that the real study of film as a language could proceed. This inclusive category is known as semiotics, the study of systems of signs.

Semioticians justified the study of film as language by redefining the concept of written and spoken language. Any system of communication is a "language"; English, French, or Chinese is a "language system." Cinema, therefore, may be a language of a sort, but it is not clearly a language system. As Christian Metz, the well-known film semiotician, pointed out: we understand a film not because we have a knowledge of its system; rather, we achieve an understanding of its system because we understand the film. Put another way, "It is not because the cinema is language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather it has become language because it has told such fine stories" [Metz, *Film Language*, p. 47].

For semioticians, a sign must consist of two parts: the signifier and the signified. The word "word," for example—the collection of letters or sounds—is a signifier; what it represents is something else again—the "signified." In literature, the relationship between signifier and signified is a main locus of art: the poet is building constructions that, on the one hand, are composed of sounds (signifiers) and, on the other, of meanings (signifieds), and the relationship between the two can be fascinating. In fact, much of the pleasure of poetry lies just here: in the dance between sound and meaning.

But in film, the signifier and the signified are almost identical: the sign of cinema is a short-circuit sign. A picture of a book is much closer

to a book, conceptually, than the word "book" is. It's true that we may have to learn in infancy or early childhood to interpret the picture of a book as meaning a book, but this is a great deal easier than learning to interpret the letters or sounds of the word "book" as what it signifies. A picture bears some direct relationship with what it signifies, a word seldom does.*

It is the fact of this short-circuit sign that makes the language of film so difficult to discuss. As Metz put it, in a memorable phrase: "A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand." It also makes "doing" film quite different from "doing" English (either writing or speaking). We can't modify the signs of cinema the way we can modify the words of language systems. In cinema, an image of a rose is an image of a rose is an image of a rose—nothing more, nothing less. In English, a rose can be a rose, simply, but it can also be modified or confused with similar words: rose, rosy, rosier, rosiest, rise, risen, rows (ruse), arose, roselike, and so forth.

The power of language systems is that there is a very great difference between the signifier and the signified; the power of film is that there is not.

Nevertheless, film is like a language. How, then, does it do what is does? Clearly, one person's image of a certain object is not another's. If we both read the word "rose" you may perhaps think of a Heritage rose you picked last summer, while I am thinking of the one Laura Westphal gave to me in December 1968, or the prop for "The Interface," the short film we shot in 1995. In cinema, however, we both see the same rose, while the filmmaker can choose from an infinite variety of roses and then photograph the one chosen in another infinite variety of ways. The artist's choice in cinema is without limit; the artist's choice in literature is circumscribed, while the reverse is true for the observer: the great thing about literature is that you can imagine; the great thing about film is that you can't.

* Pictographic languages like Chinese and Japanese might be said to fall somewhere in between film and Western languages as sign systems, but only when they are written, not when they are spoken, and only in limited cases. On the other hand, there are some words—"gulp," for example—that are onomatopoeic and therefore bear a direct relationship to what they signify, but only when they are spoken.

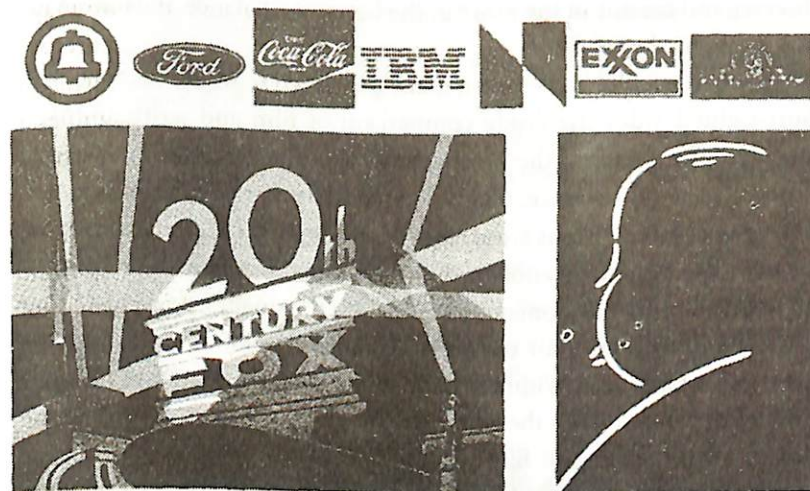


Figure 3-7. LOGOS. The concept of the logotype has been with us since medieval times, when guildsmen stamped their work with a proprietary mark. In the twentieth century, the logo became a crucial mark of corporate identity. The telephone company was unusually lucky. Founded by Alexander Graham Bell, the "Bell System" was born with a name that echoed its most identifying feature and was also easily pictured. The early years of the corporate consciousness often traded on signatures, like Ford's, or seemingly more personal script, Coca-Cola. (Even the ribbon treatment is protected.) International Business Machines—as they were once known—began the trend to acronyms. Esso (a nice derivation of S. O.—Standard Oil) decided in the 1960s that that nonce-word wasn't modern enough; they were reborn as Exxon, on the theory that x's are somehow more contemporary (although they remained Esso in Europe). Scores of major corporations followed their lead, attempting to reinvent themselves, if in name only. The trend peaked in the mid-seventies, when NBC, owner of one of the most memorable musical logos, paid over \$700,000 for a nice red and blue "N" only to discover that a public television station in Nebraska already had the same logo (for which they had paid next to nothing). Interestingly, only two of the major film studios developed animated logos, MGM and Fox. Although numerous producers of the thirties and forties used their signatures on their films, only Alfred Hitchcock developed a memorable personal logo.

Film does not suggest, in this context: it states. And therein lies its power and the danger it poses to the observer: the reason why it is useful, even vital, to learn to read images well so that the observer can seize some of the power of the medium. The better one reads an image, the more one understands it, the more power one has over it. The reader of a page invents the image, the reader of a film does not, yet both readers must work to interpret the signs they perceive in order to complete the process of intellection. The more work they do, the better the balance between

observer and creator in the process; the better the balance, the more vital and resonant the work of art.

The earliest film texts—even many published recently—pursue with short-sighted ardor the crude comparison of film and written/spoken language. The standard theory suggested that the shot was the word of film, the scene its sentence, and the sequence its paragraph. In the sense that these sets of divisions are arranged in ascending order of complexity, the comparison is true enough; but it breaks down under analysis.

Assuming for the moment that a word is the smallest convenient unit of meaning, does the shot compare equivalently? Not at all. In the first place, a shot takes time. Within that time span there is a continually various number of images. Does the single image, the frame, then constitute the basic unit of meaning in film? Still the answer is no, since each frame includes a potentially infinite amount of visual information, as does the soundtrack that accompanies it. While we could say that a film shot is something like a sentence, since it makes a statement and is sufficient in itself, the point is that the film does not divide itself into such easily manageable units. While we can define “shot” technically well enough as a single piece of film, what happens if the particular shot is punctuated internally? The camera can move; the scene can change completely in a pan or track. Should we then be talking of one shot or two?

Likewise, scenes, which were defined strictly in French classical theater as beginning and ending whenever a character entered or left the stage, are more amorphous in film (as they are in theater today). The term “scene” is useful, no doubt, but not precise. Sequences are certainly longer than scenes, but the “sequence-shot,” in which a single shot is coterminous with a sequence, is an important concept and no smaller units within it are discrete.

It would seem that a real science of film, as in physics, would depend on our being able to define the smallest unit of construction. We can do that technically, at least for the image: it is the single frame. But this is certainly not the smallest unit of meaning. The fact is that film, unlike written or spoken language, is not composed of units as such, but is rather a continuum of meaning. A shot contains as much information as we want to read in it, and whatever units we define within the shot are arbitrary.

Therefore, film presents us with a language (of sorts) that:

- ❑ consists of short-circuit signs in which the signifier nearly equals the signified; and
- ❑ depends on a continuous, nondiscrete system in which we can't identify a basic unit and which therefore we can't describe quantitatively.

The result is that, as Christian Metz says: “An easy art, the cinema is in constant danger of falling victim to this easiness.” Film is too intelligible, which is what makes it difficult to analyze. “A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand.”

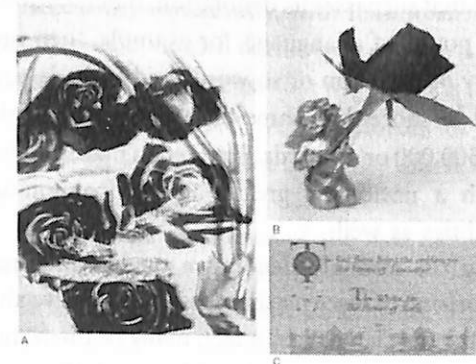


Figure 3-8. A rose is not necessarily a rose. (A) James Rosenquist's roses: *Dusting Off Roses*. 1965. (Lithograph, printed in color, composition: 25 "5/16 by 21 11/16." Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Celeste and Armand Bartos Foundation. Photograph © 1995 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.) (B) The rose from "The Interface." (C) The white rose and the red, from the credits to Olivier's *Richard III*.

DENOTATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE MEANING

Films do, however, manage to communicate meaning. They do this essentially in two different manners: denotatively and connotatively.

Like written language, but to a greater degree, a film image or sound has a denotative meaning: it is what it is and we don't have to strive to recognize it. This may seem a simplistic statement, but the fact should never be underestimated: here lies the great strength of film. There is a substantial difference between a description in words (or even in still photographs) of a person or event, and a cinematic record of the same.

Because film can give us such a close approximation of reality, it can communicate a precise knowledge that written or spoken language seldom can. "Film is what you can't imagine." Language systems may be much better equipped to deal with the nonconcrete world of ideas and abstractions (imagine this book, for example, on film: without a complete narration it would be incomprehensible), but they are not nearly so capable of conveying precise information about physical realities.

By its very nature, written/spoken language analyzes. To write the word "rose" is to generalize and abstract the idea of the rose. The real power of the linguistic languages lies not in their denotative ability but in this connotative aspect of language: the wealth of meaning we can attach to a word that surpasses its denotation. If denotation were the only measure of the power of a language, for example, then English—which has a vocabulary of a million or so words and is the largest language in history—would be more than three times more powerful than French, which has only 300,000 or so words. But French makes up for its "limited" vocabulary with a noticeably greater use of connotation. Film has connotative abilities as well.

Considering the strongly denotative quality of film sounds and images, it is surprising to discover that these connotative abilities are very much a part of the film language. In fact, many of them stem from film's denotative ability. As we have noted in Chapter 1, film can draw on all the other arts for various effects simply because it can record them. Thus, all the connotative factors of spoken language can be accommodated on a film soundtrack while the connotations of written language can be included in titles (to say nothing of the connotative factors of dance, music, painting, and so forth). Because film is a product of culture, it has resonances that go beyond what the semiotician calls its "diegesis" (the sum of its denotations). An image of a rose is not simply that when it appears in a film of *Richard III*, for example, because we are aware of the connotations of the white rose and the red as symbols of the houses of York and Lancaster. These are culturally determined connotations.

In addition to these influences from the general culture, film has its own unique connotative ability. We know (even if we don't often remind ourselves of it consciously) that a filmmaker has made specific choices: the rose is filmed from a certain angle, the camera moves or does not

move, the color is bright or dull, the rose is fresh or fading, the thorns apparent or hidden, the background clear (so that the rose is seen in context) or vague (so that it is isolated), the shot held for a long time or briefly, and so on. These are specific aids to cinematic connotation, and although we can approximate their effect in literature, we cannot accomplish it there with the precision or efficiency of cinema. A picture is, on occasion, worth a thousand words, as the adage has it.

When our sense of the connotation of a specific shot depends on its having been chosen from a range of other possible shots, then we can say that this is, using the language of semiotics, a *paradigmatic* connotation. That is, the connotative sense we comprehend stems from the shot being compared, not necessarily consciously, with its unrealized companions in the paradigm, or general model, of this type of shot. A low-angle shot of a rose, for example, conveys a sense that the flower is for some reason dominant, overpowering, because we consciously or unconsciously compare it with, say, an overhead shot of a rose, which would diminish its importance.

Conversely, when the significance of the rose depends not on the shot compared with other potential shots, but rather on the shot compared with actual shots that precede or follow it, then we can speak of its *syntagmatic* connotation; that is, the meaning adheres to it because it is compared with other shots that we do see.

These two different kinds of connotation have their equivalents in literature. A word alone on the page has no particular connotation, only denotation. We know what it means, we also know potentially what it connotes, but we can't supply the particular connotation the author of the word has in mind until we see it in context. Then we know what particular connotative value it has because we judge its meaning by conscious or unconscious comparison of it with (1) all the words like it that might fit in this context but were not chosen, and (2) the words that precede or follow it.

These two axes of meaning—the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic—have real value as tools for understanding what film means. In fact, as an art, film depends almost entirely upon these two sets of choices. After a filmmaker has decided *what* to shoot, the two obsessive questions are how to shoot it (what choices to make: the paradigmatic) and how to

present the shot (how to edit it: the syntagmatic). In literature, in contrast, the first question (how to say it) is paramount, while the second (how to present what is said) is quite secondary. Semiotics, so far, has concentrated on the syntagmatic aspect of film, for a very simple reason: it is here that film is most clearly different from other arts, so that the syntagmatic category (editing, montage) is in a sense the most "cinematic."

Film draws on the other arts for much of its connotative power as well as generating its own, both paradigmatically and syntagmatically. But there is also another source of connotative sense. Cinema is not strictly a medium of intercommunication. One seldom holds dialogues using film as the medium. Whereas spoken and written languages are used for intercommunication, film, like the nonrepresentational arts in general (as well as language when it is used for artistic purposes), is a one-way communication. As a result, even the most utilitarian of films is artistic in some respect. Film speaks in neologisms. "When a 'language' does not already exist," Metz wrote, "one must be something of an artist to speak it, however poorly. For to speak it is partly to invent it, whereas to speak the language of everyday is simply to use it." So connotations attach to even the simplest statements in film.

There is an old joke that illustrates the point: Two philosophers meet; one says "Good morning!" The other smiles in recognition, then walks on frowning and thinking to himself: "I wonder what he meant by that?" The question is a joke when spoken language is the subject; it is however, a perfectly legitimate question to ask of any statement in film.

Is there any way we can further differentiate the various modes of denotation and connotation in film? Borrowing a "trichotomy" from the philosopher C. S. Peirce, Peter Wollen, in his highly influential book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), suggested that cinematic signs are of three orders:

- ❑ The Icon: a sign in which the signifier represents the signified mainly by its similarity to it, its likeness;
- ❑ The Index: which measures a quality not because it is identical to it but because it has an inherent relationship to it;
- ❑ The Symbol: an arbitrary sign in which the signifier has neither a direct nor an indexical relationship to the signified, but rather represents it through convention.



Figure 3-9. ICON. Liv Ullmann in Ingmar Bergman's *Face to Face* (1975). This image is what it is.



Figure 3-10. INDEX. Liv Ullmann in Bergman's *Shame* (1968). The offer of money—the roll of cash on the pillow—is an index of prostitution and, hence, of Eva's shame.

Although Wollen didn't fit them into the denotative/connotative categories, Icon, Index, and Symbol can be seen as mainly denotative. Portraits are icons, of course, but so are diagrams in the Peirce/Wollen system. Indexes are more difficult to define. Quoting Peirce, Wollen suggests two sorts of indexes, one technical—medical symptoms are indexes of health, docks and sundials are indexes of time—and one metaphorical: a rolling gait should indicate that a man is a sailor. (This is the one point where the Peirce/Wollen categories verge on the connotative.) Symbols, the third category, are more easily defined. The way Peirce and Wollen use it, the word has a rather broad definition: words are symbols (since the signifier represents the signified through convention rather than resemblance).

These three categories are not mutually exclusive. Especially in photographic images, the iconic factor is almost always a strong one. As we have noted, a thing is itself even if it is also an index or a symbol. General semiotic theory, especially as it is put forth in Christian Metz's writings, covers the first and last categories—icon and symbol—fairly well already. The icon is the short-circuit sign that is so characteristic of cinema; the symbol is the arbitrary or conventional sign that is the basis of spoken and written language. It is the second category—the index—that is most intriguing in Peirce and Wollen's system: it seems to be a third means, halfway between the cinematic icon and the literary symbol, by which cinema can convey meaning. It is not an arbitrary sign, but neither is it identical. It suggests a third type of denotation that points directly toward connotation, and may in fact not be understandable without the dimension of connotation.

The index seems to be one very useful way in which cinema can deal directly with ideas, since it gives us concrete representations or measurements of them. How can we convey the idea of hotness cinematically, for instance? In written language it's very easy, but on film? The image of a thermometer quickly comes to mind. Clearly that is an index of temperature. But there are more subtle indexes as well: sweat is an index, as are shimmering atmospheric waves and hot colors. It's a truism of film esthetics that metaphors are difficult in cinema. Comparing love with roses works well enough in literature, but its cinematic equivalent poses problems: the rose, the secondary element of the



Figure 3-11. SYMBOL. Bergman often uses coffins and corpses as symbols in his films. Here, Ullmann again in *Face to Face*...



Figure 3-12. ... and Max von Sydow in *Hour of the Wolf* (1966).

metaphor, is too equivalent in cinema, too much present. As a result, cinematic metaphors based on the literary model tend to be crude and static and forced. The indexical sign may offer a way out of this dilemma. Here film discovers its own, unique metaphorical power, which it owes to the flexibility of the frame: its ability to say many things at once.

The concept of the index also leads us to some interesting ideas about connotation. It must be clear from the above discussion that the line between denotation and connotation is not clearly defined: there is a continuum. In film, as in written and spoken language, connotations if they become strong enough are eventually accepted as denotative meanings. As it happens, much of the connotative power of film depends on devices that are indexical; that is, they are not arbitrary signs, but *neither are they identical.*

*Two terms from literary studies, closely associated with each other, serve to describe the main manner in which film conveys connotative meaning. A "metonymy" is a figure of speech in which an associated detail or notion is used to invoke an idea or represent an object. Etymologically, the word means "substitute naming" (from the Greek *meta*, involving transfer, and *onoma*, name). Thus, in literature we can speak of the king (and the idea of kingship) as "the crown." A "synecdoche" is a figure of speech in which the part stands for the whole or the whole for the part. An automobile can be referred to as a "motor" or a "set of wheels"; a policeman is "the law."*

Both of these forms recur constantly in cinema. The indexes of heat mentioned above are clearly metonymical: associated details invoke an abstract idea. Many of the old clichés of Hollywood are synecdochic (close shots of marching feet to represent an army) and metonymic (the falling calendar pages, the driving wheels of the railroad engine). Indeed, because metonymical devices yield themselves so well to cinematic exploitation, cinema can be more efficient in this regard than literature can. Associated details can be compressed within the limits of the frame to present a statement of extraordinary richness. Metonymy is a kind of cinematic shorthand.

Just as, in general, our sense of cinema's connotations depends on understood comparisons of the image with images that were not chosen (paradigmatic) and images that came before and after (syntagmatic), so



Figure 3-13. METONYMY. In *Red Desert* (1964), Michelangelo Antonioni developed a precise metonymic of color. Throughout most of the film, Giuliana (Monica Vitti) is oppressed psychologically and politically by a gray and deathly urban industrial environment. When she manages to break away from its grip on several occasions, Antonioni signals her temporary independence (and possible return to health) with bright colors, a detail associated with health and happiness not only in this film but in general culture as well. In this scene, Giuliana attempts to open her own shop. The gray walls are punctuated with splashes of brilliant color (the attempt at freedom), but the shapes themselves are violent, disorganized, frightening (the relapse into neurosis). In all, a complicated set of metonymies.

our sense of the cultural connotations depends upon understood comparisons of the part with the whole (synecdoche) and associated details with ideas (metonymy). Cinema is an art and a medium of extensions and indexes. Much of its meaning comes not from what we see (or hear) but from what we don't see or, more accurately, from an ongoing process of comparison of what we see with what we don't see. This is ironic, considering that cinema at first glance seems to be an art that is all too evident, one that is often criticized for "leaving nothing to the imagination."

Quite the contrary is true. In a film of strict denotation, images and sounds are quite easily and directly understood. But very few films are strictly denotative; they can't help but be connotative, "for to speak [film]



Figure 3-14. METONYMY. In Claude Chabrol's *Leda* (1959), André Jocelyn portrays a schizophrenic character. The image in the cracked mirror is a simple, logical metonymy.

is partly to invent it." The observer who adamantly resists, of course, can choose to ignore the connotative power of film, but the observer who has learned to read film has available a multitude of connotations.

Alfred Hitchcock, for example, made a number of very popular films in a career that spanned more than half a century. We could ascribe his critical and popular success to the subjects of his films—certainly the thriller strikes a deep responsive chord in audiences—but then how do we account for the failed thrillers of his imitators? In truth, the drama of film, its attraction, lies not so much in what is shot (that's the drama of the subject), but in how it is shot and how it is presented. And as thousands of commentators have attested, Hitchcock was the master par excellence of these two critical tasks. The drama of filmmaking in large part lies in the brainwork of these closely associated sets of decisions. Highly "literate" filmgoers appreciate Hitchcock's superb cinematic intelligence on a conscious level, less literate filmgoers on an unconscious level, but the intelligence has its effect, nevertheless.

One more element remains to be added to the lexicon of film

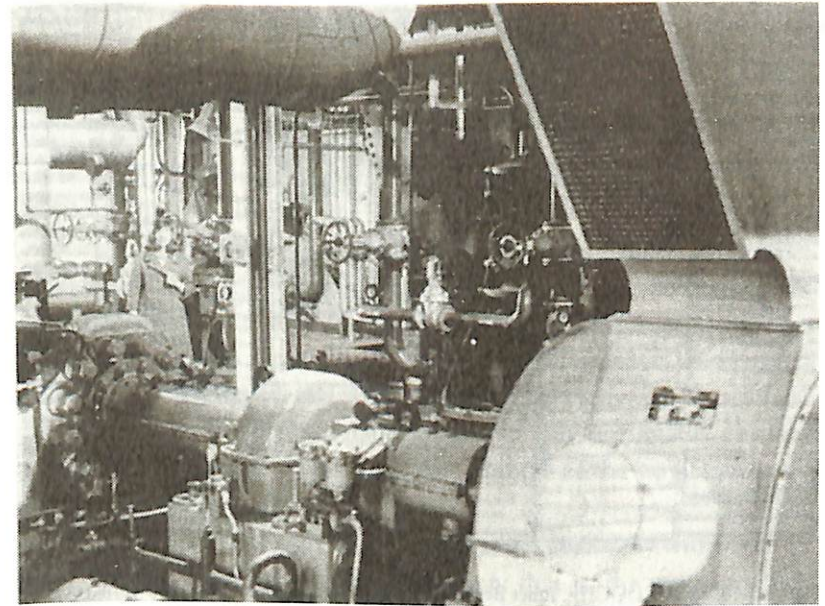


Figure 3-15. SYNECDOCHE. Giuliana in *Red Desert*, again, this time surrounded and nearly overwhelmed by industrial machinery, a "part" that stands for the "whole" of her urban society. It isn't this ship or the dockside ganglion of pipes that oppress her, but the larger reality they represent.

semiotics: the trope. In literary theory, a trope is a "turn of phrase" or a "change of sense"; in other words, a logical twist that gives the elements of a sign—the signifier and the signified—a new relationship to each other. The trope is therefore the connecting element between denotation and connotation. When a rose is a rose is a rose it isn't anything else, and its meaning as a sign is strictly denotative. But when a rose is something else, a "turning" has been made and the sign is opened up to new meanings. The map of film semiotics we have described so far has been static. The concept of the trope allows us to view it dynamically, as actions rather than facts.

As we have noted in earlier chapters, one of the great sources of power in film is that it can reproduce the tropes of most of the other arts. There is also a set of tropes that it has made its own. We have described the way they operate in general in the first part of this chapter. Given an image of a rose, we at first have only its iconic or symbolic denotative meaning, which is static. But when we begin to expand the



Figure 3-16. SYNECDOCHE. Juliet Berta in Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) has constructed a theoretical barricade of Chairman Mao's "Little Red Books," parts that stand for the whole of Marxist/Leninist/Maoist ideology with which the group of "gauchistes" to which she belongs protect themselves, and from which they intend to launch an attack on bourgeois society.

The terms "synecdoche" and "metonymy"—like "Icon," "Index," and "Symbol"—are, of course, imprecise. They are theoretical constructs that may be useful as aids to analysis; they are not strict definitions. This particular synecdoche, for example, might be better classified as a metonymy in which the little red books are associated details rather than parts standing for the whole. (The decision itself has ideological overtones!) Likewise, although this image seems easiest to classify as Indexical, there are certainly elements of the Iconic and Symbolic in it.

possibilities through tropes of comparison, the image comes alive: as a connotative index, in terms of the paradigm of possible shots, in the syntagmatic context of its associations in the film, as it is used metaphorically as a metonymy or a synecdoche.

There are undoubtedly other categories of film semiotics yet to be discovered, analyzed, propagated. In no sense is the system shown in the chart below meant to be either exhaustive or immutable. Semiotics is most definitely not a science in the sense that physics or biology is a science. But it is a logical, often illuminating system that helps to describe how film does what it does. Film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand. The semiotics of film is easy to explain because it is difficult to understand. Somewhere between lies the genius of film.



SYNTAX

Film has no grammar. There are, however, some vaguely defined rules of usage in cinematic language, and the syntax of film—its systematic arrangement—orders these rules and indicates relationships among them. As with written and spoken languages, it is important to remember that the syntax of film is a result of its usage, not a determinant of it. There is nothing preordained about film syntax. Rather, it evolved naturally as certain devices were found in practice to be both workable and useful. Like the syntax of written and spoken language, the syntax of film is an organic development, descriptive rather than prescriptive, and it has changed considerably over the years. The "Hollywood Grammar" described below may sound laughable now, but during the thirties, forties, and early fifties it was an accurate model of the way Hollywood films were constructed.

In written/spoken language systems, syntax deals only with what we might call the linear aspect of construction: that is, the ways in which words are put together in a chain to form phrases and sentences, what in film we call the syntagmatic category. In film, however, syntax can also include spatial composition, for which there is no parallel in language systems like English and French—we can't say or write several things at the same time.

So film syntax must include both development in time and development in space. In film criticism, generally, the modification of space is referred to as "mise-en-scène." The French phrase literally means "putting in the scene." The modification of time is called "montage" (from the French for "putting together"). As we shall see in Chapter 4, the tension between these twin concepts of mise-en-scène and montage has been the engine of film esthetics ever since the Lumières and Méliès first explored the practical possibilities of each at the turn of the century.

Over the years, theories of mise-en-scène have tended to be closely associated with film realism, while montage has been seen as essentially expressionistic, yet these pairings are deceptive. Certainly it would seem that mise-en-scène would indicate a high regard for the subject in front of the camera, while montage would give the filmmaker more control over the manipulation of the subject, but despite these natural tendencies, there are many occasions when montage can be the more realistic of the

two alternatives, and *mise-en-scène* the more expressionistic. Take, for example, the problem of choosing between a pan from one subject to another and a cut. Most people would say that the cut is more manipulative, that it interrupts and remodels reality, and that therefore the pan is the more realistic of the two alternatives, since it preserves the integrity of the space. Yet, in fact, the reverse is true if we judge panning and cutting from the point of view of the observer. When we redirect our attention from one subject to another we seldom actually pan. Psychologically, the cut is the truer approximation of our natural

Figure 3-17. TROPE. An ant-covered hand from Dali and Buñuel's surrealist classic *Un Chien Andalou* (1928). Another very complex image, not easily analyzed. Iconic, Indexical, and Symbolic values are all present: the image is striking for its own sake; it is a measure of the infestation of the soul of the owner of the hand; it is certainly symbolic of a more general malaise, as well. It is metonymic, because the ants are an "associated detail"; it is also synecdochic, because the hand is a part that stands for the whole. Finally, the source of the image seems to be a trope: a verbal pun on the French idiom, "avoir des fourmis dans les mains," "to have ants in the hand," an expression equivalent to the English "my hand is asleep." By illustrating the turn of phrase literally, Dali and Buñuel extended the trope so that a common experience is turned into a striking sign of decay. (I am indebted to David Bombyk for this analysis.) (MOMA/FSA.)



perception. First one subject has our attention, then the other; we are seldom interested in the intervening space, yet the cinematic pan draws our attention to just that.*

* It has been suggested that the zip pan, in which the camera moves so quickly that the image in between the original subject and its successor is blurred, would be the most verisimilitudinous handling of the problem. But even this alternative draws attention to itself, which is precisely what does not happen in normal perception. Perhaps the perfect analogue with reality would be the direct cut in which the two shots were separated by a single black frame (or better yet, a neutral gray frame), which would duplicate the time (approximately 1/20 of a second) each saccadic movement of the eye takes!

It was André Bazin, the influential French critic of the 1950s, who more than anyone developed the connections between *mise-en-scène* and realism on the one hand, and montage and expressionism on the other. At about the same time, in the middle fifties, Jean-Luc Godard was working out a synthesis of the twin notions of *mise-en-scène* and montage that was considerably more sophisticated than Bazin's binary opposition. For Godard, *mise-en-scène* and montage were divested of ethical and esthetic connotations: montage simply did in time what *mise-en-scène* did in space. Both are principles of organization, and to say that *mise-en-scène* (space) is more "realistic" than montage (time) is illogical, according to Godard. In his essay "Montage, mon beau souci" (1956) Godard redefined montage as an integral part of *mise-en-scène*.

Setting up a scene is as much an organizing of time as of space. The aim of this is to discover in film a psychological reality that transcends physical, plastic reality. There are two corollaries to Godard's synthesis: first, *mise-en-scène* can therefore be every bit as expressionistic as montage when a filmmaker uses it to distort reality; second, psychological reality (as opposed to verisimilitude) may be better served by a strategy



Figure 3-18. METONYMIC GESTURE Max von Sydow suffers in Ingmar Bergman's *Hour of the Wolf* (1967)...

experience: a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (see page 100).

director's *Shame* (1968). Gesture is one of the m

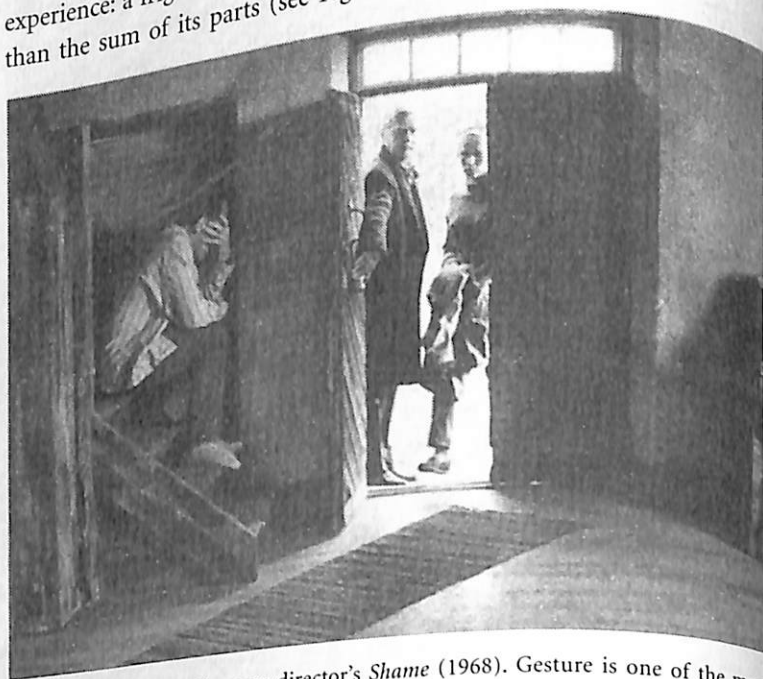


Figure 3-19. ... and in the same director's *Shame* (1968). Gesture is one of the most communicative facets of film signification. "Kinesics," or "body language," is basically an Indexical, metonymic system of meaning. Here, von Sydow's pose conveys the same basic meaning in each film: the hand covers the face, shields it from the outside world; the knees are pulled up close almost in the fetal position, to protect the body; the ego has shrunk into a protective shell, a sense further emphasized in the shot from *Shame* by the framed box of the wooden stairway von Sydow is sitting on. Texture supports gesture in both shots: both backgrounds—one exterior, one interior—are rough, barren, uninviting. The differences between the shots are equally as meaningful as the similarities. In *Hour of the Wolf*, von Sydow's character is relatively more open, relaxed: so is the pose. In *Shame* the character (at this point in the narrative) is mortified, a sense emphasized by both the tighter pose and the more distanced composition of the shot.

CODES

The structure of cinema is defined by the codes in which it operates and the codes that operate within it. Codes are critical constructions—systems of logical relationship—derived after the fact of film. They are not preexisting laws that the filmmaker consciously observes. A great variety of codes combine to form the medium in which film expresses meaning. There are culturally derived codes—those that exist outside film and that filmmakers simply reproduce (the way people eat, for example). There are a number of codes that cinema shares with the other arts (for instance, gesture, which is a code

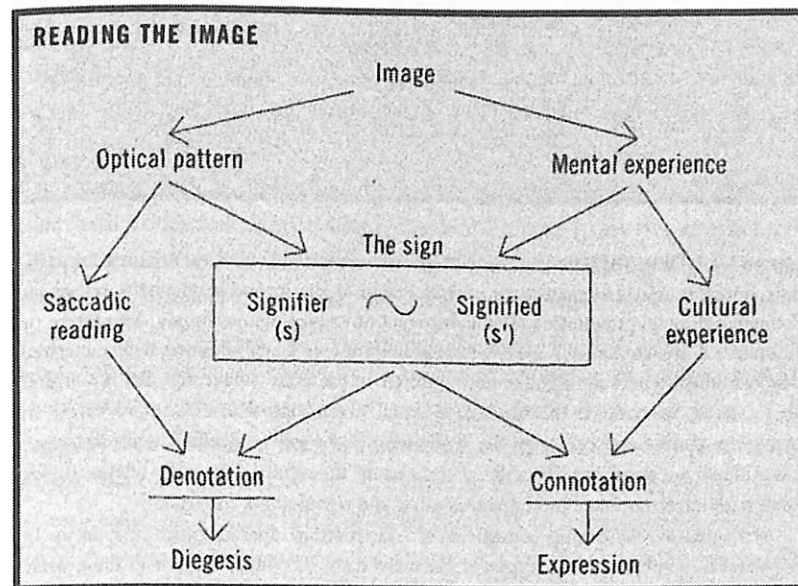


Diagram H. READING THE IMAGE: The image is experienced as both an optical and a mental phenomenon. The optical pattern is read saccadically; the mental experience is the result of the sum of cultural determinants, and is formed by it. Both optical and mental intellection combine in the concept of the sign, where signifier(s) is related to signified(s). The signifier is more optical than mental; the signified, more mental than optical. All three levels of reading—saccadic, semiotic, and cultural—then combine with each other in various ways to produce meaning, either essentially denotative or essentially connotative.

of theater as well as film). And there are those codes that are unique to cinema. (Montage is the prime example.)

