RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP IN FILM STUDIES

4AAAS110
Semester 1, 2009-2010
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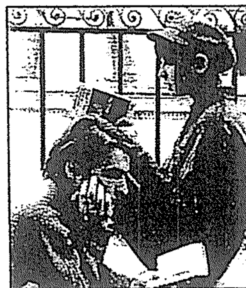
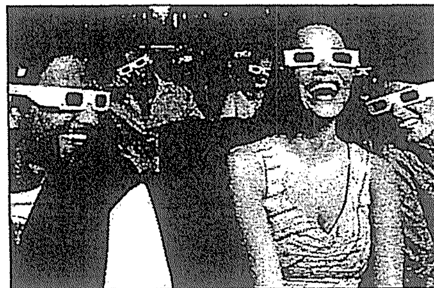
COURSE READER

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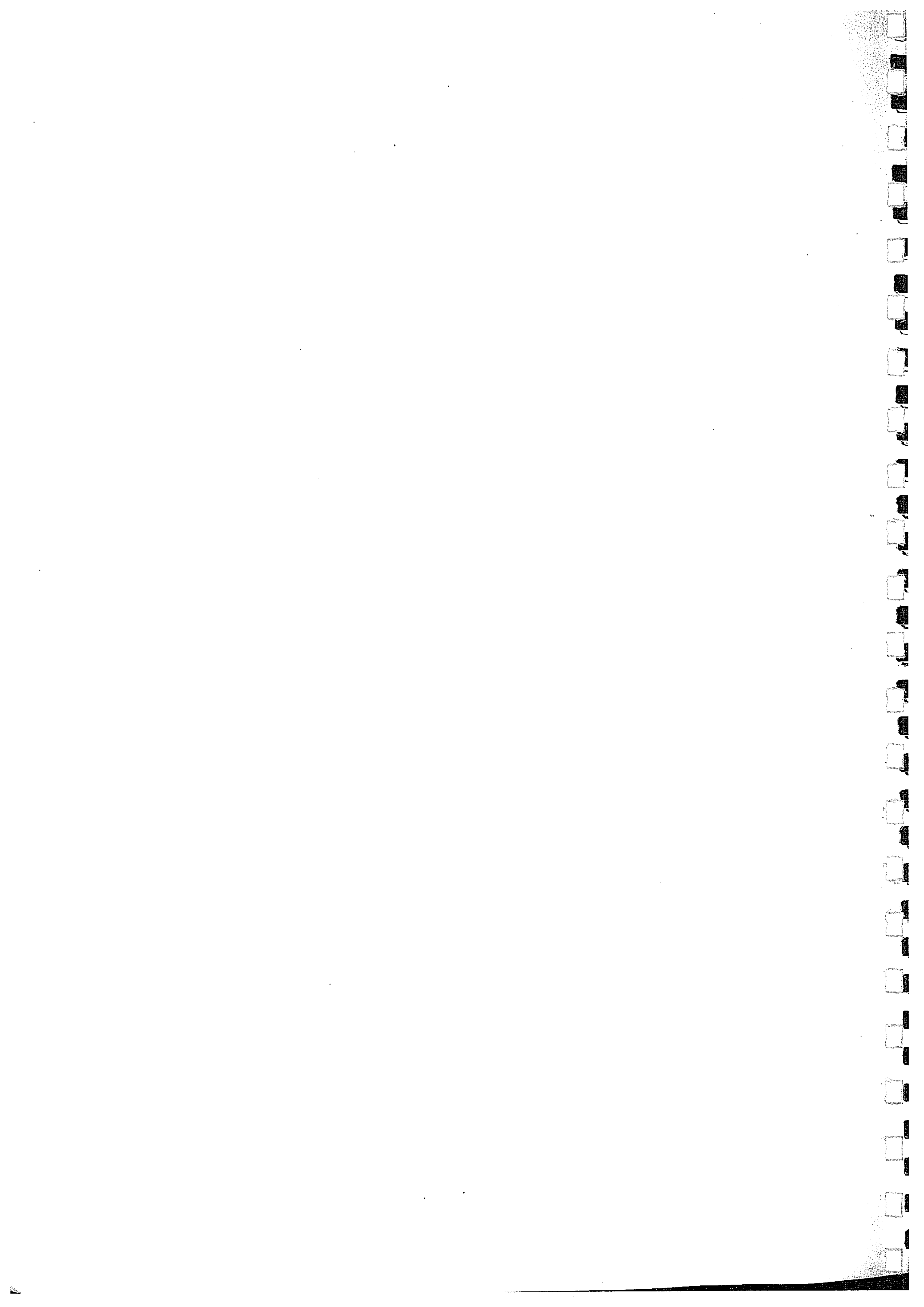
Timetable:
Please note the timetable for this course is *irregular* – a document will finalised times and rooms will be available in week 1.



RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP IN FILM STUDIES
Prescribed Reading

SECTION 1 – Practical guidance

- Corrigan, Timothy J. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, sixth edition, 36-81. New York: Longman, 2007.
- Villarejo, Amy. *Film Studies, The Basics*, 24-53. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Corrigan, Timothy J. and Patricia White. 'Writing a Film Essay: Observations, Arguments, Research, and Analysis'. In *The Film Experience, An Introduction*, 476-506. Bedford: St Martins Press, 2004.
- 'Quick Guide to Referencing Sources' (compiled by Dr Belén Vidal).

SECTION 2 – Essays using contrasting methodologies (on *Citizen Kane*)

- Bordwell, David. '*Citizen Kane*'. In *Movies and Methods*, edited by Bill Nichols, 273-290. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Citizen Kane*, 18-49. London: BFI, 1992.
- Naremore, James. '*Citizen Kane*. The Magician and the Mass Media'. In *Film Analysis, A Norton Reader*, edited by Jeffrey Gerger and R.L. Rutsky, 340-360. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005.

SECTION 3 – Essays on *M*

- Gunning, Tom. '*M*: The City Haunted by Demonic Desire.' In *The Films of Fritz Lang, Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 163-199. London: BFI, 2000.
- Kaes, Anton. *M*, 38-53. London: BFI Film Classics, 2000.
- Corrigan, Timothy J. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, sixth edition, 95-102, New York: Longman, 2007. (a sample essay on *M*).

SECTION 4 – Essays on *Amelie/Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*

- Vanderschelden, Isabelle. *Amélie*, 47-76. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007.
- Clifton Moore, Rick. '*Ambivalence to Technology in Jeunet's* Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain'. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (February 2006), 9-19.
- Scatton-Tessier, Michelle. 'Le Petisme: flirting with the sordid in *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*'. *Studies in French Cinema*, Volume 4, Number 3 (2004), 197-207.

SECTION 1

3

FILM TERMS AND TOPICS FOR FILM ANALYSIS AND WRITING

Developing a sense of how to question movie images and take notes on them goes hand in hand with an ability to direct those questions toward specific topics for analysis. Questions and notes should lead to more questions and partial or full answers. This path leads to an essay focused on particular themes and techniques in a movie. A major part of this process is developing a vocabulary with which to ask those questions properly, to describe what you see and think, and to help you focus and organize your analysis. Being able to notice and then comment on a significant "shot/reverse shot" pattern in *Cinderella Man* (2005) or to describe the "narrative structure" in *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) not only is good for classroom conversation, but also allows a good writer to make finer, more accurate discriminations and evaluations and to situate a film within the larger tradition of film history and analysis. These kinds of discriminations should begin to point you toward a topic for a paper.

Every discipline has its own special language or use of words that allows it to discuss its subject with precision and subtlety. A literary critic, for example, needs to distinguish between a metaphor and a simile, because these terms describe different rhetorical figures, that, in turn, refer to different sorts of perceptions. "My love is like a red, red rose" (simile) is different from "My love is the red rose of life" (metaphor), and the person who can appreciate that difference will read and interpret those lines better. Similarly, a knowledgeable basketball fan will be able to summarize quickly and evaluate the action of a game if he or she knows a specialized vocabulary that includes terms such as *jump shot*, *pick*, and *fast break*.

With film, too, a critical vocabulary allows you to view a movie more accurately and formulate your perceptions more easily. Consider the term *frame*. In writing about film, *frame* refers to the rectangle that contains the image: the frame of the movie screen itself, which does not change during a movie, and more importantly, the camera frame, which regularly

changes its relationship to the objects being filmed. Being aware of this term and its uses means you will be more sensitive to how the camera frame controls what you see and how you see it. You will be able to note, for instance, that the camera frame may include certain actions and exclude others, and that the angle at which it is placed or its distance from a person adds considerably to what the filmmaker is trying to say. As one student observed of a recent movie, "Although the scene seems to be a typical family gathering, the viewer becomes aware that something is wrong or unsettled because the camera frame is slightly tilted and unusually crowded with characters and furniture." What may sometimes go unnoticed is brought to light through the accurate use of a term.

THEMES

Going over your notes, your first step may be trying to identify the major themes of the movie, which often comes down to stepping back and asking what this film is "about": the triumph of good over evil in *Star Wars* (1977), for example, or reluctant heroism before unimaginable brutality in *Schindler's List* (1993). These themes, in many cases, become the foundation for an analysis because they point to the main ideas in a movie. They are not, strictly speaking, the "moral" or message of the movie; they are the large and the small ideas that help to explain the actions and events in it. Ask, for example:

- Who are the central characters?
- What do they represent in themselves and in relation to each other? The importance of individuality or society? Human strength or human compassion?
- How do their actions create a story with a meaning or constellation of meanings?
- Does the story emphasize the benefits of change or endurance?
- What kind of life or what actions does the film wish you to value or criticize, and why?
- If there is not a coherent message or story, why not?
- How does the movie make you feel at the end? Happy? Depressed? Confused? Why?

Having sketched some major and minor themes in a film, the writer needs to refine these in terms of the specific situation and aims of the movie. The more sensitive a writer's vocabulary, the more refined his or her

perception and argument will be. Thus, *alienation* may very well describe the broadest thematic lines of Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931), Frank Capra's *You Can't Take It with You* (1938), Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970), and Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill, Vol. 1* (2003).