The culturally derived codes and the shared artistic codes are vital to cinema, naturally, but it is the unique codes, those that form the specific syntax of film, that most concern us here. Perhaps “unique” is

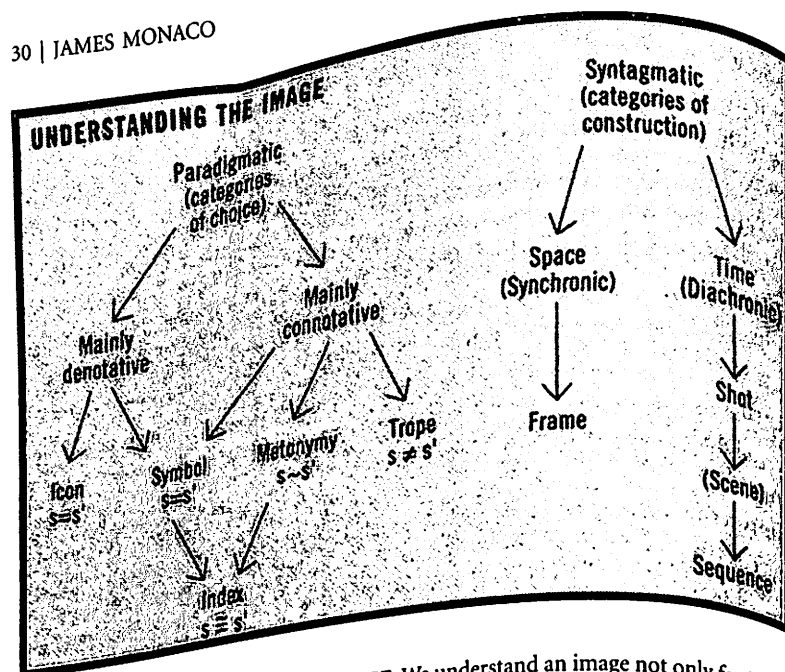


Diagram I. UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGE: We understand an image not only for itself, but in context in relation to categories of choice (paradigmatic) and in relation to categories of construction (syntagmatic). The categories of choice are variously denotative or connotative, and each variety, none of whose boundaries are sharply defined, is characterized by the relationship between signifier and signified. In the iconic image, signifier is identical with signified. In symbols the signifier is equal to the signified, but not identical. In metonymies and synecdoches, signifier is similar in some way to signified, while in tropes, the signifier is not equal to (distinctly different from) the signified. Here the relationship is considerably more tenuous. In indexes, signifier and signified are congruent.

Syntagmatic relationship (categories of construction) operate either in space or in time: synchronic phenomena happen at the same time, or without regard to time, while diachronic phenomena happen across time, or within it. (Here, the words "synchronic" and "diachronic" carry their simplest meanings. They are also used with more specific definitions generally in semiotics and linguistics, in which case synchronic linguistics is descriptive, while diachronic linguistics is historical.)

Finally, we must note that many of the concepts expressed in this chart are true for sounds as well as images, although usually to a considerably lesser extent. While it is true that we do not read sounds saccadically, we nevertheless focus psychologically on particular sounds within the total auditory experience, just as we "block out" unwanted or useless noise. While sound must seem, in general, far more denotative and iconic than image, it is nevertheless possible to apply the concepts of symbol, index, metonymy, synecdoche, and trope, if the necessary changes are made.

not a completely accurate adjective. Not even the most specifically cinematic codes, those of montage, are truly unique to cinema. Certainly, cinema emphasizes them and utilizes them more than other arts do, yet something like montage has always existed in the novel. Any storyteller is capable of switching scenes in midstream. "Meanwhile, back at the ranch," is clearly not an invention of cinema. More important, for nearly a century film art has had its own strong influence on the older arts. Not only did something like montage exist prior to 1900 in prose narrative, but also since that time, novelists, increasingly influenced by film, have learned gradually to make their narratives even more like cinema.

The point is, simply, that codes are a critical convenience—nothing more—and it would be wrong to give them so much weight that we were more concerned with the precise definition of the code than with the perception of the film.

Taking the shower scene in *Psycho* once again as an example, let's derive the codes operating there. It is a simple scene (only two characters—one of whom is barely seen—and two actions—taking a shower and murdering) and it is of short duration, yet all three types of codes are evident. The culturally derived codes have to do with taking showers and murdering people. The shower is, in Western culture, an activity that has elements of privacy, sexuality, purgation, relaxation, openness, and regeneration. In other words, Hitchcock could not have chosen a more ironic place to emphasize the elements of violation and sexuality in the assault. Murder, on the other hand, fascinates us because of motives. Yet the dimly perceived murderer of *Psycho* has no discernible motive. The act seems gratuitous, almost absurd—which makes it even more striking. Historically, Jack the Ripper may come to mind, and this redoubles our sense of the sexual foundation of the murder.

Since this particular scene is so highly cinematic and so short, shared codes are relatively minor here. Acting codes hardly play a part, for instance, since the shots are so brief there isn't time to act in them, only to mime a simple expression. The diagonals that are so important in establishing the sense of disorientation and dynamism are shared with the other pictorial arts. The harsh contrasts and backlighting that obscure the murderer are shared with photography. The musical code of Bernard Herrmann's accompaniment also exists outside film, of course.

In addition, we can trace the development of the use of the culturally derived codes in cinema and allied arts: Hitchcock's murder scene might be contrasted with the murder of Marat in his bath (in history, in the painting by Jacques-Louis David, and in the play by Peter Weiss), the bathtub murder scene in Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955), or that in *The Last of Sheila* (1973), written by Stephen Sondheim and Anthony Perkins (who played in *Psycho*), or the direct homages to *Psycho* in Mike Hodges's *Terminal Man* (1974) or Brian DePalm's *Dressed to Kill* (1980), or even the shot-by-shot remake of *Psycho* by Gus Van Sant (1998).

As we have already noted, the specifically cinematic codes in Hitchcock's one-minute tour de force are exceptionally strong. In fact, it's hard to see how the montage of the sequence could be duplicated in any other art. The rapid cutting of the scene may indeed be a unique cinematic code.



Figure 3-20. Mise-en-scène or montage? A crucial scene in Bergman's *Face to Face*, this was shot from a hallway giving a "split screen" view of two rooms. Instead of cutting from the action in one to the action in the other, Bergman presented both simultaneously while keeping the action in each separate. The cross-cutting dialectic of montage is thus made an integral element of mise-en-scène. (Frame enlargement)

Hitchcock manipulates all these codes to achieve a desired effect. It is because they are codes—because they have meaning for us outside the narrow limits of that particular scene: in film, in the other arts, in the general culture—that they affect us. The codes are the medium through which the "message" of the scene is transmitted. The specifically cinematic codes together with a number of shared codes make up the syntax of film.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Three questions confront the filmmaker: What to shoot? How to shoot it? How to present the shot? The domain of the first two questions is mise-en-scène, that of the last, montage. Mise-en-scène is often regarded as static, montage as dynamic. This is not the case. Because we read the shot, we are actively involved with it. The codes of mise-en-scène are the tools with which the filmmaker alters and modifies our reading of the shot. Since the shot is such a large unit of meaning, it may be useful to separate a discussion of its components into two parts.

THE FRAMED IMAGE

All the codes that operate within the frame, without regard to the chronological axis of film, are shared with the other pictorial arts. The number and range of these codes is great, and they have been developed and refined in painting, sculpture, and photography over the course of thousands of years. Basic texts in the visual arts examine the three determinants of color, line, and form, and certainly each of the visual codes of film fits within one of these rubrics. Rudolf Arnheim, in his highly influential study *Art and Visual Perception*, suggested ten areas of concern: Balance, Shape, Form, Growth, Space, Light, Color, Movement, Tension, and Expression. Clearly, a full exposition of the codes operating in the film frame would be a lengthy undertaking. We can, however, describe briefly the basic aspects of the syntax of the frame. Two aspects of the framed image are most important: the limitations that the frame imposes, and the composition of the image within the frame (and without necessary regard to it).

Since the frame determines the limit of the image, the choice of an aspect ratio suggests the possibilities of composition. With the self-



Figure 3-21. Hitchcock's spellbinding shower murder in *Psycho* (1959) has become notorious over the years for its vertiginous editing, yet the bathroom murder was not a new idea. (From *Psycho*. © 1974. Ed. by Richard J. Amble. Frame enlargement.)



Figure 3-22. Several years earlier Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Diabolique* had shocked audiences with an altogether quieter but no less eerie murder scene. (Paul Meurisse is the victim.) (Walter Daran. *Time/Life* Picture Agency. © Time Inc. Frame enlargement.)



Figure 3-23. *Psycho*'s star, Anthony Perkins, cowrote the script for Herbert Ross's *The Last of Sheila* (1973). Joan Hackett attempted suicide in an elegant shipboard bath.

THE BATH TUB/ SHOWER CODE

Figure 3-24. Murder isn't the only activity that takes place in tubs. In Godard's poetic essay *Pierrot le fou* (1965), Jean-Paul Belmondo relaxed in a tub as he shared some thoughts on the painter Velázquez with his daughter. (*l'Avant-Scène*. Frame enlargement.)



Figure 3-25. In Jean-Charles Tacchella's *Cousin, cousine* (1975), Marie-France Pisier settled into an empty tub in contemplation



Figure 3-26. Gian Maria Volonté found some surcease from exile in a remote Italian village in an old-fashioned tub. Irene Papas assisted in Francesco Rosi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1979).



THE BATH TUB/ SHOWER CODE



Figure 3-27. In the late seventies, the bath became a focus of contemporary California life with the rise in popularity of the hot tub. Stacey Nolkin took a call in *Serial* (1980).



Figure 3-28. *Ghostbusters II* (1989). The bath fights back; Sigourney Weaver wins. (Frame enlargement.)



Figure 3-29. In a variant, Kevin Kline as President *showers* in Ivan Reitman's *Dave* (1993). Weaver is surprised. (Frame enlargement.)

THE BATH TUB/ SHOWER CODE



Figure 3-30. The bathtub code extends as far back as Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat* (1793), shocking because of its intimate realism. (Oil on canvas. 65" by 50 1/2". Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels.)

justification that has been endemic to the elusive subject of film esthetics, early theoreticians waxed eloquent over the value of the Academy aperture, the 1.33 ratio. When widescreen ratios became popular in the 1950s, the classical estheticians bemoaned the destruction of the symmetry they perceived in the Academy aperture, but, as we demonstrated in Chapter 2, there was nothing sacred about the ratio of 4:3.

The question is not which ratio is "proper" but rather which codes yield themselves to exploitation in which ratios? Before the mid-fifties, it seems, interiors and dialogue dominated American and foreign screens. After the introduction of the widescreen formats in the 1950s, exteriors, location shooting, and action sequences grew in importance. This is a crude generalization, but there is some useful truth to it. It's not important whether there was a cause-and-effect relationship between the two historical developments, only that wide screens permitted more efficient exploitation of action and landscape codes.

CinemaScope and Panavision width ratios (2.33 and above) do make it more difficult, as the old Hollywood estheticians had suggested, to photograph intimate conversations. Whereas the classic two-shot of the

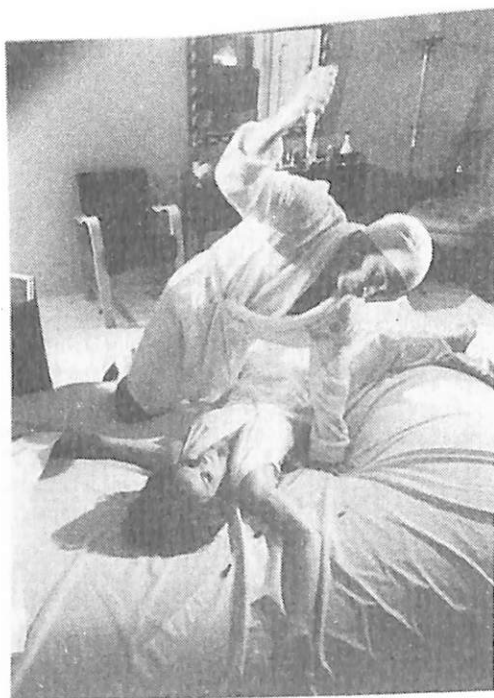


Figure 3-31. *Psycho* itself spawned a number of homages. Here, George Segal (just out of the bath) in Mike Hodges's *Terminal Man* (1974)....



Figure 3-32. ... and Angie Dickinson in Brian De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* (1980). (Compare the hands here and in Figure 3-33.)

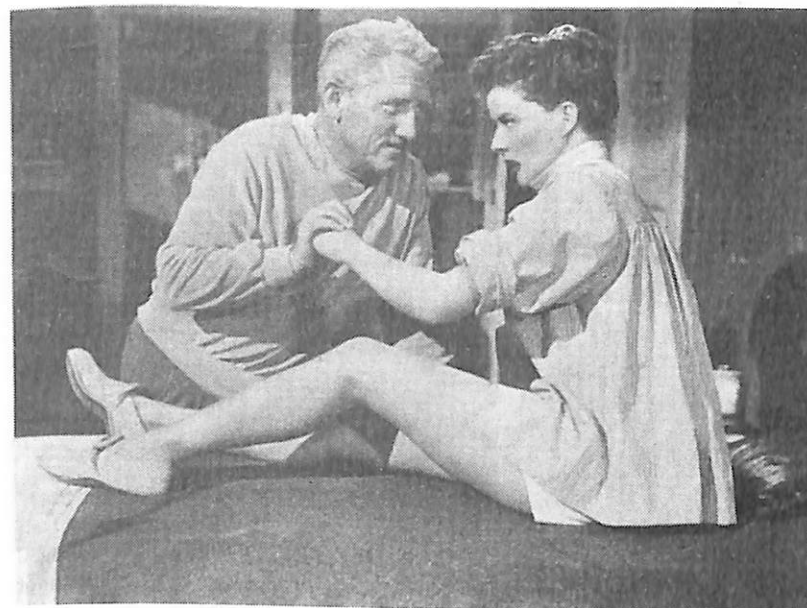


Figure 3-33. The Academy aperture two-shot. Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn in George Cukor's *Pat and Mike* (1952). More intimate and involving than...

1.33 screen size tended to focus attention on speaker and listener, the very wide anamorphic ratios cannot avoid also photographing the space either between them or beside them and therefore calling attention to their relationship to the space surrounding them. This is neither "better" nor "worse"; it simply changes the code of the two-shot.

The filmmaker can also change the dimensions of the frame during the course of the film by masking the image, either artificially or naturally through composition. This has been an important aspect of the syntax of frame shape ever since D. W. Griffith first explored its possibilities.

Just as important as the actual frame size, although less easily perceived, is the filmmaker's attitude toward the limit of the frame. If the image of the frame is self-sufficient, then we can speak of it as a "closed form." Conversely, if the filmmaker has composed the shot in such a way that we are always subliminally aware of the area outside the frame, then the form is considered to be "open."

Open and closed forms are closely associated with the elements of



Figure 3-34. ... the widescreen two-shot. Jean-Claude Brialy and Anna Karina in Jean-Luc Godard's *A Woman Is a Woman* (1961). The still life on the table is carefully composed, both to fill the middle space of the frame and to connect the characters.

movement in the frame. If the camera tends to follow the subject faithfully, the form tends to be closed; if, on the other hand, the filmmaker allows—even encourages—the subject to leave the frame and reenter, the form is obviously open. The relationship between the movement within the frame and the movement of the camera is one of the more sophisticated codes, and specifically cinematic.

Hollywood's classic syntax was identified in part by a relatively tightly closed form. The masters of the Hollywood style of the thirties and forties tried never to allow the subject to leave the frame (it was considered daring even if the subject did not occupy the center of the 1.33 frame). In the sixties and seventies, filmmakers like Michelangelo Antonioni were equally faithful to the open widescreen form because it emphasizes the spaces between people.

Most elements of compositional syntax do not depend strictly on the frame for their definition. If the image faded at the edges like a vignette (which itself is one of the minor devices of the framing code), such codes as intrinsic interest, proximity, depth perception, angle of

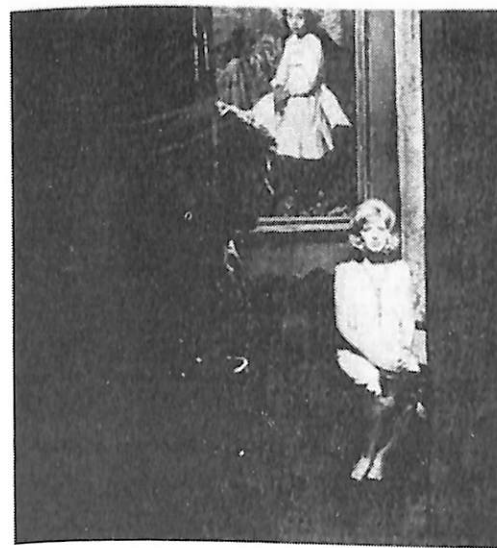


Figure 3-35. Michelangelo Antonioni was well known for his sensitivity to architectural metaphor. This naturally masked shot from *Eclipse* (1962) both isolates Alain Delon and Monica Vitti and calls attention to the comparison to be made between Vitti and the portrait on the wall behind her.

approach, and lighting would work just as well as they do in frames with sharply defined limits.

The filmmaker, like most pictorial artists, composes in three dimensions. This doesn't mean necessarily that he is trying to convey three-dimensional (or stereoscopic) information. It means that there are three sets of compositional codes: One concerns the plane of the image (most important, naturally, since the image is, after all, two-dimensional). One deals with the geography of the space photographed (its plane is parallel with the ground and the horizon). The third involves the plane of depth perception, perpendicular to both the frame plane and the geographical plane. Figure 3-40 visualizes these three planes of composition.

Naturally, these planes interlock. No filmmaker analyzes precisely how each single plane influences the composition, but decisions are made that focus attention on pairs of planes. Clearly, the plane of the frame must be dominant, since that is the only plane that actually exists on the screen. Composition for this plane, however, is often influenced by factors in the geographical plane since, unless we are dealing with animation, a photographer or cinematographer must compose *for* the frame plane *in* the geographical plane. Likewise, the geographical plane and the plane of depth perception are coordinated, since much of our ability to perceive



Figure 3-36. Antonioni was obsessed with widescreen composition. This shot from *Red Desert* demonstrates his architectural formalism. (Frame enlargement.)

depth in two-dimensional representations as well as three-dimensional reality depends on phenomena in the geographical plane. In fact, perception of depth depends on many important factors other than binocular stereoscopic vision, which is why film presents such a strong illusion of three-dimensional space and why stereoscopic film techniques are relatively useless.*

Figure 3-41 illustrates some of the most important psychological factors strongly influencing depth perception. Overlapping takes place in the frame plane, but the three others—convergence, relative size, and density gradient—depend on the geographical plane. We've already discussed in Chapter 2 how various lens types affect depth perception (and linear distortion as well). A photographer modifies, suppresses, or reinforces the effects of lens types through composition of the image within the frame.

Here are some other examples of how the codes of the compositional planes interact:

Proximity and proportion are important subcodes. Stage actors are

* If so-called 3-D film techniques simply added the one remaining factor to depth perception, there would be no problem with them. The difficulty is that they actually distort our perception of depth, since they don't allow us to focus on a single plane, as we do naturally, and since they tend to produce disturbing pseudostereoscopic and pseudoscopic stereoscopic images.

forever mindful of them. Obviously, the closer the subject, the more important it seems. As a result, an actor in the theater is always in danger of being "upstaged" by other members of the company. In film, of course, the director has complete control over position, and reverse angles help to redress the balance.

Figure 3-42, a classic shot from *Citizen Kane* (1941), gives us a more sophisticated example of the significance of proximity and proportion. Kane enters the room at the rear; his wife is in bed in the midground; a bottle of sleeping medicine looms large in the foreground. The three are connected by their placement in the frame. Reverse the order and the medicine bottle would disappear into the background of the shot.

One of the aspects of composition that differentiates Baroque from late Renaissance painting is the shift from the "square" orientation of the geographic plane to the oblique. There were several reasons for this—one was the quest for greater verisimilitude: the oblique composition emphasized the space of the painting, whereas the symmetrical Renaissance compositional standard emphasized its design. The net effect, however, was to increase the psychological drama of the design: geographical obliques translate into the plane of the frame as diagonals, which are read as inherently more active than horizontals and verticals. Here, as in the earlier examples, there is a relationship between compositional factors in separate planes.

Eventually the geographic and depth planes "feed" information to the plane of the frame. This is truer in painting and photography, which don't have the ability film does to move physically into the pictorial space, but it is still generally true in cinema as well. The frame plane is the only "real" plane. Most elements of composition, therefore, realize themselves in this plane.

The empty frame, contrary to expectations, is not a tabula rasa. Even before the image appears, we invest the potential space of the frame with certain qualities, ones which have been measured scientifically: our natural tendency to read depth into the two-dimensional design, for instance. Latent expectations determine intrinsic interest. Figures 3-43 and 3-44 demonstrate this. In 3-43, both verticals are precisely the same length, yet the left-hand line looks much longer. This is because we read the angles at top and bottom as representative of corners, the left

receding, the right intruding. If both lines *seem* to be equal, we then calculate that the line on the left must be longer, since it is "farther away." In Figure 3-44, which stairway ascends and which descends? The "correct"

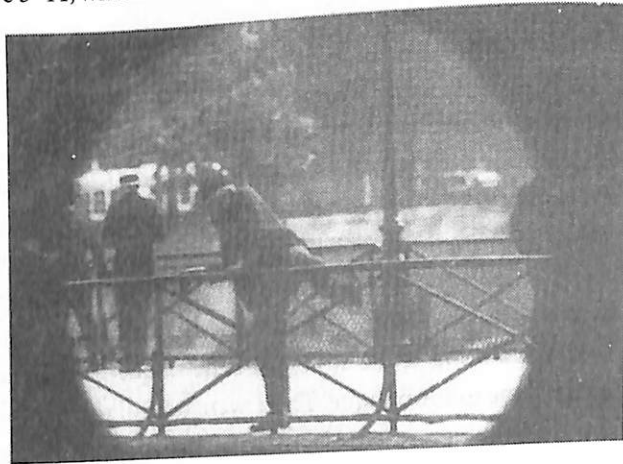


Figure 3-37. This shot from Jean Renoir's *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932) isolates the forlorn figure of Boudu, about to jump into the Seine, by vignetting the image. The masking has a literal function as well: Boudu (Michel Simon) is seen through a telescope in this shot. (*L'Avant-Scène*. Frame enlargement.)

answers are that *A* ascends and *B* descends. The trick is in the verbs, of course, since stairs always go both up and down. But since Westerners tend to read from left to right, we see stair *A* ascending and stair *B* descending.

So, even before the image appears, the frame is invested with meaning. The bottom is more "important" than the top, left comes before right, the bottom is stable, the top unstable: diagonals from bottom left to top right go "up" from stability to instability. Horizontals will also be given more weight than verticals: confronted with horizontal and vertical lines of equal length, we tend to read the horizontal as longer, a phenomenon emphasized by the dimensions of the frame.

When the image does appear, form, line, and color are impressed with these latent values in the frame. Form, line, and color also have their own inherent values of weight and direction. If sharp lines exist in the design of the image, we tend to read along them from left to right. An object with a "light" inherent significance (Mrs. Kane's medicine bottle) can be given "heavy" significance through shape.



Figure 3-38. CLOSED FORM. The notorious stateroom scene from *A Night at the Opera* (Sam Wood, 1935) must be the zenith of Hollywood-style closed form! The brothers are cramped in the frame, as well as in the stateroom.



Figure 3-39. OPEN FORM. Macha Meril in Godard's *A Married Woman* (1964). The taxi is moving to the left out of the frame. Meril is walking to the right out of the frame and looking back toward the left; the car in the background is moving diagonally up out of the frame. The design elements of the shot conspire to make us aware of the continuous space beyond the limits of the frame. (*French Film Office*.)

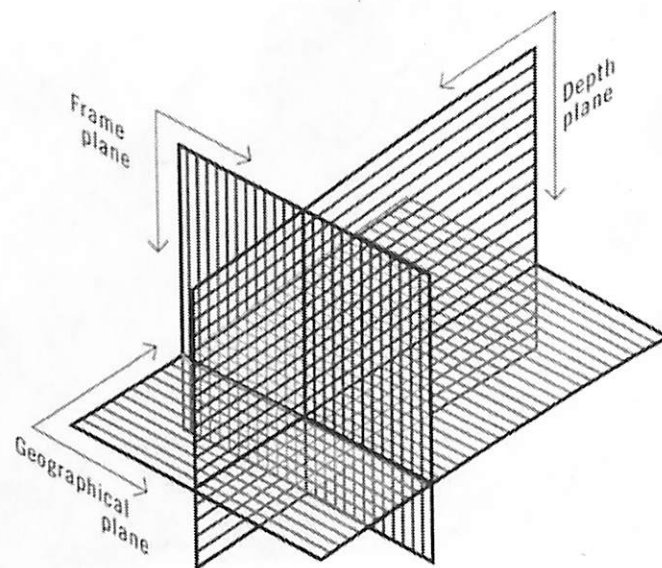


Figure 3-40. THE THREE PLANES OF COMPOSITION: The plane of the image; the geography of the photographic space; the axis of depth perception.

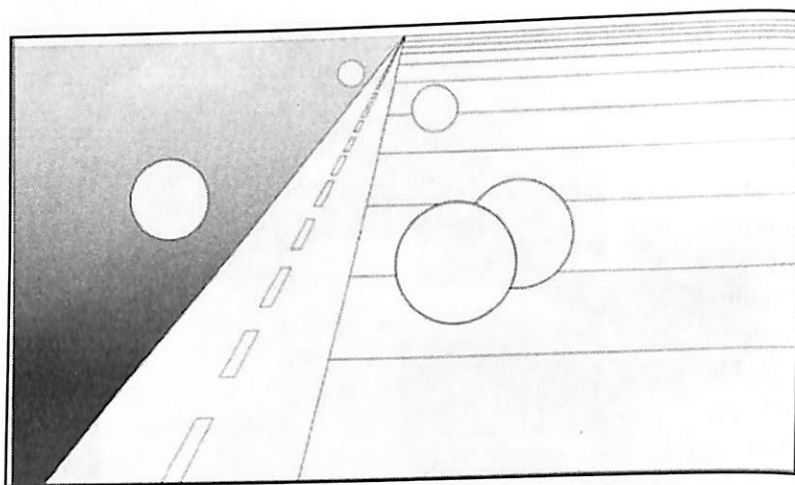


Figure 3-41. CONVENTIONS OF DEPTH PERCEPTION. Four major conventions of depth perception are illustrated here: convergence (the boundaries of the road), relative size (the near and far balls), density gradient (of shade on the left, of lines on the right), and overlapping (the balls on the right).

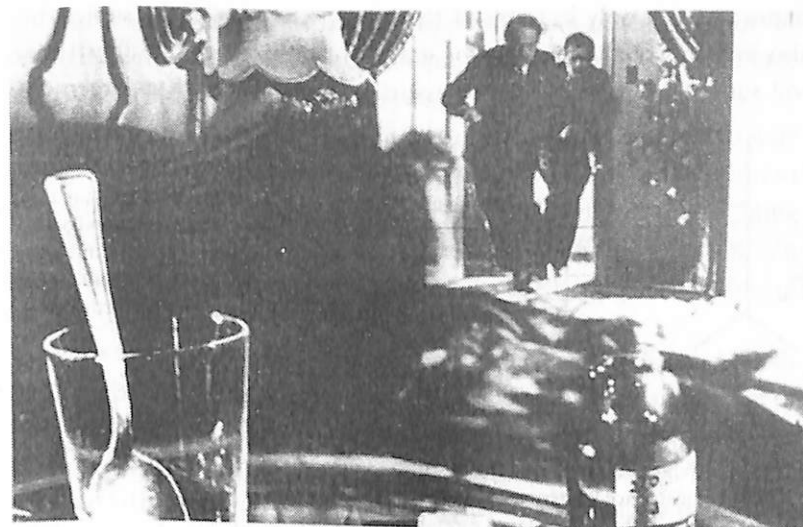


Figure 3-42. Dorothy Comingore (in shadow), Orson Welles, and Joseph Cotten in Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941). It is not the material of the shot but its design that tells the story. (*Sight and Sound*.)

And color, of course, adds an entirely new dimension. Hitchcock begins *Marnie* (1964) with a close shot of his heroine's bright yellow pocketbook. The other color values of the scene are neutral. The sense is of the pocketbook carrying the woman rather than vice versa, just the effect Hitchcock wants, considering that the yellow bulge contains the money Marnie had just stolen and that her life, as we later see, is dominated by her kleptomania. Before we learn any of this narratively, we "know" it. (*Marnie* is also an excellent example of other types of color dominance, since the subject of the film is color symbolism: Marnie suffers from rosophobia.)

Elements of form, line, and color all carry their own intrinsic interests, significant weights that counteract, reinforce, counterpoint, or balance each other in complex systems, each read against our latent expectations of the frame and with the senses of composition in depth and planar design combined.

Multiple images (split screen) and superimpositions (double exposures, et cetera), although they are seldom used, can multiply the intrinsic weights by factors of two, three, four, or more. Texture, although it is not often mentioned when speaking of film esthetics, is also

important, not only in terms of the inherent texture of the subject but also in terms of the texture—or grain—of the image. One illustration will suffice: we have learned to associate graininess with enlargement,

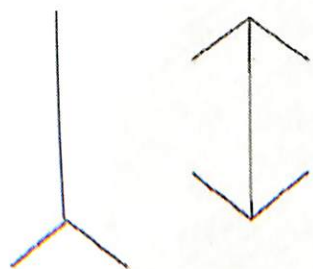
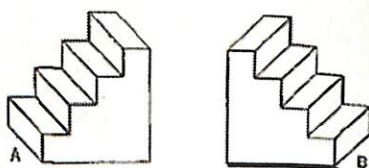


Figure 3-43.

THE MULLER-LYER ILLUSION. Both verticals are the same length, yet the left-hand line looks much longer. We read the angles at top and bottom as corners, the left receding, the right intruding. If both lines seem to be equal, we think the line on the left must be longer, since it is “further away,”

Figure 3-44.
UPSTAIRS/DOWNSTAIRS ILLUSION.

Which stairway ascends and which descends? Since Westerners tend to read from left to right, we see stair A ascending and stair B descending.



and with documentary. The filmmaker therefore has this code at his command. A grainy image signifies a “truthful” one. The grain of enlargement and its significance as a barrier to comprehension provided the basic metaphor of Antonioni’s 1966 film *Blow-up*.

Perhaps the most important tool the filmmaker can use to modify the meanings of form, line, and color, and their intrinsic interests, is lighting. In the days when filmstock was relatively insensitive (before the 1960s), artificial lighting was a requisite, and filmmakers made a virtue of necessity, as always. The German Expressionists of the twenties borrowed the code of chiaroscuro from painting to dramatic effect—it allowed them to emphasize design over verisimilitude. The classical Hollywood cinematographic style wanted a more natural effect and so developed a system of balanced “key” lights and “fill” lights (see Figure 3-50) that provided thorough but not overt illumination and therefore presented a minimal barrier between observer and subject. At its best, this sophisticated system was capable of some extraordinary, subtle effects, yet it was inherently unrealistic; we seldom observe natural scenes that have both the very high light level and the carefully balanced fill that mark the Hollywood style (and that is perpetuated today in both theatrical and television productions).

The development of fast filmstocks permitted a new latitude in the code of lighting, and today most cinematographers work for verisimilitude rather than classic Hollywood balance.

Needless to say, all the lighting codes that operate in photography operate in film as well. Full front lighting washes out a subject; overhead lighting dominates it; lighting from below makes it lugubrious; highlighting can call attention to details (hair and eyes most often); backlighting can either dominate a subject or highlight it; sidelighting is capable of dramatic chiaroscuro effect.

Aspect ratio; open and closed form; frame, geographic, and depth planes; depth perception; proximity and proportion: intrinsic interest of color, form, and line; weight and direction; latent expectation; oblique versus symmetric composition; texture; and lighting. These are the major codes operating within the static film frame. In terms of the diachronic shot, however, we have just begun.

THE DIACHRONIC SHOT

Filmmakers use a wealth of terminology in regard to the shot. The factors that now come into play include distance, focus, angle, movement, and point of view. Some of these elements also operate within the static frame, but all are more appropriately discussed as dynamic qualities. Shot distance is the simplest variable. So-called “normal” shots include the full shot, three-quarter shot, medium shot (or mid-shot), and head-and-shoulders shot—all defined in terms of the amount of subject viewed. Closeups, long shots, and extreme long shots complete the range of distances.

Note that none of these terms has anything to do with the focal length of the lens used. As we saw in Chapter 2, in addition to being defined in terms of the distance of the camera from the subject, shots are also named for their lenses. Note, too, that in practice these terms are loosely used. One person’s closeup is another’s “detail shot,” and no Academy of film has (so far) sat in deep deliberation deciding the precise point at which a medium shot becomes a long shot, or a long shot metamorphoses into an extreme long shot. Nevertheless, within limits, the concepts are valid.

A film shot mainly in closeups—Carl Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan*



Figure 3-45. Mischa Auer in Orson Welles's *Mr. Arkadin* (1955): a typically tilted Welles composition. That the line of the table moves down from left to right disorients us even further. The observer in the frame strains, stretches his neck to see. The low angle of the shot increases our sense of foreboding. Most important, the trope of the magnified eye is doubled and redoubled with typically Wellesian irony by the echoing circles of the top hat and the light above. The "cheat" here is that the magnifying glass is positioned for our use, not Auer's. (*l'Avant-Scène. Frame enlargement.*)

of *Arc* (1928), for example—deprives us of setting and is therefore disorienting, claustrophobic. The effect can be striking. On the other hand, a film shot mainly in long shot—many of Roberto Rossellini's later historical essays, for instance—emphasizes context over drama and dialectic over personality. The code of shot distance is simple, but to a large extent it controls which of the many other codes of film we may use.

Focus is the next most important variable in the syntax of the shot. There are two axes in the determination of focus: the first choice is between deep focus, in which foreground, middle ground, and background are all relatively sharp focus, and shallow focus, in which the focus emphasizes one ground over the others. Shallow focus obviously allows the filmmaker greater control over the image. Deep focus, on the other hand, is one of the prime esthetic hallmarks of *mise-en-scène*. (It is much easier to "put things in the scene" when all three grounds are in focus,



Figure 3-46. Multiple exposure is one of the most unnatural codes of cinema (we seldom see two images at the same time in real life) but it can also be one of the most meaningful. Here, three multiple exposures from various films by Orson Welles, in increasing order of complexity. The first, from *Citizen Kane*, simply connects Susan Alexander (Dorothy Corningore) with her image in the press, a common use of the double exposure code.... (*l'Avant-Scène. Frame enlargement.*)



Figure 3-47. ... The second, from *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), suggests two levels of reality.... (*l'Avant-Scène. Frame enlargement.*)



Figure 3-48. ... The third, from *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), is from the famous mirror sequence in that film: will we survive the nightmare? (*l'Avant-Scène. Frame enlargement.*)

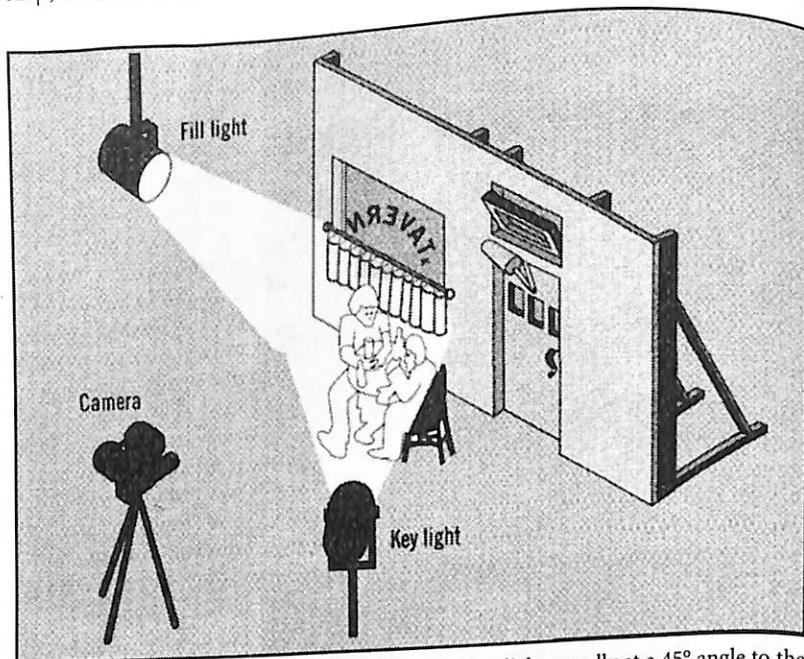


Figure 3-49. KEY LIGHTS AND FILL LIGHTS. The key light, usually at a 45° angle to the camera-subject axis, provides the main source of illumination. The smaller fill light softens the shadows in this classic Hollywood lighting technique

since the scene is then much larger, more accommodating.) (See Figures 2-18 and 2-19.)

The second axis of focus is the continuum between sharp and soft focus. This aspect of the shot is related to texture. Soft focus is generally associated with so-called romantic moods. Sharp focus is more closely associated with verisimilitude. These are generalizations that specific instances often contradict. (As always, the rules are made to be broken.) Soft focus is not so much romantic as it is mollifying. It smoothes out the identifying details of an image and distances it.

Surely focus is a function of the still frame as well as of the diachronic shot. It is intimately associated with the compositional planes, since it permits concentration on a single ground. But it also tends toward movement. By maintaining relatively shallow focus and changing focus during the shot, the filmmaker can shift the intrinsic interest of the frame from one ground to another, which in a way parallels the effect of the pan, zoom, or tracking shot but does so within the frame and without moving the camera.

Focus changes within the shot are of two basic sorts: follow focus, in which the focus is changed to permit the camera to keep a moving subject in focus; and rack focus, in which the focus is changed to direct attention away from one subject and toward another in a different ground. Follow focus was one of the basics of the Hollywood style, admired for its ability to maintain attention on the subject. Rack focus is one of the hallmarks of the modern, intrusive style. Focus, then, is one of the codes that connect the codes of composition with those of movement.

The third aspect of the diachronic shot—angle—also reaches back toward static composition and forward toward the movement of the shot. Because the relationship between camera and subject exists in three-dimensional space, there are three sets of separate angles that determine the shot.

We have already discussed one of these, the angle of approach (squarely symmetrical or oblique), in the previous section. To understand the relationships among the three types of angle, it may be useful to visualize the three imaginary axes that run through the camera (Figure 2-25). The pan axis (vertical) is also the axis of the angle of approach; it is either square or oblique. The tilt axis (horizontal from left to right) determines the elevation of the shot: overhead, high-angle, eye-level, and low-angle are the basic terms used here. It goes without saying that high-angle shots diminish the importance of the subject while low-angle shots emphasize its power. Interestingly, the eye-level shot, the least obtrusive, is not always so easily defined. The Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu is well known for the constant low-angle of his style, yet Ozu wasn't really trying to distort the basic design of his image: he was merely shooting from the eye level of a Japanese observer seated on a tatami mat. "Eye level," of course, depends on the eye of the beholder. Even in European and American cinema, the subtle differences among eye levels, although not immediately remarkable, can have significant effects over the course of a film.

The third angle variable, roll, is determined by the movement of the camera around the last remaining axis, the horizontal that parallels the axis of the lens. Possibly because this axis represents the metaphysical bond between the observer (or camera) and the subject, possibly because

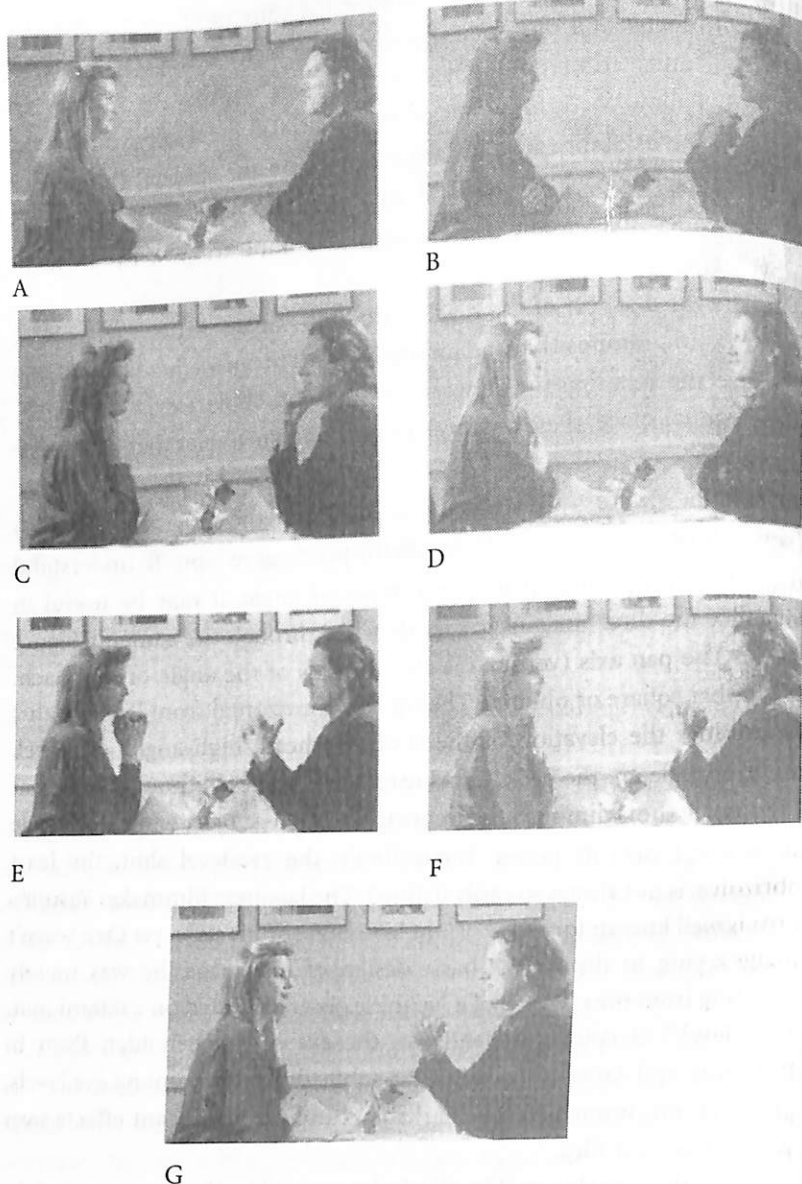


Figure 3-50. LIGHTING COMBINATIONS FROM "THE INTERFACE": (A) Key light. Two key lights were used here. (B) Back light. (C) Fill light. (D) Key light and fill light. (E) Back light and fill light. (F) Key light and fill light. (G) The final composition: key, fill, and back lights.



Figure 3-51. HOLLYWOOD LIGHTING. Margaret O'Brien and Judy Garland in Vincent Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). The set is vibrantly, thoroughly lit. There are only the faintest hints of shadows, even in the back room, which is out of focus. Since this was a Technicolor film, the lighting is even stronger than it might have been for black-and-white.

roll destroys the stability of the horizon, the camera is very seldom revolved around this axis. The only common roll movement that comes to mind is that sometimes used to mimic the movements of the horizon as seen from the boat in heavy seas. Roll movement (or the oblique horizon of a static shot) is the only change of camera angle that does not significantly alter our focus of attention. To pan or to tilt is to change images; to roll is simply to alter the original image.

The camera not only revolves around these three axes, it is also moved from one point to another: hence "tracking" shots (also called trucking or dolly shots) and "crane" shots. The zoom shot, as discussed in Chapter 2, mimics the effect of a track in or track back, but not precisely. In the zoom, since the camera does not move, the relationships among objects in different planes remain the same; there is no sense of entering into the scene; our perspective remains constant, even if the image is enlarged. In the track, however, we do move physically into the scene; the spatial

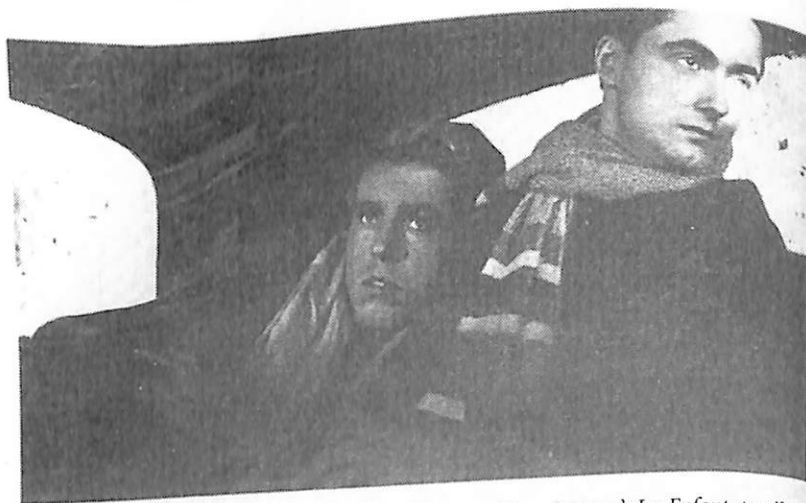


Figure 3-52. HIGHLIGHTING. Jean-Pierre Melville's and Jean Cocteau's *Les Enfants terribles* (1950). The eyes are specially lit.

relationships among objects shift, as does our perspective. Although the zoom is often an inexpensive alternative to the tracking shot, its effect is strangely distancing: we seem to move closer without getting any nearer, and that is disorienting, since we have no such experience in real life for comparison.

Just as debates have evolved between proponents of deep focus and shallow focus, and between champions of *mise-en-scène* and montage, so, too, the moving camera has its adherents and detractors. Because it continually changes our perspective, the tracking shot significantly increases our perception of depth. More important, the moving camera has an inherent ethical dimension. It can be used in two essentially different ways (like focus shifts, pans, and tilts): either to follow the subject or to change it. The first alternative strongly emphasizes the centrality of the subject of the film; the second shifts interest from subject to camera, from object to filmmaker. As André Bazin has pointed out, these are ethical questions, since they determine the human relationships among artist, subject, and observer.



Figure 3-53. Backlighting is one of the more interesting lighting codes taken from painting. Here, a relatively early example from painting, Constance Marie Charpentier's *Mlle Charlotte du val d'Ogries* (c. 1801). The light source highlights the subject's hair and the folds of her dress. Although there is no perceivable light source from the front, details are nevertheless evident and the shadows are soft and elegant. (Oil on canvas, 60 1/2" by 50 5/8", The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Mr and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Collection. Bequest of Isaac D. Fletcher, 1917.)



Figure 3-54. Jean-Luc Godard is one filmmaker who has been intrigued by this code. By the time of *Weekend* (1968), from which this shot comes, he had abstracted the backlit shot to the extreme of silhouette. The lighting is harsh, bold, and overwhelms the subject. In order to search out detail in the shot we have to work, which makes us feel, faced with the bright window, not unlike voyeurs—exactly the effect Godard wants. Jean Yanne and Mireille Darc in *Weekend* (1968). (Frame enlargement.)



Figure 3-55. Woody Allen achieved an entirely different feel in this equally harshly backlit shot from *Manhattan* (1979). The silhouettes of Diane Keaton and Allen are instantly recognizable at a cocktail party in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 3-56. In addition to widescreen architectural composition, Antonioni was fascinated by the focus code. Here, in *Red Desert*, Monica Vitti enters the frame out of focus (just like her character). (Frame enlargement.)

Although some estheticians insist that the moving camera, because it calls attention to the filmmaker, is somehow less ethical than the stationary camera, this is as specious a differentiation as the earlier dichotomies between *mise-en-scène* and montage and between deep and shallow focus. A tracking or crane shot need not necessarily shift interest from subject to camera; it can, rather, call attention to the relationship between the two, which is arguably both more realistic and more ethical, since there is in fact a relationship.

Indeed, many of the best and most lyrical tracking shots are the cinematic equivalents of making love, as the filmmaker courts, then unites with his subject; the track becomes the relationship, and the shot a synthesis of filmmaker and subject, greater than the sum of its parts.

F. W. Murnau and Max Ophüls loom large in the history of the moving camera. Their use of it was, essentially, humanistic—to create a lyrical celebration of their subjects and to involve their audiences more deeply. Stanley Kubrick, a contemporary filmmaker closely identified with tracking shots, also uses camera movement to involve his audience, but in a colder, more intellectual way. Michael Snow, an important abstract filmmaker and artist, explored in great depth—in a series of three seminal films—the signficatory potential of the moving camera.



A. Sylvia Bataille in Jean Renoir's *Partie de campagne* (1936).



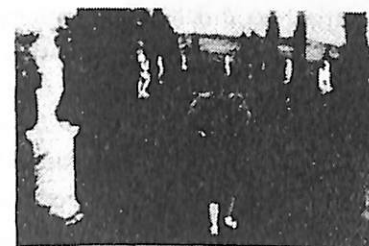
B. Bibi Andersson, Gunnar Björnstrand, Liv Ullmann in Bergman's *Persona* (1966).



C. Renée Longarini, Marcello Mastroianni in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1959).



D. Giulietta Masina in Fellini's *La Strada* (1954).



E. Masina in Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957).



F. Masina in Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits* (1965).

Figure 3-57. SHOT COMPOSITION. In practice, shot distance is much more idiosyncratic than the terminology suggests. Both A and B, for example, are somewhere in between closeups and detail shots. Both give us half a woman's face, yet in A the face takes up nearly the whole frame while in B it is part of a three-shot. The aspect ratio of the frame is an important consideration, too. Both C and D are, more or less, mid-shots, yet C, in the scope ratio, has an entirely different effect from D, in the standard Academy ratio. C includes a lot more action than D; D is more like a closeup in effect. Composition is a major element, as well. Shots E and F both must be classified as long shots—same actress, same director. In each, Giulietta Masina takes up three-quarters of the height of the frame, more or less. Yet in E, Fellini has composed a shot in which the other design elements—the road, the statues, the horizon—work to focus attention on Masina. Psychologically, the image of her is more impressive here. In F, composition (and her posture) works to de-emphasize her presence. (All shots, *l'Avant-Scène*. Frame enlargements.)



Figure 3-58. A typical low-angle shot from Yasujiro Ozu's *The End of Summer* (1961). The angle doesn't seem so striking because the subjects are seated on the floor. (*New Yorker Films.*)

Wavelength (1967) is an obsessive zoom, lasting forty-five minutes, which takes us from an image of a rather large New York loft in its entirety to, in the end, a detail shot of a photograph hanging on the wall at the opposite end of the large room. The potential of the simplest pan from left to right and back again is explored in 4 $\leftrightarrow$ (1968-69, also called *Back and Forth*). Snow set up his camera in an empty classroom, then panned continuously and quickly over a sector of about 75° and in periods ranging from fifteen cycles per minute to sixty cycles per minute. *La Région Centrale* (1970-71), Snow's masterwork lasting more than three hours, gives us an obsessive "map" of the complete sphere of space that surrounds the camera on all sides. Snow constructed a servomechanism control head for his camera, set it up in a remote and rocky region of northern Quebec, and controlled its patterns of movement from behind a hill. The camera swoops, swirls, gyrates, twirls, tilts, zigzags, sweeps, arcs, and performs figure eights in a multitude of patterns while nothing is visible except the barren landscape, the horizon, and the sun. The effect is the thorough liberation of the camera from both subject and photographer. The global space that surrounds it becomes raw material for Snow's complex patterns of movements. Movement is all.

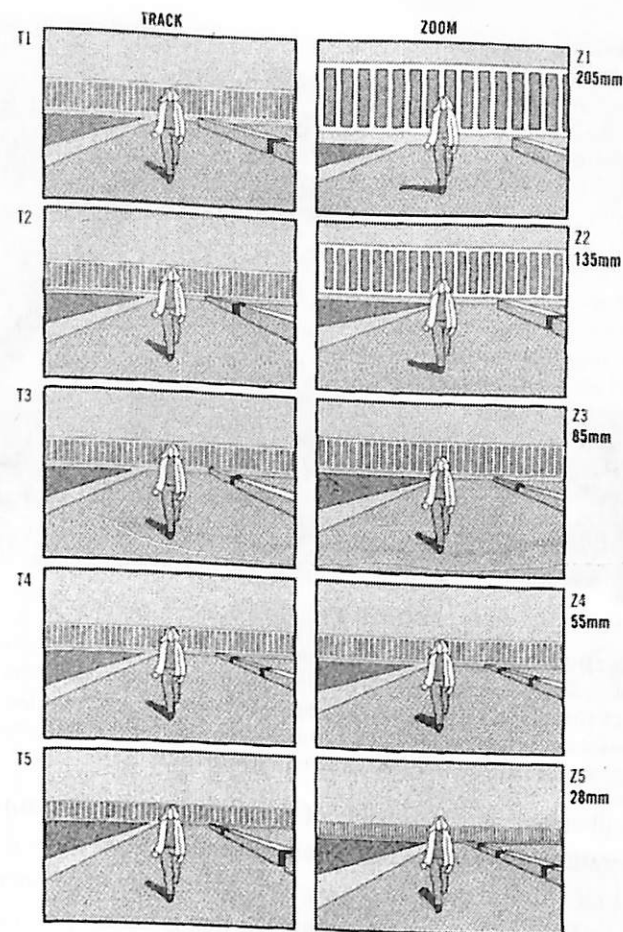


Figure 3-59. TRACKING VERSUS ZOOMING. These ten frames from parallel tracking and zoom shots illustrate the significant differences between the two techniques. In both series, the woman is walking towards the camera, covering a distance of approximately fifty yards between frame 1 and frame 5. The track was shot first, with a 55 mm lens. (Thus frames T4 and Z4 are identical.) The zoom was then shot to correspond to the track. The relationship between subject and background is dramatically different in the zoom. As the lens changes from telephoto (205 mm) to wide-angle (28 mm) focal lengths, depth perception changes from suppressed to exaggerated, and perspective undergoes a slight moderation as well. In the tracking shot, the distance between subject and camera is constant from one frame to another, and the building is far enough in the background so as not to change greatly between frames. In the zoom, the distance between subject and camera is constantly changing, and the relative size of the background building is magnified in the telephoto shots and distanced, or minimized in the wide-angle frame. Notice, too, that the angle of the shadow changes in the zoom. See Figure 2-10.

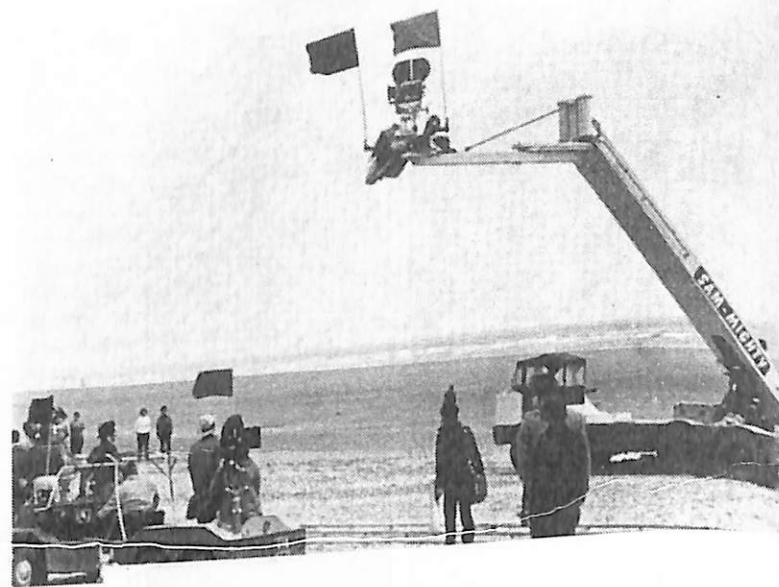


Figure 3-60. THE MOVING CAMERA. On the set of Jean-Luc Godard's *One Plus One* (1968). The typical camera at right is a "prop" in the film. (The red and black flags are not standard equipment.) The camera platform is counterbalanced by weights out of the frame. In the middle ground can be seen tracks laid for a camera that is barely visible at the extreme left. In the foreground, a third camera is mounted on a special truck.

The liberated, abstract quality of Snow's images leads us directly to a consideration of the last of the five shot variables: point of view. Unlike the first four, this is more a matter of metaphysics than of geometry. The point of *La Région Centrale*, for example, is that it has no point of view, or rather that its point of view is abstract and global. Most narrative films, however, do show some sort of subjective point of view. This varies from the objective point of view of long shots, deep focus, and static camera, to the more subjective approach of closeups, shallow focus, and moving camera. We've already noted that the moving camera has an ethical aspect to it. The question of point of view is at the heart of this ethical code, and critics and semioticians are only now beginning to investigate the phenomenon specifically. Considering the structure of the artistic experience we set up in Chapter 1, the ethics of film—the quality and shape of the relationships among filmmaker, subject, artwork, and audience—is elemental: all other ideas about film must stem from it and

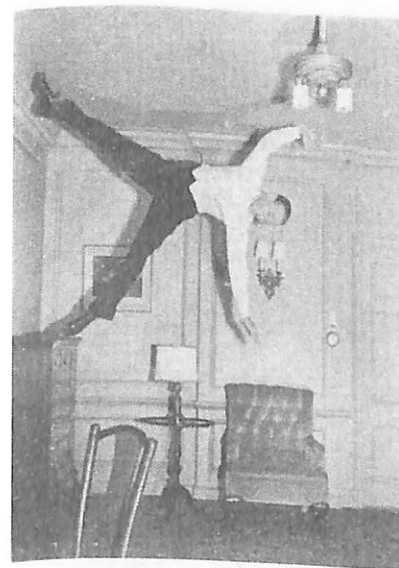


Figure 3-61. ROLL. Pans, tilts, and tracks are common enough cinematic codes, but rolls are relatively rare. The reason is obvious: pans, tilts, and tracking shots mimic common, everyday movements, but we seldom "roll" our heads (tilt them sideways), so this is often a striking perspective. While shots are often made at a rolled angle (see the illustrations from Orson Welles films in Figures 3-42 and 3-45) the movement of rolling is unusual. Here, Fred Astaire performs an entire dance routine in one unedited shot, gradually moving up the wall, across the ceiling, and down the opposite wall, in Stanley Donen's *Royal Wedding* (1951). The precisely choreographed routine was accomplished on a set mounted within a drum. The furniture and the camera were secured. As Astaire moved from floor to wall, from wall to ceiling, the set turned and the camera turned with it.

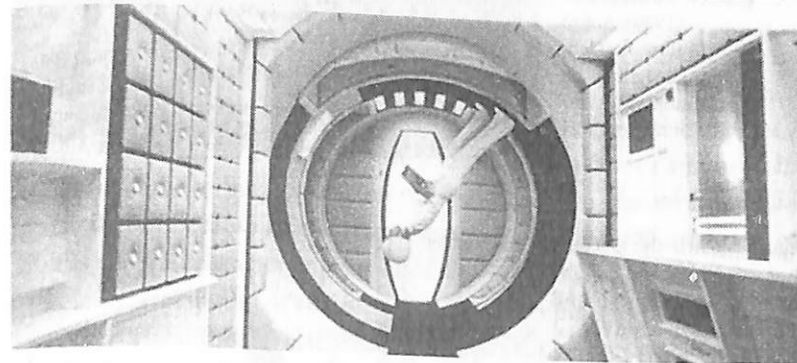


Figure 3-62. Stanley Kubrick used a similar apparatus for many unusual shots in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This particular shot was a setpiece to show off the device. The flight attendant walked full circle, supposedly using Velcro slippers on the special path. (Frame enlargement.)

relate back to it.

Point of view is easier to describe in prose narrative: novels are either narrated by someone in the story—the first-person narrator—or by someone outside it—the omniscient narrator. The first-person narrator may be either a major or a minor figure in the events; the omniscient narrator is sometimes developed as a separate character, sometimes characterless, except insofar as he represents the character of the author. In its totality, film can fairly well duplicate these fictional models.

Figure 3-63. Murnau's set for *Sunrise* (1927). The long tram ride has earned a place in film history. In this case, the tracking shot is purely verisimilitudinous: there is no other way to ride a tram than on tracks! (MOMA/FSA.)



Figure 3-64. Max Ophüls was unusually fond of the moving camera. This is a still from a long lyrical, and very complex craneshot in *La Ronde* (1950). Anton Walbrook at left, Simone Signoret on the carousel. (MOMA/FSA.)



Figure 3-65. If the tracking shot was logical and realistic for Murnau, lyrical and romantic for Ophüls, it became, by 1968, a tool of intellectual analysis (as well as a grand joke) for Jean-Luc Godard. This frame comes from the middle of the seven-minute-long tracking shot of the traffic jam in *Weekend*. Godard's camera moves slowly and inexorably past a



seemingly endless line of stopped autos. Drivers and passengers honk incessantly, argue with each other, fight, stop for an impromptu picnic, play ball from car to car (as here), or test their gear on trailer-mounted sailboats. The poplar trees that line the road at regular intervals divide this magnificent continuous shot into segments that function as separate framing devices. (Frame enlargement.)

TRACKING

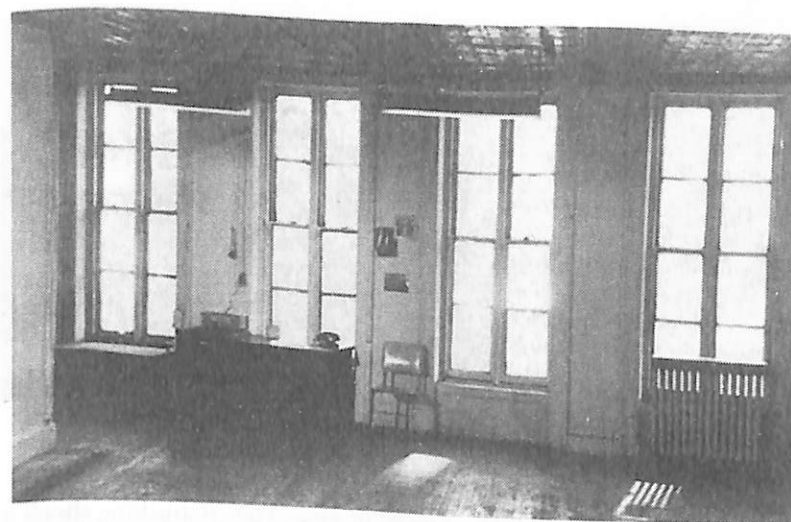


Figure 3-66. Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) treated the tracking shot as a structural law, the subject of the film. This is a frame from about the middle of the forty-five minute zoom. By the end of the film, Snow's camera has moved into a closeup of the middle of the photograph tacked to the wall above the chair. The image? Waves, of course! (MOMA/FSA. Frame enlargement.)

Most films, like most novels, are told from an omniscient point of view. We see and hear whatever the author wants us to see and hear. But when we come to the first-person mode—which has proved so useful in prose fiction because of the resonances that can be developed between events and the character or persona of the narrator who perceives them—problems arise in film. It's easy enough to allow a film character to narrate the story. The difficulty is that we see what is happening as well as hear it. In the novel, in effect, we only hear it. As we've noted earlier, Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1945) is the most famous example of rigid adherence to the first-person rule applied to cinema—and the most obvious demonstration of its failure.

In *Stage Fright* (1950), Alfred Hitchcock discovered, to his chagrin, that the first-person point of view in film is fraught with problems even when it is used perfunctorily. In that film, Hitchcock had one of his characters narrate a flashback—and lie. Audiences saw the lie on screen, and when they later found out that it was false they reacted angrily. They weren't able to accept the possibility that the *image* would lie, although they would have been quite willing to believe that the *character* had lied.

Figure 3-67, Michael Snow's ultimate pan/tilt/roll machine, with camera, set up to shoot *La Région Centrale*. Snow operated the camera from behind the rock at right so as not to appear in the picture. (MOMA/FSA).



The screen image is vested with an immutable aura of validity. By the early 1940s, Hollywood had evolved a very smooth, efficient, and clearly understood idiom of point of view. The establishing shot—a long shot—established place, often time, and sometimes other necessary information. Hitchcock was a master of the establishing shot. The opening pan and track of *Rear Window* (1954), for example, tells us where we are, why we are there, whom we are with, what is going on now, what has happened to get us there, who the other characters of the story are, and even suggests possible ways the story might develop—all effortlessly and quickly and without a spoken word! Paragraphs of prose are condensed into seconds of film time.

The Hollywood dialogue style is equally efficient: we normally begin with a shot of both speakers (an establishing two-shot), then move to a montage of one-shots as each of the participants variously speaks and listens. Often these are “over-the-shoulder” shots, an interesting use of the code, since it suggests the speaker’s point of view but is also physically separate from it. The shot of the first character from (approximately) the second character’s point of view is usually termed a reverse-angle shot. The rhythms of this insistent and intimate shot-countershot technique are often intoxicating: we surround the conversation.

This is the ultimate omniscient style, since it allows us to see everything from the ideal perspective. More contemporary techniques, which tend to emphasize the separateness and individuality of the camera, may allow us to ‘see everything,’ but always from a separate, distinct point of view. Antonioni’s camera, for instance, often holds on a scene that a



Figure 3-68. Grace Kelly and James Stewart in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954). Stewart, a photographer, is immobilized in his apartment on Tenth Street in Greenwich Village. The “CinemaScope” picture windows of the building across the courtyard intrigue him. (Look closely!) He becomes deeply involved in the stories they tell. A metaphor for filmmaking? Certainly a study in “point of view.” (MOMA/FSA.)

character has either not yet entered or already left. The effect is to emphasize environment over character and action, context over content. We might call this the “third-person” point of view: the camera often seems to take on a personality of its own, separate from those of the characters.

In either omniscient style—the Hollywood or the modern—the point-of-view shot (abbreviated “POV”) has its uses. And soundtrack narration is often able to strengthen the sense of the character’s perspective of events. Yet the psychologically insistent, ever-present image attenuates this perspective. In print we need not always be “looking” at a scene: writers don’t always describe or narrate, they often explain or theorize. In film, however, because of the presence of the image, there is always the element of description—even when the soundtrack is used concurrently for explanation, theorizing, or discussion. This is one of the most significant differences between prose narrative and film narrative. Clearly, the only way to circumvent this insistent descriptive nature of the film image is to eliminate it entirely, in which case the soundtrack can duplicate the abstract, analytical potential of written language. Jean-Luc Godard experimented with just this technique in his highly theoretical films of

the late sixties. Sometimes the screen is simply black, while we listen to the words on the soundtrack.

Sound

While the fact of the image is a disadvantage of a kind in terms of point of view in film narrative, the fact of sound—its ever-presence—is a distinct advantage. Christian Metz identifies five channels of information in film: (1) the visual image; (2) print and other graphics; (3) speech; (4) music; and (5) noise (sound effects). Interestingly, the majority of these channels are auditory rather than visual. Examining these channels with regard to the manner in which they communicate, we discover that only two of them are continuous—the first and the fifth. The other three are intermittent—they are switched on and off—and it is easy to conceive of a film without either print, speech, or music.

The two continuous channels themselves communicate in distinctly separate ways. We “read” images by directing our attention; we do not read sound, at least not in the same conscious way. Sound is not only omnipresent but also omnidirectional. Because it is so pervasive, we tend to discount it. Images can be manipulated in many different ways, and the manipulation is relatively obvious; with sound, even the limited manipulation that does occur is vague and tends to be ignored.

It is the pervasiveness of sound that is its most attractive quality. It acts to realize both space and time. It is essential to the creation of a locale; the “room tone,” based on the reverberation time, harmonics, and so forth of a particular location, is its signature. A still image comes alive when a soundtrack is added that can create a sense of the passage of time. In a utilitarian sense, sound shows its value by creating a ground base of continuity to support the images, which usually receive more conscious attention. Speech and music naturally receive attention because they have specific meaning. But the “noise” of the soundtrack—“sound effects”—is paramount. This is where the real construction of the sound environment takes place.

But “noise” and “effects” are poor labels indeed for a worthy art. Possibly we could term this aspect of the soundtrack “environmental sound.” The influence of environmental sound has been felt—and noticed—in contemporary music, especially in that movement known

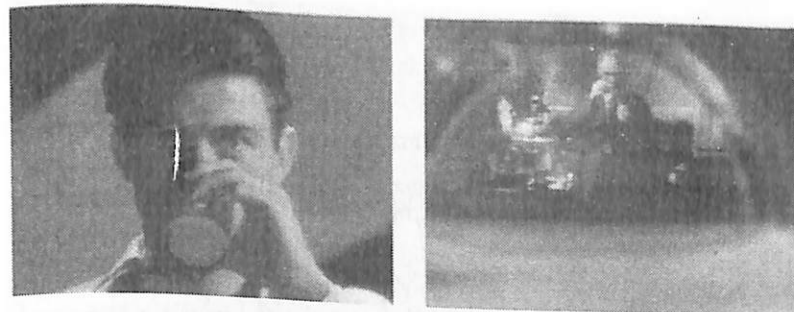


Figure 3-69. Gregory Peck drowns his interlocutor in a glass of milk—and we share the view-point and the experience—in this memorable pay shot from Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. (Frame enlargements).

as “musique concrète.” Even recorded speech has been affected by this new ability. In the great days of radio, “sound effects” were limited to those that could be produced physically. The advent of synthesizers, multitrack recording, and now computer-manipulated digitized sound has made it possible for the sound effects technicians, or “Foley artists,” as they are now called, to recreate an infinite range of both natural and entirely new artificial sounds. Much of the best modern sound drama (which has appeared mainly on records, and public interest radio stations) has recognized the extraordinary potential of what used to be known simply as sound effects. Contemporary music also celebrates this formerly pedestrian art.

Film, too, has recognized sound's new maturity. In the early days of the sound film, musicals, for instance, were extraordinary elaborate visually. Busby Berkeley conceived intricate visual representations of musical ideas to hold an audience's interest. Now, however, the most powerful film musical form is the simple concert. The soundtrack carries the film; the images are dominated by it.

We can conceive of nonmusical cinema in this vein as well. In England, where radio drama lasted longer than in the U.S., a tradition of aural drama was maintained from the *Goon Shows* of the 1950s through *Monty Python's Flying Circus* of the 1970s.

In the U. S. much of the best comedy has been almost exclusively aural since the days of vaudeville: beginning with the masters Jack Benny, George Burns, and Fred Allen, this exuberant if unsung tradition has given us Nichols and May, Mel Brooks, and Bill Cosby; the complex

"cinematic" constructions of the Firesign Theatre and Albert Brooks; and the "new commentary" of Billy Crystal, Whoopi Goldberg, Jerry Seinfeld, and Steven Wright. Much of this recent comedy extends the boundaries of the old vaudeville tradition: aural artists have moved into more complex modes.

In cinema, Francis Ford Coppola's fascinating *The Conversation* (1974) did for the aural image what *Blow-up* (1966) had done for the pictorial image eight years earlier. While the soundtrack can certainly support greater emphasis than it has been given, it cannot easily be divorced from images. Much of the language we employ to discuss the codes of soundtracks deals with the relationship between sound and image. Siegfried Kracauer suggests the differentiation between "actual" sound, which logically connects with the image, and "commentative" sound, which does not. Dialogue of people in the scene is actual, dialogue of people not in the scene is commentative. (A filmmaker sophisticated in sound, such as Richard Lester, often used commentative dialogue of people who were in the shot, but not part of the action of the scene.)