This may be a good start, but a sharp analysis demands that the writer make finer distinctions about the historical, stylistic, and structural presentations of that theme in each movie. Does the alienation seem inevitable or, perhaps, even desirable? Does it lead to new knowledge, or is it a disaster that could have been avoided? Is it presented as a tragic or a comic problem in the movie? Writing about *The Conformist,* a student might refine the theme of alienation by observing that here it relates to the protagonist's sexuality and the fascist period in Italy and that, unlike the first two movies (and, to some extent, the fourth), the movie never really resolves this alienation. She or he might further specify and clarify that argument by describing how the main character regularly seems entrapped and isolated by the rigorous framing of the camera (Figure 9) and by the many frames within the image as a whole (door frames, window frames, etc.). Note, however,

Figure 9 The frames within the framing of *The Conformist* (1970).

that this kind of refinement of alienation in *The Conformist* does not attempt to fashion an oversimplified and inapplicable moral. One cannot say, "In *The Conformist,* alienation is an evil which dooms the character to misery."

While identifying themes provides an important foundation for your analysis, writing about the movies involves a wide range of special terms that will help you to organize and clarify your topic. The remainder of this chapter discusses the most important of these terms as they are used to discuss four dimensions of the movies:

1. The connections between the movies and other artistic traditions, such as literature and painting
2. The theatrical dimension of the film image, or of its mise-en-scène
3. The composition of the movie, achieved through camera positions and editing
4. The use of sound in the film

Depending on your topic, any or all of these dimensions and their vocabulary may be central to your essay.

FILM AND THE OTHER ARTS

Although the movies are one of the youngest of the arts, they have absorbed the structures and forms of many older arts. Not surprisingly, therefore, writing about film requires some of the critical language of these other literary and visual arts: We speak of *plot* and *character* in both films and novels, and terms such as *point of view* are part of the critical vocabulary of painting, literature, and the movies. Borrowed terminology allows a critic to make important connections with other fields; it also demands that a writer be sensitive to how terms and structures change when they are applied to film. Here we will look at three related terms that film studies share with the literary and visual arts: *narrative, characters,* and *point of view.*

Narrative

When most of us refer to the movies, we are referring to narrative movies alone, not documentaries or experimental films. A *narrative* can be divided into different components:

- The *story* is all the events that are presented to us or that we can infer have happened.

- The *plot* is the arrangement or construction of those events in a certain order or structure.

Thus, all films that sketch the life of Napoleon would tell the same story: his birth, his rise to power, the French Revolution, its aftermath, and his exile to Elba. The plots in these different movies may, however, be structured and arranged in various ways: One could begin with Napoleon's last days at Elba and tell his story through a series of flashbacks (showing events that occurred earlier than the ones just shown); another could start with his birth and move chronologically through his life.

Always ask yourself how the narrative of the film you are watching is constructed. Is it, first of all, a movie with a story line? If not, why not? Is the story told chronologically, or does the plot rearrange events in an unusual temporal order? Is there a reason for that particular plot structure? What in the story is left out in the actual plot construction? Are there reasons for including some material and omitting other material? Does the way the story is told become a prominent feature of the film and, thus, a central factor in an analysis of it? How do you recognize the narrative structure: Is there a *voice-over*, in which a character's voice is heard describing events and, thus, makes it clear that he or she is organizing the plot? Are there technical elements that give dramatic indications about how the story is structured, such as the change from black-and-white to color in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) or Abel Gance's use of three different screens in his *Napoleon* (1927)? Is the movie especially concerned with questions of time and history, which may, in turn, influence how the plot is constructed, as in *Back to the Future* (1985)? What propels the story: A mystery, as in *The Big Sleep* (1946)? A desire to reach a goal, as in *The Wizard of Oz*? Or, is it difficult to say, as in some modern movies in which the plot seems to have no definite direction?

The various relationships between a story, its plot, and a narrative style are numerous. When most of us think of a narrative film, however, we probably have in mind what is often called a *classical narrative* (Figure 10). To discuss any kind of film narrative, it is useful to have some sense of this important narrative form. Usually, a classical narrative has:

1. A plot development in which there is a logical relation between one event and another
2. A sense of closure at the end (a happy or a tragic ending, for example)
3. Stories that are focused on characters
4. A narrative style that attempts to be more-or-less objective

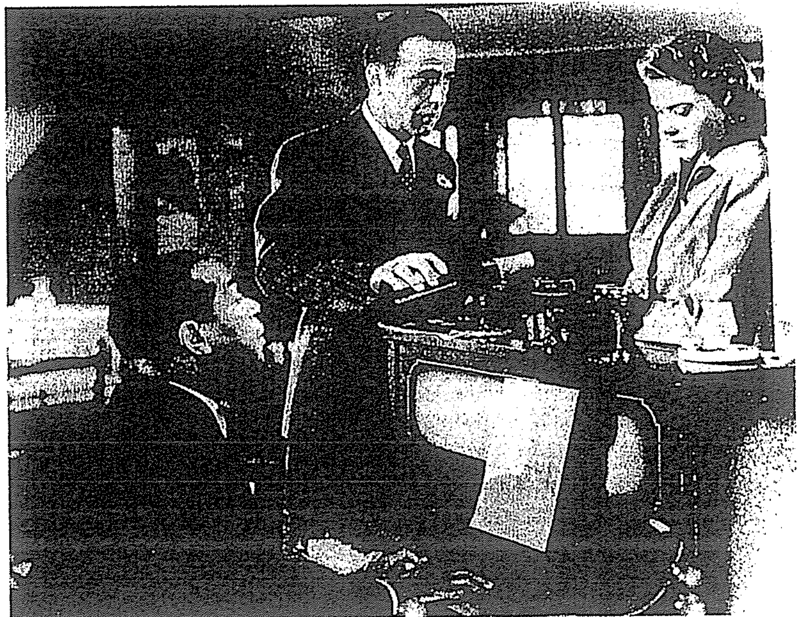


Figure 10 The narrative of *Casablanca* (1942) employs many of the features of classical narrative: a plot propelled by a central character (Bogart as Rick), a realistic depiction of events, and a dramatic sense of closure (as Ilsa and Rick sacrifice their love for a greater patriotic good).

Not all classical narratives are the same, of course, and many fine essays are about the variations and innovations within this model. One student, for example, began his paper on Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* by observing:

Bill Evans

This classic mystery story does not make complete sense. It seems as if the complicated plot has lost track of the story, and frequently it is very difficult to follow the logic of who killed whom and why. Nonetheless, The Big Sleep remains a model of classical filmmaking in the way it concentrates all the action on the main characters, Bogart and Bacall. If the plot is confused, these characters make you forget that confusion and realize that the story is about them.

In the following paragraphs, Gerald Mast looks at the narrative structure as it applies to many Hawks films (such as *To Have and Have Not* [1944] and *His Girl Friday* [1940]). Note how Mast first places his analysis in the literary tradition of narrative and then moves to a discussion of plots constructed around the notion of "surprising inevitability."

> What is a good story? First, there is the construction of an action—not just enumerating a string of events but organizing those events into a coherent and powerful shape. The construction of a narrative action relies on a very interesting paradox, of which Hawks was well aware. On the one hand, the events in a narrative must seem to flow spontaneously, naturally, surprisingly; nothing must be expected, nothing foreseen. On the other hand, the events in a narrative must be prepared for, motivated, foreshadowed; nothing is unexpected, everything foreseen. On the one hand, everything that happens to King Lear is a surprise. On the other, everything in the play proceeds from Kent's command in the beginning to "See better, Lear." It is surprising that Emma Woodhouse discovers that it is Mr. Knightley whom she really must marry; yet everything in Emma points the way to this inevitable and inescapable discovery. The paradox of narrative construction is that it synthesizes the accidents of nature—which seem random—and the patterns of logic—which are fixed; the outcome of events is simultaneously inevitable yet surprising to the reader or viewer when the inevitable occurs. The narrative that is insufficiently spontaneous and surprising is familiarly condemned as contrived, over-plotted, unnatural, and stilted; the narrative that is insufficiently patterned is familiarly condemned as random, wandering, arbitrary, and formless.
>
> How does Hawks' story construction relate to this paradox of surprising inevitability? In over forty years of filmmaking, collaborating with over a dozen major writers, Howard Hawks builds every story in an identical four-part structure. The first part is a prologue that either (1) establishes the conflict in a past or present close relationship of the major characters (this is the usual pattern of Ben Hecht's scripts for Hawks) or (2) initiates a conflict by the collision of two apparently opposite characters upon their initial meeting (this is the usual Furthman–Faulkner pattern). The second and third parts develop the central conflict established in the first, either by letting one of the conflicting characters or life styles dominate in the second part, then the other in the third, or by letting one of the characters work alone in the second part, then both of them together in the third. And the fourth section resolves the central conflict, often by a return to the original physical setting of the prologue, but in which setting the warring characters now see themselves and one another in a new light. Occasionally Hawks adds a very brief epilogue or "tag" to return the narrative full circle to its beginning. Whatever else one can say about this narrative structure, it gives a Hawks story the firmness of shape, the elegance, economy, and symmetry that allow surprising events to transpire within the firm logic and structure of a controlled pattern. (30–31)

Not all movies are classical narratives or even narratives. Some movies are nonnarrative: They do not tell stories, or they subsume stories within other organizational structures other than narrative. For instance, there are experimental films that avoid stories and investigate questions unrelated to narrative, such as the abstract patterns of light and shadow on film. There are documentary films that may present real events, such as a typical day at a factory or the religious ritual of a Native American tribe, without organizing those events as a story (Figure 11). In addition, many movies create narratives that are outside the classical tradition or that may intentionally confront that tradition to tell their stories distinctively.

When you watch a movie that seems to avoid a traditional story line or to tell its story in an unusual or, perhaps, confusing way, ask yourself how the movie is organizing its plot and narration and what it is trying to achieve. Does the story seem illogical, as in some surrealist films in which events follow the logic of a dream? Does the narrative seem to be telling two or more stories that are difficult to connect, as in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), in which the story of a woman and her Nazi lover is told alongside the story of the bombing of Hiroshima? Does the movie have a confusing beginning or an unresolved conclusion? Why? How do these or other narrative strategies relate to the stories being told? About *Hiroshima Mon Amour,* a writer might, after some thought, begin by observing that both stories concern World War II and are told by two newly met lovers; the difficulty in the narrative structure might then be related to the woman's pain in organizing and communicating her memories to someone from a completely different culture but with a similar historical crisis. Once you have learned to recognize classical narrative forms, you should be more aware of the variety of ways in which stories can be told.