Director and theorist Karel Reisz used slightly different terminology. For Reisz, who wrote a standard text on editing, all sound is divided into "synchronous" and "asynchronous." Synchronous sound has its source within the frame (the editor must work to synchronize it). Asynchronous sound comes from outside the frame.

Combining these two continuums, we get a third,^{*} whose poles are "parallel" sound and "contrapuntal" sound. Parallel sound is actual, synchronous, and connected with the image. Contrapuntal sound is commentative, asynchronous, and opposed to or in counterpoint with the image. It makes no difference whether we are dealing with speech, music, or environmental sound: all three are at times variously parallel or contrapuntal, actual or commentative, synchronous or asynchronous.

The differentiation between parallel and contrapuntal sound is perhaps the controlling factor. This conception of the soundtrack as working logically either with or against the image provides the basic esthetic dialectic of sound. The Hollywood sound style is strongly parallel. The programmatic music of thirties movies nudged, underlined,

* I am indebted to Win Sharples Jr, "The Aesthetics of Film Sound." *Filmmakers Newsletter* 8:5, for this synthesis.



Figure 3-70. The title frame from Orson Welles's tour de force establishing track at the beginning of *Touch of Evil* (1958). In a few minutes, we know all that we need to know. (Frame enlargement.)

emphasized, characterized, and qualified even the simplest scenes so that the duller images as well as the most striking were thoroughly pervaded by the emotions designed by the composers of the nearly continuous music track. Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Max Steiner were the two best-known composers of these emotionally dominating scores.

In the experimental 1960s and 1970s, contrapuntal sound gave an ironic edge to the style of film music. Often the soundtrack was seen as equal, but different from, the image. Marguerite Duras, for example, experimented with commentative soundtracks completely separate from the image, as in *India Song* (1975). In the 1980s, Hollywood returned to programmatic music. John Williams, composer of the soundtracks for many of the blockbusters of the late 1970s and 1980s from *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977) to *Home Alone* (1990) and *Jurassic Park* (1993), has defined the musical themes of a generation, just as his notable predecessors had done. But music is still used commentatively as well. Rock, for example, offers filmmakers a repertoire of instant keys to modern ideas and feelings, as George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* (1983), or any of the films of John Hughes demonstrated clearly.

Ironically, music—which used to be the most powerfully

asynchronous and commentative element of the soundtrack—has now become so pervasive in real life that a filmmaker can maintain strict synchronicity of actual sound and still produce a complete music track. The ubiquitous Walkman radio and Boom Box have made life a musical.

Montage

In the U.S., the word for the work of putting together the shots of a film is “cutting” or “editing,” while in Europe the term is “montage.” The American words suggest a trimming process, in which unwanted material is eliminated. Michelangelo once described sculpture similarly as paring away unneeded stone to discover the natural shape of the sculpture in a block of marble. One edits or cuts raw material down. “Montage,” however, suggests a building action, working up from the raw material. Indeed, the classic style of Hollywood editing of the thirties and forties, revived in part in the eighties—what the French call *découpage classique*—was in fact marked by its smoothness, fluidity, and leanness. And European montage, ever since the German Expressionists and Eisenstein in the twenties, has been characterized by a process of synthesis: a film is seen as being constructed rather than edited. The two terms for the action express the two basic attitudes toward it.

Whereas *mise-en-scène* is marked by a fusion of complexities, montage is surprisingly simple, at least on the physical level. There are only two ways to put two pieces of film together: one can overlap them (double exposure, dissolves, multiple images), or one can put them end to end. For images, the second alternative dominates almost exclusively, while sounds lend themselves much more readily to the first, so much so that this activity has its own name: mixing.

In general parlance, “montage” is used in three different ways. While maintaining its basic meaning, it also has the more specific usages of:

- ❑ a dialectical process that creates a third meaning out of the original two meanings of the adjacent shots; and
- ❑ a process in which a number of short shots are woven together to communicate a great deal of information in a short time.

This last is simply a special case of general montage; the dialectical process is inherent in any montage, conscious or not.

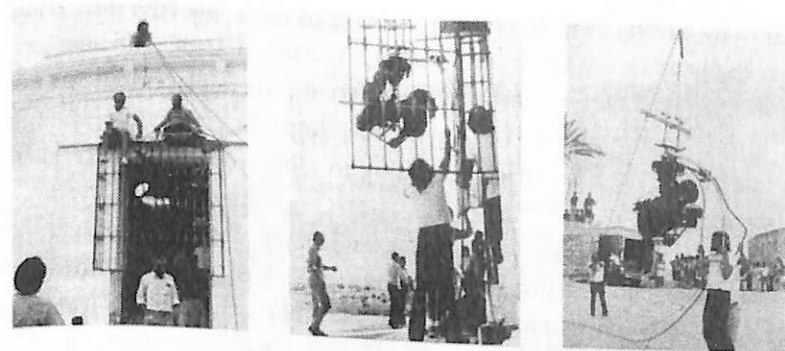


Figure 3-71. To end *The Passenger* with a long, majestic, and mysterious track up to and through a window, Antonioni set up this complex apparatus—sort of a corn bination of a Steadicam, Skycam, and overhead track. The operator guided the camera, suspended from a crane, up to the window grill, which grips then opened while attaching the camera to the crane so that it could move out into the courtyard.

Découpage classique, the Hollywood style of construction, gradually developed a broad range of rules and regulations: for example, the practice of beginning always with an establishing shot, then narrowing down from the generalization; or the strict rule of thumb for editing dialogue scenes with master shots and reverse angles. All the editing practices of the Hollywood grammar were designed to permit seamless transitions from shot to shot and to concentrate attention on the action at hand. What helped to maintain immediacy and the flow of the action was good; what did not was bad.

In fact, any kind of montage is in the end defined according to the action it photographs. Still pictures can be put together solely with regard to the rhythm of the succeeding shots. Diachronic shots, inherently active, demand that the movements within the shot be considered in the editing. The jump cut, where the natural movement is interrupted, provides an interesting example of the contrasting ways in which *découpage classique* and contemporary editing treat a problem.

In Hollywood cinema, “invisible cutting” was the aim, and the jump cut was used as a device to compress dead time. A man enters a large room at one end, for instance, and must walk to a desk at the other end. The jump cut can maintain tempo by eliminating most of the action of traversing the long room, but it must do so unobtrusively. The laws of Hollywood grammar insist that the excess dead time be smoothed over

either by cutting away to another element of the scene (the desk itself, someone else in the room) or by changing camera angle sufficiently so that the second shot is clearly from a different camera placement. Simply snipping out the unwanted footage from a single shot from a single angle is not permitted. The effect, according to Hollywood rules, would be disconcerting.

Modern style, however, permits far greater latitude. In *Breathless* (1959), Jean-Luc Godard startled some estheticians by jump cutting in mid-shot. The cuts had no utilitarian value and they were disconcerting. Godard himself seldom returned to this device in later films, but his “ungrammatical” construction was absorbed into general montage stylistics, and jump cuts are now allowed for rhythmic effect. Even the simple utilitarian jump cut has been streamlined: edited from a single shot (single angle), it can be smoothed by a series of quick dissolves.

The lively 1960s films of Richard Lester—especially his musicals *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), *Help!* (1965), and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966)—popularized jump cuts, rapid and “ungrammatical” cutting. Over time, his brash editorial style became a norm, now celebrated every night around the world in hundreds of music videos on MTV. Because these video images now dominate our lives it's hard to understand how fresh and inventive these techniques seemed in the 1960s. Because this style is now so pervasive in music videos, Lester must be counted as—at least in one sense—the most influential film stylist since D. W. Griffith. Except for morphs, there are few techniques of contemporary music videos that Richard Lester didn't first try in the 1960s. (But then, there isn't much about contemporary music that the Beatles and their colleagues didn't first explore in the 1960s.)

It's important to note that there are actually two processes going on when shots are edited. The first is the joining of the two shots. Also important, however, is determining the length of any individual shot, both as it relates to shots that precede and follow it and as it concerns the action of the shot. *Découpage classique* demands that a shot be cut so that the editing doesn't interfere with the central action of the shot. If we plot the action of each shot so that we get a rising then a falling curve, Hollywood grammar demands a cut shortly after the climax of the curve. Modern directors like Michelangelo Antonioni, however, reversed the



Figure 3-72. Robert Altman's magnificent satire of the film industry, *The Player* (1992), begins with a reel-long tracking shot which is the equal of Murnau's, Welles's, or Godard's: establishing the location, setting up the action, introducing the characters, passing by small incidental antecedents at the same time that it pays homage to them, even while Altman's own shot surpasses those of his predecessors, distanced with insouciant wit, as if to say, "long tracking shots, like long sentences, separate the players from the rest." (Frame enlargement.)

logic, maintaining the shot long after the climax, throughout the period of aftermath. The last shot of *The Passenger* (1975) is an excellent example.

The rhythmic value of editing is probably best seen in the code of "accelerated montage," in which interest in a scene is heightened and brought to a climax through progressively shorter alternations of shots between two subjects (often in chase scenes). Christian Metz pointed to accelerated montage as a uniquely cinematic code (although Charles Ives's antagonistic brass bands provided an illustration of this kind of cross-cutting in music). Accelerated montage points in the direction of a second type of editing.

Montage is used not only to create a continuity between shots in a scene but also to bend the time line of a film. "Parallel" montage allows the filmmaker to alternate between two stories that may or may not be interrelated, cross-cutting between them. (Accelerated montage is a special type of parallel montage.) The flashback and the flash-forward permit digressions and forecasts. "Involute" montage allows a sequence to be narrated without particular regard for chronology: an action can be

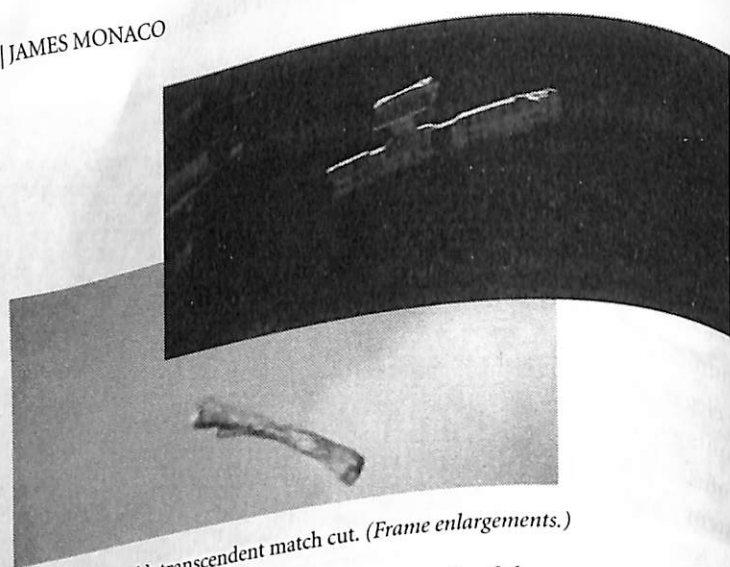


Figure 3-73. Kubrick's transcendent match cut. (Frame enlargements.)

repeated, shots can be edited out of order. Each of these extensions of the montage codes looks toward the creation of something other than simple chronology in the montage itself, a factor very little emphasized in classic *découpage* continuity cutting.

Possibly the most common dialectic device is the match cut, which links two disparate scenes by the repetition of an action or a form, or the duplication of *mise-en-scène*. Stanley Kubrick's match cut in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), between a prehistoric bone whirling in the air and a twenty-first-century space station revolving in space, is possibly the most ambitious match cut in history, since it attempts to unite prehistory with the anthropological future at the same time as it creates a special meaning within the cut itself by emphasizing the functions of both bone and space station as tools, extensions of human capabilities.

The codes of montage may not be as obvious as the codes of *mise-en-scène*, but that doesn't mean that they are necessarily less complex. Few theorists have gone further than differentiating among parallel montage, continuity montage, accelerated montage, flashbacks, and involuted montage. In the 1920s, both V. I. Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein extended the theory of montage beyond these essentially practical concerns. Pudovkin identified five basic types of montage: contrast, parallelism, symbolism, simultaneity, and leitmotif. He then developed a theory of the interaction between shots variously called "relational editing"

or "linkage." Eisenstein, on the other hand, saw the relationship between shots as a collision rather than a linkage, and further refined the theory to deal with the relationships between elements of individual shots as well as the whole shots themselves. This he called the "montage of attractions." Both theorists are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

In the late sixties, Christian Metz attempted to synthesize all these various theories of montage. He constructed a chart in which he tried to indicate how eight types of montage were connected logically. There are a number of problems with Metz's categories, yet the system does have an elegance all its own and it does describe most of the major patterns of montage. More important, despite its idiosyncrasies and occasional confusions, it remains the only recent attempt to comprehend the complex system of montage.

Note that Metz is interested in narrative elements—syntagmas—that can exist within shots as well as between them, an important refinement since, as we have already indicated, the effects of many types of montage can be accomplished within a shot without actually cutting. If the camera pans, for example, from one scene to another, those two scenes exist in relationship to each other just as they would if they were cut together.

Metz's grand design may seem forbidding at first glance, but it reveals a real and useful logic when studied. He begins by limiting himself to autonomous segments of film. These must be either autonomous shots—which are entirely independent of what comes before and after them—or what he calls "syntagmas"—units that have meaningful relationships with each other. (We might call these "scenes" or "sequences," but Metz reserves those terms for individual types of syntagma.) At each stage of this binary system, a further differentiation is made: the first bracket differentiates between autonomous shots and related shots, clearly the primary factor in categorizing types of montage. Either a shot is related to its surrounding shots, or it is not.

The second bracket differentiates between syntagmas that operate chronologically and those that do not. In other words, editing either tells a story (or develops an idea) in chronological sequence, or it does not. Now, on the third level, the differentiations branch out. Metz identifies two separate types of achronological syntagmas, the parallel and the bracket. Then he differentiates between two types of chronological syntagmas: either

a syntagma describes or it narrates. If it narrates, it can do so either linearly or nonlinearly. If it does so linearly, it is either a scene or a sequence. And finally, if it is a sequence, it is either episodic or ordinary.

The end result is a system of eight types of montage, or eight syntagmas. The autonomous shot (1) is also known as the sequence shot (although Metz also places certain kinds of inserts—short, isolated fragments—here). The parallel syntagma (2) has been discussed above as the well-known phenomenon of parallel editing. The bracket syntagma (3), however, is Metz's own discovery—or invention. He defines it as "a series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical examples of a same order or reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other" [Metz, p. 126].

This is rather like a system of allusions. A good example might be the collection of images with which Godard began *A Married Woman* (1964). They all alluded to modern attitudes toward sex. Indeed, Godard in many of his films seemed to be particularly fond of the bracket syntagma, since it allows film to act something like the literary essay.

The descriptive syntagma (4) merely describes. The relation between its elements is spatial rather than temporal. Almost any establishing sequence (such as the one already discussed in *Rear Window*) is a good example of the descriptive syntagma. The alternate syntagma (5) is very much like the parallel syntagma except that the parallel syntagma offers two separate scenes or sequences that do not have a narrative connection, while the alternate syntagma offers parallel or alternating elements that do. The effect here is of simultaneity, as in chase scenes in which the montage alternates between shots of pursuer and pursued.

If events do not happen simultaneously, they happen one after the other, in linear sequence, and this brings us to Metz's remaining three categories of montage: the scene (6) and two types of sequence—episodic (7) and ordinary (8). There has always been a great deal of confusion in the vocabulary of film criticism between the concepts of scene and sequence, and Metz's elaborate system is valuable for the precise definitions he offers. Metz takes his definition of scene from theatrical parlance. In the scene, the succession of events—the linear narrative—is continuous. In the sequence, it is broken up. It is still linear, it is still narrative, it is still chronological, it is still related to other elements, but it

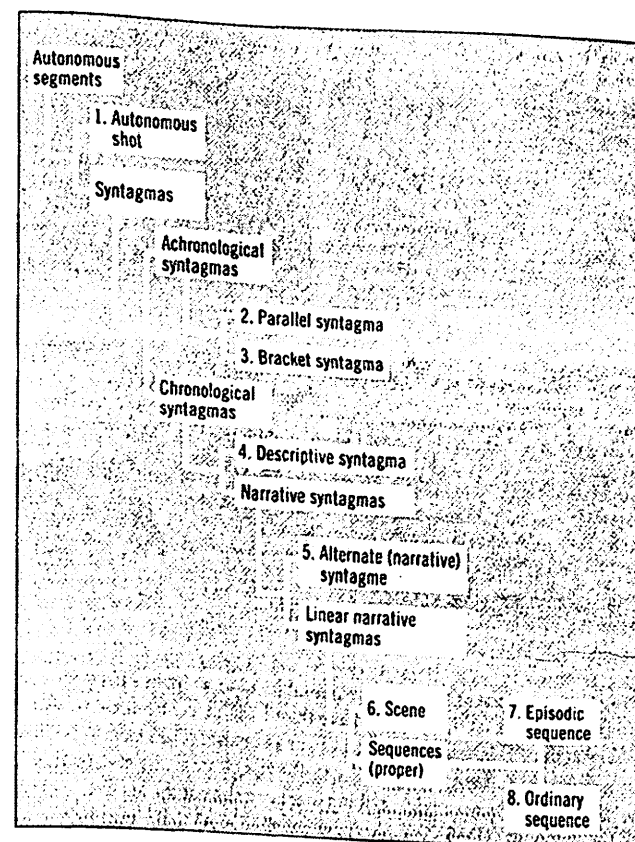


Diagram J. METZ'S SYNTAGMATIC CATEGORIES

is not continuous.

Metz's last differentiation, between the episodic sequence and the ordinary sequence, is a bit arbitrary. In the episodic sequence the discontinuity is organized; in the ordinary sequence it is not. A good example, then, of the episodic sequence is the one in *Citizen Kane* in which Orson Welles portrays the progressive deterioration of Kane's marriage by a set of successive episodes at the breakfast table. Infact, we might call this a "sequence of scenes," and this is a major characteristic of the episodic sequence—that its elements are organized so that each of them seems to have an identity of its own.

Some of these differentiations might still not be clear. For most film viewers, the concepts of the bracket syntagma and the descriptive



Figure 3-74. This sequence of four shots is a double dissolve from Alfred Hitchcock's *Northwest by Northwest* (1959). At first it seems no more than a highly economical transition from the previous scene at the UN building, in which Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) has been mistaken for a murderer, to a conference at the CIA in Washington, at which this turn of events is discussed. Hitchcock segues from his striking overhead shot of the antlike Thornhill running away from the slab of the UN Secretariat (barely visible in A) to the building nameplate in B. Since Hitchcock has had the foresight to use a mirrored surface for the sign, it can reflect the Capitol building, thus identifying the city as well as "company" and neatly saving an extra shot. He then dissolves to the newspaper headline in D, which tells us that (1) time has passed, (2) Thornhill has been identified, and (3) he has so far eluded capture. The newspaper is being held by the head of the intelligence agency. Hitchcock pulls back from the paper and goes on with the conference scene.

At the same time, however, there is some rich metaphorical information in this elegant little dissolve, for, if we analyze these still images, we can see that the CIA imposes itself on the UN, that the Capitol is a reflection of the CIA (or that the intelligence agency has superimposed itself over the seat of government), and finally, that the CIA gives birth to the newspaper headlines that include, in addition to the one conveying the necessary information: "National Fears Tieup" and "Nixon Promises West Will Remain in Berlin." (*Frame enlargements.*)

syntagma are so close that differentiation may seem specious. Parallel syntagma and alternate syntagma present the same difficulty, as do episodic and ordinary sequences. Yet, despite its problems, Metz's system remains a helpful guide to what is, as yet, relatively uncharted territory: the ever-shifting, complex, and intricate syntax of film narrative. Whether

or not his eight categories seem valid, the factors of differentiation that he defines are highly significant and bear repeating:

- ❑ Either a film segment is autonomous or it is not.
- ❑ Either it is chronological or it is not.
- ❑ Either it is descriptive or it is narrative.
- ❑ Either it is linear or it is not.
- ❑ Either it is continuous or it is not.
- ❑ Either it is organized or it is not.

We have only to describe the punctuation of cinema to complete this quick survey of the syntax of *mise-en-scène* and montage. Because punctuation devices stand out and are simply defined, they often take pride of place in discussions of cinematic language. They are useful, no doubt, as are, well, commas, for example, in written language.

The simplest type of punctuation is the unmarked cut. One image ends, another begins. The "fade" calls attention to the ending or the beginning, as does the "iris" (a favorite of early filmmakers that has now fallen into disuse). The "wipe," in which one image removes another in a dizzying variety of ways (flips, twirls, pushovers, spirals, clock hands), was a favorite in the thirties and forties. Optical houses offered catalogues of scores of patterns for wipes. Now it is used in film only for nostalgic effect, although it has found new life in television, where electronic special-effects generators permit new variations on the theme, sometimes shifting the preceding image so it looks like a page of a book is being turned, in three dimensions.

"Intertitles" were an important mark of punctuation in the silent cinema and are still used on occasion today. The "freeze frame" has become popular since it was used to such effect by Francois Truffaut in *The 400 Blows* (1959). (Truffaut, by the way, was the C. S. Lewis of film punctuation.) Filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s modernized some of the old forms, fading to colors instead of black (Ingmar Bergman) or cutting to blank, colored frames (Godard). Focusing in and out (the effect of going slowly in focus at the beginning of the shot, or out of focus at the end) paralleled fading, and Antonioni was fond of beginning a shot on an out-of-focus background before an in-focus subject moved into the frame.



Figure 3-75. Truffaut's landmark freeze frame brings *The 400 Blows* to an abrupt and quizzical stop. (MOMA/FSA.)

All these various marks are periods. End points. A fade out/fade in may suggest a relationship, but it is not a direct link. The dissolve, however, which superimposes fade out and fade in, does connect. If there is a comma in film amongst this catalogue of periods, it is the dissolve. Interestingly, the dissolve serves a multitude of purposes: it is commonly employed to segue or lead into a flashback; it is also used in continuity montage with the jump cut, while at the same time it can represent the passage of long periods of time, especially when it is sequential. It is the one mark of punctuation in cinema that mixes images at the same time that it conjoins them.

BACKGROUND ESSAYS

ON THE ART OF ADAPTATION

LINDA HUTCHEON

Despite the argument implicit in Spike Jonze's latest film, *Adaptation*, every age can justly claim to be an age of adaptation. The desire to transfer a story from one medium or one genre to another is neither new nor rare in Western culture. It is in fact so common that we might suspect that it is somehow the inclination of the human imagination—and, despite the dismissive tone of some critics, not necessarily a secondary or derivative act. After all, most of Shakespeare's plays were adapted from other literary or historical works, and that does not seem to have damaged the Bard's reputation as an inventor. But in recent years, it is true, we have witnessed on our televisions and in our movie theaters enough adaptations—based on everything from comic books to the novels of Jane Austen—to make us wonder if Hollywood has finally run out of new stories.

Although our age might well claim to be the age of adaptation, in part because of the surfeit of new media now available, the act of transposition and what we could call 're-functioning' is as old as art itself. It may have taken T. S. Eliot and Northrop Frye to convince me that all art is derived from other art, but it didn't take those theorists to convince avid adapters across the centuries of what for them—on the dramatic, dance, and operatic stage, and in literature in general—had always been a truism. In this sense, adaptation joins imitation, allusion, parody, travesty, pastiche, and quotation as popular creative ways of deriving art from art.

If this is so, why, then, have so many people lamented the results of the process of moving from the page to the stage or the screen? So often film's relation to literature has been characterized as a tampering, a deformation, a desecration, an infidelity, a betrayal, a perversion. The

deeply moralistic rhetoric of such characterizations belies the fact that what is at stake here is really a question of cultural capital. For some people, as cultural theorist Robert Stam has argued, literature will always have "axiomatic superiority" over any cinematic adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form. This hierarchy also has something to do with what he calls "iconophobia" (the suspicion of the visual) and the concomitant "logophilia" (the love of the word as sacred). From this perspective, adaptations are, by definition, "belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior." Commenting in 1926 on the fledgling art of cinema, Virginia Woolf deplored the simplification that inevitably occurs in the transposition of literary work to the visual medium, calling film a "parasite," and literature its "prey" and "victim." Still, she conceded that "cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression." And so it did.

Film semiotician Christian Metz has said about cinema that it "tells us continuous stories; it 'says' things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations." The same could be said of musicals, operas, ballets, songs, and other narrative forms. While no medium is inherently good at doing one thing and not another, each medium (like each genre) has different means of expression and so can aim at certain things better than others. Art theorist E. H. Gombrich offers a useful analogy when he suggests that if an artist stands before a landscape with a pencil in hand, he or she will "look for those aspects which can be rendered in *lines*"; if the artist has a paintbrush, his or her vision of the same landscape will emerge as masses instead. A poet, by the same analogy, will be attracted to representing different aspects of a story than the creator of a musical spectacular; and the linear and single-track medium of language will produce a different version than the multitrack film, with its amalgam of music, sound, and moving visual images.

Perhaps it is the very possibility of telling the same story in many different ways that provokes us to make the attempt. When we adapt, we create using all the tools that creators have always used: we actualize or concretize ideas; we simplify but we also amplify and extrapolate; we make analogies; we critique or show our respect. When we do all this,

does it matter whether the narrative we are working with is 'new' or adapted? Our postromantic valuing of the originary is, after all, a late addition to a long history of borrowing and stealing—or, more accurately, of *sharing*—stories.

I am just beginning a new research project to try to theorize adaptation, and while my general interest in the questions of adaptability and adaptation is wide and includes all those new forms of 'remediation' that information technology has given us, in this brief note I want to limit my remarks to the move from the page to the stage and the screen, that is, the move from a purely verbal medium to the embodied, enacted forms intended for performance. I would like to focus on how language, sound, music, and visual images together convey a once purely verbal narrative in a new way.

The shift from looking at black marks on a white page to perceiving a direct representation on the stage or the screen is a fraught move. Since it takes longer to sing than to speak (much less read) a line of text, operas and musicals must necessarily distill, often radically, the narrative of a novel or play. This necessary compression means the trimming of expansive plot lines, the removal of much psychological analysis, and the loss of stylistic texture. Characters and events are omitted; colorful slang and expletives are deleted. With literature, we start in the realm of imagination—which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural. We can stop reading at any point; we can reread or skip ahead; we can hold the book in our hands and feel (as well as see) how much of the story remains to be read. But with film and stage adaptations, we are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story. And there we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct perception, with its infinite detail and broad focus.

The move from stage to screen entails yet another medium shift. Opera may have been Richard Wagner's idea of the total work of art (the *Gesamtkunstwerk*) that unites all the arts of music, literature, dance, and the visual, but today it is cinema that fulfills this claim. "A composite language by virtue of its diverse matters of expression—sequential photography, music, phonetic sound, and noise—the cinema," according to Stam, "inherits" all the art forms associated with these matters of

expression"—"the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the decor of architecture, and the performance of theater." Film clearly has resources that the stage can never have: the power of the close-up that gives the "microdrama of the human countenance" and the separate soundtracks of film that permit voiceovers, music, and the nonvocal to intermingle.

There are clearly many different issues around medium, genre, production, and reception to consider when theorizing adaptation, including a very basic physical one. The private and individual experience of reading is closer to the private visual and domestic spaces of television, radio, DVD, video, and computer than it is to the public and communal viewing experience in the dark of the theater. And, when we sit, quiet and still, in the dark watching real live bodies on the stage, our kind of identification is different from when we sit in front of a screen and have reality mediated for us by technology.

Certainly, new electronic technologies have made what we might call 'fidelity to the imagination' possible in new ways, well beyond earlier animation techniques and special effects. The many new adaptations of fantasy fiction are, arguably, the result of these technological breakthroughs. One of the central clichés of film adaptation theory is that audiences are more demanding of fidelity when dealing with the classics—with the work of Shakespeare or Dickens, for instance. But a whole new set of what we might call cult popular classics—the classics of fantasy—are now being made visible and audible in the movie theater. And the readers of cult classics are likely to be just as demanding of film adaptations as are the fans of the more traditional classics.

What happens when these readers see their favorite books depicted on-screen according to somebody else's imagination? The answer can be found somewhere in the audience reactions to the recent adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter novels. Now, for instance, that I know from the movie version of *The Lord of the Rings* what an orc looks like, I'll never be able to recapture my first imagined version of it. Is this good or bad?

Is there a limit finally to what we'll call an 'adaptation'? In his film *Moulin Rouge*, Baz Luhrmann borrowed Puccini's operatic story of the consumptive heroine and the bohemian artist from *La Bohème*, just as

he deployed the conventions of film musicals and MTV music videos. Is this a multiple adaptation? And what about spin-offs? Are DVDs an extension or another aspect of adaptation? What about the toys, t-shirts, board and video games, and the websites? Where does what we are willing to call 'adaptation' stop?

These are the kinds of questions that I am asking myself at this early stage of my research. Of one thing I have already become convinced: that adaptation is not necessarily parasitic. Instead, it is a fundamental operation of the storytelling imagination. For us in the audience, part of the very real pleasure of watching adaptations lies in recognition and remembrance. But it is equally true that part of the also very real masochistic fear provoked by adaptations lies in recognition and remembrance. This is one of the paradoxes that fascinates me, that makes me want to take on that reductive, negative rhetoric that sees adaptations as inevitably derivative and unfaithful to the adapted works.

ADAPTATION STUDIES AT A CROSSROADS

THOMAS LEITCH

After years of being stuck in the backwaters of the academy, adaptation studies is on the move. A decade's worth of pioneering work by Brian McFarlane, Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, James Naremore and Sarah Cardwell on the relation between film adaptations and their literary antecedents culminated in the publication of Robert Stam's three volumes on adaptation, two of them co-edited with Alessandra Raengo, in 2004 and 2005. The monumental project of Stam and Raengo sought to reorient adaptation studies decisively from the fidelity discourse universally attacked by theorists as far back as George Bluestone to a focus on Bakhtinian intertextuality—with each text, avowed adaptation or not, afloat upon a sea of countless earlier texts from which it could not help borrowing—and this attempt was largely successful. If Stam and Raengo had any notion of settling the fundamental questions of adaptation studies, however, they must have been surprised to find that their impact was precisely the opposite. Instead of redrawing the field, they have stirred the pot, provoking a welcome outburst of diverse work on adaptation. This essay seeks to map this latest round of work in four categories: collections of new essays, textbooks, monographs focusing on the relation between adaptation and appropriation and more general monographs on adaptation.

Much of this latest work, as might be expected of writers on adaptation, is not wholly new. Ever since its inception half a century ago, adaptation studies has been haunted by concepts and premises it has repudiated in principle but continued to rely on in practice. The most obvious of these is prominently on display in the title of anthology by Cartmell and Whelehan, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*. What, we might ask, is literature on screen? If it is on screen, is it still literature? If it is literature, how can it be cinema as well? And why

would anyone want to claim that it is both?

Contemporary critics of adaptation who enshrine literature at the heart of their subject increasingly find themselves grappling with the consequences of that decision. Cartmell and Whelehan assert in their Introduction that 'it's vital that literature *and* film be distinguished from literature *on* film' and acknowledge that 'the latter, the subject of this book, has historically privileged the literary over the cinematic'. They salute the literature so that adaptations are not derided as sycophantic, derivative, and therefore inferior to their literary counterparts' (1–2). Yet they seem not to recognize the extent of the logical problems the phrase 'literature on screen' evokes. If Cambridge issued a companion to cinema in stories that cited movies, and not a collection of prose fiction that was at the same time cinema in another form. But 'literature on screen' suggests something more capacious and defining than citation: the possibility that literary adaptations are at once cinema and literature.

Beneath this contradictory notion of film adaptations as not merely hybrid texts but texts holding dual citizenship in two modes of presentation is an even more pervasive legacy that haunts adaptation studies: the assumption that the primary context within which adaptations are to be studied is literature. Even though a growing number of films eligible for Academy Awards for Best Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium borrow that material from print journalism, franchise characters, television series, comic books, video games and toys, academic studies of adaptation remain stubbornly attached to literature as cinema's natural progenitor. It is as if adaptation studies, by borrowing the cultural cachet of literature, sought to claim its institutional respectability and gravitas even while insuring adaptation's enduring aesthetic and methodological subordination to literature proper.

The most notable contributions to the 1999 anthology of Cartmell and Whelehan *Adaptation: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* included Will Brooker's essay on Batman films and Ken Gelder's on *The Piano*, which 'attracted the kind of sustained analytical criticism which worked to designate it as "literary," even though it was not actually an adaptation' (157). But their new collection, which concludes with a section titled

'Beyond the "Literary," consistently balances cinema against literature, as if the two terms carried equal weight. Because 'literature', unlike 'cinema', is already an honorific, however, any discussion of literature on screen, as opposed to journalism or comic books or video games on screen, will begin willy-nilly with a bias in favour of literature as both a privileged field (literary texts are what movies normally adapt) and an aesthetically sanctified field (literary texts have already been approved by a jury whose verdict on their film adaptations is still out).

Finally, despite the best efforts of Cartmell and Whelehan and virtually every other theorist of adaptation past and present, the field is still haunted by the notion that adaptations ought to be faithful to their ostensible source texts. Reviewing a few of the many taxonomies of adaptation that seek to measure how closely the film follows the book, they acutely observe: 'Hidden in these taxonomies are value judgements and a consequent ranking of types, normally covertly governed by a literary rather than cinematic perspective. What fascinates us here is not so much the taxonomies themselves . . . but this *will to taxonomize*, which is symptomatic of how the field has sought to map out its own territory' (2). There is no logical reason why a division of adaptations into borrowing, intersecting and transforming, to take Dudley Andrew's tripartite division (98) as typical, must involve relative value judgements. Certainly, Kamilla Elliott's six approaches to adaptation—psychic, ventriloquist, genetic, de(re)composing, incarnational and trumping (133–83)—carry no implication that any of them are better than the others. What is most remarkable in the will to taxonomize is two other tendencies. First is the frequency with which it gets entangled with gratuitous value judgements that are not required by the taxonomy but sneak in under its cover, as if the will to taxonomize were only a mask for the will to evaluate. Second is the continued determination of adaptation studies with the world all before it to define its field with primary reference to its closeness to literature. Of all the ways to classify adaptations, surely the decision to classify them as more or less faithful to their putative sources, especially by critics who insist that Julia Kristeva, Mikhail Bakhtin and Robert Stam have persuaded them that there is no such thing as a single source for any adaptation, is one of the most fruitless.

The challenge for recent work in adaptation studies, then, has been

to wrestle with the un-dead spirits that continue to haunt it however often they are repudiated: the defining context of literature, the will to taxonomize and the quest for ostensibly analytical methods and categories that will justify individual evaluations. Adaptation theory cannot simply ignore these figures because they are to a great extent the material of the field, and new entrants cannot locate themselves without reference to them. So other strategies are necessary. Some recent theorists, seeking to turn their backs on these spirits by changing the subject, remain haunted by them. Others accept their presence more or less willingly and find their work accordingly limited. Still others attempt to manage the contradictions they raise, as Cartmell and Whelehan do with varying success in their Introduction and the organization of their collection. These contradictions between the desire to break new ground in adaptation studies and the constraints of a vocabulary that severely limits the scope and originality of new contributions are often frustrating, especially to readers who think that they are encountering the same essay over and over and over with only the names of novels and their film adaptations changed. Increasingly, however, the very same contradictions have generated productive debate.