Characters

Characters are another common topic for analysis in literature, drama, and film. They are the individuals who populate narrative and nonnarrative films. Whether they are the main characters or minor characters, they

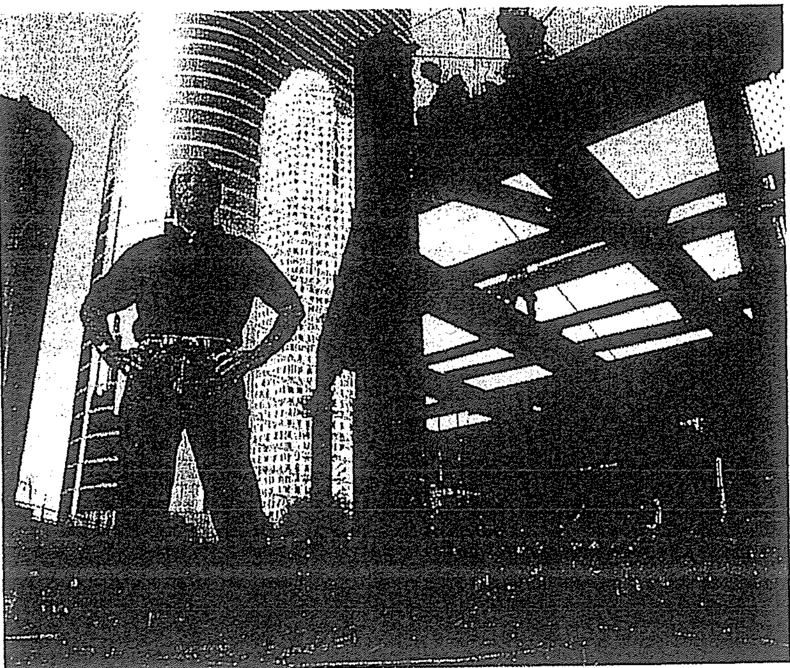


Figure 11 Alex Gibney's *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005) is a documentary that describes the massive financial collapse of a powerful American corporation. Less a story than an investigation, the film uses interviews, old video and film clips, abstract visual patterns, and contemporary music tracks to expose the deceptions and contradictions of the official story.

normally focus the action and, often, the themes of a movie (Figure 12). Often, a discussion of film concentrates exclusively on what happens to the characters or how they change. *My Dinner with André* (1981), which films the dinner conversation between two men, could more accurately be described as being about two characters telling stories than as being a story about two characters. Both traditional movies, like *Catch Me If You Can* (2002), and untraditional ones, like *Crumb* (1994), focus their narratives almost exclusively on the biography of their main character, con artist Frank Abagnale, Jr. (in the first case), and underground cartoonist Robert Crumb (in the second). Keep in mind that an analysis of characters in a movie can be boring or seem simpleminded if you approach them as if they are merely reflections of real people or if you blur the difference between the real historical person, the actor playing the role, and the character. Yet, if

Figure 12 Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) presents characters in a more extreme and disturbing way than many films. It follows the development of young men who, drafted to become soldiers during the Vietnam War, are transformed into killing machines.

you remain attuned to the variety in character types and constructions, you can begin to see subtleties and complications in how characters function and what they mean in different films. As an exercise, choose three different characters—those portrayed by Lillian Gish in *Broken Blossoms* (1919), Lauren Bacall in *The Big Sleep*, and Julianne Moore in *The Hours* (2002), for example—and try to describe how and why those characters are so different.

You can begin an analysis of characters by asking yourself if those characters seem or are meant to seem realistic. What makes them realistic? Are they defined by their clothes, their conversation, or something else? If they are not realistic, why not, and why are they meant to seem strange or fantastic? Do the characters seem to fit the setting of the story? Does the movie focus mainly on one or two characters (as in *The Big Sleep*) or on many (as in *Nashville* [1975], in which there doesn't seem to be a central character)? Do the characters change, and if so, in what ways? What values do the characters seem to represent: What do they say about such matters as independence, sexuality, and political belief? Normally, we take characters for granted, and these are a sampling

of the kinds of questions you can begin to direct at characters to make more sense of them and determine why they are important.

Point of View

Like narrative, *point of view* is a term film shares with the literary and visual arts. In the broadest sense, it refers to the position from which something is seen and, by implication, the way that point of view determines what you see. In the simplest sense, the point of view is purely physical. My point of view regarding a house across the street will, for example, be very different if I am looking from the rooftop of my house or from the basement window. In a more sophisticated sense, point of view can be psychological or cultural. For example, a child's point of view about a dentist's office will probably not be the same as an adult's.

In the same way, we can talk about the point of view that the camera has in relationship to a person or action or even the point of view that a narrative directs at its subject (Figure 13). Usually, movies use an objective point of view so that most of what is shown is not confined to any one person's perspective. In *Gone with the Wind* (1939) or *Gandhi* (1982), the audience sees scenes and events (the battle of Atlanta, epic encounters in India) that are supposedly objective in their scope and accuracy, beyond the knowledge or perspective of any one person. In specific scenes, however, that audience may be aware that they are seeing another character only through Rhett's or Gandhi's eyes, and in these cases, the camera is re-creating that individual's more subjective point of view. Some movies experiment with the possibilities of point of view: In *Apocalypse Now* (1979), we seem to see the whole story from Captain Willard's (Martin Sheen's) point of view; he introduces the story as something that has already happened to him, but despite this indication of historical objectivity, many of the scenes re-create his personal, nightmarish perspective on the war in Vietnam.

Point of view is a central term in writing about films because films are basically about seeing the world in a certain way. Pay attention to point of view by using these two general guidelines:

1. Observe how and when the camera creates the point of view of a character.
2. Notice if the story is told mostly from an objective point of view or from the subjective perspective of one person.

Ask yourself in what ways the point of view is determining what you see. Does it limit or control your vision in any way. What can you tell about

Figure 13 Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1945) is a film explicitly organized around the point of view of a photographer confined to a wheelchair. As he and his girlfriend watch the secret lives of his New York neighbors, he discovers both the power and dangers of a point of view.

the characters whose eyes you see through? Are they aggressive? Suspicious? Clever? In love?

Comparative Essays

Because the movies incorporate the traditions of books, plays, and even sculpture and painting, terms such as *narrative, character,* and *point of view* are not only useful but necessary in analyzing film. Often, these terms provide the basis for a comparative essay that examines a book and its adaptation as a film. Other kinds of comparative essays may compare

different versions of the same movie or a group of films by the same director. When you write a comparative essay of this kind, be sensitive to and careful not only about how these terms connect different art forms but also about how they highlight differences. Be aware of how the film medium may change the message of the original book or play: Look at how a literary or artistic trope is translated successfully into a movie, as well as at what may be lost. To compare *Apocalypse Now* and Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1898), a writer may choose to discuss the subjective point of view that describes one Marlow's—Captain Willard's—journey through Vietnam and the other Marlow's journey into Africa. That comparison will be much sharper and more revealing, however, if the writer can show how certain literary techniques (long sentences full of repetitions, for example) create one point of view and how certain film techniques (the use of light and shadow or exaggerated mise-en-scènes, for instance) create the other. These film techniques are the subject of the rest of this chapter.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE AND REALISM

The *mise-en-scène*, a French term roughly translated as "what is put into the scene" (put before the camera), refers to all those properties of a cinematic image that exist independently of camera position, camera movement, and editing (although a viewer will see these different dimensions united in one image). Mise-en-scène includes lighting, costumes, sets, the quality of the acting, and other shapes and characters in the scene. Many writers mistakenly believe that these theatrical features are a somewhat unsophisticated topic for analysis because they appear to be more a part of a dramatic tradition than of a cinematic tradition. Evaluating the performance of an actor may, for some, seem much less important than analyzing the narrative or the camera work. Yet, for many other perceptive critics, the tools and terms of mise-en-scène are the keys to some of the most important features of any movie.

Realism

The major reason that we tend to overlook or undervalue mise-en-scène in the movies is the powerful illusion of realism that is at the heart of the film medium. In many movies, we often presume that "what is put into the scene" is simply what is there; it consequently cannot be analyzed as we would analyze the construction of a plot. We accept the Philadelphia

setting of Jonathan Demme's 1993 movie *Philadelphia* as merely the background that was chosen for the battle between a prestigious law firm and a young associate discovered to be HIV-positive. But comparing the affluent setting of that film with, say, the mise-en-scène of Philadelphia in the 1976 movie *Rocky* (set in the ethnic neighborhoods of South Philadelphia) or in the 1995 movie *Twelve Monkeys* (set in a Philadelphia of urban squalor and decay) should make it clear that the realism of a place is very malleable. The illusion of realism, in short, is a kind of mise-en-scène that makes us believe that the images are of an everyday world that is simply "there"—one we know and are familiar with. Or, as Allardyce Nicoll described the problem:

> In the cinema we demand something different. Probably we carry into the picture-house prejudices deeply ingrained in our beings. The statement that "the camera cannot lie" has been disproved by millions of flattering portraits and by dozens of spiritualistic pictures which purport to depict fairies but which mostly turn out to be faintly disguised pictures of ballet-dancers or replicas of figures in advertisements of night-lights. Yet in our heart of hearts we credit the truth of that statement. A picture, a piece of sculpture, a stage-play—these we know were created by man; we have watched the scenery being carried in back stage and we know we shall see the actors, turned into themselves again, bowing at the conclusion of the performance. In every way the "falsity" of a theatrical production is borne in upon us, so that we are prepared to demand nothing save a theatrical truth. For the films, however, our orientation is vastly different. Several periodicals, it is true, have endeavored to let us into the secrets of the moving-picture industry and a few favored spectators have been permitted to make the rounds of the studios; but for ninety percent of the audience the actual methods employed in the preparation of a film remain far off and dimly realised. . . .
>
> The strange paradox, then, results: that, although the cinema introduces improbabilities and things beyond nature at which any theatrical director would blanch and murmur soft nothings to the air, the filmic material is treated by the audience with far greater respect (in its relation to life) than the material of the stage. Our conceptions of life in Chicago gangsterdom and in distant China are all colored by films we have seen. What we have witnessed on the screen becomes the "real" for us. In moments of sanity, maybe, we confess that of course we do not believe this or that, but, under the spell again, we credit the truth of these pictures even as, for all our professed superiority, we credit the truth of newspaper paragraphs. (35–38)

You must learn, however, to be suspicious of realism in the movies, because it can distract you from the many interesting possibilities that mise-en-scène analysis offers. Watching a documentary from another country or an old movie once considered very realistic, you recognize how relative your sense of realism is and, how, even when the filmmaker may not acknowledge it, the reality of a movie is constructed for a purpose. Simply putting a camera in front of a scene, as one writer has noted, changes the most realistic situation into a kind of theatrical setting. Asked to look more closely at the realism of *Philadelphia*, one student thus corrected her original perception and observed how the mise-en-scène of *Philadelphia* was not just where the central character lived and worked:

Cecilia A. Graham

> The choice of the city of Philadelphia as the setting for the film of the same name clearly evokes connotations which are central to understanding this movie. Since the city itself has historically been referred to as the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia uses its urban backdrop to set, somewhat ironically, a tale of a gay man whose physical love of a "brother" meets only fear and loathing from the "brothers" in his law firm. At the same time, the mise-en-scène of Philadelphia becomes strangely anonymous in this movie. Most of the action of the movie takes place before the sumptuous modern skyscrapers in a business district which could be any business district and in plush offices whose picture windows show a glittering backdrop of only lights and other buildings. This Philadelphia is, finally, a place without much identity, depth, or individuality, and that seems an appropriate mise-en-scène for a film that largely sanitizes the suffering and confusion of a man battling HIV and an extremely narrow-minded society.

Whether the movie is a documentary or a realistic Hollywood film, a practiced eye might begin an analysis by asking basic questions about the theatrics of realism and how it is used. Why does the movie try to seem realistic? How does it try to create a realistic scene? What is included, and

what is left out? What realistic details in the mise-en-scène relate to the actions of the characters or themes of the movie: the clothing, the homes, the props, or the outdoor world? Treat the mise-en-scène of realistic films with the same analytical sense you might direct at a stage play, in which costumes and sets are never selected casually.

Elements of Mise-en-Scène

In any film, from the most realistic to the most theatrical, there are specific properties of the mise-en-scène at which to direct your attention and from which good paper topics will come.

Settings and *sets* refer to the location or the construction of a location where a scene is filmed. In some movies, you will notice immediately how important the setting and sets are. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), for example, the expressionistic set design may be far more interesting to some viewers than the characters or structure of the story: The sets are obviously painted buildings and streets whose distorted angles and shapes are meant to suggest the mental imbalance and social chaos of the characters. One might make the same case for a movie like *Alien* (1979), in which the elaborately twisted passageways of the spaceship or the mysterious construction where the characters discover the alien eggs reverberate with a symbolic significance associated with women and motherhood. Hitchcock uses his settings more ironically as commentaries on the plot and characters. In the climactic closing of *North by Northwest* (1959), for instance, the hero and the heroine climb across the gigantic faces of the presidents on Mt. Rushmore; in a movie so much about U.S. security and government, this use of setting is not only spectacular but central to the themes of the movie. The settings in these and other cases are much more than background, and a writer interested in the use of sets and settings like these should start with these questions:

- Do the objects and props in the setting, whether natural ones (like rivers and trees) or artificial ones (like paintings and buildings), have a special significance that relates to the characters or story?
- Does the arrangement of objects, props, and characters within that setting have some significance? (For example, are they crowded together? Do inanimate objects seem to have a life, as they do in a Chaplin movie?)

Although most good films give the setting and its objects nearly as much meaning as the characters, films differ greatly in how they use their settings in relation to characters and stories. Sets and settings may suggest documentary realism, as in *Gimme Shelter* (1971) (Figure 14); provide images of a character's mind, as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari;* describe the central theme of the film, as does the house/home in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) (Figure 15); or become more complex and important than the story or characters themselves, as, perhaps, does the Gothic cityscape in *Batman* (1989). In writing about setting, however, one must do more than just describe it: One must seek to discover its significance in relation to the major themes of the film or to other aspects of the film (its system of production or its historical period, for instance). Such a focus will help explain why the setting and the way it is constructed are important.

Use the same rule of thumb in discussing other elements of the mise-en-scène: Whether your interest is acting styles, costumes, or lighting, precise description must be coupled with a sense of why they are

Figure 14 A documentary about the Rolling Stones tour across America, *Gimme Shelter* (1977) describes the thin line between theatrics and realism—and the sometimes dangerous relationship between the two.

Figure 15 In *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), the setting of the house often appears more like a stage on which the characters act out their loves, desires, and fears.

important and how they add to the meaning of the movie—that is, how they can become part of a topic for analysis. We all know that an actor is the individual who plays the part of a character in a movie. But *acting style*—how an actor plays a part—differs considerably from film to film and from one decade to the next. When looked at thoughtfully, acting style is a challenging topic to address or a target for focusing an analysis of a specific movie. A writer might, for instance, compare the acting style in an Italian neorealist movie such as *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), in which some of the actors were people chosen precisely because they had no acting experience, with the mannered style of a British or American actor, like Maggie Smith, whose notion of a realistic performance includes a great deal of studied artifice. Carl Dreyer said, "There is no greater experience in a studio than to witness the expression of a sensitive face under the mysterious power of inspiration," and it is precisely that kind of performance which he solicited from René Falconetti in the famous close-ups of his *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). In the following paragraph,

James Naremore describes, with exemplary sense of details, the remarkable acting style of Sandra Bernhard as Marsha in *The King of Comedy* (1983):

> Bernhard is in fact a club comic, and in many ways she relies on the conventional devices of clowns. She lacks the symmetrical face of "serious" actors like Fonda or Streep, so she pushes her features into grotesque extremes—poking out her lips or curling them up against her long nose, frowning or letting her jaw hang lax. When she moves, she is all angles, a gangling stick figure who looks like an anorexic bobbysoxer; when she speaks, her voice pitches up to the register of a New York teenager on the verge of hysteria. Nevertheless she inflects her exaggerated behavior in ways quite different from old-fashioned zanies like Fanny Brice or Martha Raye. Hers is a comedy of neurosis, a mingling of anxiety and laughter, and she behaves as if the whole weight of an Oedipal scenario were on her shoulders. (282)

Costumes, as we all know, are the clothes the characters wear. Like other aspects of the mise-en-scène, they vary along a spectrum from realistic dress to extravagant costumes; often, they provide a writer with the key to a character's identity. James Bond often wears a tuxedo, but Sylvester Stallone's Rocky prefers to wear as little as possible. In both cases, we learn something about the character from the costume. Some films, like *Tootsie* (1982) and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), are largely about costuming and changing appearances through dress and makeup, and both films are about how men dress like women to confront or deal with conventional attitudes about sexual roles. White hats no longer necessarily indicate a good character, but you should continue to question why characters look and dress the way they do. Do their costumes suggest how they view themselves or how they wish to be viewed by others? Does a character change clothing, as in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), when John Travolta becomes a different person by donning his dancing clothes at night? Do those changes tell you anything about the personality or the society? Is there a special feature of a costume, such as the baseball glove that identifies Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape* (1963), that helps you to analyze that character? Again, do not take the costumes of the mise-en-scène for granted.

Lighting describes the various ways a character or an object or a scene can be illuminated, either by natural sunlight or from artificial sources (such as lamps). It allows a filmmaker to direct a viewer's attention in a certain way or to create a certain atmosphere. We all recognize large distinctions, such as the difference between the bright lighting of an outdoor scene in a western and the shadowy darkness used in the

alleyways of a gangster film. We probably notice that, in the first case, the lighting creates a feeling of clarity and optimism and, in the second, a feeling of oppression and gloom. A more demanding task would be to note and comment on the more subtle gradations and patterns of lighting that do not dramatically call attention to themselves. In Bertrand Tavernier's *Sunday in the Country* (1984), for instance, the softly lit interiors and exteriors are meant to recreate the lighting found in impressionist paintings, a vision of the world that the painter grandfather in that movie knows is fading. In Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1978), some scenes use very low light (candlelight, in fact) to emphasize the grotesquely isolated faces of characters who are cut off from each other and from the world that exists in the darkness around them. Whether you notice the lighting immediately or not, be prepared to look for patterns of light and shadows. Are there important graphic patterns (such as sharp shadows), created to highlight a scene or a group of scenes in a movie? Does the lighting or coloring seem totally natural or unusually artificial? Some experimental films make the entire subject of the film the artistic manipulation of light, but any intelligent narrative movie uses lighting with as much a sense of its possibilities and purpose as a painting does (Figure 16).

Figure 16 In *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), spectacular lighting techniques and graphics are the heart of the movie.