Absent the silver bullet that will free adaptation studies from the dead hand of literature, taxonomies and evaluation, the temptation to succumb to these orthodoxies is greatest in the essays commissioned for collections because the orthodoxies are built into the premise of each collection. Just as *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* promises a focus on adaptations of canonical literary texts, the titles of two volumes edited by R. Barton Palmer, *Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen* and *Twentieth-Century American Fiction on Screen*, strongly imply a disciplinary subordination of cinema to literature. Both the organization of each volume—the contributions are arranged chronologically in order of the literary originals' publication dates, not the dates of the films' release—and the focus of each essay on one or more adaptations of a single canonical literary work reinscribe this subordination. But it is not simply the organization of such collections or the likely topics of the essays they collect that establishes a fundamentally conservative, based-on-the-literary-text model for adaptation studies. The model goes far toward dictating the argument of each individual contribution.

At the same time, a growing number of theorists represented in each

of five recent collections have been able to work within this model in ways that challenge its foundational assumptions. It is especially revealing to categorize a representative selection of the contributions to these five volumes according to the leading questions they raise, from the least to the most interesting.

1. Does the movie in question betray its literary source? This is the question David Lavery asks about adaptations of *Moby-Dick*, which he finds inadequate in fulfilling three prerequisites he lays down: 'It must be humorous . . . It must make Ishmael a prominent character and tell the story from his point of view . . . it must be faithful to *Moby-Dick's* metaphoric structure' (Palmer, *Nineteenth* 101, 102, 103) and James M. Welsh asks about modern-dress Shakespeare adaptations that jettison the Bard's poetry on the grounds that 'a film that presumes to adapt poetic drama should at the very least be "poetic" in style and substance' (Welsh and Lev 112).
2. Does a given adaptation seek to establish itself as a transcription or an interpretation of its source? Two contributions to Palmer's *Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen* typify this approach: Paul Woolf's discussion of adaptations of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', which 'enter into debates over the issues raised in the original texts' (57-58), and Brian McFarlane's defence of Merchant Ivory's *The Europeans* (1979) as 'not so much tinkering with James but rather suggesting another way of reading him' (185).
3. Does the film depart from its literary source because of new cultural or historical contexts it addresses? This very common approach, which excuses lapses in fidelity as expressions of changing cultural mores rather than concessions to a crass commercial medium, is best represented by three essays in Palmer's *Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen*: the reconsideration of Martin Barker and Roger Sabin of the studio pressures that shaped the 1936 *Last of the Mohicans*, Michael Dunne's overview of film adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter* and Tony Williams's account of adaptations of *The Sea-Wolf*.
4. If the movie transcends its original literary source, does that source, however fairly eclipsed by the movie, deserve closer consideration as

- interesting in its own right? Peter Lev's reading of Boileau-Narcejac's *D'entre les morts* (1954), the little-read source of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), uses its comparative reading to conclude that 'the most common paradigm for literature and film adaptation studies [that is, adaptations of canonical literary works whose value can be safely assumed] are not adequate to cover or explain many interesting cases' (Welsh and Lev 184).
5. Is it possible for a film to recreate what might be assumed to be specifically literary aspects of its source that challenge medium-cinema brings to matters once thought the exclusive province of literature (almost always, in this case, the novel)? Wendy Everett's analysis of Terence Davies's 2000 adaptation of *The House of Mirth* contends that Davies not only seeks to recreate the surfaces and spaces of the novel' as well, even to the blank page separating Books 1 and 2 (Welsh and Lev 162).
 6. Is the movie as well as its source subject to cultural and historical contextualization? Two contributions to the collection of Welsh and Lev advance this argument: Linda Costanzo Cahir's essay on adaptations of Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959) and C. Kenneth Pellow's on adaptations of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955). The crucial distinction between this approach and that in #3 above is that contextual forces, from biographical circumstance to ideological assumptions, are assumed to play a pivotal role in shaping the source text as well as its adaptations, undermining its claims to stability and centrality in any debate about adaptations and their sources. Lindiwe Dovey's essay on Ramadan Suleman's 1997 adaptation of Mdebele's 1983 apartheid novella *Fools* explores this position further by contending that for many African filmmakers, the challenge of adaptation is 'not only . . . how to transfer literature to cinema', but also 'how to represent a colonial past in a postcolonial present, thereby creating a history and identity' (Aragay 164).
 7. What questions about different kinds of fidelity do adaptations of other sorts of texts than canonical literary works raise? Four essays

- in the new collection by Cartmell and Whelehan focus on exactly this question: Judith Buchanan's on silent adaptations of the Gospels, I.Q. Hunter's on the particular sort of fidelity Peter Jackson and his collaborators sought in adapting J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1954–55), Whelehan's essay on adapting women's novels like Olive Higgins Prouty's *Now, Voyager* (1941) to cinema and Cartmell's on the 'rivalry' (179) between children's books and their film adaptations.
8. How do television adaptations challenge assumptions about the formal and institutional differences between verbal and audio-visual texts that might be overlooked in discussions that restricted themselves to literature and cinema? Sarah Cardwell, who had already argued warmly for the distinctive aesthetic strategies of televisual adaptations in *Adaptation Revisited* (2002), offers a bracing polemic on the same subject in her contribution to Cartmell and Whelehan.
 9. How do adaptations based on non-literary or non-fictional sourcetexts similarly enlarge the range of adaptation studies by revealing the parochialism of theories that restrict their examples to films based on fictional texts? Three contributors to Welsh and Lev offer three different approaches to this question: Joan Driscoll Lynch through biography, Frank Thompson through history and, most trenchant and provocative of all, William Mooney through memoir.
 10. How are models of adaptation that assume the primacy of literary texts challenged by the phenomenon of novelizations based on cinematic sourcetexts? Jan Baetens, in Cartmell and Whelehan, argues that novelization challenges all binary, text-to-intertext models of adaptation and 'forces us to consider cinema and literature in the global (mass) media structure of our time and to tackle the various ways in which media complete and contaminate each other, without losing their specific features' (236–37).
 11. How must models of adaptation be modified to account for movies that demonstrably draw on other sources than their putative sourcetexts, some of them perhaps even more important in determining its textual strategies? Many recent essayists mention this problem, but three are especially noteworthy. Stephen Railton reveals the debt film adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) owe to 'the "Tom Shows"' (Palmer, *Nineteenth* 63), unauthorized dramatic

- adaptations that shaped Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel to their own ends. John Style suggests that Dirk Bogarde's 'queer performance as [Sydney] Carton' in Ralph Thomas's 1958 *Tale of Two Cities* expresses an indeterminacy in the hero's character more fully than Charles Dickens does and so 'is more faithful to Dickens's main source, Carlyle's account of the French Revolution', than the novelist himself (Aragay 85). In his essay on Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Donald Whaley extends this argument still further in his exploring all of the sources of the text, not only earlier texts but social sources as well' (Welsh and Lev 48).
12. When films self-consciously raise questions about their own status as adaptation, what general implications do they offer adaptation studies? This is the specific appeal of adaptations that incorporate figures or features of the author or the author's biography (e.g., Patricia Rouzema's *Mansfield Park*, 1998). Steffen Hantke uses David Cronenberg's adaptation of *Naked Lunch*, which combines adaptation and biography more slyly and radically, to explore the consequent challenges the film poses for Cronenberg's contradictory status as a filmmaker with 'high modernist ambitions' who nonetheless 'work[s] within commercial cinema' (Palmer, *Twentieth* 176).
 13. What implications do characteristic features frequently found in adaptations carry for more general theories of intertextuality? Aragay's collection includes three essays that address this question directly. Karen Diehl, extending the analysis of author-figures in adaptations, concludes that such adaptations reauthorize the canonical texts they adapt even as they enable a critique of the original author's authority. Aragay and Gemma López, in their examination of elements of contemporary romance in Simon Langton's 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* and Sharon Maguire's 2001 adaptation of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), call adaptation 'a prime instance of cultural recycling, a process which radically undermines any linear, diachronic understanding of cultural history' (201). Celestino Delayto's essay on the cinematic narrators of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Stephen Frears's *High Fidelity* (1999) poses questions about the fragmentary nature of film narrators and the different

relations they have to genre imperatives and notions of identity that range far beyond adaptation studies.

14. How do concepts commonly treated by adaptation theorists as universal change when they cross national and cultural borders? Eckart Voigts-Virchow enlarges and complicates the notion of heritage cinema by contrasting the valence of heritage in English culture with the German notion of *Heimat*, which 'smacks of anti-internationalism, anti-Marxism, anti-Enlightenment, anti-capitalism, anti-urbanism, and military aggression' (Cartmell and Whelehan 126).
15. How must models of adaptation change to accommodate novels that formally and economically usurp the place traditionally accorded movies? Cartmell and Whelehan attack this problem by considering the ways in which Harry Potter novels have made successful adaptations virtually impossible because they 'have been marketed and constructed as if they were the films' and so have 'usurped the role of the film even before the film was released' (Aragay 39, 48), opening fascinating new lines of inquiry about what constitute the cinematic qualities of cinema and the bookishness of books.

Arranging these essays according to the increasingly pointed questions they raise suggests that the future of adaptation studies is best indicated by essays that either challenge the still prevailing model of book-into-film—a model which dictates most of the interchangeable titles of monographs and collections on film adaptation—or raise more interesting questions, questions that are more productive of further, still more probing questions. Essays that are organized around the question of whether or not a given film is better than the book on which it is based or whether its changes were dictated by concessions to a mass audience or expressions of changing cultural mores may be accomplished and persuasive in advancing their claims about the adaptation at hand, but they are unlikely to play a leading role in advancing adaptation studies as it struggles to emerge from the disciplinary umbrella of film studies and the still more tenacious grip of literary studies. They are limited not because they give incorrect answers to the questions they pose, but because those questions themselves are so limited in their general implications. Is the movie as good as the book? Hardly ever, but even if it is, the question is still reducible to

thumbs-up or thumbs-down. Even if the book won a decisive victory in any given competition, the cost would be great, for, as Pedro Javier Pardo Garcia points out, 'very poor films . . . can make for very interesting adaptations' (Aragay 238) that could shed much-needed light on problems of adaptation if the films were not overlooked simply because they were unsuccessful. Does the movie attempt to replicate or interpret the book? Almost never simply the first; more often than not, a combination of the two. Is the movie subject to contextual pressures that inflect its meanings? Of course it is. So is the book.

If the future of adaptation studies is best illuminated by looking at the questions most likely to lead it away from its dependence on one-to-one comparisons between specific adaptations and works of literature, a category that provides both a repository of privileged intertexts and a touchstone of value for new texts, it is hardly surprising to find that two recent textbooks on adaptation aimed at undergraduate students more often look back toward this old model than forward to new questions. Their titles—*Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature* by John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes and *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches* by Linda Costanzo Cahir—accurately indicate their dyadic approach to adaptation as 'the transfer of a printed text in a literary genre to film' (Desmond and Hawkes 1). Both follow years of theoretical practice in dividing adaptations into three categories—'close, loose, or intermediate' (Desmond and Hawkes 3) or 'literal, traditional, or radical' (Cahir 17)—depending on the degree of freedom with which they treat their sourcetexts. Both warn against the heresies of 'faithfulness' (Cahir 15) as an evaluative touchstone and encourage students to keep open minds in weighing adaptations against their sources. Both include material that enlarges the book-to-film model, Desmond and Hawkes brief chapters considering the narrative tropism of commercial cinema and reviewing common terms for the study of literature and film, Cahir more substantial chapters on the relation between literary and cinematic language, the collaborative nature of commercial cinema, and the different ways of writing about film. Both provide many useful lists of adaptations and many questions for study or debate. Yet because both are dominated by a transfer model that closes off alternative possibilities, neither offers either a model of adaptation superior to the fidelity discourse they reject

or a mode of inquiry likely to lead to better questions or better models.

Desmond and Hawkes are at their best in discussions of what particular strategies filmmakers adapt when they attempt to put literature on screen. Novels have to be made shorter, short stories have to be made longer and stage plays have to be opened up. This much is obvious, but Desmond and Hawkes detail these processes in ways that are often illuminating. Cinematic adaptations of short stories, for example, can expand their material to feature length by one of three strategies. Filmmakers who follow the 'concentration strategy' (128) produce films like Robert Siodmak's 1946 adaptation of *The Killers*, which begins by following Ernest Hemingway's 1927 story almost line by line before going off for the rest of its length in a completely new direction. Those who adopt the 'interweaving strategy' retain the leading elements of the story at hand but 'disperse those elements throughout the film . . . and interweave either invented elements or expansions on already existing elements' (133), as Frank Perry does in *The Swimmer* (1964). In the 'point of departure strategy' exemplified by Christopher Nolan's adaptation of his brother Jonathan's story 'Memento Mori' to *Memento* (2001), 'the filmmakers drop most of the narrative elements from the short story . . . and . . . invent a new story' based on the remaining elements (136, 137). After outlining these three approaches, Desmond and Hawkes conclude with an enlightening discussion of the ways Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) combine them. Their requisite chapters on adapting novels, stories and plays are supplemented by welcome discussions of the challenges of adapting non-fiction to docudramas and literary texts to cartoons, and they conclude with a splendidly contentious discussion of 'the failed adaptation' (231), the one chapter that seems likely to incite productive disagreement about why adaptations fail and what counts as failure.

The certainty of Desmond and Hawkes about these questions, however, points to the principal limitation of their book: its conceptual timidity. Although they do not take sides in defining close, loose and intermediate adaptations—'we use *fidelity* not as an evaluative term that measures the merit of films, but as a descriptive term that allows discussion of the relationship between two companion works' (2–3)—they consider adaptations only in terms of their relationships to specific

source texts whose elements they simply 'keep, drop, or add' (51). Their laudable attempts to avoid categorical pronouncements about adaptation sometimes lead to waffling that undermines their authority without raising correspondingly provocative questions, as when they observe that '[a]lthough these adaptations [of Merchant Ivory] succeed in varying degrees, critics complain that some of them stress the visual splendor of costumes, houses, furnishings, and grand settings at the expense of drama' (242). They offer a wealth of discussion questions, but many of these questions are coercively leading. 'Take a descriptive sentence from any literary text', they suggest. 'Draw the scene . . . Compare your version to other students' drawings. What do the various versions say about the possibilities of faithful adaptation?' (47). Such questions make it unlikely that students will learn anything about adaptation that Desmond and Hawkes do not already know.

Cahir's textbook has several advantages over that of Desmond and Hawkes. It is more original, more literate and more ambitious in its aim: 'to increase the skill with which its readers apprehend, appreciate, and express themselves about film, specifically films that are based on literary sources' (7). She makes no bones about her own aesthetic critical orientation, which provides both her book's most appealing strength and its sharpest limitation. It generates a rubric of four criteria she urges students to apply about every film adaptation:

1. The film must communicate definite ideas concerning the *integral* meaning and value of the literary text, as the filmmakers interpret it.
2. The film must exhibit a collaboration of filmmaking skills
3. The film must demonstrate an audacity to create a work that stands as a world apart, that exploits the literature in such a way that a self-reliant, but related, aesthetic offspring is born.
4. The film cannot be so self-governing as to be completely independent of or antithetical to the source material (263).

This is admirably direct, but it raises two problems. The first concerns several contradictions in which it ensnares Cahir when she fails to live up to the boldness of her own programme, the second the most important word in the programme itself.

Like Desmond and Hawkes, Cahir distinguishes three modes of adaptation—in her case, literal, traditional and radical—and like Desmond and Hawkes, she argues that each has its distinctive standards, rewards and pitfalls. Cahir's rubric, however, makes it clear that she favours traditional adaptations over literal adaptations that lack 'the audacity to create a work that stands as a world apart' and radical adaptations that are 'so self-governing as to be completely independent of or antithetical to the source material'. Hence, her analyses of both John Huston's literal adaptation of *Moby-Dick* (1956) and Millard Webb's radical 1926 adaptation *The Sea Beast* are both significantly more minatory than her more extended analysis of Franc Roddam's traditional three-part 1998 adaptation for the USA Network. In practice, Cahir's rubric establishes traditional adaptation as a norm from which literal and radical adaptations depart at their peril.

Cahir argues that '[t]he first step in exploring the merits of literature-based films is to see them as translations of the source material and to understand the difference between "adaptation" and "translation"'. Adaptation involves the changes in structure or function a given entity makes to survive in a new environment, translation the generation of 'a fully new text—a materially different entity'—through 'a process of language' (14). It is not clear, however, what bearing this distinction would have on adaptation studies, because Cahir sometimes complicates or contradicts it, as when she observes that in the most successful adaptations, 'the literary text is stripmined for the riches the filmmakers can use to promote their own vision of the work' (97), a figure few translators would apply to their own labours. Nor do most readers expect translations to a new language to 'communicate definite ideas' about the work at hand, as Cahir's rubric demands. Adaptations engage in a wider variety of cultural tasks than the metaphor of translation can explain.

The most distinctive feature of Cahir's praxis, however, is not her preference for any particular mode of adaptation or the occasional inconsistency of her analogy between film adaptation and translation, but rather her detailed demands about what adaptations ought to do. Her rubric, which she calls 'a theoretical framework for understanding and evaluating any literature-based film' (9), is dominated, like Lavery's essay on adaptations of *Moby-Dick*, by the word *must*, and even Cahir's most

subtle and expansive analyses of individual adaptations, from Akira Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985) to Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1993), are everywhere informed by her judgements about whether they are toeing the mark. As a result, all the analytical skills she seeks to develop in students are subordinated to the comparative judgements she wants them to make more discriminatingly. Not surprisingly, then, many of Cahir's study questions are simply evaluative, leading, or both: 'The opening shots of *The Killers* compose a sequence that is generally regarded as one of the very best in movie history. Why?' (223). Like Desmond and Hawkes, Cahir is most doctrinaire in her questions, which persistently lead backwards to aesthetic certitudes rather than forwards to more productive questions about the dynamics of adaptation.

The logical place to look for these questions is not in essays commissioned for book-to-film anthologies (although it is gratifying to find so many of them arising there) or introductory college textbooks but in full-length monographs. Several recent books hold the particular promise of exploring the relations between adaptation as a specific practice and the wide array of activities commonly included within the notion of intertextuality—or, as Gérard Genette would call it, transtextuality. Two of them, both responding to Dudley Andrew's call for 'adaptation studies to take a sociological turn' (104), focus on the relation between adaptation and appropriation, though in profoundly different ways.

Julie Sanders's *Adaptation and Appropriation* is best thought of as a cornucopia of questions, terms, ideas, readings and suggestions for further research. Undergraduates searching its pages for the definition of adaptation that might seem to be implied by its status as the latest entry in Routledge's New Critical Idiom series, or indeed by a chapter titled 'What Is Adaptation?', will search in vain. Sanders brings up the notion of adaptations as 'cinematic versions of canonical plays and novels' (23) only to contend that the concept is far more elastic, encompassing non-cinematic examples from Shakespearean musicals like George Abbott's *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938), with its score by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, to the Darwinian model of evolution. The one constant she finds in all adaptations is an 'inherent sense of play, produced in part by our informed sense of similarity and difference between the texts being

invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise' (25). But this sense of play, she readily acknowledges, is central to appropriations as well.

For Sanders, appropriation is a more general term than adaptation. Unlike adaptation, which 'signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original', appropriation 'frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain' that 'may or may not involve a generic shift' and may or may not explicitly acknowledge this relationship (26). Her distinction between 'embedded texts' (27) like Sam and Bella Spewack's *Kiss Me Kate*, with its Cole Porter score (1949, filmed 1953 by George Sidney), and the 'sustained appropriation' (32) of Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (1996) is less valuable as an act of categorization than as a springboard for further ruminations about how 'Kiss Me Kate is both an adaptation and an appropriation' (29) and questions about whether Swift's relation to William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) is better described as appropriation or plagiarism.

As Sanders traverses examples from novels and plays, folktales and fairy tales, appropriations of Ovid and Shakespeare, and the novels of Graham Swift, to which she repeatedly returns, her argument, whose progression from chapter to chapter is always clear, begins to shimmer and dissolve within individual chapters, each of them an endless stream of provocative examples and aperçus about the rewriting of master narratives from new points of view, Peter Carey's appropriation of the Victorian era in *Jack Maggs* (1997), and the ways that the writing of history, itself 'a history of textualities', depends on appropriation (146). Arguing that adaptation studies would do well to replace its preferred model, 'the rather static or immobilizing discussion of source or influence' (154–55), with 'a more active vocabulary' (38), she proposes forward-looking models ranging from J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations to jazz riffs to the genetic code of DNA that emphasize recreation and regeneration. Her sustained attempt to peer over the horizon is so compelling that even her omissions become productive. Why is there no mention of restagings or revivals of dramatic works? What place do performance media like music and dance have in her account of texts constantly renewed through acts of appropriation? What is the relation between the copies of master

paintings apprentice artists produce and the copies or inventions that forgers pass off as genuine? What place do adaptation and appropriation have in disciplines that fancy themselves progressive, like science and literary criticism? In raising questions like these, Sanders produces a stellar example of that rare species, a forward-looking handbook.

Sanders's opposite number is Jennifer M. Jeffers, who ends by describing herself with some irony as 'dangerously veer[ing] toward the ledge of Conservative Right-reading' (233). The organization of *Britain Colonized: Hollywood's Appropriation of British Literature* is as far from Sanders's fusillade of provocations, passing observations and loose ends as any editor could wish. The argument economically set forth in Jeffers's subtitle could not be clearer. Neither could her tone. From James Ivory's *Remains of the Day* (1993) to Neil LaBute's *Possession* (2002), she finds that the American perspectives and values typical of contemporary adaptations have colonized England and English literature, replacing the specifically nationalistic concerns of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (1995) with American views of history, literature and sexual politics—or, even more insidiously, with a spuriously 'Americanized universality' (202).

Jeffers's reaction to this wholesale appropriation is incredulous outrage. In half a dozen closely reasoned chapters, she demonstrates that one British novel after another has been Americanized in its film adaptation, even if the adaptation, like Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* (1996), is the work of British hands, for, as in heritage tours of Britain aimed at American tourists, 'Britain reterritorializes itself in the image of an American film-set on location in Britain' (233). Anthony Minghella's 1996 adaptation of *The English Patient* trades Michael Ondaatje's searching dramatization of colonial tensions in the figure of the Sikh sapper Kip for a single-minded emphasis on the doomed romance of Count Ladislaus de Almásy and Katharine Clifton, a romantic melodrama typical of 'the best Academy Award-winning "tear-jerkers"' (130). The casting of the American Renée Zellweger as Bridget Jones is only the most obvious sign of the film's surrender to the United States, beginning with its adoption of a romantic comedy formula designed specifically to appeal to Americans. And '[w]ith [Stephen Gyllenhaal's 1992 film adaptation of Graham Swift's] *Waterland*, but more so with *High Fidelity*, the British content is

simply obliterated' (176).

This indictment is certainly true, but readers who do not share Jeffers's outrage are likely to find it unnecessarily detailed, repetitive and familiar from dozens of Sunday newspaper columns. As her frequent references to 'global capitalist axiomatics' (227) attest, Jeffers does not write like a columnist. But her capacity for moral dudgeon is equally great, as when she observes that 'Americans cannot really perform Shakespeare' (218) or that *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *High Fidelity* 'appear to fulfill a certain niche in a language, culture and society, but when deterritorialized for film, the reterritorialized product renders one of the novels as *not even British*' (193). Jeffers's critique of Hollywood's Americanization of contemporary British fiction is smartly observed, exhaustively supported and cogently argued. It is easy to sympathize with her furious denunciation of the ways John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) remakes 'the greatest poet of the English language' as a "commercial entertainment" writer' (221). But the very next sentence—'Shakespeare is the finest and noblest in the English language, not "entertainment"'—goes too far, establishing poetic drama and entertainment as not only distinct but mutually exclusive. Jeffers's description of herself as 'a critical vigilante' whose book comes close to 'tak[ing] the law into its own hands' (228) shows an impassioned determination to turn back the clock on cultural appropriation (what gives someone the right to appropriate a novel clearly ordained to fill a specific niche for its original audience?) and implies a correspondingly conservative attitude toward adaptation studies far more backwards-looking than anything in Desmond and Hawkes or Cahir.

The pull between looking back and looking forward that produces both Jeffers's denunciation and Sanders's celebration of appropriation finds a more even-handed response in two more general surveys by Linda Hutcheon and Christine Geraghty. I have already reviewed Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation in Literature/Film Quarterly*, but this essay would not be complete without some brief remarks about her book. Hutcheon, who approaches her subject not through a background in literature and film but from the context of earlier studies of parody, pastiche, opera and intertextuality, identifies herself less closely with a field than a method: 'to identify a text-based issue that extends across a variety of media, find

ways to study it comparatively, and then tease out the theoretical implications from multiple textual examples' (xii). She looks backward in her unobtrusively displayed familiarity with earlier work in adaptation studies and in the rigorous topical organization of her volume into chapters that explore the who, what, when, where and why of adaptation (more precisely, in Hutcheon's case, the what, who, why, how, when and where). At the same time, her decision to organize her study around a series of interconnected topics rather than a series of readings is a novelty that sets her book apart from the field as clearly as the attention she gives such non-cinematic examples as theatrical and radio plays, graphic novels, operas and musicals.

Hutcheon is most forward looking in the arguments and assumptions she rejects: the emphasis on book-to-film adaptations, the aesthetic hierarchy that establishes literature as both the source of adaptations and the measure of their value and the definition of adaptations as a collection of products. She shares these positions with most recent writers on adaptation but sees their implications more clearly. If adaptation is not simply a series of transcriptions or imitations, what is it? Hutcheon defines it alternatively as a creative process and, in parallel with Sanders, as a receptive process whereby adaptations are recognized and enjoyed as adaptations by audiences who are constantly invited to shift back and forth between their experience of a new story and their memory of its progenitors.

Such a shift, of course, is common in the reception of many texts that are not adaptations, most notably in members of popular genres whose success depends on their audience's knowledge of the genre's rules and their expectation that a given text will both invoke those rules and play with them. Acknowledging that adaptations' intertextual strategies ally them with a vast number of other texts, perhaps with all texts, Hutcheon ends her survey not with a conclusion but with a pair of questions: 'What is *not* an adaptation?' (170) and 'What is the appeal of adaptations?' (172). Her emphasis on the ways readers and viewers enjoy experiences that combine familiarity with difference provides a compelling answer to the second question but not the first. Although Hutcheon offers her own breakdown of what counts as adaptation (remakes, literary translations, musical transcriptions, condensations, bowdlerizations, parodies, sequels,

prequels, commentaries, reviews and academic criticism) and what does not (brief allusions, music sampling, museum exhibits and presumably specific performances of musical and theatrical texts), her categorizations are not especially persuasive, but they do not need to be, because the question is more valuable than any answer.

The same talent for raising productive questions comes out more unexpectedly in Christine Geraghty's *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*. At first glance Geraghty's book seems just another collection of case studies that might just as well have been commissioned from diverse hands. But the assumptions with which Geraghty approaches her task, and the articles of faith she jettisons, distinguish her approach from the beginning. In developing the suggestions of Dudley Andrew and Robert Stam that adaptations are peculiarly layered texts, she implicitly agrees with Hutcheon that adaptation is a 'layering process [that] involves an accretion of deposits over time, a recognition of ghostly presences, and a shadowing or doubling of what is on the surface by what is glimpsed behind' (195). She proceeds to her analysis without the obligatory prologue reviewing earlier developments in adaptation study because such reviews 'too readily . . . lead to methods of analysis that rely on comparisons between original source and film' and the attendant comparative evaluations (1). In a still more original stroke, she decides 'to remove the original book or play from the analysis' in order to examine the ways 'adaptations can be understood without the crucial emphasis on literary origin' (194).

This challenge sounds paradoxical, for how can adaptations be studied as adaptations without close attention to the novels and plays on which they are based? Geraghty's achievement lies in the variety of contextual frames—history, genre, space, performance, marketing, reception—she develops to accomplish this task. She considers the ways film versions of *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist* and *Pride and Prejudice* seek to establish their credentials as 'classic adaptations' (16) without any specific reference to textual fidelity. She examines the strategies films based on novels by Proust, Woolf and Joyce use to negotiate their double status as art films, which carry the cultural cachet of their originals, and heritage cinema, with its more commercial aspirations. Geraghty excels in close textual analysis, as she shows in examining the use of settings and camera

setups to suggest or expand theatrical space in cinematic adaptations of Tennessee Williams's plays. But she is equally proficient in the contextual study demanded by her analysis of the generic positioning of two films based on contemporary novels by women, Wesley Ruggles's *Cimarron* (1931) and Sidney Franklin's *The Good Earth* (1937). Textual and contextual study meet in her discussion of the use of space, scene and publicity in two Westerns, Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) and Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and of the attempt by William Wyler's *The Heiress* (1949), Terence Davies's *The House of Mirth* (2000) and Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* (2002) to recreate the look of nineteenth-century New York.

Like Hutcheon, Geraghty leaves readers with plenty of unresolved questions. Her suggestion that 'popular and much-adapted texts have to work with similarity and difference in a movement that refers to but does not rely on knowledge of previous versions' (42) opens the way to a debate about the relation between referring to previous texts, assuming some familiarity with them, and relying on viewers' having read them. Her approving citation of Catherine Grant's assertion that '[t]here is no such thing . . . as a "secret" adaptation' (3, 197; cf. Grant 57) is bound to provoke further argument about Hutcheon's premise that an adaptation must be perceived as an adaptation in order to work as an adaptation. Like Hutcheon, Geraghty extends the range of intertextual contexts for adaptations so dramatically that she must leave unresolved the question of adaptation's relation to other intertextual modes.

A new collection of essays from Germany offers a tantalizing glimpse of the more distant future. As its title suggests, *Intermedialities*, edited by Werner Huber, Evelyne Keitel and Gunter Süss, is not about adaptation. Of all its thirteen contributions, only two, Monika Seidl's essay on the relation between the sitcom *The Nanny* and nineteenth-century English governess novels and Keitel's essay on the parodistic treatment of Poe's poem 'The Raven' in the 'Treehouse of Terror' episode of *The Simpsons*, could be called adaptation studies. Instead, the contributors focus on an array of intertextual relations almost dizzying in their arbitrariness: the figure of Zorro, Baudrillard and the *Matrix* trilogy, Satanic and occult rock music, the reception aesthetics of audiobooks, the bogus commentary track Joel and Ethan Coen produced for the Director's Cut DVD release

of *Blood Simple* (1984). In their Introduction, the editors note that the term *intermedium*, first coined by Coleridge 'to distinguish between person and personification in narrative allegory' (1), has, as *Intermedialität*, found wide acceptance in Europe but little in English language theory, even though it carries less unexamined metaphoric weight than *adaptation*. Their volume is not an attempt to break out of the imprisoning discourse that has often limited adaptation studies. Instead, it seeks to dig a tunnel from the opposite direction in the hopes of meeting the tunnel escapees like Sanders, Hutcheon and Geraghty who have been digging away from the prison-house of adaptation studies.

In the face of such a clouded crystal ball, it would seem the height of folly to make any predictions or prescriptions about the crossroads at which adaptation studies finds itself. Nonetheless, the temptation is irresistible. The most urgent item on the agenda is to shift evaluative problems the field has inherited from literary studies—fidelity, hierarchy, canonicity—from the praxis of adaptation studies to part of its subject. Instead of producing more anthologies of book-to-film analyses, which populate the field more and more densely without enlarging it, editors and publishers might consider collections that focus on specific problems in the production and reception of adaptations and the relations between adaptation and other intertextual modes. Theorists of adaptation could do a service to both themselves and their field by looking more closely at the ways adaptations play with their sourcetexts instead of merely aping or analyzing them. Finally, theorists of adaptation would do well to explore more deeply the one context that 'takes pride of place in Anglo-American discussions of "intermediality"' (Huber et al. 5): media literacy. If adaptation studies can make a decisive contribution to students' "ability to 'critically read and write with and across varied symbol systems'" (Huber et al. 6; cf. Semali and Paillotet 6), it will have succeeded where literary studies has increasingly failed.

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'FILMI' SHAKESPEARE

POONAM TRIVEDI

In the film *Agneepath*, Amitabh Bachchan, playing a mafia don and inevitable killer, comes to have a meal with his mother who strongly disapproves of his dealings. As he washes his hands in preparation for the meal, which is meant to be a gesture of appeasement of the parent, the mother quips, "all the water of Bombay will not cleanse your hands ..." in an obvious and succinct use of one of the most well-known lines of Shakespeare—from the sleep-walking scene of *Macbeth*. The message about the indelible taint of the immoral is unexceptional; it could have been said in countless different ways. That the commercial Hindi potboiler chooses to borrow lines from as canonical a figure as Shakespeare is significant. It is this unnoticed and unacknowledged presence—a unique appropriation, intertextuality and absorption of Shakespeare in the Indian film which is the basis of the seemingly unholy conjugation in the title of this essay, 'Filmi' or film 'me' Shakespeare, i.e. the conjugation of the Indian film and Shakespeare.

The popular Indian film has in the recent past been subject to considerable critical attention and exegesis, particularly in its embodiment of a public domain which is expressive of a people's desires, quests and achievements. From being dismissed as crass and commercial, the popular film, particularly the Bombay Hindi film, has now acquired a legitimacy, even authority, as a marker in the evolution of mass culture. Indian cinema, its production and reception, is being read as a text which quintessentially articulates the space of a pan-Indian identity and nationalism. However, little attention has been paid to the hybrid genealogy, the diverse seeding sources or the inspirational resources which have provided the ground for the growth of something which has become so recognizably indigenous as the Hindi film. To look for Shakespeare in the Indian cinema may evoke

suspensions of bardolatry or even seem like a colonial throw back. Yet, a long look into the history of the Indian, and particularly, the Hindi, film reveals this co-relation as neither whimsical or nor contrived. Shakespeare was a leaven to the initial growth of Hindi cinema and has since nourished it in diverse forms, legitimate and illegitimate, as appropriations, recreations, relocations and as 'after life' or presences. To trace this varying use of Shakespeare in the Hindi film is not just to navigate the changing attitudes to the colonial bard, but more crucially, to chart the shifts in the politics of an interculturalism which provides another inroad into the cultural imaginary of the mainstream Indian cinema.

It is well known that Indian cinema sprang up on the floor boards of the Parsi theatre. What is less known is the contribution and influence of Shakespeare in providing an inexhaustible source of plots, scenes, characters and dialogue to be exploited. Like many of the plays of the Parsi theatre, the early films too were broad adaptations, which borrowed freely, changed liberally and interpolated without qualms and usually without acknowledgements. The earliest Indian cinematic engagement with Shakespeare goes back to the silent era and is generally recognized to be *Dil Farosh* (1927) based on a popular stage adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* by the same title by Mehdi Hasan "Ahsan." Two other films of the silent era, *Khoon-e-Nahak* (1928) and *Mitha Zahar* (1930) were based on adaptations of *Hamlet* and *Cymbeline* by Ahsan and Narain Prasad Betab, both stalwarts of the Parsi theatre. With the coming of the talkies, in the 1930's and into the 40's, the translation and transmission of Shakespearean rhetoric, already circulating on stage, was exploited and several of the successful stage adaptations of Shakespeare, in Urdu, were re-adapted for the screen. Beginning with *Hathili Dulhan* (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 1932), *Khudadad* (*Pericles*, 1935), *Khoon-ka-Khoon* (*Hamlet*, 1935) to *Said-e-Havas* (*Richard III* and *King John*, 1936), *Zan Mureed* (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, 1936) and *Pak Daman* (*Measure for Measure*, 1940).

Like the stage versions, these films were as much 'using' Shakespeare as 'abusing' him. Betab, who translated and adapted only two Shakespeare plays, nevertheless ran a magazine titled 'Shakespeare' to popularise his plays and ideas; Aga Hashr Kashmiri, the most gifted of the later Parsi theatre dramatists, who translated and adapted five plays, was accorded the non de plume of 'Indian Shakespeare,' so that when he started his own

theatrical company, it is no surprise that he decided to call it the 'Indian Shakespeare Company.' Mehdi Hassan Ahsan was more open and is reported to have admitted that in his opinion Shakespeare's way of thinking did not harmonize with the Indian ways of thinking, and that is why the plays were being altered.²

Of these *Khoon-ka Khoon* (*Hamlet*, 1935) by Sohrab Modi, credited as "the man who brought Shakespeare to the Indian screen,"³ is the best known and the most typical. Based on one of the most popular stage adaptations of the 1920s, it was filmed with the same principle cast: Modi as Hamlet, Naseem Bano as Ophelia and Shamsadbai as Gertrude. A hybrid mixture of styles, characteristic of Parsi theatre as a whole, was reproduced in the production: apart from the main roles, the other characters were all Indianized, their costumes and sets were a mixture of the Elizabethan and Muslim-Indian, seventeen songs, some characters and much protracted clowning were added. Yet, the film advertised itself as "*Hamlet alias Khoon-ka-Khoon*" and Modi himself, as Hamlet, was dressed in the customary black, and posed in characteristic pensive stances, and several scenes, e.g. the closet scene, and the play-within-play were visualized in the English theatrical manner. An influence of the imagery of the silent Shakespeare films, particularly in the case of the female roles, is to be noted in the stylised feminine look of highly arched eyebrows, large smoldering dark eyes and dark painted bow-lips. The formal properties, too, of these early Indian Shakespeare films remained marked by their theatrical origins: Modi's account of the filming of *Khoon-ka-Khoon* is revealing, "As the play had proved popular it was decided to film it in the way it was presented on the stage – in the same chronological order of scenes, with the movie camera replacing the audience."⁴ A frontality of presentation, a declamatory and histrionic vocalization with a rhetorical and visual flamboyance were their characteristic modes—traces of which may still be seen today in the continuing heightened expressionism of Indian cinema. The main contribution of these early Shakespeare films was to popularise the iconic poet and assimilate him into the mass consciousness often without the audiences' knowledge. Further, their bold and subversive appropriation of Shakespeare in the vernaculars and in a hybrid performative mode which took place during the high noon of the empire and within the context of

an aggressive propagation of the study of English (in 1844 Lord Hardinge, the Governor-general passed a resolution assuring preference in government jobs for those acquainted with European literature) may be seen as acts of cultural resistance, "upstaging" at the popular level the official dictates of the empire. Imitation and simultaneous displacement was an assertion of the local modes of pleasure in the face of the growing hegemony of English.⁵

In the 1940s and 50's, with another class of more literary Indians being attracted to the film industry (Indians had begun being literally 'schooled' into Shakespeare and English literature in India with the establishment of Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817, and the Universities in the metropolitan cities in 1857) there were attempts to bring a more "authentic" Shakespeare on the screen. Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* (1954) is an acute illustration. Sahu was an unusual actor, writer, director and producer who came into films after a university degree in literature. He scripted, directed and starred in several films based on classic European sources.⁶

His film on Hamlet not only retained the title, the Shakespearean names, settings and most of the plot, but more crucially, modeled itself on, or rather 'mimicked' closely the visualizations of Lawrence Olivier's film *Hamlet* (1948). While Modi's Hamlet was only fitfully imitative, in some scenes and costumes, of the western cinematic styles, Sahu's film strove to be completely so. Sahu's Hamlet, visualized as a replica of the traditional prince, like Oliver, was also costumed in black doublet and hose with a gold chains on his chest and a poniard by his side. But the dark interiors, misty battlements, enframing arches, stair imagery, even the unfolding of scenes, especially in the beginning, were straight out of Olivier's film. No other Indian Shakespeare film has come so close to suggesting an Elizabethan / Western ambience. Nevertheless, the film had to concede to Indian taste and generic compulsions: Ophelia was given a flashback in which she sang and danced with her companions, confessing her love for Hamlet, the gravediggers were used for comic effect, many mandatory songs were interpolated and the psychological complexity of the whole was simplified into an emotional pathos. In this second stage of negotiation with the English bard, the anxieties of authenticity verses populist appropriation were more sharply manifest. Sahu's faithful recreation, in the context of post-independence, was measuring up to the

might of the master, doing it like them. It was also an attempt to harness the cultural capital of the original in the international arena—India had just hosted its first International Film Festival in 1952. But its replications, manifestations of a narcissistic desire to be the same as a canonical subject, had to be de-centered and fragmented to become the consumerist, commercial spectator.

Yet Sahu was not content to mimic and displace, he had to comment and inscribe too. In an unusual gesture of intertextuality and interculturality, the result, probably, of the literary leanings of Sahu, key moments of the dialogue (largely from Ahsan's *Khoon-e-Nahak*) were punctuated by apt quotations in form of couplets from classical Urdu poets. Therefore, Hamlet and Ophelia quoted couplets from Ghalib in a romantic scene, Polonius used well-known Urdu proverbs in his advice to Laertes, Ophelia in her madness sang not a bawdy ballad, but lines of a fatalistic pathos from Bahadur Shah Zafar's much loved poem "*na kisi ki ank ka noor hun...*" and Hamlet in his dying speech to Horatio exhorting him to live to tell his story, adds another well-known couplet by Zauq on the preparedness or readiness of man "*Layee hayaat aaye, kaza le chali, chale / Apni khushi na aaye na apni khushi chale.*"⁷ Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* was not just measuring up to Shakespeare, but re-coding and improving him too!

The reception of Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* highlighted the tensions of this kind of interculturalism. The film did reasonably well at the box office but its critical assessment was mixed. While the *Filmfare* critic lauded the film, the *Filmindia* critic tore it to pieces. The debate was, like with all Shakespeare films, polarized around the burden of the book, i.e. around authenticity and appropriation: the former critic saw the rendering as "credible,"⁸ the latter as a "slander" to Shakespeare's memory, "stupid" and "selfish," while yet another indicted it for its "lack of Indianness."⁹ Dame Sybil Thorndike, who was, surprisingly, present for the premiere in Bombay, praised both Gertrude, "magnificent" and Ophelia, "perky, impassioned, human."¹⁰ The Indian intelligentsia, however, still under a colonial hangover, could only accept Shakespeare either pure and pristine or bowdlerized and indigenised!

This attempt to prove oneself as a filmmaker through a faithful reproduction of the codes of filming Shakespeare had been initiated

earlier: a Tamil *Shylock* in 1940, had taken great pains to recreate an authentic Venetian 'look,' through costume and setting, for its narrative. In Hindi, a *Romeo and Juliet* (1947) scripted by Kamal Amrohi, not only eschewed Indianisation, but also tried to copy the Hollywood version of Norma Shearer and Leslie Howard (1936). Similarly, *Cleopatra*, in Hindi (1950), was largely derived from Cecil B. De Mille's Hollywood extravaganza. All these films failed at the box-office, despite the presence of well known actresses as Nargis as Juliet and Bina Rai as Cleopatra.

The only way of being 'faithful' to Shakespeare, in the intercultural context, it seems, is to re-locate him fully. Or, so it was shown in the next stage in the negotiation of this colonial legacy, which chose to inflect the main concerns of the plays into a pervasive local *mise en scene*. It led to a Shakespeare transformed and expropriated, but paradoxically 'true.' Of these, Gulzar's *Angoor* (1981), a complete Indianisation of *The Comedy of Errors* has been the most successful, in fact, the most commercially successful Indian Shakespeare film to date, as is proved by its continuing sales on DVD. Yet, perhaps because earlier films based on Shakespeare did not do well at the box-office, *Angoor* nowhere, in its credits or posters, acknowledges its debt to Shakespeare, except at the very end in an ironic self-reflexive gesture, when it flashes a portrait of Shakespeare winking at the audience! The story of comic confusions caused by the mis-recognitions between two sets of identical twins is tailor made for cinematic treatment, the tricks of the camera can concretize what is left to the imagination on stage. Before *Angoor*, two other film versions, of *The Comedy of Errors*, *Bhrantibilas*, in Bengali (1963) and *Do Dooni Char* (Hindi, 1968) were ventured. The success of *Angoor*, ably scripted by Gulzar, an Urdu poet in his own right, however, went beyond its localization, which nevertheless rang true. It lay more in its obvious delight in its own virtuosity; Shakespeare's comic structures were preserved and merged into the indigenous *hasya* traditions. A consummate performance by Sanjeev Kumar as Antipholus, of perfect timing and comic insouciance added to it. Other localizations, in regional cinema, of the *Taming of the Shrew*, in Kannada, *Bahadur Ganda* (1976) and *Nanjundi Kalyana* (1989) have, similarly, proved very successful.

An extension of the dialogics of this re-location into a critical intervention is achieved by *Kaliyattam*, an award-winning film by Jayaraaj

(1998), in which the relocation of *Othello* becomes a means to examine the circulation of power within class and caste structures in rural Kerala. It uses the indigenous folk-ritual theatre of *theyyam*, its conventions and community, to foreground the key issue of racism in the play by transposing it on to the iniquities of the caste system. Fair and winsome Thamara, a Brahmin landlord's daughter falls in love with Perumalayan, a revered *theyyam* master, but dark, bulky and a pock-marked low caste. Their happiness is poisoned by Paniyan the Iago figure, a junior *theyyam* artist, confined to the minor comic roles, who covets Perumalayan's skill's and position. A third *theyyam* artist, Kanthan / Cassio favoured by Perumalayan, unfortunately cannot hold his drink during the wedding celebrations and is made the scapegoat by Paniyan. Cheerma / Emilia, his wife, is persuaded to steal the handkerchief / consummation sheet which is used to stoke the fires of jealousy. Thus, despite the relocation into a completely different ambience, the film manages to incorporate most of Shakespeare's plot and dialogue fairly closely, adding only one character, an elder female confidant for Desdemona, and some scenes setting the *theyyam* festival. The film is promoted as an "adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Othello*" in its publicity handouts, but its skill and sophistication produce an unfamiliar take on a familiar myth, going beyond adaptation, or even re-location, to create a critical reinterpretation of the original in post-colonial terms. Not only does it use Shakespeare to examine and expose the tensions of contemporary Kerala society, its reworking provokes insights into aspects of the play buried under centuries of learned response. Some of the Malayalam intelligentsia has had a somewhat lukewarm response to *Kaliyattam* holding its depiction of a romantic union between a *theyyam* personator, always a low caste, and a brahmin's daughter as entirely implausible. However, the value of the film lies in driving home this very point, that Shakespeare's romantic pairing of Othello and Desdemona was as unbelievably transgressive in his own time, something readers and viewers are apt to forget given the familiarity of the story. Fire, as a symbol of this transgressive passion—both within and without—is central and is given a live presence through the cinematography. It is seen both as a propitiatory fire, integral to the ritual of the *theyyam*—Perumalayan achieves his transformation into a godhead by walking on fire and therefore it is the source of his mystery

and attraction—as he says to Thamara, "I have no other fire"; and at the end, as the funeral pyre into which Perumalayan throws himself. The handkerchief, an object which in the play is talismanic of the sexual union of Othello and Desdemona, frequently seems too common and trivial to sustain its symbolic meaning. In *Kaliyattam* it is substituted by a red and gold patterned *patta* which functions as a consummation cloth, the multiple associations of which are instantly available. At their wedding night Perumalayan hands this *patta* to Thamara with the words, "It's my life," reinforcing its association with his passion/sexuality/fire. When Thamara spreads this *patta* on their bed in preparation for their second tryst, it becomes a symbol which mediates her 'appetite' and legitimizes female desire. Jayaraaj even betters Shakespeare here (dare we say so!) for the red cloth also represents fertility and this is suggested as a reason why Cheerma steals it from her mistress she is so devoted to—something left ambiguous in the play—for she is shown caressing it and the implication is that perhaps she too may conceive via the *patta*, such is the longing that is stroked in her. When Paniyan / Iago finally gets hold of it, he rolls and cavorts on it, laughing in a kind of illicit joy as if he had got hold of Peru and Thamara's sexuality. Othello's murder of his blameless wife is almost always seen in criticism as a sign of his innate savagery. In *Kaliyattam*, Perumalayan comes to the bedchamber with part of his makeup / *kollam* on—dark eyes in a vermillioned face—a half-human, half-god, unhinged by the dualities and divisions of his being. As he bends down to give his wife a last kiss and she wakes up, he threatens to kill her, but she suddenly clings to him, grabbing his bare chest for protection. Her touch on his bare chest sends a quiver through Perumalayan, in a flash love seems to assert itself and for a second he melts, looking as if he will change his mind. Othello's turmoil, "of one that loved not wisely, but too well" (5.2.353) was never more poignantly realized: the visual imagery—his chest painted with coiled snakes, part of the *theyyam* *vesham*—and the camera's forensic closeup of his erotic shiver, lift it beyond the dimensions of stage performance. The film creates an intercultural 'intertext' bringing to scopic satisfaction significant subtexts of the play which more than often remain unarticulated, forcing us to, literally, see anew.

This kind of re-visioning that adds to and expands the canonical text, leads to the fourth and current stage in the engagement with, by now, a

globalised bard, which is of a post-colonial confidence to 'play around' with and deconstruct Shakespeare for our own needs. Here the critical issue is no longer how much of the play is retained but how succinctly it can be dovetailed into local concerns. Two recent films, *Maqbool* (2004), and *Omkara* (2006) in Hindi, by the same director, Vishal Bharadwaj, are outstanding examples of this trend.¹¹ Hailed as 'crossover' films, they take this negotiation with Shakespeare several steps further. They demonstrate not only a postcolonial 'play' with Shakespeare's text, but also a confident post-modernist re-imagining of literary heritage: convincingly turning the war torn Scotland of *Macbeth* into Mumbai's gangland presided over by the ageing Don, Jehangir Khan alias Abbuji, and his right hand man, Maqbool, and the Mediterranean worlds of Venice and Cyprus into the small town badlands of Western Uttar Pradesh held in thrall by the wily politician, Bhaisaab and his prime henchman, Omkara. While both the films together constitute a paradigm shift in the Indian reconfiguration of Shakespeare on screen, they also reveal a significant evolutionary progress. *Maqbool*, the first film, was described gingerly by its director/script writer and music composer, Vishal Bharadwaj, as "a loose adaptation"¹² of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Anxious to sell his film as a commercial entity, Bharadwaj played down the Shakespearean source in interviews and press releases: "My film is not meant for Shakespeare scholars."¹³ "My interpretation is not text-bookish" ... "I have tried to be true to the play's spirit than to the original text."¹⁴ The critical success of *Maqbool* in various film festivals, however, emboldened Bharadwaj, two years later, to market his *Omkara* openly as an "adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*." Not only did he flaunt his canonical source, promos and websites also traced earlier cinematic adaptations, positioning his film within an international/global tradition, rubbing shoulders with the likes of Orson Welles.

Reviewers of *Maqbool*, by and large, were taken in by Bharadwaj, and did not see more than a soup-spoon of Shakespeare in the film. But it seems that India's English schooled generations had not carried home much of their Shakespeare. For, what it is strikingly significant about the film is how much of the original text is retained, and engaged with, within the adaptation, in terms of the plot, character, imagery and not just theme and atmosphere. That this had largely gone unmarked and unnoticed, at

least in print, is not altogether surprising, for much of the textual detail of the source is presented in an oblique fashion, though seamlessly dovetailed into the translation, localization and cinematic visualization. As one has seen, there has existed a practice in India of exploiting Shakespeare's plays as stageable or screen-able fodder; the Indian film industry is notorious for plagiarizing almost everything. But *Maqbool* blazed a new path; within the terms of its appropriation it found innovative ways of presenting and even enhancing the concerns of the text, becoming in the process, a 're-textualisation' of Shakespeare. *Omkara*, on the other hand, released as a mainstream commercial film, rode on the acclaim of more abroad. It received more assured critical approbation: "He captures the essence of the original in a blanket of innovation, intelligence and integrity..." *Indian Express Group*; "I've never seen the play so perfectly tuned to a time (present) or a place (Uttar Pradesh)," *The Times of India*, and "What you take away from *Omkara* is the knowledge that a classic script always has the power to move us, provided it is handled by a director who knows his craft, and actors who understand their job. Shakespeare would have smiled" said Lindsay Pereira in *Rediff.com*.¹⁵ More than even its adaptative success, it was seen as a film which broke the conventional Bollywood mould ("into smithereens" *The Times of India*) with panache. "The most arrogant piece of kitsch ever made... Startling..." was the verdict of *The Times*, London.¹⁶ Clearly, both films merit a longer discussion.

Maqbool retains and even expands all the major relationships and events of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Duncan / Abbuji's trust in Macbeth / Maqbool, the prophesying witches / cops who plant the seed of ambition, the seduction of Maqbool into treachery by his beloved wife / here Abbuji's mistress Nimmi, the drunken guard, the killing of Abbuji in his sleep, the ensuing suspicion and fear, the poisoning of the bond with fellow captain / henchman, Banquo / Kaka, and his subsequent slaughter by Maqbool, the escape of his son Fleance / Guddu who survives to be the inheritor, the setting in of guilt and nemesis, the hallucinating Lady Macbeth, the beguiled Macbeth, the avenger Macduff / Boti and the tragic end, (unusual for Bollywood) all these form the central structure of the film. After a basic transposition of the cultural milieu into a largely

Muslim gang in Mumbai, there are continuous and consistent parallels with Shakespeare's text despite Vishal Bharadwaj's disclaimers.

This re-imagining is, however, not without its mandatory "masala" formula features like comic bumbling cops, family scenes of festivity and weddings, catchy music, dances and songs—religious and romantic, even an "item number" with a vamp cum would-be moll in a backless kurti, hospital scenes and the populist picture of communal harmony—of Muslims and Hindus working and marrying together. But the film unrolls not as what is defensively termed "a loose adaptation" but rather as a close and acute appropriation. And, as a Shakespeare film, it bears the burden of the book with some finesse.

Significant changes / interpolations in plot and character clarify areas of obscurity or ambiguity in the original. For instance, giving Duncan / Abbuji a young daughter, Sameera (instead of two sons), who is in love with and is going to marry Fleance / Guddu establishes a more immediate moral equity and structural neatness and coherence than Shakespeare's own use of Fleance as an elaborate compliment to King James I who was said to be an eighth-generation descendant of Fleance. Lady Macbeth / Nimmi figure is here made the Don / Duncan's mistress, who is attracted to Maqbool / Macbeth instead and seduces him into the murder of the Don. Not only does this amplify the dominant theme of treacherous transgressivity, but it also literally fleshes out the suggestion in Shakespeare's play that Lady Macbeth uses her sexual command over Macbeth to subdue his scruples and make him agree to kill to fulfill her ambitions too.

It is in the range and depth of its re-textualisation, however, that *Maqbool* becomes a contemporary 'literary film,' "symptomatic of the contemporary imagination" which needs to be read not from the centre, but from its spaces of discursive difference.¹⁷ It locates itself in the popular genres of the Bollywood gangster and the Muslim social film; it is a direct inheritor of recent critiques of urban violence like *Satya* and *Company* which are generally accepted as fictionalizations of real life gangsters like Dawood Ibrahim and Chota Rajan and their mafia like hold on the people and institutions of Mumbai. The radicalism of *Maqbool* lies in its use of a canonical text to ally itself to such exposures of festering urban culture. Both these films, like *Maqbool* and *Macbeth*, are narratives of people who depend on bloodshed and violence for their living; who, to

consolidate their positions, are sucked into treachery and revenge; and who end by eliminating each other. All these films position women in a seductive, but ultimately destructive role, and though they valorize violence as a livelihood, they end by asserting the moral that violence does not pay.

Retelling in a literary film initiates its own alternative referentiality. In its own lifeline, i.e. Bollywood, *Maqbool* dares to talk of itself, exposures of the deep nexus between the underworld and the film industry in Bombay. There are several references to Bollywood all of which reveal it to be another field of action for the mafia, where the contract killing, is admitted to be part of their "*dhanda*" or business. In the fortunes of Bollywood and Kaka / Banquo quips that Abbuji's life was worthy of being filmed, and then goes on to brag that it will not auger well if this year they cannot get out a film with 'Bhabhi' i.e. Nimmi, Abbuji's mistress. "Tell me, Bhabhi, which director do you want, Karan Johar, Ram Gopal Verma, Mani Ratnam," he grandiosely reels off, offering her the pick of the best, only to be reduced to a stammer by an icy stare from Abbuji who is definitely not pleased. The business or let fall earlier in the conversation, in a kind of double irony, the gangsters believe Bollywood is peopled by the cheap and low kind—"ghatiya." Another glance at the equation between the film world and the underworld is made through Om Puri / Inspector Pandit's observation regarding Abbuji that "had he had not been in the underworld, he would have been in films, what an actor he is" after watching him enjoy a nautch with some composure immediately after an emotional shakeup—which is strategically simulated—at being reminded of the police raid at his own wedding which left him bereft of his god-father figure, again something we suspect was stage-managed by Abbuji himself. Such seemingly casual self-referrals in the film are not a simple narcissism, but function as searing critiques, tearing off the veil of make-believe which covers the underhand dealings of both the film and the extortion industry. They also establish a parallel between the king-making delusions of the underworld / Bollywood and the royalist ambitions in the theatre of war in *Macbeth*.

"There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face" (4.1.11-12), Duncan's observation on the traitor Macdonwald, self-reflexively exposes Abbuji, and by analogy, casts back a doubt on the Scottish king's manipulations.

The film ventures bravura quotation and parody too. A delightful bit of pastiche, verging on parody, occurs in the seduction scene between Maqbool and Nimmi, where she forces him to accept her on the point of a gun, and which ends with him ferreting around with a lighted faggot to recover, among the stones, her fallen earring. This, of course, is recognizable as a reworking of a well-known romantic song sequence from a hit of the 60s *Gunga Jamuna*, "*dhoondo dhoondo re saajanaa, mere kaan ka bala*." While the original was a celebration of married love, dramatizing the morning after, here, in a literally dark (*noir*) film it becomes the summation of a transgressive love, showing how Maqbool has been finally caught in Nimmi's net. These self reflexive stances, on Bollywood and its genres, intersect with the reflexivities of *Macbeth*: if *Macbeth* comes to the conclusion that "life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets its hour upon the stage" (5.5.24-25), Inspector Pandit too is made to remark on role playing in life.

Most of all, it is in the cinematic visualizations of the poetic images of the play that the seamless blend of the popular with the post-modern is to be seen. One of the strengths of the film is its power to surprise. Unusual placements of Shakespeare's images accost one at unexpected turns in the narrative, forcing at times a revelatory extension of meaning. These cinematic enactments don't call attention to themselves, are integral to the new narrative, yet resonate fully with the old. A loud raucous chatter of crows, and other birds, for instance, imaging Lady Macbeth's statement, "the raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements," (1.5.38) forms the background 'music' to Maqbool and Nimmi's first long scene, by the roadside, where she plants the seed of treachery in his mind. The cawing of crows, in fact, becomes a choric comment on any talk of murder: it accompanies the new ACP Devasare's questioning of the Inspectors on his first day; it forms the background of Abbuji's questioning of the dead Moghul's son Boti; it chimes in with Nimmi's aggressive stroking of the fires of ambition and eroticism in Maqbool.

The festivity of the engagement party celebrations takes the place of the banquet in honour of Duncan in the backdrop of which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth plot the murder. A huge steaming cauldron, that in the play is full of "Double, double, toil and trouble: Fire burn and cauldron bubble," (4.1.10-11) is glimpsed in the kebab makers' shop where a rival gang gathers to plot further machinations of crime and revenge. The atmosphere of fear and terror unleashed by Macbeth reflected in the line: "Each new morn, / New widows howl" (4.3.4) is graphically and aurally pictured in Sameera's wild scream of anguish and hate when Maqbool pretends to commiserate the breakup of her engagement after Kaka's death and Guddu's flight. The dagger soliloquy is encapsulated in a brief sequence in which Maqbool hallucinates that the blood of the goat butchered for the wedding feast has not been washed clean. The haunting of Banquo's ghost is given a fresh spin when Kaka's body is brought in disrupting Abbuji's prayer meeting, and as Maqbool touches the body in a pretended show of grief, the eyes of the dead body suddenly flip open completely throwing Maqbool off his guard. The most creative transposition and illustration, however, is of the central image of the play, "Pity like a naked new born babe ... shall blow the horrid deed in every eye / that tears shall drown the wind" (1.7.21, 24-25). This is visualized in Nimmi's new born son, seen lovingly cradled by Guddu / Fleance and Sameera at the end, the very sight of which weakens Maqbool's blood-lust, blowing his horrid deeds in his own eyes, making him drop his gun and walk out in a gesture of surrender, leaving the camera to mark a tear staining the glass visor through which Maqbool was looking at the babe. Pity, as the naked babe remains the unborn child in the play *Macbeth*, emphasizing the sterility of the Macbeths. In *Maqbool* its embedded meaning is released to force a final moment of *anagnorisis*, a self-realisation of the futility of a life of bloodshed in Maqbool. Since in the film, the child is born of pre-mature labour, it is also a visualization of the child that was "untimely ripped" ... "from his mother's womb," (5.8.15-16) the figure who was forecast as the one which will vanquish Macbeth. It thus becomes the twice fold instrument of the reassertion of the good. Finally, at the very end, in the play, Macbeth's head is cut off and brought on stage, a sign of the just desert for the "butcher king." In the film, Maqbool walks out of the hospital, having dropped his guns and

is shot down by Macduff / Boti who happens to see him outside. But no shriek or blood is shown, instead the camera pans, then tilts its line of vision to ground level, cuts to a view of the sky above and then cuts back to a close-up, framing only Maqbool's head as fallen and rolling on the ground. As the viewer looks from Maqbool / Macbeth's field of vision, spiritual music begins, there is another cut, the camera swivels up to show a clear blue sky, rare in the film, heralding the closing mood of "the time is free" (5.9.21). Such cinematic visualizations create a "re-textualisation" of the source, adding to and re-leasing embedded meanings, almost as if the deferred possibilities of Derrida's *différance* were being caught!

Yet, the genius stroke in the re-imagining, and which is the summation of the popular and the post-modern blend, is the recasting of the witches as a pair of conniving cops. The three Weird sisters of the play are turned into a duo of comic cops, both corrupt and bumbling. This has to be a first, an entirely original turn, for though there have been dozens of adaptations of *Macbeth*, in gangland situations too, the witches have almost always remained female (in *Joe Macbeth*, dir. Ken Hughes, 1955, they are a pair of street eccentrics - a hot chestnut seller and a sandwich board man, and in *Men of Respect*, dir. William Reilly, 1991, they are turned into occultist groupies). But never have they been visualized as policemen who monitor and control the underworld through their prophecies. This breaks free of and reverses several traditions of casting and performing the witches who, in fact, always pose something of a challenge in staging *Macbeth*, for how do we embody the unnatural / supernatural? Polanski, for instance, imaged them as a cultist feminist group, which almost threw the text overboard. There is a risk in modernizing the witches too much; they lose their mystery and menace. On the other hand, the prophesying astrologer / witch is a familiar figure in India, but in relocating them as two policemen, Inspectors Pundit and Purohit who compulsively draw horoscopes and foretell the future—using ketchup to sketch the chart and tidbits of food, cigarette stubs or pebbles to mark the planets on it—in their daily line of duty, Bharadwaj and Tyrewala, the scriptwriters, do not just naturalise and make believable, the unnatural and the supernatural, but peg it down into a gamut of known material relations and inferences. As an interfering pair, the comic cops intersect with the vice / devil, clown / fool tradition. In their

bumbling attempts at duty they are the scapegoat cops of every Bollywood film. As conniving abettors and simultaneous upholders of the law they form an expose of the role and function of the police in India, a sly, ironic glance at the recent scams and prison escapes in which the police are being proved to have given a helping hand. But, most of all, they acquire shades of the Shakespearean wise fools and take on some of the critiquing and ribald function of the Porter when they are caught by the camera pissing in unison, into the night rain off the first floor balcony ("drink, Sir, is a great provoker of three things. ... nose-painting, sleep, and urine. ... he took up my legs sometime..." 2.3. 26, 28, 41)!

These cop witches thus constitute the radicalism of the re-imagining which inexorably hangs a new question on a canonical text: for who are the witches / weird sisters, what is their power of magic? *Weird*, in Middle English, meant not evil but fate. Are the witches marginal people trying to assert power by "prophesying" or "equivocating" on both sides? In Shakespeare's play the witches kill, avenge, trade in body parts and lead *Macbeth* on. In the film, the cop duo promises much but delivers little. They attempt to chase, encounter and interrogate, but instead let off prisoners and fail to make them speak. They act as go-betweens, being privy to the deals hatched and the payoffs made. They seem to be hand in glove with Abbuji's gang, turning up in the nick of time to bail them out. They seem like sponges, out to milk their situations. It is only through their prophesying that they retain some credibility and exert power. Maqbool is impelled to go to them after the murder of Abbuji, to find out what lies further for him. Yet they justify all their actions as an expression of their own grass roots philosophy, of maintaining a balance of power, a "*shakti ka santulan*," by letting fire and water confront and confound each other: "*aag ko pani ka dar bahut bada hai*." They believe in letting the gangs fight it out among themselves, let dog eat dog. The witches in *Macbeth* too, are called "juggling fiends" (5.9.19) and *Macbeth* a "wayward son" (3.5.11). Were the witches in *Macbeth* also trying to wrest a little control / power? The ambiguities of the text are extended in the film and by the end a suspicion begins to creep up at the back of our minds whether this prophesying, instigating ambition and power struggle was not a ploy, planted by the witches / police, to seduce the chieftains / gangsters into liquidating each other? So cleverly is reality

and unreality juggled around that one begins to doubt one's straight perceptions.

Omkara, a more polished and assured cinematic rendering of Shakespeare in the Indian milieu takes the adaptative layering a stretch further. Like *Maqbool*, it too retains most of the basic plot interpolating situations to flesh out the new location of the story. Thus, several gang fights and summary dismissal of opponents are etched in to underline the ethos of ruthless violence in which the hero, Omkara / Othello is drenched; Dolly / Desdemona is betrothed to Rajju / Roderigo, making her elopement, on the eve of the wedding, more transgressive; a family and a home are visualized for Omkara / Othello lending greater credence to his obsession with the *kardhani*/cummerbund/handkerchief as a precious family heirloom. Bianca the prostitute becomes Billo, a chanteuse, providing the license for the Bollywood trademark song and dance routines. Yet, paradoxically, these features which give ballast, root the story in its new milieu, simultaneously work against it. While Vishal Bharadwaj's adaptation 'explains' much, ironing out the perplexing ambiguities of the play, it sacrifices too, crucial shades of the tragic inevitability and pathos. Narrowly identifying Omkara with a violent macho culture robs him of that valorous heroism, or of an artistic edge like Perumalayan's in *Kaliyattam*, which forms the basis of Desdemona's undying love for him. Giving him scenes of a familial domesticity opens out and dilutes the tension of a tight claustrophobic play—Othello's isolation being part of the reason for his downfall. And Billo / Bianca's 'item' numbers, though they have become the hit songs of the season, do not add, rather, detract from the localization. Bharadwaj's most successful revisioning, of Iago / Ishwar 'Langda' Tyagi, seen as a believable loyal comrade at arms alienated at being passed over for a promotion, is nevertheless shorn of his bedeviling misogyny and racism in the realistic singularity of his presentation. Similarly, the racism of the play, transposed into the endemic casteism of north Indian society, is pegged at a credibility: unlike in *Kaliyattam*, Omkara is not a low caste, but a half caste Brahmin, more befitting his position as a trusted general / 'bahubali', but which nevertheless, dilutes the rationale for his murderous insecurities. So does the playful tease by Indu / Emilia, of the contrast between Omi's dark colouring and Dolly's white complexion, render superficial and skin

deep the huge class and race divide of the original.

Yet, there is more to Bharadwaj's adaptive prowess than merely providing recognizable Indian equivalents to Shakespeare's classic. It lies, the suggestions and insinuations of the text. In *Omkara*, he goes a step beyond imagification, to evolving a *trope*, a visual/descriptive shorthand, which patterns and problematises many occurrences. The most arresting of these is a witty deployment of the technologies of the mobile phone. The plot of *Othello* turns crucially on 'hearsay'; 'calling' 'telling,' 'listening,' are salient actions in a play which dramatizes a poisoning of the mind through whisperings in the ear. In this tragedy, it is not so much the 'eye' as the 'ear' which leads the hand, as for instance in *Macbeth*. Right at the start we are told by Othello how Desdemona would "with a greedy ear/ devour up my discourse" (1.3.149-50) of how "telling my story" [which]...wish'd she had not heard" (1.3.161) became a story through which "the bruised heart was pierced through the ear" (1.3.219). Desdemona pleads with the Senators: "to my unfolding lend a gracious ear" (1.3.244) when she wishes to accompany Othello to Cyprus. Later Iago plots to "abuse Othello's ear" (1.3.393), whilst Othello fears that Iago "makest his ear / A stranger to thy thoughts" (3.3.146-7). Such critical communication via the 'ear' is captured in the film through the many uses of the mobile phone. From the opening scene, with the *barat* party's mobiles being confiscated, the instrument progressively becomes embroiled in the elopement; it intervenes during the confrontation with an irate Brabantio who is threatening to blow out Omi's brains, when the Godfather, Bhaisaab's, voice and salutary authority is relayed through the mobile's speaker phone. A video clip on a mobile phone provides irrefutable ammunition in the blackmail and liquidation of a political opponent. Later, the mobile phone becomes essential to Iago's machinations establishing alibis and, finally, it is used to provide proof of Desdemona's so-called infidelity. From an instrument, a mere means, the mobile phone becomes an agent, its instrumentality layering echoes and resonances into a network of connections. The circuit of deceptions, lies, and misunderstandings which add up to the tragedy of 'hearsay' in *Othello* is neatly enfolded in *Omkara* into the mobile circle of the telephonic.

Needless to add, these scenes also document and comment on, the local exponential boom in the use of the mobile phone and its varying functionalities as the new tool of empowerment, as fair in love as in crime.

It is in attempting this blend, a balancing of the 'global' (bard) with the recognizably 'local' (regional Indian) that takes *Omkara* a step further in the appropriative trajectory: not only does it reconfigure its 'local' genre of the commercial Bollywood gangster film, it also projects itself strategically into an internationalism of the by now globalised Shakespeare. This straddling of two worlds: *Omkara* does not so much break the mould as it stretches the gangster film to turn the spotlight on the battle within (the depiction of the warring hinterlands of U.P. never did ring so unsentimental and true), its box-office success abroad,¹⁸ its sweep of awards at home (seven Filmfare awards) has pitched the Indian Shakespeare film into a mainstream format and won for it an acceptance beyond that of the art house film. In contrast, *Kaliyattam*, which eschewed commercial dimensions, but was more completely immersed in its local cultural context, and thus could present an acutely felt, and argued, inter-textual evocation of *Othello*, remained nevertheless tethered to the niche art cinema circuit. The runaway success of the songs and music score of *Omkara* is another testimony of its achieving a position in the mainstream 'popular' film market. *Maqbool*, on the other hand, though more playfully inventive, and closer to Shakespeare's imagistic text, perhaps because of it, could not command that level of box-office success as *Omkara*.