Mise-en-scène, then, is about the theatrics of space as that space is constructed for the camera. This use of space—how it is arranged and how the actors and objects relate within it—can generate exciting topics and commentary on film. The balance or imbalance that relates figures or various planes in the mise-en-scène sometimes says more about that action than does the dialogue: Is, for instance, one character always positioned above another? Is one always in shadows? Likewise, in comparing two sets or settings in a film, you may discover important themes that would otherwise not be noticed: Do catastrophes, for instance, occur only in the city, or only on land? A cinematic mise-en-scène is different from but as complex as a theatrical mise-en-scène, and a writer about film should aim for the same acuteness and subtlety demonstrated in the following analysis of the mise-en-scène (specifically the setting) in Buster Keaton's *Our Hospitality* (1923):

> Mise-en-scène functions, not in isolated moments, but in relation to the narrative system of the entire film. *Our Hospitality*, like most of Buster Keaton's films, exemplifies how mise-en-scène can economically advance the narrative and create a pattern of motifs. And since the film is a comedy, we shall find that the mise-en-scène also creates gags. *Our Hospitality*, then, exemplifies what we shall find in our study of every film technique: an individual element will almost always have several functions, not just one.
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> Consider, for example, how the settings function within the narrative of *Our Hospitality*. They help divide the film into scenes and contrast those scenes. The film begins with a prologue showing how the feud between the McKays and the Canfields results in the deaths of the young Canfield and the husband of the McKay family. We see the McKays living in a shack and are left in suspense about the fate of the baby, Willie. Willie's mother flees with her son from their southern home to the North (action narrated to us mainly by an intertitle). The main action begins years later, with the grown-up Willie living in New York. There are a number of gags concerning early nineteenth-century life in the metropolis, contrasting sharply with the prologue scene. We are led to wonder how this locale will relate to the southern scenes, and soon Willie receives word that he has inherited his parents' home in the South. A series of amusing short scenes follows as he takes a primitive train back to his birthplace. Here Keaton uses real landscapes, but by laying the railroad tracks in different ways, he exploits the landscapes for surprising and unusual comic effects. The rest of the film deals with Willie's movements in the southern town and in the vicinity. On the day of his arrival he wanders around and gets into a number of comic situations. That night he stays in the Canfield house itself, since the law of hospitality has made it the only safe place for him. And, finally, an extended chase occurs the next day, moving through the countryside and back to the Canfield house for the end of the feud. Thus the action depends heavily on shifts of setting that establish Willie's two journeys, as baby and as man, and later his wanderings around to escape his enemies' pursuit. The narration is relatively unrestricted once Willie reaches the South, moving between him and members of the Canfield family. We usually know more about where they are than Willie does, and the narrative generates suspense by showing them coming toward the places where Willie is hiding.
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> Specific settings fulfill distinct narrative functions. The McKay "estate," which Willie envisions as a mansion, turns out to be a tumbledown shack. The McKay place is paralleled to (contrasted with) the Canfields' palatial plantation home. In narrative terms the Canfield home gains even more functional importance when the Canfield father forbids his sons to kill Willie on the premises: "our code of honor forbids us to shoot him while he is a guest in our house." (Once Willie overhears this, he determines never to leave.) Thus, ironically, the home of Willie's enemies becomes the only safe spot in town, and many scenes are organized around the Canfield brothers' attempts to lure Willie out. At the end of the film another setting takes on significance: the meadows, mountains, river banks, rapids, and waterfalls across which the Canfields pursue Willie. Finally, the feud ends back in the Canfield house itself, with Willie now welcomed as the daughter's husband. The pattern of development is clear: from the opening shoot-out at the McKay house that breaks up Willie's home, to the final scene in the Canfield house with Willie becoming part of a new family. In such ways every setting becomes highly motivated by the narrative's system of causes and effects, parallels and contrasts, and overall development. (Bordwell and Thompson 142–43)

COMPOSITION AND THE IMAGE

In any movie, it is the camera that eventually films a mise-en-scène: When you watch a movie, you see not only the setting, actors, and lighting but all of these elements as they are recorded and then projected. The composition of a scene through the film image is what distinguishes film

from drama, and it is another important dimension of the movies that a good writer should be able to discuss. When you watch a home video, you might first recognize a party with you and your friends. However, with a closer look, you might also comment on how the images, because of the angles, or coloring, make some of those friends look taller or darker than they really are. In the same way, a film image may influence the way you see a scene or a character in that scene. The student who begins by writing, "The scene had three characters . . . " will seem less attentive and perceptive than the student who begins, "The visual angle on the scene made the three characters appear. . . ." This section considers some of the terminology you can use to discuss these compositional features.

The Shot

The *shot* is the single image you see on the screen before the film cuts to a different image. Unlike a photograph, a single shot can include a variety of action or movement, and the frame that contains the image may even move. One shot may show a cowboy at a bar and then magnify the figure by moving the camera closer. When the image switches to another position and point of view on the cowboy—say, from the opposite side of the bar—the film has cut to a second shot. In writing about film, you should be sensitive to the two primary dimensions of the shot: its photographic properties, and its moving frame.

The *photographic properties* of a shot are the qualities of the film image that are found in any photograph, plus the speed at which the scene is filmed. These properties include tone, film speed, and the various perspectives created by the image. *Tone* refers to the range and texture of the colors in a film image. A movie such as *The Wizard of Oz* uses a technicolor scheme full of primary reds and yellows to suggest a fantasy world very different from the black-and-white Kansas. Some films, such as Joel and Ethan Coen's *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), use stark black-and-white tones to suggest an older movie genre or past historical period. Woody Allen in *Zelig* (1983) tells a story with intentionally grainy black-and-white tones to make parts of his modern movie look like an old documentary, and in *Schindler's List* Steven Spielberg occasionally disrupts a horrific story in black-and-white with the fleeting glimpse of a child's bright red coat. Ask if the colors are realistic. If not, why not? Is there a pattern in the way a film uses a particular color or group of colors? Does the film use colors symbolically, as Bergman uses red in *Cries and Whispers* (1972) to suggest both violence and passion? If the movie is in black-and-white, how does the black-and-white add to the movie, especially if the filmmaker could have used color? How do the colors and tones relate to the themes of the film?

Film speed is the rate at which the film is shot; it is most obvious in instances of slow or fast motion. Action in slow or fast motion usually indicates a change in the nature of what is happening or how the audience is supposed to perceive what is happening. Sometimes, slow motion is used to indicate that the action is part of a character's dream; sometimes, fast motion is a way of commenting comically on a scene—when, for instance, action on an assembly line suddenly moves at superhuman speed. It is easy to note when the speed of the film is no longer normal; be prepared to examine why these moments are singled out by the filmmaker. In Nagisa Oshima's *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (1983), David Bowie confronts his Japanese adversary with two kisses, which are filmed in slow motion; it is clear that this is Oshima's way of underlining this shattering climax in their relationship. Keep in mind, however, that many older silent movies were filmed and printed at the rate of sixteen frames per second, and their action may look faster when shown at the modern standard of twenty-four frames per second.

The *perspective* of the image refers to the kind of spatial relationship an image establishes between the different objects and figures it is photographing. These different relationships are the products of different kinds of lenses and the way those lenses are used. Thus, one movie may constantly present scenes with a great deal of *depth* or *deep focus* so that the audience can see characters in the background as sharply as it sees characters in the foreground. Another movie (often an older one) may wish to isolate or highlight only certain characters or events in the image, and it consequently uses a *shallow focus* that will clearly show only one plane in the image, such as the man with a gun who stands in the foreground apart from the blurry crowd in the background. Much less commonly seen is the odd moment of *rack focus,* when the focus is quickly changed, or pulled, from one figure or object to another within the same shot, as when the image switches focus from the face of a man talking to a piano falling out the window in the background.

Still other kinds of perspective relationships can be used in creating an image, but even while you are learning these other technical terms, you can begin to analyze perspective relationships by asking the basic questions: Who or what is in focus in an image, and why? Do the images create a world with depth, or does that world seem unusually flat? How would you describe the space in a particular image? Is it crowded?

Open? Wide? Distorted? When a specific wide-screen image drowns the characters in space, what does this say about them and their world? Make the power of the image itself come alive in your writing. Make the subject of your essays not just what you see, but how the image makes you see people and things in a certain way and in a certain relationship to one another. Here is an example in which the student briefly looks at color, tone, and spatial relations in Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973):

N. Singerpanz

Don't Look Now (1973) is a movie about not wanting to see red but being unable not to see red. The story concerns a man and a woman whose young daughter dies tragically by drowning. Later, they go to Venice, where he has a job restoring an old church that is slowly sinking. They both want to forget the horrible death of their daughter, but in Venice, they—and we, the frightened viewers—are pursued by a color, the bright red glow of the raincoat the daughter was wearing when she died.

Even before her death the color leaps out of the film. While the father is studying slides of the church he will repair, the tone and texture of the red in the image begin to vibrate and then ooze like blood. As if it is a premonition, he dashes outside to find his child face down in a pond, her coat the same color as the red in the slide.

Venice is a rather gray city in this movie, but wherever the father turns the bright shade of red seems to catch his eye, as if it has a life of its own or is beckoning from another world. For a second or longer, stained-glass windows, pieces of clothing, or a passing car appear to bear the shade of red which we and he have come to identify with the dead daughter. That red is a common color, if a shocking one, only adds to the mystery and confusion as this simple color grows more and more hypnotic and frightening. It seems to contrast with the ordinary gray life of Venice, and, since visual

space is made so claustrophobic by the narrow, windy streets of the city, the glimpses we and the father catch of a fleeing red figure in the background become moments of true terror.

This color becomes a life in itself, a life that comes to mean death. The grays of Venice and the mazelike spaces of its streets make this color impossible to miss and more fascinating because it is always vanishing into the depths. The shock of the final scene, when we and the father finally corner the color, suggests that we have been horribly seduced by the power of Roeg's images.

The *frame* of the movie image forms its border and contains the mise-en-scène. Many movies, such as Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusion* (1937) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), fill their mise-en-scène with the internal frames of windows or doorways or stage sets to call attention to the importance of frames and point of view in the story. Almost every film, though, must maintain a certain consciousness about the frame of the movie screen and the frame of the camera (Figure 17). A wide-screen frame is especially suited to catching the open spaces of a

Figure 17 What makes this shot from *The Exorcist* (1973) so disturbing?

western or the vast stellar spaces of sci-fi films. The smaller standard frame is, perhaps, best suited to more personal interior dramas or genres like the melodrama, to which a small frame can contribute a sense of anything from domestic comfort and closeness to claustrophobia. Through the course of a film, there will be a number of other more particular questions to ask about the framing:

- What is the angle at which the camera frame represents the action? Does it create a *high angle,* viewing its subject from above, or a *low angle,* viewing the action from below? When a conversation between two people is shot through a group of alternating high angles and low angles, it could mean that one character is tall and the other is short; it could also say that one of the two is the more dominant personality.
- Does the height of the frame correspond to a normal relationship to the people and objects before the camera; that is, are they at eye level, more or less? Or does the camera seem to be placed at an odd height, too high or too low? At the beginning of *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), for instance, the camera is positioned at ground level to capture James Dean's desperate and pathetic embrace of a small toy as he crumbles to the ground.
- Does the camera frame ever seem unbalanced in relation to the space and action (called a *canted frame*)? If so, why does this occur when it does? Is it re-creating the perspective of a character looking at the action from an odd angle so that the buildings appear diagonal rather than vertical? Is it meant to re-create the perspective of a drunk, or might it be a more subtle way of commenting, for instance, on a community that lacks harmony and balance?
- What kind of distance does the frame maintain from its subject? Does the film use many close-ups (for instance, showing just the characters' faces), medium shots (showing most of a character's body), or long shots (showing full bodies from a distance)? Perhaps a scene uses a series of these shots, beginning with a long shot of a man on the street, then showing a medium shot of him looking in a store window, and concluding with a close-up of his surprised face as he sees something in the window. Does the movie develop a more elaborate combination of these that might be interpreted according to some meaningful pattern: close-ups for love scenes and long shots for battle scenes, for instance?

- Besides describing and containing the action, does the frame suggest other action or space outside its borders? Do important events or sounds occur outside the borders of the frame—in *off-screen space?* What is the significance of this off-screen space or its relation to what is seen within the frame? Is off-screen space used for comic effect, as in Buster Keaton's movie *The General* (1927) in which we discover that the wheel he is sitting on is part of a train located outside the frame and is about to move? Or does it have a serious meaning, as in Robert Bresson's films, in which off-screen space suggests a type of spiritual reality his characters are unable to grasp or understand because it is literally beyond the frame of their world?

Within one scene, any of these compositions may change as the camera creates a *moving frame* by altering its position in relation to the object being filmed. A romantic close-up of two lovers whispering, for example, may suddenly change its meaning if the camera frame moves backward and makes them part of a long shot full of spectators: What was at first romantic has become, through the movement of the frame, comic. This kind of framing action, called *reframing,* can be done in ways that rely entirely on the movement of the frame, not on the editing of images through cuts (see pp. 65–72).

When the frame moves to high, overhead *crane shots,* which look down on the action, we all realize there has been a dramatic change in perspective: The film may be emphasizing the smallness of the character in relation to the rest of his or her space, or it may be revealing other action, such as the approach of the cavalry on the other side of the mountain range. When the frame moves up and down, *tilting* from one position, it may simply be following the point of view of a character who is looking up and down, but it may also be a way of making a statement about high and low objects (about, for instance, the tourist who feels overwhelmed by the skyscrapers of New York City). Another kind of mobile frame is the *pan,* in which the frame moves from side to side without a change in the position of the camera or the point from which the scene is viewed: Surveying the street before him, a character may look slowly from left to right, and the camera may pan to re-create the continuous movement of his gaze. In contrast, a *tracking* or *dolly shot* is not stationary but follows or intrudes on the action by moving the position of the camera (often on small tracks) and, thus, taking the frame forward, backward, or around the subject. During a cocktail party scene,

the film may recreate the roving intimacy of the gathering by using a dolly shot that follows a character through the crowd. If this action is achieved by a *hand-held shot*, in which the camera is carried by the camera operator, the shot may be jerkier (and may, in some ways, seem more realistic).

Since frames imply a perspective on the world or on certain characters, their mobility or lack of it can point to the very foundation of the world you see in those frames. Is it an active world you are seeing or one that seems rigid and static? The complexities of that world are often revealed as the frames move and change, and the more exactly you can note these frames, the more incisive your analysis will be. Try, at some point, to base your analysis of a character or a situation exclusively on the framing action that describes them. What patterns can you see? Does this character always look at the world through close-ups that track through crowds and situations, without ever getting a larger perspective on them? Does that consistent way of framing the action suggest that he participates but never really sees the whole picture?

Remember that frames and their actions have no universal meaning. Just as colors do not have unchanging symbolic value, camera angles and movements do not have to mean the same thing in different movies. Low-angle shots do not always signify dominance, nor do high-angle shots always suggest oppression (as is sometimes thought). Although in one movie a low-angle shot may remind the viewer that a weak character is being looked at by a stronger, more dangerous person, in another movie that low-angle shot may be used to describe the wonder of a child looking at a person she loves. If you begin by noting visual details carefully, you can reflect on how particular framing actions work in specific films and on how they provoke certain questions about those films and their themes. An endless series of close-ups means one thing in a movie made for American television, where it may underline the importance of the individual character, and another thing in a European art film, where it may suggest the unknowable quality of the human face. In an Ozu film, the low height of the director's frame may be meant to suggest the more relaxed, meditative perspective of a Japanese person looking at the world from the floor of a tatami room, but the Belgian filmmaker Chantel Akerman claims that the low height of her frames occurs because she is short! The lesson should be clear: Don't simply describe technical details and expect them to be self-explanatory. Rather, put them to work to convey an idea about the various ways that frames and their points of view operate and what they mean in specific films, in specific cultures, and at specific times.

The Edited Image

In the simplest sense, editing is the linking of two different pieces of film (two different shots). Usually, the editing follows some logic of development (an image of a woman and then the object she is looking at, for example) or is meant to make a statement of some sort (an image of an egotistical czar and then one of a peacock). Recall the cowboy at the bar: When a long shot shows him at the bar and then slowly tracks in closer to capture him close up, this is reframing within a single shot. But, if after that first image the camera stops and moves to another position (maybe a low angle on the other side of the bar), that reframed long shot has now been edited into two shots. The break between the two images is a *cut*.

A shot can be held on the screen for any length of time, the result being a certain *editing pace* or *rhythm*. Because the pace of the editing is relative, we should try to note why and how a film or part of a film is edited according to a certain rhythm. We expect a chase scene to be rapidly edited (with lots of quick cuts and brief shots), but to make us comically aware of our expectations about editing, that chase scene could be edited with very slow rhythms and few cuts. As an exercise, observe exactly how long a single image remains on the screen in any movie, and then reflect on why the filmmaker cuts to another angle or image at that point. Does the director use mostly *long takes*, shots that remain on a scene or object for an unusually long time (as Terrence Malick did in *The Thin Red Line* [1999] when he held the image on grassy fields or the branches of trees for mystically long periods)? Or does the film cut rapidly from one image to another, as in chase sequences in *The Terminator* (1984)? Does the pace of the editing change with the scene, for example, by using quick cuts on the streets and slow, long takes inside the home?

In the larger sense, *editing* refers to how shots are built into larger pieces of a movie and, hence, larger units of meaning. A series of shots can thus be carefully joined to create a single *scene*, which is usually an action confined to one place and time: for example, in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), the scene in which Ada (Holly Hunter) arrives on a remote beach in nineteenth-century New Zealand or, in *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), the scene in which the officers inspect the rotten meat. The latter begins with a group of angry sailors gathered on deck around a piece of maggot-infested meat; the ship's surgeon inspects the meat, which is shown in close-up, and announces that the maggots are simply dead flies; the scene ends as another officer disperses the outraged sailors.

When these shots describe significantly more action and more time and more than one location, the interwoven and unified group of shots or

scenes that results is often called a *sequence*. In *The Piano,* the beach scene becomes part of a larger arrival sequence when Ada is met and led through the jungle to her future home; in *The Battleship Potemkin,* the scenes that dramatize the sailors' mounting discontent make those scenes part of a complicated sequence leading to their rebellion. As part of the previous exercise, see if you can now mark off sections of a film that show how shots can be edited into complex relationships that create unified scenes or sequences.

Most of us pay little conscious attention to editing because we know and enjoy most the *continuity editing* of classical cinema. This editing style is appropriately called *invisible editing* because the filmmaker, not wanting the editing to distract from the story, avoids cuts and transitions between images that would be too obvious. Through various means, the filmmaker attempts to hide the film editing so that we view the images as a continuous picture. Thus, even though *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) is a very skillfully and stylishly edited movie—carefully balancing Sam Spade's entrances and exits and his keen method of noticing the details in a room—we view it as a continuous action in which obtrusive cuts would seem out of place.

Yet, continuity editing depends on some highly crafted editing techniques, techniques that, when analyzed, reveal important points about the characters and story. *Establishing shots,* for instance, are the shots that begin a scene or sequence as a way of locating a scene clearly in a certain place before dividing that sequence into more detailed shots. *Casablanca* (1942) begins with a series of establishing shots that describe the city on the map, the kind of people in the city, and finally, the outside of Rick's cabaret. Only then does the film move inside to begin its story about Rick. The *shot/reverse-shot*, or *shot/countershot,* pattern is also a fundamental part of continuity editing. With this technique, an exchange between two characters (or a character and an object) is edited to appear logical and natural, by cutting from the person speaking or looking to the object or person being addressed or seen; for instance, a shot shows Humphrey Bogart asking Ingrid Bergman a question and then cuts to her responding. When considering a film that uses continuity editing, a writer can begin, as with realism itself, by questioning the basic purposes of the techniques used:

- Are there larger implications concerning the world and society in the "continuity"? Is the movie trying to create a sense of a logical or safe world? Do establishing shots, for instance, indicate that the characters (and the audience) know where they are and should feel at home? Does the continuity help establish, as in *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), a sense of logical inevitability, a feeling that events and relationships have to move toward a natural conclusion, that Hepburn and Grant will remarry?
- Has the continuity editing been adjusted to fit a genre or to create certain emotional responses? Do road movies have fewer cuts and more long takes? In westerns, do the shot/reverse-shot patterns involve people and things more than people and other people?
- When the editing presents a fundamentally continuous and unified world, are there times when that continuity is disrupted? If so, why? In *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), for instance, Orson Welles regularly disrupts the viewer's sense of space and time through the questionable reliability of the narrator, O'Hara, and through visual distortions, such as in the hall of mirrors at the end of the movie. In this case, the disrupting images and editing imply the collapse of a world incapable of maintaining old certainties.
- Does the shot/reverse-shot pattern in a particular sequence tell you anything about the characters involved or how they see the world and each other? Are considerably more shots given to one person or the other? Does the editing create a pattern in which one character's eyes never meet the other's?
- How would you distinguish between the continuity editing of an older, classic movie like *Ben-Hur* (1925) and that of a more modern Hollywood film like *Chicago* (2002)? Does one use more long takes and the other more quick cuts? How would you differentiate between the continuity editing in a European movie such as *The Rules of the Game* (1939) and an American movie such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940)? Does the first rely more on a moving frame to emphasize the world around the characters and the second more on smooth editing techniques that emphasize the characters themselves?

Continuity editing can also use more noticeable and stylized methods, which are often associated with older movies. These include:

- *Fade-in* or *fade-out:* An image is darkened or lightened so that it appears or disappears.

- *Iris-in* or *iris-out:* The new image appears as an expanding circle in the middle of the old image, or the old image becomes a contracting circle that disappears into the new image.
- *Wipe:* A line moves across an image to gradually clear one shot and introduce another.
- *Dissolve:* A new shot is briefly superimposed on the fading old shot.