Maqbool and *Omkara*, then, as a mix of art and commerce, are positioned as third generation post-colonial adaptations, not in awe of Shakespeare, neither plagiarizing him, like the Parsi theatre film, nor genuflecting to his canonical authority, like the faithful imitations discussed earlier. Shakespeare forms a kind of a benchmark; our responses to him determine our own distance from our past. On stage there have been several successful adaptations of *Macbeth* and *Othello* performed in our own indigenous theatre styles. But with *Maqbool* and *Omkara* we have hit another level of appropriation. Here it is neither ethnicity nor authenticity that is aimed at. But, rather, a post-colonial maturity in contemporising the universality of Shakespeare into our own current concerns. While *Omkara* domesticates Shakespeare, *Maqbool* re-writes him in Indian terms.

This third generational post-coloniality is reinforced through the persona of Vishal Bharadwaj, the director, scriptwriter and music director of the films. A back woods boy from Bijnor, UP, Bharadwaj, by the creativity shown in *Maqbool* and *Omkara*, has unfixed Shakespeare from the grip of the English medium school and made him a free floating signifier available for anyone with the nous to take him on. Like cricket, then, we seem at last to have appropriated another imperial icon and have shown to do it well.

These full-fledged Shakespeare films notwithstanding, the equally, or perhaps, more, significant and surprising dimension of Shakespeare in the Indian cinema, as noted at the start of the essay, is his continuing circulation in 'bits and pieces,' or as an 'afterlife.' This is to be found in diverse modes: in the form of fleeting images (a silent film titled *Indian Shylock*), lines of dialogue (as seen in *Agneepath* [*Macbeth*] or 36 *Chowringee Lane* [*Lear*]), as fragments of scenes and sequences (the performance of the balcony scene of "Romeo and Juliet" in 1942: *A Love Story*, and of an opera, "Troilus and Cressida," in *Dil Chahta Hai*), as citations or quotations (a boat named "Much Ado" is sighted in the harbour when the love triangle in *Dil Chahta Hai* gets very involved - to name an obvious few), as characterisation or themes—the heroine in male disguise, the female lawyer, the doomed young lovers, feuding families, the hardheaded money-lender, the taming of the shrew, identical twins, the return of the uncanny, the revenge tragedy, etc—instances of which are too ubiquitous to need enumeration. The repeated re-surfacing of such Shakespearean traces shows that Shakespeare is no longer the other, but exists as absorbed into the cultural imaginary of the nation, the result of a process elucidated by the cannibal theory of translation¹⁹ in which the original has to be 'devoured' for the colonized to break free, and where the act of devouring is both a violation and an act of homage. This cannibalistic metaphor helps us to reconfigure the dynamism of the film industry with its borrowing or 'consuming' of texts and their reproduction only in tangentially identifiable forms. Journeying through Indian cinema, via Shakespeare, takes us through a history of negotiation with what was once the colonial book, to its transformation and unnoticed acceptance into a public domain of the nation.

NOTES

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1. For an account of Shakespeare in early Hindi cinema see Rajiva Verma's "Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema" in *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance*, ed. Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005, and Pearson (India) 2005.
2. For a history of the Parsi Theatre see Somnath Gupta, *Parsi Thiyetar: Udhbhava aur Vikas*, Allahabad: Lok Bharti, 1981.
3. Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, eds. *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, 150.
4. Rajiva Verma, "Hamlet on the Hindi Screen," *Hamlet Studies* 24(2002): 84.
5. For an account of the place of Shakespeare in the growth of the modern Indian theatre, see my "Introduction" to *India's Shakespeare*, op.cit. For a performance history of *Hamlet* in India, see my "'Play[ing]'s the thing': *Hamlet* on the Indian Stage," *Hamlet Studies* 24(2002).
6. Rajadhyaksha, 203.
7. For other such intertextualities, see Rajiva Verma, op.cit.
8. Quoted by Rajiva Verma, 85.
9. Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 169.
10. Ibid., 169.
11. Another film which would also fall into this category but which is more in the nature of an 'art' film, not being commercially released, is *In Othello* (2003) by Roysten Abel, a cinematic take on his own, far more successful, play-*Othello: A Play in Black and White*, which had won the best first award at the Edinburgh Festival in 1999. Roysten's play was the first such innovative post-colonial intervention into the staging practice of Shakespeare in India: it used the outsider theme in the play to highlight the discrimination in metropolitan India against those of the provinces; it thus debated the issue of identity and nationalism. Its success was due to its timing, in the contemporisation of a canonical text and in its performative finesse. But the film which tries to elaborate these ideas failed to communicate the immediacy of the play and was lost in a welter of esoteric images. An earlier Bengali film *Saptapadhi* (Seven Steps of Marriage) 1961, is a more complex post-colonial extension of the *Othello* theme, in which a Brahmin boy, Krishnendu, falls in love with his Anglo-Indian college mate, Rina Brown, during a college performance of *Othello*. He converts to Christianity

- to marry her, is separated because of class and racial differences, but finally is reunited after some years. See Paromita Chakravarti, "Modernity, Postcoloniality and *Othello*: the case of *Saptapadhi*" in *Remaking Shakespeare: Performance Across Media, Genres and Cultures*, ed. Pascale Aebischer, Edward J. Esche and Nigel Wheale, London: Palgrave, 2003.
12. Interview by Vijay Singh, www.rediff.com, 29 January 2004.
 13. Interview by Arthur J. Pais, www.rediff.com, 6 November 2003.
 14. Interview with Subhash K. Jha, *Deccan Herald*, 15 February 2004.
 15. As quoted in the DVD promotional flyer.
 16. Ibid.
 17. Belen Vidal Villaur, "Classic adaptations, modern reinventions: reading the image in the contemporary literary film," *Screen* 43:1 Spring 2002, 5, 17.
 18. *The Times of India*, 24 December 2006, "Bollywood hits jackpot in the US," quotes *Forbes* magazine to show how Bollywood reaped an American windfall in 2006 with its films making up half of the 14 foreign language films that grossed more than \$2 million in US—more than any other language, and that the seven Hindi hits of 2006 in the US offered "another sign that India's film industry is capturing broad, even global, appeal." "Bollywood is hot," the magazine observed. It also mentions an overall estimate of \$ 14.7 million gross takings for *Omkara* in 2006.
 19. As proposed by Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropofago* (1928) and developed by Haraldo de Campos. See Else Ribeiro Pires Vieira, "Liberating Calibans: Readings of *Antropofagia* and Harold de Campos' Poetics of Transcreation," in *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, London: Routledge, 1999.

FIGURES OF BOND

TONY BENNETT AND JANET WOOLLACOTT

'I am very much a Domino sort of girl myself. A fun-loving extrovert. Whatever it is I am doing I enjoy doing it—loving, driving, riding, shopping, travelling, even cooking.'

As alluring as all of Fleming's girls are, there is always some masculine trait about them . . . 'Even so,' says Claudine, 'they are essentially feminine, the ultimate in modern, emancipated woman.'

'They can live without a man doing everything for them because they are independent. They like to decide their future destinies for themselves. They are highly sexual—but only with men worth their loving. They are free, you see, completely free. I may be married, but I feel I am like this. I am free. I always have been. I always will be.'¹

So said Claudine Auger, who played Domino Vitali in *Thunderball*, reported in a 1965 fanzine. A decade later, in a *TV Times* feature, she is quoted again on the subject of 'the Bond girl':

I think a woman needs to feel the strength of a man to acknowledge his superiority. The fact that young men today are not strong is basically the fault of women who dress to look like boys. A woman should always keep her femininity. I like the Bond girls because they are free, they make love easily and they are on equal terms when it comes to intelligence. But they are essentially feminine. I married an older man because he knew what life was about. And he married me because I have a feminine body. I would not dare to put on the trousers unless I was going horse-riding or hunting.²

Both passages typify the ways in which the figures of actresses and actors have been constructed and made to stand in relation to the Bond films. Functioning as simulacres for either Bond or the 'Bond girl', their lives, views and preferences have been made to mimic the fictional world of

Bond in order that that world might appear not entirely fictional. Life is thus modelled on fiction in order that fiction, in appearing to reflect life, might also serve as a model for it. However, the differences between the two passages are equally noteworthy. In the first, the concept of the 'essentially feminine' is articulated to the 'emancipated woman' of the early 1960s whereas, in the second, it functions as a sign of women's necessary subordination to men, limiting the possible scope of women's emancipation in specifying the 'laws of nature' it must respect.

This shift is symptomatic of the general change in the ideological currency of Bond and 'the Bond girl' between the early 1960s and the 1970s as the emphasis moved away from the construction of new and relatively more independent forms of gender identity and sexuality, for women as well as for men, towards the placing of women—already 'too greatly emancipated'—back into a 'properly subalterned' position in relation to men. As we have seen, this was one of the major transformations associated with the Bond films of the 1970s. It is all the more interesting, therefore, that the occasion for the second interview with Claudine Auger was the first television screening of the Bond films produced in the 1960s. In thus being activated for consumption via a different construction of 'the Bond girl', their relations to ideologies of gender and sexuality were, at least tendentially, reordered in being brought into line with the specific network of ideological concerns which the figures of Bond and 'the Bond girl' served to condense and articulate in the 1970s.

This example nicely illustrates our purpose in this chapter, to examine the various 'texts of Bond' which, in contributing to the expanded reproduction of the figure of Bond, have also played their part in remodelling that figure culturally and ideologically. In doing so, we shall relate our discussion to a number of more general concerns.

First, we shall consider the active part such texts play in organising and reorganising the social and ideological relations of popular reading. They function, in effect, similarly to the way in which criticism functions regarding the consumption of texts classified as 'literary' or, more generally, as being of serious cultural value. However, they do so by different means. In the case of valued texts which circulate under the name of an author, Foucault argues, criticism normally organises their reading by constructing

the author as the issuing source of their meaning.³ Popular reading is more typically organized in accordance with different interpretative principles. Here, to put the point in terms of Foucault's formulations, the figure to which a text is made to point and which serves as a support for its meaning is not one which is outside and precedes it (the author), but one which is simultaneously outside and within it (the actor/actress as a cypher for the character portrayed). The result, in the case of the 'texts of Bond', has been the construction of a series of micro-narratives in which the 'real' biographies, views, tastes and preferences of Connery and Moore and the various actresses who have played opposite them have filled out and been filled out by the figures of Bond and 'the Bond girl'. These micro-narratives have thus run alongside and adjacent to the Bond novels and films, complementing them by means of a seeming mimesis whilst in fact actively organizing their consumption in particular ways.

While differently organized, however, such texts have effects similar to those produced by the functioning of criticism. In the case of texts classified as 'literary', criticism constitutes a series of bids and counter-bids concerning the inter-textual, ideological and cultural references which are to prevail in animating reading practices in a particular context. It is by the operation of this system of bids and counter-bids that a text is kept alive in history, yet always as other than just 'itself' since, in the process, its relations to history are constantly rewritten. In like manner, the 'texts of Bond' we are concerned with here have functioned as 'textual shifters', drawing the Bond novels and films into the orbit of activity of the different sets of ideological and cultural concerns that have been articulated around the figure of Bond at different points in time.

The implications of these considerations are far-reaching. A part of our concern in this study has been to study the Bond novels and films not as completed givens but in the light of the incessantly mobile reordering of the relations between them. One consequence of doing so is to call into question the assumption that the relations between a text classified as fiction and ideology can be determined, in an essentialist way and once and for all, purely by an examination of its internal formal properties. By considering the ways in which what we have called 'textual shifters' have located the Bond films and novels within different spheres of ideological action—or within the same spheres of ideological action,

but placed in different and even contradictory relations to them at different points in time or within different reading formations—it will be possible to show that the question of the 'ideological effects' of the Bond films and novels cannot be resolved abstractly. Indeed, properly speaking, they have never had such effects but have rather functioned as pieces of play within different regions of ideological contestation, capable of being moved around differently within them.

Furthermore, such considerations also call into question the view that the distinction between 'literature'—that is, as Fleming put it, 'literature with a capital L'⁴—and popular fiction, conceived as an inferior category, can be established by purely formal means. In the case of Marxist criticism, these two problems are closely connected since most Marxist theories of literature have depended on the assumption that 'literature', as a specialising category, can be intrinsically distinguished from ideology. This view clearly depends on the assumption that a text's relations to ideology can be specified once and for all time. It has thus recently become common to argue, in the wake of the earlier work of Pierre Macherey and that of Louis Althusser, that the genuinely literary text is one that inherently ruptures or troubles dominant ideologies, throwing them into relief so that their fault-lines become visible.⁵ Similar discourses have spilled over into film criticism where *avant-garde* film practices are often distinguished from commercial cinema in equally essentialist terms. The corollary of this is the view that popular fiction merely reproduces dominant ideologies and, again, inherently so. Annette Kuhn has taken issue with this line of reasoning, arguing that it takes no account of the ways in which reading its subject to definite forms of social organisation: 'Once the notion of reading as an active and situated practice is adopted, the distinction between films which embody an internal self-criticism and films which are completely ideologically complicit becomes redundant.'⁶

According to such a view, the 'literary effect', or its filmic equivalent, is not an attribute which texts naturally possess. Indeed, it is not property at all but a specific sphere and kind of action that is produced for certain texts by virtue of their being classified as 'literary' and, accordingly, organised for consumption through the application of particular reading norms. The history of the putative literarisation of Fleming's Bond

novels—their circulation as ‘texts of Fleming’ rather than as ‘texts of Bond’—thus bears witness to the ways in which ‘the same text’ may be differently organised for consumption in different regions of textual distribution. In examining the contours of this history, we shall argue that the distinction between the ‘literary’, as a specialising and privileged category, and the non-literary as the residue of fiction which remains once the ‘literary’ has been defined, breaks down when conceived as a distinction between different practices of writing. Rather, we shall suggest, the distinction needs to be reformulated in being conceived as relating to the different spheres of cultural operation that are produced for texts by means of the differential distribution of different protocols of reading between them.

TEXTUAL SHIFTERS

While the ideological preoccupations discernible in the ‘textual shifters’ bearing most directly on the popular reading of the Bond novels and films have been fairly consistent in scope, their *relative weight* and *specific functioning* have varied considerably. We shall illustrate this by examining the changing function of the ideology of competitive individualism as articulated in relation to the figure of Bond, and by tracing some of the shifts in the representations of sexuality associated with Bond and ‘the Bond girl’.

Jerry Palmer has argued that the distinguishing characteristic of the thriller genre consists in its organisation of the relations between the values of amateurism and bureaucratic rigidity and, mediating between the two, those of professionalism in its ‘combination of improvisation and programming’.⁷ In the case of the Bond novels, Palmer suggests, Bond thus mediates between the values represented by ‘the girl’ and the villain. ‘The girl’ (sometimes) represents the values of amateurism in the sense that her actions are ineffective against the organised conspiracy of the villain and likely, moreover, to make life more difficult for the hero: Tilly Masterton’s attempt to avenge her sister’s death, for example, results in both Bond and Tilly being captured by Goldfinger. At the other extreme, the villain embodies the principle of planning carried to excess: he puts into operation a ‘master plan’, perfected down to the last detail,

leaving no possible room for error or miscalculation. As a consequence, Palmer argues, the villain is ‘often incapable of improvising, and when a contingency that he has failed to foresee arises, he is completely lost’.⁸ Bond combines the two virtues and, thereby, dissociates them from their negative aspects. A professional, trained in his occupation, operating within a bureaucracy and, usually, with a back-up team, he none the less retains a capacity to improvise which usually turns the tables decisively in his contest with the villain. It is thus that, in *Goldfinger*, he slashes through the window of the aircraft which Goldfinger has commandeered, with the result that Oddjob is sucked through it, although he ‘had had no idea what would happen’ when he did it. In thus embodying an ideal blend of trained programming and improvisation, Palmer suggests, Bond constitutes an exemplary hero of capitalist competitive individualism constructed in opposition to the rigidities of communist totalitarianism.

It’s true, of course, that the opposition between Bond’s innovative professionalism and the dead hand of bureaucratic inertia played an important part in the constructions of Bond which predominated in the late 1950s. However, this came to be rather less important, in the early 1960s, than the way in which these qualities were made to stand for a new image of nationhood, fashioning, in Bond, the model for a new ‘classless ruling class’. While the earlier, Cold War dimensions of these aspects of Bond’s characterization were not entirely jettisoned, they typically survived only in muted and significantly modified forms. Connery’s biography—the son of a Glaswegian van driver who made good, but solely through his own efforts and self-reliance, fighting his way to the top through a series of dead-end jobs and bit parts—was thus endlessly rehearsed, but usually with the effect of constructing these virtues in opposition to the allegedly morally sapping effects of welfare socialism, as part of a diagnostics of national decline, rather than in direct opposition to communist regimes.⁹

Christopher Brooker has commented on the widespread tendency, in the 1960s, to construe the period as a watershed marking a decisive break with the values of Britain’s traditional Tory governing élite and those of ‘old-fashioned’ socialism.¹⁰ Attributing the responsibility for the vicissitudes of Britain’s post-war history to the contest between these two anachronistic forms of political and cultural leadership, Brooker argues that the tough,

no-nonsense professionalism of a new meritocracy, recognising no loyalties of class or any virtues other than those of ability, was widely regarded as heralding a new way forward for Britain. The key political figures in this respect were Heath and Wilson, the one portrayed as embodying the image of a modernized Toryism and the other, in shedding the shibboleths of socialism, as dragging a reluctant Labour Party into an age dominated by the 'white heat of science and technology'. In thus being grouped together, in spite of their different political philosophies, as exemplifying a critical temper opposed to the dodoism of tradition, Heath and Wilson served as representatives of a new 'spirit of the age'.

More immediately relevant to our concerns here was the operation of this discourse of modernisation in the construction of new types of public heroes and heroines in the media, fashion, advertising and the cinema. Tracing the media's celebration of actors such as Terence Stamp, Michael Caine ('an anti-actor... exactly right for 1965 in his triumphant classlessness', according to a contemporary newspaper) and Connery himself, of novelists such as Len Deighton and John Braine and fashion designers like Mary Quant, Brooker contends that the result was to foster an image of a young, talent-based, classless, untraditional, anti-establishment cultural élite which respected only dedicated professionalism and not birth or privilege. Something of the flavour, and legacy of this period, is captured in John Boorman's introduction to M.F. Callan's *Sean Connery: His Life and Films*:

There is no bitterness about his [Connery's] deprived childhood. He looks upon it as an enriching experience. He suffered the customary humiliations of the British class system, but today moves up and down classes with tolerance and, above all, without modifying his own behaviour... I believe that Connery touches us because he personifies the best qualities that came out of the postwar upheavals in Britain. The reform of education, the busting of the BBC's monopoly, and so on allowed a lot of new talent to flourish... Connery is an archetype of what was best in those times. And that is his power. But like all archetypes, he also represents something timeless. His persona reaches back and touches a tradition in British life. I can best define that by suggesting characters that he could play better than anyone else:

CAPTAIN COOK

TOM FINNEY

THOMAS HARDY

ISAMBARD BRUNEL

W. G. GRACE

KIER HARDIE DRAKE¹¹

The shift in the signifying currency of the figure of Bond which resulted from its insertion in this discourse of modernisation amounted to little less than an ideological *volte face*. Whilst, initially, Bond had supplied a point of fictional reference in relation to which an imperialist sense of nation and nationhood could be symbolically refurbished, he was now made to point in the opposite direction—towards the future rather than the past. Functioning as a figure of modernisation, he became the very model of the tough, abrasive professionalism that was allegedly destined to lead Britain into the modern, no illusions, no holds-barred post-imperialist age, a hero of rupture rather than one of tradition. Or rather, as Boorman suggests, a hero of rupture *and* tradition, heralding a brighter future by recalling the virtues of a doughtier, more valiant and socially inclusive tradition of Englishness which could be opposed to the cloying and restrictive foibles of the Establishment.

This shift in Bond's ideological currency, while chiefly attributable to the first cycle of Bond films, was not limited to these or to their influence on the ways in which the novels were read. It was also discernible in the classificatory and contextualizing practices brought to bear on the 'texts of Bond'. One of the most telling examples of this was provided by the first edition of the *Sunday Times Colour Supplement*, published in 1962. Titled 'A Sharp Look at the Mood of Britain', its purpose was to discern the currents which had allegedly been slumbering within Britain and which, on the brink of awakening, were said to embody a strongly throbbing new sense of national purpose. The 'evidence' for this consisted of six articles on 'people who represent today'—an airline pilot, Jimmy McIlroy of Burnley Football Club, Peter Blake, Alan Little (a sociology lecturer), Sebastian de Ferranti and Mary Quant. Although from different walks of life and backgrounds, these were all portrayed as belonging to the same 'classless class', new leaders, committed to professionalism and efficiency, slicing through tradition like a knife through butter. Alan Little, for example, was described as follows:

Dr Alan Little is 27 and a sociologist, A milkman's son from Liverpool with a brother at Trinity, Cambridge, he is married to a doctor, earns slightly

more than £1,000 a year and lives in a Span house in Beckenham. . . . In his way he is typical of something new asserting itself in the life of Britain's Universities. . . . Men like him spell the death of the comfortable, feline, cloistered world which dons are supposed to inhabit. At Oxford or Cambridge, the donnish ideal that still lingers is that of the inspired amateur. By contrast, Little is a tough and highly dedicated professional. . . . And, during the last few years, men like him have been quietly setting the pattern for a new type of donnish society. . . . They live in a dispersed, classless society of their own and seem to value the universities for the freedom they have to probe society wherever it is most vulnerable.¹²

The final item in the supplement was a new Bond short story, specially written for the occasion, presenting Bond as a figure ranged alongside the exemplary biographies constructed in the preceding items, a mythic encapsulation and 'capping' of the discourse of modernization.

It might, of course, be argued that the Cold War construction of Bond's competitive individualism should be regarded as its 'true' or 'essential' meaning, subsequently distorted in being adapted to a new set of ideological concerns. However, this argument can easily be turned on its head. Like Eco, Palmer discusses the Bond novels as variants of the crime thriller represented by Micky Spillane. Looked at through the prism of the imperialist spy-thriller, however, Bond's combination of programming and improvisation could be read differently, viewed primarily as a means of distinguishing him from the amateurism of the earlier heroes within this tradition—as Palmer himself suggests in his later, fuller study. According to such an account, as we argued in Chapter 4, the accent would fall on Bond's programming on his training schedules, his reliance on technological gadgetry, and so on—rather than on his capacity for improvisation which, in turn, might be regarded as more significant in distinguishing Bond from M rather than from the villain or, alternatively, as no more than a clumsy plot device, an implausible means of enabling the narrative to progress. There is, however, nothing to be gained in representing the relations between these readings such that one is privileged as 'truth' and the other devalued as 'distortion'. The most that can be established is that the novels served as a basis for one set of meanings when hooked into a particular set of ideological and cultural co-ordinates and for another set of readings when uncoupled from those

co-ordinates and connected to new ones.

The same is true of the way the figure of Bond has functioned in relation to ideologies of gender and sexuality. The key 'textual shifters' in this respect have consisted in representations of the relations between Bond and 'the Bond girl'. Apart from varying between the early 1960s and the 1970s, these relations have also been differently constructed according to whether the envisaged readership has been male, female or mixed. Throughout all periods, the position of an implied male reader has predominated, and necessarily so, since any discussion which accepts the terms of reference suggested by the phrase 'the Bond girls' is committed to constructing female gender identities and forms of sexuality in relation to the norms of masculinity supplied by the figure of Bond.

The discourse of 'liberation' which governed representations of 'the Bond girls' in the early 1960s would thus be more accurately described as a discourse of female adjustment. A component of the discourse of modernisation, the new set of identities it constructed for women was defined in relation to the requirements of a liberated male sexuality. Representations of 'the Bond girl', in portraying her as the subject of an independent and free sexuality, served only to make her instantly and always available—but only for men. 'They are women of the nuclear age', Terence Young argued, 'freer and able to make love when they want to without worrying about it'.¹³ From a male point of view, this constituted strategic and selective 'liberation' of women—free only in the areas (bed) and respects (sexuality) that 'liberated man' required. Moreover, the freedom of 'the Bond girl' was conceived as essentially masculine in form; she was, in fact, Bond's *alter ego*, fashioned in his image. As Luciana Paluzzi, who played Fiona in *Thunderball*, described her part: 'Yes rather like a female Bond in a way. She lives like he does. She's 100 per cent feminine—but able to do things men do'.¹⁴

The ideal represented by 'the Bond girl' in this period thus consisted of a harmonious blend of tradition, defined in female terms, and modernity, defined in male terms. Although sexually 'liberated', her sexuality, in being represented as merely the female equivalent of a promiscuous male genital sexuality, was devoid of any disturbing threat of otherness. At the same time, she was still 'essentially feminine', still knew 'her place', a place defined in relation to men and to the phallus.

Here's Connery again, constructing for himself/Bond the role of Big Prick of the phallic order:

'All feminine women are mobile, adaptable. To be temperamentally mobile is to be like a wheel. The person at the hub is fixed, stable. The person at the end of the spoke goes round the hub. Such a person is mobile, adaptable. One of the first reactions of a mobile person is to cross the legs—men as well as women. If you are attracted to someone, you sit like this—he leaned forward, knees apart, hands outstretched.¹⁵

In sum, 'the Bond girl' of the 1960s disconnected female sexuality from traditional female gender identities, preserving these latter virtually intact (although adding to them the requirement of competence in outdoor and physical pursuits) whilst articulating the former to male defined norms of genital sexuality. In essence, her sexuality was the product of a licensed distribution of phallic attributes from men to women. Since the 1970s, this licensed adjustment of traditional norms of female sexuality has given way before an obsessive concern to effect a redistribution of phallic attributes back from women to men. Publicity posters for the Bond film of this period thus typically represented the relations between Bond and 'the Bond girl' in the form of a contest between two rival sources of phallic power and authority.

The poster for *For Your Eyes Only*, read from an anxious male perspective, is a case in point. The foreground is dominated by the buttocks and legs of a girl clad in swimming wear and seen from the rear. She stands with legs astride, the relations between her two feet—clad in high-heeled shoes—and her crotch form a triangle with the crotch forming the apex. Her right hand holds a cross-bow, sprung for action and armed with an arrow, pointing to the ground. Bond is framed within the triangle formed by the girl's legs and crotch. Diminished by the girl's domination of the foreground—his head is level with her knees—Bond is placed directly below the girl's crotch, gun in hand with his gaze directed anxiously not to the viewer or to the girl's face but to her crotch. Outside the triangle formed by the girl's legs, a variety of action scenes from the film are depicted—a car chase, an underwater sequence, etc. The 'adventure' elements of the plot are thus relegated to the margins of the composition, a series of escapades which have a distinctly Boy's Own

flavour compared with the central challenge which Bond has to respond to: restoring the symbolic order of the phallus by 'outgunning' the girl whose phallic power threatens to overwhelm him.

In earlier posters, by contrast, the contest between Bond and the girl was more usually portrayed as in the process of being resolved, or as already having been resolved, in Bond's favour. In the posters for the first cycle of Bond films, the subordination of women takes the form of a fetishization of the body of the hero. Typically, the image of Connery/Bond predominates, his phallic authority represented by fetishistic symbols of male power. The girl or girls are usually portrayed as significantly subservience in relation to him. The poster for *Thunderball* (1965) portrays Connery/Bond kneeling in a wet-suit with one knee up and a loaded spear-gun pointing up vertically from between his thighs. He is surrounded by four women, kneeling or lying before him, a sea of swooning and dependent femininity belittled by the preponderance of his physical presence. The poster for *Live and Let Die* (1973) strikes a more shrill and anxious note. It consists of five playing cards bevilled towards the viewer so that the central one is larger than the rest. The women portrayed in the frames of each of the two cards on either side of the central card are thus perspectively diminished by the figure of Moore/Bond emerging from the central card, breaking its frame, with gun to cheek. A piece of flame-spurting artillery juts from between his thighs with a girl placed astride it.

Such shifts in time in the signifying currency of Bond and of 'the girl' are rather less important than the differences between the ways in which that currency has been manifested, and contested, in 'textual shifters' aimed at different groups of readers. The cult of Bond has thus been explicitly attacked in women's magazines. *Nova* published a hard-hitting article by Mordecai Richler who attributes Bond's popularity to a regressed formation of male sexuality, locked into the pre-Oedipal phase in its inability to recognize the otherness and autonomy of female sexuality.¹⁶ However, this is the only piece of an explicitly analytical and critical nature that we have come across in women's magazines. More typical was the attempt to puncture the illusionism of the Bond films in a 1979 *Woman's Own* feature on 'Glamour Girls in Bondage'. This

consisted mainly of interview material with a series of minor starlets who take the lid off the way the glamour of 'the Bond girls' is carefully contrived and produced, and discuss the personal problems which arise from their surrendering control over their bodies to the studio. The editorial comment mobilises this shared and secret 'inside knowledge' against the gullibility of the male viewer:

As far as giving shape and form to thousands of male fantasies is concerned, the creators of the James Bond films have got it right. . . . The girls in Bondage follow a set formula: it doesn't matter if a girl's blonde or brunette, so long as she displays evenly tanned skin (no knicker elastic marks, please). It's a 'plus' if the script places her on the opposing side, as the tool of the current arch enemy, for then gentleman James can knock her around a little, thus allowing her pneumatic breasts to bob about ever so slightly. . . . And Mr Average Man in the cinema will love them all, too. He will never know of the hours spent in Make-up, the specially designed clothing that went into the making of a Bond girl. Nor will he guess at the other problems arising from the transformation. Everything will be perfect in 007's fantasy land—even if it isn't in real life.¹⁷

However, these are exceptions. More typically, features on 'the Bond girls'—whether in the popular press or in magazines aimed at a mixed or a primarily female readership—have been complicit with the general currency of Bond, underwriting its effects rather than opposing them. In some cases, it is true, contradictory tendencies have coexisted, but usually within a definite order of priority. In 1977, for instance, the *Sunday People*, in an article on the production of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, noted that while 'Bond has become the ultimate sex symbol . . . few of his screen heroines share the same feelings about him'. Britt Ekland, who played Mary Goodnight in *The Man with the Golden Gun*, is thus quoted to the effect that she considered Bond 'a total male chauvinistic pig'. All of this, however, is placed within the context of an exemplary tale which, in the case of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, put 'the Bond girl' in her place even before filming had started:

Barbara Bach, latest of a beautiful line of Bond girls, feels she is a liberated enough creature of the 1970s not to wear a bra. But when she turned up on the set of the new James Bond epic. *The Spy Who Loved Me*, there was

a shock for this russet-haired American beauty. 'Go and buy a bra', she was politely but firmly told.¹⁸

However, even this limited degree of variability is in marked contrast to the part played by the figures of Bond and 'the Bond girl' in the constructions of sexuality in men's magazines. These have exhibited a consistent pattern throughout the various moments of Bond's career, falling into two broad categories. First, articles on the technological gadgetry associated with the Bond films have typically articulated male sexuality to the ability to harness and control the power of machinery. The following commentary on Bond's Aston Martin DBS in *Thunderball*, although taken from a fanzine intended for general circulation, aptly illustrates the ways in which Bondian machinery has thus been 'phallomorphised': 'A twist of the key sets the motor bursting into powerful throbbing life. It is then that you realise that here is a machine that separates the men from the boys.'¹⁹

However, photo-essays of 'the nudest Miss Bond' variety in men's soft-porn magazines have arguably been more influential. 'You will never', according to the *Sunday People*, 'ever see an 007 girl in the nude.' The justification for this view was provided by Cubby Broccoli: 'Nudity would destroy Bond's career. His image must be clean cut. We can't risk offending his massive family audience in any way.'²⁰

A little while later, Barbara Bach was featured in both semi and total nudity in *Playboy*, photographed in various poses of crouching subordination before Moore/Bond, the inevitable gun in hand. Timed to coincide with the release of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, the feature was clearly a promotional stunt, a requirement of Bach's contract rather than a piece of freelance work. *Playboy* has regularly carried features of this type as has *Penthouse* and, in Britain, magazines like *Mayfair*, *Men Only* and *Rex*.²¹ Their function is clear. The film of *For Your Eyes Only* ends as 'the girl', turning to Bond, drops her towel from her shoulders, saying, to Bond: 'For your eyes only.' We look on this scene alternately from behind 'the girl', so that we see Bond looking, and from behind Bond, but with his body shielding that of 'the girl' from our view, so that we may only imagine but do not see what Bond looks at. This is typical of the way the Bond films end, with Bond, in possessing 'the girl', being placed in a position of vision and power withheld from the spectator. The films thus

produce a scopophilic drive which is always stopped tantalisingly short of its object. Photo-essays featuring 'the Bond girls' 'as never seen before' realize the scopophilic expectations engendered by the films in placing the male reader in a position of dominant specularity, inscribing him in the place of Bond in subordinating 'the girl' to his controlling gaze. They complete the work of the narrative in carrying it to a point of visual fulfilment that is impossible within the constraints of the requirements imposed by the family entertainment film.

Nor, according to Michael Denning, is it entirely a coincidence that the first edition of *Playboy* was published in the same year as *Casino Royale* (1953). In his extremely stimulating discussion of the Bond novels, Denning suggests that their role—and that of the Bond phenomenon more generally—in relation to the reformation of sexuality is best understood when they are viewed in relation to the narrative code of the era of mass pornography which *Playboy* inaugurated.²² Denning argues that the Bond novels construct imperialist and racist ideologies by means of a narrative code of tourism through which the strange and exotic locations of peripheral societies are represented as the object of Bond's Western, metropolitan look. Similarly, he argues that 'the girl' is put into place within a new system of sex and gender relations via the narrative code of pornography in which Bond's 'licence to kill' is less important than his 'licence to look'. Just as the narrative code of tourism represents peripheral societies as objects of spectacle, so the narrative code of pornography codes women as the object of a voyeuristic look; these two systems of looking—the western look and the male look—being privileged in being combined with the secret look of the spy. Denning supports this analysis by drawing attention to the many sequences in the Bond novels in which, much as in the films, 'the girl' is made the object of the reader's look through the relay of Bond's look—the appearance of Honeychile Rider on the beach at Crab Keys, for instance.

The details of this analysis are of less concern to us here than the more general point it illustrates. Denning is less concerned to distil the meaning of the Bond novels than he is to understand the ways in which they operated, within a broader set of inter-textual relations, to promote a genuine shift in sexual practices and a reconstitution of sexuality which continued to subordinate and oppress women, but in ways tailored to

the requirements of a mass consumer capitalism. Bond, as bearer of the 'licence to look', becomes the key exemplar of a 'licence to consume'—foreign sights, women, cars, cigarettes and liquor—thus furnishing a model for the reformation of human capacities appropriate to an economic system which requires obedient and diligent consumers as well as willing producers.