When these techniques are used in a movie, ask what they are meant to achieve. Used in older movies, they create logical transitions from one time or place to another. In a D. W. Griffith film, a fade might be saying, "Later that same day," as the shot reveals the same kitchen in the evening; a wipe could suggest, "In another part of town"—when the interior of the court house is wiped off by a line across the image and a Chinese opium den appears on the other side of the line. When watching an older film, ask if one technique is used for one kind of linkage (a wipe connecting different places, for example) and another technique for other situations (a dissolve indicating changes in time). When analyzing modern movies, ask why the editor would choose these older continuity devices. Does Woody Allen use irises just for a humorous effect because they are so unusual in a contemporary movie? In *The Cotton Club* (1984), are the wipes simply a reference to the 1920s, when the story takes place, or are they a dramatic means of emphasizing the passage of time and history—one of the main themes of the film?

Besides recognizing the techniques of continuity editing, you should learn to recognize, make sense of, and analyze how films undermine or challenge your expectations about continuity editing. Especially in more contemporary films, begin to notice when a film breaks with the standards of continuity editing and begin to ask questions such as:

- Why are there so few establishing shots in a particular movie? Is it difficult to say where an action takes place because the scene begins with a close-up of a character or inside an unidentified room? Do the characters seem to share our disorientation? Is this disorientation related to the themes of the film?
- Why is the temporal continuity within a film broken up in such a confusing fashion? Does the editing use a number of *jump cuts,* in which a continuous shot is suddenly broken and the image jumps to new figures or another background or even the same background but at a different time? As a character discusses her life, for instance, the monologue may be broken in places, while the light in the room changes with each jump cut to indicate the passage of time. Is the filmmaker trying to make us more aware of the passage of time, or is he or she commenting ironically on this character's boring life story?
- Why is there no point of view with which we can identify? Does this have something to do with the lack of shot/reverse-shot scenes that would allow us to identify with the perspective of a character? Does the filmmaker, as Werner Herzog often does in his films, force his audience to remain detached from the ordinary people and to identify instead with animals, lunatics, or dwarfs? Does the film contain images that seem to have no place in the story? A movie about war may inexplicably cut to an image of a cherry tree time and time again. Is it a symbol? Is it part of a character's memory? Why is the continuity of the action broken by this unexplained image?

In these cases, the editing calls attention to itself, and the trade-off for that obtrusiveness is an initial confusion about why the editing has upset the usual perception of the world. When that confusion leads to larger questions (and, perhaps, to answers) about the themes and the historical context of the film, the writer is beginning to sketch a paper topic. After thinking about a Herzog movie, one student realized his paper would discuss how Herzog's unconventional editing, particularly his undermining of a shot/reverse-shot exchange, is part of an effort to move the audience outside the logical patterns that have traditionally placed human society at the center of the world, part of Herzog's vision of a natural world that is more important than individual men and women.

When examining editing strategies and the relationships between shots, begin with these general guidelines about what to look for, but adapt them to deal with concrete and specific uses and variations in each film.

First, observe how the editing of the shots establishes certain relationships between the objects and actions. Does the editing establish connections or oppositions among the people, things, and actions being shown? In *The Last Laugh* (1924), the doorman is frequently linked to the image of the revolving door, and the identification of the two predicts the reversal of the man's good fortune. In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968),

a prehistoric ape tosses a bone into the air, which then becomes the image of a spaceship. This famous *match-on-action*—two images being edited together as parallel actions or motions—crystallizes thousands of years of human development propelled by violence and the need to conquer people and territory.

Second, accustom yourself to noticing more abstract relationships between images. This is a more difficult practice but, as the example from Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* shows (see pp. 28–33), these more abstract aspects of editing can be brilliantly used for certain effects. Does the direction and movement of the figures in the different images match when these shots are connected, creating, for example, a kind of visual and emotional force driving in a single direction? Are graphic contrasts or similarities created through the use of space in the different shots, for example, by alternating large and small spaces? Does the editing set up certain rhythms by strictly controlling the length of each shot? (Although most of us know best the accelerated rhythms of a chase sequence, the editing can fashion many other kinds of rhythms.) Remember, these formal patterns have no final and universal meaning in themselves, and their evolution through film history is not independent of other historical questions. Although editing can be seen as a formal way of organizing images in time and space, more than just formal or technical issues are usually involved. Look precisely at editing, but let it lead you to think more about how and what films mean. In the following student essay, the writer examined a very short sequence in *Citizen Kane* (1941) and related the editing and the composition of the image to a specific theme:

Scott Richardson

Editing Breakfast in Citizen Kane

Soon after Charles Foster Kane marries Emily, the woman of his dreams who is brought back from Europe like one of his statues, their marriage begins to collapse. The severity and intensity of this collapse are captured in one two-minute sequence, which remains one of the most striking examples of Welles's evocative and economical editing in Citizen Kane.

The sequence begins with a medium two-shot of Kane and Emily in relatively warm light. Their conversation is teasing and intimate, visually reinforced by a shot/reverse-shot exchange of loving looks: He tells her she is beautiful, and when she complains about his having to leave for his newspaper office, he says he will call and change his appointments. That exchange is followed by five more short shot/reverse-shot pairs, and in each, the eyes of the couple grow increasingly suspicious and severe. The conversations are progressively hostile and clipped, and the newspaper becomes both a visual and a verbal symbol of their growing division. In the first scene of this middle section, she complains, "Charles, if I didn't trust you. . . . What do you do on a newspaper in the middle of the night?" In the third, Emily pleads with him to stop attacking her uncle, the president, in his newspaper. By the fifth, he is not even allowing her to finish her sentence:

EMILY: Really, Charles, people have a right to expect. . . .

CHARLES: What I care to give them.

Through the entire sequence, the changes in the clothing and other aspects of the mise-en-scène indicate that the passage of time is also a passage away from emotional intimacy. Kane changes from a romantic tuxedo to a business suit. Their setting alters from an unobstructed and close space to an obstructed space cluttered with plants, flowers, and newspapers.

The succinct logic of the editing is then powerfully concluded with a shot/reverse-shot and then another two-shot. In the shot/reverse-shot, the eyes no longer meet or match, since they are now both reading separate newspapers—he, his own (The Inquirer); she, the rival (The Chronicle). Formally balancing the opening of the sequence, the medium-long two-shot has much colder and darker lighting. The two former lovers are placed conspicuously at opposite sides of the frame.

The real time that this sequence describes is probably many years. Yet, through a rigorous and creative use of an edited space and a series of conversations within that space, Welles depicts more than just the synopsis of a failed marriage. Linking the six encounters, appropriately, with flash pans, he also tells a succinct and cinematic version of the entire tale of Citizen Kane: of how Kane's greatest desires seem to turn to dust almost immediately after he achieves them and of how he consequently becomes a man always alienated in the great spaces that surround him.

SOUND

Few of us have learned to listen to the movies. What this common failure means to new and curious students of the movies is that many topics and problems having to do with film sound have only recently begun to be addressed and are waiting for good ears to take them up. If students with an interest in music and sound direct and concentrate that interest on a movie or a specific group of movies, they will tackle some original and provocative material.

In theory, sound can be used and edited with as much complexity and intelligence as images can. Certainly, sound has many dimensions and uses in film: it can be described according to pitch, loudness, or timbre; it can figure in a film as *direct sound* (recorded when the image is being shot) or *postdubbed sound* (sound and dialogue added later in the studio). Movie sound can take the form of dialogue, music, or noise (thunder or a car screeching to a halt), any or all of these sounds being naturally or artificially produced. Film sound can have a multitude of relations to the image and the narrative: It can be background music; its source may be on- or off-screen; and it can even precede or follow the image to which it is linked (as when a character's remark forms a bridge into the next image).

Throughout film history, one can find movies in which the sound alone would make a major topic for analysis. A well-known example, Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet's *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968), sets up a complex opposition between the graceful music of Bach on the soundtrack and the tormented story of Bach's physical and

Figure 18 *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935): creating transitions and links . . .

financial troubles. Francis Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) recounts the story of a man who specializes in sound surveillance, who tries to discover the truth through sound alone, and who finally loses all faith in the visual world. Some of the most fascinating and provocative uses of sound are found in films of the early 1930s, when sound was first being introduced into the movies. In one early sound film, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935), Hitchcock employs sound as a central element in the plot: At a critical moment, he creates a dramatic *sound match* by connecting a woman's scream and the whistle of a locomotive to link disparate images (Figures 18 and 19).

To write about sound, one must first learn to attend to sound—truly to listen. This does not mean that the more obvious or dramatic uses of sound in film—in movies with lavish sound tracks like Ridley Scott's war-film *Black Hawk Down* (2001) or films organized around musical performances like *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999)—cannot inspire good essays. But because a good essay is one that reveals intuitive, careful, and discriminating thinking, a good essay on sound will attend to what might normally escape a normal viewer and listener. A writer about sound in film might therefore begin by asking bluntly:

Figure 19 . . . through sound matches.

- What is the relation of the sound to the image in specific scenes or sequences? How might the answer to that question be refined to reveal the aims, achievements, or even failures of sound in the movie?
- Is the sound used to link images, or does the sound have the conventional role of beginning and terminating with the image?
- Does sound ever become more important than the image, and what is the reason for this unusual strategy?
- Do the musical numbers in a musical have any special relation to the narrative structure (for instance, do they occur when the characters need to escape into fantasy)?
- Why does the dialogue of the characters overlap or seem mumbled in some recent movies so that it is difficult to understand the characters? Does the dialogue serve some other purpose than to help tell the story?
- What role does silence play in this movie?
- Are there sound motifs that identify the characters or actions? Does the rhythm of the sound support or serve as counterpoint to the rhythm of the editing?

- If you had to pick three key sound sequences from this movie, which would they be, and why?