In his *Visible Fictions*, John Ellis argues that the function of the various types of film publicity we have considered in this section is to construct a 'narrative image' of the individual film concerned, a promise of a particular type of pleasure which will attract the public to see the film.²³ They may also subtly determine the nature of the film the public sees. Kier Elam has argued that dramatic reviews function in this way:

The review sets up, before the event, a secondary and explicit frame of a 'metalinguistic' kind (i.e. parasitic on the object 'language', the performance) which will determine the decodification to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the credence given by the spectator to the critic's judgment.²⁴

Film publicity posters, fanzine articles, interviews with stars, promotional stunts, etc., function in much the same way. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that the forms of publicity brought to bear on films may vary through time and from one context of reception to another and that, thereby, the 'same text' may be differently constituted as a text-to-be-read as a result of its insertion within differently organized social and ideological relations of reading. Moreover, in the case of the Bond films, it's clearly not possible to analyse the functioning of publicity items of this type solely in terms of their relations to the particular films to which they refer. They necessarily spill over the limits of such a one-to-one relationship in being drawn into an association with the full range of texts implicated in the construction and reconstruction of the figure of Bond. They do not just organise expectations in relation to a particular film but reorganise the signifying currency of Bond so as to inflect its ideological and cultural articulations slightly differently.

To put this point more forcibly, this means not merely that the same Bond film may be liable to be read differently in different contexts of reception. Our argument is not that every 'spectator's interpretation of the text is in effect a new construction of it according to the cultural and

ideological disposition of the subject.²⁵ Rather, it is that what we have called 'textual shifters' function, alongside the other components of a reading formation (systems of inter-textuality, the institutional practices which bear on the formation of reading competencies, etc.), to organise *the relations between texts and readers*. They do not act solely upon the reader to produce different readings of 'the same text' but also act upon the text, shifting its very signifying potential so that it is no longer what it once was because, in terms of its cultural location, it is no longer where it once was. As Jan Mukarovsky puts the point:

[The] work of art itself is not a constant. Every shift in time and space and social surroundings alter the existing artistic tradition through whose prism the work of art is observed, and as a result of such changes that aesthetic object also changes . . . And even, for example, when a certain work in two chronologically separate periods is evaluated affirmatively and equally, the aesthetic object being evaluated is a different one in each case, and hence, in some sense is a different work.²⁶

Of course, consideration of such 'textual shifters' is not, in itself a sufficient account of 'the role of the reader' or a substitute for it. None the less, their role in structuring the social and ideological relations of reading—producing texts for readers and readers for texts—is of considerable importance. Much previous debate on the question of reading has deadlocked on the opposition between the view of the text as dictating its readings and the view that readers are able to mobilise cultural resources which enable them to read against the grain of the text or to negotiate its meanings in particular ways. Our purpose has been to displace the terms of this dispute by suggesting that neither approach takes sufficient account of the cultural and ideological forces which organise and reorganise the network of inter-textual relations within which texts are inserted as texts-to-be-read in certain ways by reading subjects organised to read in certain ways. The relations between texts and readers, we have suggested, are always profoundly mediated by the discursive and inter-textual determinations which, operating on both, structure the domain of their encounter so as to produce, always in specific and variable forms, texts and readers as the mutual supports of one another.

The functioning of discourses of culture provides an especially vivid example of the ways in which such determinations operate, whilst also raising some more general questions concerning the effects of the forms of classification under which textual phenomena are put into circulation.

BOND AND CULTURE

A common ingredient in many formulations of the relations between high and popular culture is the supposition that the former is made up of texts which require a specific cultural competence in order to be fully understood, whereas the latter is comprised of texts which, requiring no such competence, are accessible to everyone. Recent criticisms of this view have argued against its essentialising tendency, suggesting that the distinction between high and popular culture is primarily a representational one—a distinction between texts which are *represented* as requiring such a specific competence and those which are *not* so represented, rather than one between texts which *do* or *do not* require such a competence in some intrinsic or essential way. This directs attention to the effects of the classificatory and institutional practices through which the relations between texts are organised and represented, especially in being differentially valorised.

Pierre Bourdieu and J. C. Passeron, for example, suggest that texts which are so classified and valorised function as tokens of exchange within a 'game of culture', which serves as a means of both transmitting privilege from generation to generation and legitimating the resulting perpetuation of class differences in representing it as the consequence of unequally distributed natural aptitudes. In rewarding those who exhibit the special competence which such texts are represented as requiring, the education system operates in collusion with broader mechanisms of class reproduction to the degree that these organise the conditions of access to such special competence. The education system thus passes off the trick of appearing to reward and measure intelligence and ability whereas, in valorising a specific set of cultural competences above others, it merely exchanges qualifications with those who, by virtue of their class background, have acquired the appropriate tokens of culture to enter into the educational/exchange relationship. The valorisation of texts thus

serves as a means of valorising persons—establishing their economic currency by cultural means—and, thereby, of separating them for, and justifying, their largely preordained economic destinies.

Given that the stress here is placed on the competences which particular texts are *represented* as requiring, it is clear that, in principle, any text may, if appropriately classified, function as a part of such a system of exchanges. Indeed, Bourdieu and Passeron argue that, in the case of Parisian university students, knowledgeability of *all* forms of culture, including those classified as popular, serves as a means of distinguishing students of bourgeois origin from those of working-class or even petit-bourgeois origin, although less within the official university culture than within the unofficial student milieu. 'In every area of culture in which it is measured,' they write, '— be it the theatre, music, painting, jazz, or the cinema—students have richer and more extensive knowledge the higher their social origin.'²⁷ It is thus not only in relation to texts officially classified and valorised as high culture that relations of cultural superiority/inferiority may be produced and reproduced. Relations of a similar kind may also be produced in relation to texts classified as popular which, although generally available to be read in a 'naive' way, may, via the application of particular reading norms, be constituted to be read as both requiring and testifying to a superior cultural competence. This, in turn, suggests that the forms of cultural stratification that may be produced in relation to textual phenomena are more complex and varied, less cut and dried, than is usually supposed.

Although it is primarily as popular texts that the 'texts of Bond' have been classified, produced and circulated, they have also, as we have seen, been differently constituted within particular contexts of reception. This has been particularly true of Fleming's novels which, on occasion, have been organised to be read along culturally stratified lines. The attempt to produce a 'knowing reader'—largely undertaken in the pages of the *Spectator*, the *London Magazine*, and the like—thus constituted an attempt to organise reading in such a way that pleasure could be aestheticised and the possession of 'cultural capital' be confirmed in the superior vantage point afforded in relation to merely 'vulgar readings', which failed to see beneath the surface level violence, sexuality and snobbery of the novels to appreciate their redeeming literary qualities. Whilst this putative literari-

sation of the Bond novels has been an admittedly marginal component in the history of the Bond phenomenon, it is none the less of considerable interest in the light it throws on the contrasting ways in which texts may be classified and on the effects of their classification.

The key issues here centre on the ways in which the figure of Fleming has been constructed and made to stand in relation to the Bond novels written by Fleming. In the 'textual shifters' bearing most directly on the organisation of popular reading, the figure of Fleming has been constructed in the same way as those of Connery and Moore: that is, as a 'real life' site for the expanded reproduction of the figure of Bond. One of the most telling examples of this is provided by an article in *For Bond Lovers Only*. Allegedly an eye-witness account of a meeting between Ian Fleming and Len Deighton, these writers are represented as entirely the *alter egos* of the fictional heroes they respectively produced. Witness the following exchange, initiated by Fleming:

'Ever been to Tokyo?'

'Yes,' said Deighton.

'Fly?'

'BOAC,' said Deighton.

'Pleasant?'

'I was a steward,' said Deighton.

Again that circling, first-round silence. 'I have a rotten feeling,' Deighton said moodily, 'that my car's going to be towed away.'

'What do you drive, old boy?' asked Fleming, perhaps sensing a common bond in cars.

'A beaten-up Volkswagen, actually,' said Deighton, adding brightly, 'but I've installed a telephone. Yours?'

'I've just got one of those new Studebaker Avantes. Nought to 60 in 4.5 seconds. 175 miles an hour with 4 passengers up. Supercharged, of course. I must say I adore it,' said Fleming.²⁸

This contrasts markedly with the ways in which the figure of Fleming has been constructed within the discourses of critics of varying tendencies. Relating a conversation with a young relative who, entertaining literary ambitions, described himself as an author, Fleming recalled that he replied: 'Well, I describe myself as a Writer. There are authors and artists

and then again there are writers and painters.²⁹ Critical representations of Fleming have tended to concur. Whilst relating the Bond novels to Fleming as their extra-textual origin and the source of their meaning, the ways in which such relations have been constructed have differed from those in evidence in critical discourses where the author function is more fully developed. Perhaps the most important of the functions which Foucault attributes to the category of the author is that of supplying a means of neutralising the apparent contradictions within a set of texts:

Governing this function is the belief that there must be—at a particular level of an author's thought, of his conscious or unconscious desire—a point where contradictions are resolved, where the incompatible elements can be shown to relate to one another and to cohere around a fundamental and originating source.³⁰

It has been this demand for a unity and consistency of meaning that has been most conspicuously lacking in critical discussions of the Bond novels, resulting in a different articulation of the relations between life and work than those which prevail when it is present. In the latter case, criticism seeks to tie life, work and meaning into an indissoluble unity—the whole life, the whole work and a whole meaning. Most critical discussions of the Bond novels, by contrast, have sought to connect life and work only associatively, via homology at the level of their respective parts—the similarities between Fleming's views, tastes and preferences and those of Bond, for example—rather than seeking to knit the two together as unities. There's another difference, too. We have argued elsewhere that criticism, in order to value a text, must also value the life of its author, 'that a text that is valuable for life should also be seen to be the product of a valuable life'.³¹ Where a set of texts grouped under the name of a writer are denied the status, unity and consistency of an authorial *oeuvre*, this principle may operate in reverse. In such cases, as sign and justification of their mutual lack of value, life may be related to the work by the 'bad side' only. The most noted example of this construction of Fleming is the discussion of the Bond novels in David Holbrook's *The Masks of Hate*.³² Deploring the Bond novels as dehumanising—as 'gilded faeces'—Holbrook interprets what he regards as their most unattractive aspects as the product of a series of supposed psychological disorders or personality deficiencies on the part of Fleming.

In short, critical reactions to Fleming's Bond novels have fallen mainly within two broad categories. They have either taken the form of a warning against reading, seeking to produce a 'non-reader' in stressing the inferior moral or artistic qualities of the novels, or, in reacting against this tendency, and somewhat defensively, they have sought to produce a 'knowing reader', placed above harm in being recruited as the subject of a 'superior reading' in which the novels function as tokens of exchange in a game of cultural connoisseurship between writer and reader.

However, there have also been attempts to effect a full-blooded literarisation of the Bond novels; to construe them not merely as permissibly readable but as worthwhile reading. This has involved attributing to Fleming the full range of functions Foucault assigns to an author in the case of culturally valorised texts. Moreover, the means by which this putative literarisation of the Bond novels has been attempted are indistinguishable from those involved in the case of texts which have been successfully literarised. Ian Hunter has argued that the constitution of a text as literary is effected by the application of a specific set of rules of reading which function 'not to reveal a hidden meaning but rather to alter the public deployment of a text and to transmit definite criteria of textual recognition in the form of a practice of commentary'.³³ 'Literariness', thus construed, is not a property which texts have but a particular status and mode of cultural action that is produced for them by means of the classificatory and reading practices brought to bear on them.

In an article concerned with similar issues, David Saunders has shown how 'the same text' may be classified in different ways in different regions of a society's legal and ideological apparatuses. He further shows how the constitution of a text as 'literature' may require that literary principles of classification and rules of reading establish their pertinence by displacing the influence of contesting ones. He thus examines the contending rules of evidence brought into play in the prosecution of Penguin Books, under the Obscene Publications Act, 1959, for its publication of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. An obscene publication or literature? The very fact of the trial is testimony to the fact that, at the time, the text was ambiguously installed between these two categories, its 'place' unsettled. Penguin's successful defence and the resultant classification of the text as 'literary', Saunders argues, was due to the fact that legal

pertinence was accorded to literary rules of reading invoking criteria of artistic merit and authorial intention even though these had no legal force within the rules of evidence provided for by the Obscene Publications Act. It is worth noting that, according to Saunders, the testimony of the 'expert witnesses' called by the defense (Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, for instance) rescued Lawrence for literature by means of four procedures for the placement of texts in the class of literary works:

the representation of an authorial intention; the representation of an authorial corpus or *oeuvre* in which the text was placed; the performance of allegorical readings, represented as grounded in expert knowledge of an authorial intention; and the representation of a literary tradition in which the text was placed.³⁴

These are exactly the procedures which Anne Boyd deploys in *The Devil with James Bond*. Approaching the Bond novels from an existential-cum-Christian perspective, she argues that they constitute 'a deliberate analysis of the relationship between the "demonic" and individual responsibility' and sees, in Bond, 'one of the seven greatest legendary champions of Christendom', a defender of 'justice and humanity'.³⁵

Construing Bond as a modern-day St George sent to do battle with the dragon (the villain), Boyd interprets the contest between Bond and the villain as an allegory of man's struggle against the seven deadly sins, and particularly against the sin of sloth or *accidie*, the capital sin in its 'refusal of life and joy'.³⁶ In short, she constitutes the novels as a medium for the transmission of a set of significant moral and cultural values from Fleming, as author, to the reader. She does so by means of a particular application of the four protocols of reading outlined above:

1. Boyd's comparison of Bond with St George is based on analogically derived principles of plot analysis. The Bond novels are likened to the story of St George because their plot elements are similar: in both cases, the hero rescues a damsel in distress and rids the world of a monster (the dragon/the villain) which threatens it with destruction. Furthermore, a number of explicit references to the story of St George suggest, Boyd argues, that Fleming intended the reader to compare the two. In *You Only Live Twice*, for example, the mission Tiger Tanaka entrusts to Bond is to 'enter this Castle of Death and

2. Boyd justifies reading the Bond novels allegorically by marshalling textual evidence to support her contention that the villains stand for the 'dragons of inner life', a series of inner temptations externalised in the contest between Bond and the villain. Goldfinger thus embodies the sin of avarice, Blofeld—in seeking the dignity of noble ancestry—those of snobbery and vanity, Emilio Largo—who made a 'fetish of inertia'—that of sloth, and so on. Boyd further argues that a constant theme runs through all the novels, connecting them into a coherent cycle within which there is developed a coherent philosophy. This consists in Bond's ongoing inner struggle against the sin of sloth as he fights off the 'dog-days', the slough of despondency into which he slips during his periodic bouts of inactivity between missions, to engage, once again, in life affirming activity.
3. The broader discursive strategies which organise Boyd's reading are supplied by the frameworks of inter-textual reference within which she locates the Bond novels. These operate along both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' axes. Vertically, she places the Bond novels within a classical tradition, comparing them to the works of Bunyan, Wordsworth, Ruskin and Spenser whilst likening Bond himself to a series of earlier mythological heroes—Perseus, Hercules, David, even Christ. Horizontally, she compares the Bond novels to contemporary spy-thrillers, a genre which she theorises—and is by no means alone in doing so—as a fictive means for exploring the identity problems of the individual in mass society. The key to this reading of the spy-thriller is provided by Boyd's interpretation of the 'blackout sequence' in which the secret agent loses consciousness only to recover revitalised, a renewed subject of action fully committed to seeing his mission through to the end no matter what the cost. Boyd construes this 'blackout sequence' as a rite of transition in which the hero crosses an existential threshold, passing through death (the death of his inertia, passivity and lassitude) into new life, a life lived at the limits. In this, she argues, it represents an analogue for the 'culture shock' experienced by modern man as a result of the 'cosmic insult' of the Copernican revolution, the 'psychological insult' of Freud and the 'cultural insult' of Marx, Tönnies, Durkheim and Simmel. All these,

in depicting man as determined, are alleged to have created a modern man 'who has been rendered senseless, lost his image of himself and of his God; and who is now reawakening, trying to reorient himself spatially, temporally, and morally'.³⁷ The spy-thriller represents this moment of reawakening and produces, in its hero, a model for it. The secret agent, having experienced the 'culture shock' of modern times and come out of it to maintain a sense of identity, integrity and purpose, points towards 'a positive image of man who is able to act creatively and responsibly in a world come of age'.³⁸ Bond, in consistently triumphing over the 'dog-days', is simply the most life-affirming secret agent of them all.

4. Finally, Boyd seeks an authorial warrant for her reading in the intentions of Fleming. She deploys three strategies in doing so. First, she cites remarks attributed to Fleming which suggest a degree of coincidence between her reading and Fleming's conscious purpose. For example: 'But Bond is really a latter-day St. George. He does kill wicked dragons after all.'³⁹ Or, as Fleming once said of Bond: 'He's like Bunyan's Pilgrim, he has to get through the Slough of Despond before he gets to the prize that is really worth having.'⁴⁰ Secondly, Boyd excerpts from Fleming's journalistic writings passages which suggest that the concerns she attributes to the novels were a continuing preoccupation of Fleming's. Fleming's foreword to *The Seven Deadly Sins*—a collection of essays instigated by Fleming—is used in this way. Reviewing the seven ancient deadly sins, Fleming writes that 'only sloth in its extreme form of *accidie*, which is a form of spiritual suicide and a refusal of joy... has my wholehearted condemnation'—a passage which is made to stand behind Bond's views in *From Russia, With Love*: 'Just as, in at least one religion, *accidie* is the first of the cardinal sins, so boredom, and particularly the incredible circumstance of waking up bored, was the only vice Bond utterly condemned' (p. 78).

Perhaps most distinctively, Boyd deals with those statements attributed to Fleming which would seem to gainsay not only the ethical purposes she attributes to him but any serious purpose whatsoever—'I write for warm-blooded hetero-sexuals in railway trains, aeroplanes and beds; for example—in construing these as smokescreens; part of a conscious

attempt by Fleming to conceal his moral didacticism so that his purpose, in being hidden, might work all the more effectively with a mass readership.

None of this, of course, is to endorse Boyd's reading. But it is a possible reading and, moreover, one produced by quite conventional means. Indeed, Boyd presents her analysis as an attempt to rescue the Bond novels from the history of their previous misunderstanding in uncovering their true but previously hidden meaning. One may argue that Boyd fails to observe certain critical procedures, just as one may query her interpretation of the spy-thriller genre, cite contradictory evidence from the Bond novels and Fleming's other writings, and so on. To do so would be to invoke another set of rules for reading and, within those rules, to produce the Bond novels as objects for analysis in a different way. In effect, it would be to make a counterbid for the discursive organisation of the text—reader encounter by attempting to yoke reading on to a different set of inter-textual, ideological and cultural co-ordinates. However, there would be no point within such an analysis at which the discursive and inter-textual wrappings placed around the Bond novels might be peeled away to permit any claims to be made on the basis of a supposedly unfettered access to those novels 'in themselves'.

More to the point, the influence of Boyd's reading cannot be gainsaid by referring it to another set of reading norms in relation to which it is found wanting. It's difficult, now, to determine either the extent or type of influence exerted by Boyd's study. Clearly, it has been relatively marginal. On the other hand, considering that it has been published in three separate editions, it seems likely to have played some role in enabling the Bond novels to be used as 'pre-texts' for the development of moralising or theologically inclined pedagogies. Her views were thus widely circulated in Catholic educational circles in Australia in being summarised and further elaborated by a Father Malone in the *Compass Theological Review*. There is, indeed, a wide and considerably developed body of Catholic writing which has articulated virtually the entire galaxy of popular and super-heroes to the Christian cause.⁴¹ Whatever its precise impact, Boyd's reading and the uses to which it has been put constitute determinations which would have to be taken into account within any approach which aimed to 'net' the total range of cultural and ideological

traffic that has been conducted around the 'texts of Bond' in the light of the history of their rereadings and rewritings.

Nor is it only the Bond novels that have led a double life in being installed simultaneously in 'popular' and 'literary' reading formations. The same has been true of the films, although probably to a lesser extent and in ways that cannot be so readily chronicled. In their study of *Doctor Who*, John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado show how the Tom Baker episodes of the series tended to divide the audience. Baker's camp style tended to alienate committed fans whilst, together with other modifications to the series format, it proved popular with audiences whose education equipped them with the competence to read the Baker episodes as a parodic send-up of the science fiction genre or, in some quarters, as a modernist critique of realism. In this case, such readings were provided for in the process of production through the deployment of a series of allusions—to classical mythology and other science fiction texts—as part of an attempt to create a double-layered text which would recruit a new, sophisticated audience without losing the series' regular viewers. The history of the cinema likewise affords many examples of films achieving cult status without this having been in any way planned for in the process of production: *Casablanca*, for example.⁴² This has not yet happened with the Bond films, although they did recruit a cult following from students on campuses across Europe and North America when they were first released in the 1960s. A cult audience was also recruited when the National Film Theatre ran a season of Bond films in 1980. Of all the films shown, George Lazenby's performance as Bond in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, the least successful Bond film in commercial terms, was the only one to be singled out for special appreciation: it received a standing ovation as the audience applauded itself for having 'seen' what the mass audience had 'missed'.

TEXTS IN HISTORY

We have indicated, at various points in this study, that a part of our interest in 'the Bond phenomenon' consists in the degree to which its analysis requires that methods be used which differ from and call into question the more usual ways in which texts are grouped into sets in being constituted as objects of analysis. A 'limit case', its value is that of highlighting a series of problems concerning the purposes of textual

analysis and the means by which they should be pursued. We have thus, in approaching the various individual 'texts of Bond', stressed the degree to which these have always been variably produced—not as 'the same text' but as different 'texts-to-be-read'—as a result of their insertion within different regimes of inter-textuality. Further, we have suggested that it is not possible to abstract any of the individual texts of Bond from the mobile and changing systems of inter-textual relationships through which their reading has been organised in order to constitute a space in which such texts might be stabilised as possible objects of knowledge 'in themselves'.

This is to query the way in which the relations between texts and their readings are normally conceived. Virtually without exception, all approaches to this question have assumed that the intra-textual and the extra-textual determinations of reading can be specified separately.⁴³ Moreover, they have assumed that the former can be specified *first*—that is, that the processes through which a text organises its reading can be specified independently of the variable extra-textual determinations which may bear in upon it. This entails that these latter determinations are construed as secondary phenomena which cannot touch or modify a text's essential properties. This is true even of the encoding/decoding model, perhaps the most socially oriented approach to the question of reading. We have already touched on the limitations of this approach in Chapter 3. At root, however, they are traceable to their dependency on a set of founding assumptions derived from Saussurean linguistics. The study of reading, within the encoding/decoding model, stands in relation to the study of texts much as, within Saussure's dichotomous division of the study of language, the study of *parole* stands in relation to the study of *langue*. The view that the 'fixed codes' of a text should be analysed *first*, both before consideration of the reading practices of different subjects and as a means of establishing *what it is* that is variably decoded by such subjects, effects an ordering of the relations between the objective and the subjective, the necessary and the contingent, across the relations between texts and readers that is analogous to their distribution across the relations between *langue* and *parole*. To the text, as to readers, there belong all those systematic properties—the 'fixed codes'—which inform its objective structure. The study of reading, by contrast, like that of

parole, is concerned with the subjective and contingent determinations which, so to speak, flow into the text (but without affecting its fixed properties) through the practice of the reader.

Clearly, this model holds good only so long as the linguistic paradigm on which it is based is not itself called into question. According to Michel Pêcheux, however, the *langue/parole* couplet has constituted a major impediment to the development of an adequately social approach to the analysis of the mechanisms whereby meaning is produced within and in relation to language. Echoing Volosinov's earlier criticisms of Saussure,⁴⁴ Pêcheux contends that it is not possible to constitute *langue* as a system of rules governing the meaning of individual linguistic elements by virtue of the relationships of difference, similarity and substitutability it establishes between them. The unity of *langue*, he argues, is only tendential, incompletely achieved, in the sense that it is always riven by different, socially determined discursive formations—that is, different principles of organising the relationships of difference, similarity and substitutability which govern the meaning of individual linguistic elements—which serve as the basis for the initiation of different discursive processes within and in relation to language. Meaning, he says, exists and is produced only within such discursive formations. There is no place outside or behind them, no neutral linguistic domain such as that proposed by the concept of *langue*, within which meaning can be said to be operative. 'A meaning effect,' as Pêcheux puts it, 'does not pre-exist the discursive formation in which it is constituted.'⁴⁵

In like manner, we have suggested, texts are productive of meaning only within particular and determinate reading formations—a concept we have ventured as a means of specifying the inter-textual and discursive conditions which mould and configure the text-reader encounter. This is not, we should stress, so much a question of reducing text to context as an attempt to rethink the concept of context such that, ultimately, neither text nor context are conceivable as entities separable from one another. Terry Eagleton has argued against such a construction of the relations between a text and the context of its production in arguing that analysis must show how a text bears within it the impress of its conditions of production rather than such conditions being conceived as 'the sociological outworks of the text'.⁴⁶ The same demand has not been made of the

relations between texts and the contexts of their reception. According to most formulations, such contexts are conceived as social; that is, as sets of extra-discursive and inter-textual determinations to which a text is related as an external backdrop or set of reading conditions. The concept of reading formation, by contrast, is an attempt to think contexts of reception as sets of discursive and inter-textual determinations which, in operating on both texts and readers, mediate the relations between them and provide the mechanisms through which they can productively interact.

As such, these determinations bear in upon a text not just externally, from the outside in, but internally, shaping it—in the historically concrete forms in which it is available as a text-to-be-read—from the inside out. According to such a view, there is no fixed boundary between the extra-textual and the intra-textual which prevents the former from pressing in upon the latter and reorganising it. The intra-textual, in effect, is always the product of a definite set of inter-textual relations. Clearly, this is to undermine conventional conceptions of texts, readers and contexts as separable elements, fixed in their relations to one another, in suggesting that they are variable functions within a discursively ordered set of relations. Different reading formations, that is to say, produce their own texts, their own readers and their own contexts, not to mention, to complete the list, their own authors.

In short, any appeal to the authority of 'the text itself' should be recognised for what it is: a rhetorical device used to support a particular intervention within what Frederic Jameson calls the 'Homeric battlefield' of interpretation.⁴⁷ Such appeals are inherently paradoxical in their functioning in that the claim to have uncovered the true but previously hidden meaning of 'the text itself' invariably forms a part of a political bid to reorganise reading by pinning it down to a new set of inter-textual, ideological and cultural co-ordinates. While the political and ideological use—value of such claims may be considerable, they are, from a theoretical point of view, of zero, indeed minus value. They do not enable any work to be undertaken that could not otherwise be undertaken, and they constitute a serious impediment to work that urgently needs to be done.

We place particular stress on this last point. It is not our purpose to query the concept of 'the text itself' in the interests of a fashionable 'anything goes, everything is permissible' relativism tacked on to the coat-

tails of Derrida's project of deconstruction.⁴⁸ Our contention is not that all possible knowledges of 'the text' are of equal value but that 'the text', as such, is an impossible object of knowledge. Nor, by this, do we intend a neo-Kantian position according to which 'the text' is posited as an unknowable *ding an sich*. Our argument is not that 'the text itself' is somehow 'there' (wherever that might be) but unknowable, but that there is no 'there' in which its existence might be posited other than the varying reading formations through which its actual history is modulated, and that, therefore, to seek to produce a knowledge of it is to chase a chimera. In all of this, we are not denying the objective material existence of *texts*, as if these were products of our imaginations. However, as we have been at pains to point out in the case of the 'texts of Bond', texts are different even when they appear to be the same—different in their material forms and in the way their external relations to other texts and practices are ordered. Rather, our argument is directed against the notion, most succinctly expressed by F. R. Leavis, that there is, lodged somewhere behind the diverse forms in which texts are materially produced, the social relations in which they are inscribed and the interpretative horizons in which they are embedded, a shadowy, ideal text which is the source of a true meaning.⁴⁹

It is this view of 'the text itself', massively influential within Marxist criticism too, which must be jettisoned in the interests of developing a consistently historical and materialist approach to the study of the processes whereby meanings are produced in relation to textual phenomena. It is necessary, in order to analyse the functioning of texts in the historically varying forms of their social use and inscription, to refuse the specious concreteness of the text as given, 'the text on one's desk', whose seductive facticity is rather like that of the commodity. Marx, introducing his critique of commodity fetishism, argued that:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it . . . But, so soon as it steps forward as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent.⁵⁰

Much the same is true of texts. So long as a text is conceived as a 'text in use', there is nothing mysterious about it. We are dealing here with a

set of material notations taking an objectively verifiable form and circulating within social and cultural relations of a determinable kind. As soon as an attempt is made to go beyond such 'texts in use' to locate 'the text itself' that is ideally present in all such uses, then, indeed, 'the text' becomes a transcendent entity abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. And for much the same reason as a commodity:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relations of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the product of their labour.⁵¹

By analogy, 'the text itself' is a mysterious thing because, in it, the social character of its resignification—of its incessant rewritings and reinscriptions in history—assumes the form of an objective character stamped on the product of that labour. Ultimately, to subscribe to such a view of the text is to be taken in by the history—the whole ensemble of material, social and ideological relations—which, in conditioning the given form of the text, simultaneously occludes itself.

None of this, of course, is to oppose the practice of arguing for certain readings and against others. To the contrary, this is necessarily the sharp end of any politically concerned critical practice. However, the inherently relational nature of such practices should be recognised. To argue for certain readings and against others is to attempt to clear a space within which the former can become active; it is to mount a bid to shift the horizons of inter-textuality within which the texts concerned are read and, thereby, to modify their signifying function. It is, in short, an attempt to *make texts mean* some things and not others by organising texts, readers and contexts into a particular configuration. Of course, it may be necessary to represent such readings as textually 'more adequate' than the contending readings whose social power they seek to displace. It is also necessary that such readings should *be* more adequate—but more adequate in relation to the text as a historically constituted object rather than as a metaphysical essence. Real difficulties arise, however, when 'the text' which is mobilised as a rhetorical device at the level of criticism is granted, theoretically, an ontological—epistemological value such that it is allowed to arbitrate between readings, qualifying some and disqualifying others.

Most obviously, this would entail an idealist and historicist approach to the history of reading. It would be idealist in the sense that it would have to posit, as the standpoint from which to broach the history of reading, a position which was represented as standing outside, above and beyond that history in rescuing the text from its previous misunderstandings, restoring to it the neglected, forgotten or hitherto unseen—but none the less essential—properties brought to light only by criticism's most recent endeavours. Such a history of reading could account for earlier readings only by correcting them, situating them as one-sided, inadequate or incomplete when measured against the criteria for reading (achieved or anticipated) provided by a valid knowledge of 'the text itself'. It would also be teleological, as Jameson is bold enough to make explicit in his *The Political Unconscious*, in the sense that each reading would thus have to be assigned its place in relation to an anticipated 'final reading' to be reached when, once the 'text of History' has been completed, the meaning of each text within it will finally become transparent. The idealism of such an approach is apparent. The text whose readings are thus understood as comprising a history of (relative) incomprehension is that text which achieves a full and adequate relationship to itself only when the 'text of History' has been fully realised. It is an ideal text which assumes a social and material form which is fully adequate to itself only at the end of History pending which it exists only as a shadowy presence, an ideal form lodged behind the diverse social, material and ideological relations which regulate the real history of its reading.

Nor, finally, to complete our list of possible objections, do our criticisms imply that all readings have the same cultural weight or that any old reading can come along, parachute itself into the arena of readings and secure a space for itself. Many approaches in reception theory and reader-response criticism have seemed vulnerable to the charge of endorsing an anything-goes voluntarism. The defence against this has usually been worked through in terms of the problem of determinacy: that is, of identifying some determinate properties within the text which do act as an unmediated given, a check on the interpretative process which precludes readings from being either totally random or infinitely varied. The problem is real although, in our view, its resolution requires that attention be paid to texts as and within social relations

rather than to 'the text' as an isolated structure. Texts are encountered as a resisting force; they *do* have to be taken into account as a constraining factor which has to be reckoned with. But this is to speak of *texts* and not 'the text', of material entities which carry the history of their rereadings and rewritings with them, transmitted—rarely without discontinuities, but also rarely without continuities—from one context of reception to another through the reading formations and institutional apparatuses which organise and reorganise the social and ideological relations of reading. It is for these historical, rather than for essentialist reasons that, in practice, apart from moments of profound rupture which significantly revolutionise the horizon of reading possibilities, the readings of a text cluster around a limited set of options.

Limited, but not closed: paradoxically, while Marxist criticism has, at least implicitly, always acknowledged this in one area of its practice, it has simultaneously denied it in others. We have in mind here the contrasting orientations it has exhibited in relation, on the one hand, to texts classified as 'literary' or as 'high culture', and, on the other, to texts classified as 'popular' or, more perjoratively, as 'mass' or 'pulp' fiction. With regard to the former, Marxist criticism has always functioned as an active, transformative practice—making texts mean differently in and for the present by rewriting their relations to history. In this—since, in doing so, it has had to argue against bourgeois constructions and appropriations of the 'great tradition'—it has thus implicitly recognised the 'movability' of texts; that is, the fact that they may be plucked from the organisation of reading expectations produced by one set of inter-discursive and inter-textual relations and installed in another such set of relations with different political consequences. This contrasts markedly with the essentially passive orientation that most Marxist critics have adopted in relation to popular texts, usually regarded as mere vehicles for the transmission of dominant ideology and as being somehow inert, impossible to mobilise in any way. As a consequence, analysis of such texts has largely taken the form of attempts to expose their effects or lay bare their mechanisms so as to reveal their repressive operations, as if these were given and fixed independently of the way in which the reading of such texts may be differently organised in different reading formations. The upshot of this has been that Marxist criticism has been unable to intervene in this area of reading except

negatively, by means of a series of warnings—either ‘Don’t read this stuff’, or ‘Danger. Reading this stuff may damage your ideological well-being’. Not only are such gestures Canute-like given the prevailing distribution of reading habits; they block off in advance the development of critical strategies which may engage with popular reading without hectoring the reader as a subject whose tastes need to be reformed.

It is for these reasons, whilst far from wishing to reclaim the ‘texts of Bond’ as ‘progressive’ or, indeed, to literarise them, that we have been concerned to stress the *historical variability* of the cultural and ideological business that has been conducted around, through and by means of those texts. Nor has this traffic been all one way. To suppose that it has is a consequence of *limiting attention to the spaces and possibilities for reading produced within culturally dominant reading formations*. The explanation for Bond’s popularity consists not only in the range of cultural and ideological concerns that have been condensed and articulated in relation to the figure of Bond but also in the ambivalent and sometimes contradictory ways in which the relations between these have been organised within different reading formations.

NOTES

1. ‘The Bond Girls’, in *James Bond in Thunderball* (not paginated).
2. K. Passingham, ‘The Gorgeous Girls of James Bond’, *TV Times*, 23 October 1975, p. 27.
3. See our discussion of Foucault in Chapter 3, pp. 46–7.
4. I. Fleming, ‘How to write a Thriller’, *Books and Bookmen*, May 1963, p. 14.
5. See P. Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, and L. Althusser, ‘A Letter on Art’, in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, New Left Books, London, 1971.
6. A. Kuhn, *Women’s Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1982, p. 92.
7. J. Palmer, ‘Thrillers: The Deviant Behind the Consensus’, in I. Taylor and J. Taylor (eds), *Politics and Deviance*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 142. See also, for a more extended analysis along similar lines, J. Palmer, *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*, Edward Arnold, London, 1979.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
9. See, for example, Connery’s *Playboy* interview discussed in Chapter 3 and D. Lewin, ‘Sean Connery the Screen’s James Bond’, in *James Bond in*

Thunderball.

10. See C. Brooker, *The Neophiliacs: A Study in the Revolution in English life in the Fifties and Sixties*, Collins, London, 1969.
11. See M. F. Callan, *Sean Connery: His Life and Films*, W. H. Allen, London, pp. 1–2.
12. *Sunday Times Colour Supplement*, no. 1, 4 February, 1962, p. 18.
13. Cited in ‘What happened to the Bond girls?’ *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, September 1978, p. 10.
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