These questions are only a sample of the many inquiries that movie sound and particular movies might inspire. Listen to all film sound, and write about it with the same curiosity and suspicion exhibited by the characters in Godard's *Every Man for Himself* (1980), who continually hear background music and wonder where it's coming from and why. Here a renowned French filmmaker (and early innovator with sound), René Clair, writing in 1929, detailed one of the first successes with sound in the cinema:

> Of all the films now showing in London, *Broadway Melody* is having the greatest success. This new American film represents the sum total of all the progress achieved in sound films since the appearance of *The Jazz Singer* two years ago. For anyone who has some knowledge of the complicated technique of sound recording, this film is a marvel. Harry Beaumont, the director, and his collaborators (of whom there are about fifteen, mentioned by name in the credit titles, quite apart from the actors) seem to delight in playing with all the difficulties of visual and sound recording. The actors move, walk, run, talk, shout, and whisper, and their movements and voices are reproduced with a flexibility which would seem miraculous if we did not know that science and meticulous organization have many other miracles in store for us. In this film, nothing is left to chance. Its makers have worked with the precision of engineers, and their achievement is a lesson to those who still imagine that the creation of a film can take place under conditions of chaos known as inspiration.
>
> In *Broadway Melody*, the talking film has for the first time found an appropriate form: it is neither theater nor cinema, but something altogether new. The immobility of planes, that curse of talking films, has gone. The camera is as mobile, the angles are as varied as in a good silent film. The acting is first-rate, and Bessie Love talking manages to surpass the silent Bessie Love whom we so loved in the past. The sound effects are used with great intelligence, and if some of them still seem superfluous, others deserve to be cited as examples.
>
> For instance, we hear the noise of a door being slammed and a car driving off while we are shown Bessie Love's anguished face watching from a window the departure which we do not see. This short scene in which the whole effect is concentrated on the actress's face, and which

the silent cinema would have had to break up in several visual fragments, owes its excellence to the "unity of place" achieved through sound. In another scene we see Bessie Love lying thoughtful and sad; we feel that she is on the verge of tears; but her face disappears in the shadow of a fade-out, and from the screen, now black, emerges a single sob.

In these two instances the sound, at an opportune moment, has replaced the shot. It is by this economy of means that the sound film will most probably secure original effects. (93–94)

In observing and writing about sound or any formal features, your first goal should be as much precision as possible. Developing a vocabulary of technical terms can be extremely helpful, but most important is developing the ability to write concrete descriptions of images and sounds in the way that best allows your reader to see and hear the images and sounds you are describing. Sometimes, of course, that detailed precision is more difficult to achieve than at other times. When you must work with only sketchy notes, try to get as much out of those notes as possible. There is nothing wrong with writing about a general style in a film ("a predominance of long shots," "an amplified sound track," or "exaggeratedly artificial sets"), as long as your paper has a focus that does not rely solely on generalities. Otherwise, always try to integrate as much accurate concrete description as possible into your argument. As practice, describe—without analyzing—all the technical features of an opening or closing sequence of a movie or an especially interesting use of sound in a scene.

Interpretation, analysis, and evaluation are, however, the primary goals of most writing about film these days. Your appreciation of these elements of a film and how they work together must, at some point, be assimilated and made part of your ideas about what the film or films mean. Whether you examine the editing of a sequence, the lighting throughout a series of films, or how the mise-en-scène, framing, and sound work together in a single scene, remember that seeing, listening, and thinking must join forces as you begin to put your perceptions into words.

SAMPLE ESSAY

This student essay on *The Searchers* (1956) is a good example of how a discriminating analysis involves comparative questions (about film and literature) and, in the process, demonstrates how the movie uses specific technical and formal strategies to express its themes.

Richard Geschke

The Darkened Doorways of The Searchers

Based on a 1954 novel by Alan LeMay, John Ford's 1956 adaptation of The Searchers dramatizes some of the critical changes that can occur in moving a story from a book to the screen. Most film adaptations require some adjustments to the plot (usually deletions). But in Ford's The Searchers, we witness a major alteration in the central character, Ethan Edwards, which in turn affects the significance of the entire story. As part of Ford's transformation of Edwards, the film uses a specific image pattern based on the composition of a darkened doorway, an image pattern that indicates how a film narrative can sometimes supplement or even surpass a literary narrative.

Although most of the central plot elements remain intact, the most significant change in the adaptation is the character of Ethan Edwards. In the novel he is a fairly traditional western hero who, without much psychological complexity, rescues his niece and returns home. In the film, however, his character grows much more complicated in three ways. First, from the beginning, there is the subtle but definite indication of a mysterious and possibly criminal past: Since the end of the Civil War, Ethan apparently resisted returning home and possibly participated in some unmentionably dangerous, violent, or illegal acts. Second, Ford's Ethan struggles with the turbulent dangers of sexual desire. As carefully suggested by the opening sequence with Ethan and his brother's wife Martha, Ethan has had to repress his love and passion for Martha, presumably knowing that passion would violate the domestic and family codes he lives by. Third, in the film, Ethan is clearly a racist. Unlike in the novel, here he makes sarcastic remarks about his "half-breed" nephew (who is partly Native American) and, more importantly, his

mission to find Debbie is, unlike in the novel, motivated by the wish to kill her because he believes she has been sexually violated by her non-white captor.

A violent, racist, and sexually troubled Ethan thus motivates and complicates the straightforward plot of the novel in new ways. On the one hand, The Searchers proceeds as a linear quest: Ethan and Marty Pauley search for the lost Debbie, who has been kidnapped by the Comanche tribe of Scar. That plot is ultimately resolved, in a classical manner, when they find her and she is returned home. A counter-current within this linear, forward plot, however, is an interior search that seems to move backward and inward in the film, investigating Ethan's twisted mind and dark past. At the center of these parallel plots, Marty becomes more and more aware of Ethan's violence and racism, and increasingly confronts him, eventually attempting to stop him from killing Debbie. At first, Ethan does not appear to respond to any of these demands for self-knowledge, and his climactic confrontation with Scar suggests that nothing about him has changed: He not only kills the Comanche chief but, in an act of grotesque brutality, Ford has this cinematic Ethan actually scalp Scar (which does not happen in the novel).

When in a scene that immediately follows, Ethan chases down Debbie but does not kill her, the film indicates, however, that something has indeed changed in Ethan, that his search for Debbie has revealed something horrid about himself to himself. Perhaps the scalping of Scar, who more and more seems a reflection of Ethan, has acted as a cathartic confrontation with his own dark soul. Perhaps his entire quest has, with the help of Marty, allowed him to see his own barbaric and primitive self. His decision to spare Debbie's life becomes then, at least in part, a decision to acknowledge and free himself from his own violent desires and troubled past. Driven by the need to restore a home and domestic life, Ethan's narrative has now become an inquiry into the dark passions that threaten that home life from within.

Brilliantly dramatizing the tension between Ethan's two searches is a pattern of shots focused on darkened entryways. At the opening, a three-quarters shot from behind Martha shows her looking across the plain as she stands in a doorway. The black interior of the cabin contrasts sharply with the bright light that fills the doorway from outside. A tracking shot then follows Martha out onto the porch where she watches Ethan riding toward her in the distance. At the conclusion, virtually the same shot recurs as Ethan delivers Debbie to her new home with the Jorgensens. After Debbie and the Jorgensens enter the black interior, the newly married Marty and his wife follow. Ethan, though, hesitates on the porch and then turns back into the desert.

Both these shots position Ethan as a wanderer separated from the domestic interiors that he approaches. Complicating this image, moreover, those interiors are blackened in a way that suggests a darker reality than is usually associated with the inside of a home. In an important sense, I believe, the exteriors represent that wild and primitive world that Ethan must wander through, while the interiors of home (and self) represent for Ethan the shadowy and dangerous passion now associated with his illicit love of Martha.

Between these two scenes of darkened doorways is a third scene whose black space acts as the turning point in Ethan's story and a measure of what has changed between the beginning and end of this narrative. After killing Scar, Ethan chases the fleeing Debbie to a cave. Shot from the interior as a medium long shot, the

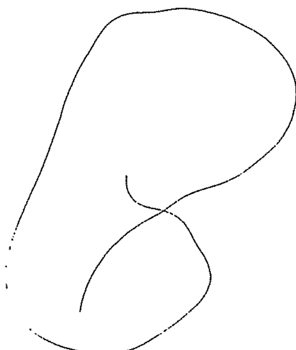
composition here clearly replicates the doorway shots that open and close the film. After approaching the cringing Debbie, Ethan does not, as we expect, kill her but instead lifts her up and says "Let's go home, Debbie." As part of a climactic turning point that begins with his brutal scalping of Scar, the scene becomes a moment of partial and temporary redemption for Ethan as he enters that darkened interior but quietly refuses to act out his repressed violence. When he releases Debbie later at a similar threshold, Ethan has recognized his own violent passion and has resisted it. As he turns at the threshold and walks back into the desert, the long take becomes an acknowledgement that Ethan cannot enter that domestic world because of who he is. In the words of the sound track, he is a man who must continue to "search his heart and soul."

There may be many social or personal reasons for these alterations in adapting the novel to the film in this way. What is clear is that Ford's version of the story is a much more troubling and disturbing version as it injects race and sexuality into a character and the narrative. In this case adapting a literary narrative as a film narrative becomes not simply the translation of characters and themes but the creation of significantly different characters and themes.

Exercises

1. Write a three- or four-paragraph evaluation of a film adapted from a work of literature. What are the most visible omissions and additions? How and where has the film most effectively used its own formal techniques? Has the film adaptation simply re-created the main themes and plot elements of the literary work, or has it changed the meaning and themes in some way?

2. For one film, write three or four paragraphs on a single element of film technique—such as image composition, editing, or sound. Whichever technique you concentrate on, first simply describe the most important instances in the film and only then evaluate how those techniques add to the meaning of the specific shot, scene, or sequence.



AMY VILLAREJO Film Studies, The Basics
London & New York : Routledge, 2007

THE LANGUAGE OF FILM

Film is structured like a language. Or is it? Composed of fundamental units, called shots, films rely upon **edits** to join shots together into larger strings called **sequences** (a series of shots united in time and space), just as words become sentences. Many films depend for their intelligibility upon rules or cinematic **conventions**, a form of film grammar that has evolved over time. A military parade, such as the masses in motion in the German propaganda film *Triumph des Willens / Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935), always moves in the same onscreen direction, for example; flashbacks, or **temporal ellipses** of many sorts, are often signaled with a **dissolve** (that edit which joins two shots, the first fading while the second gradually appears). And, like a language, new elements, born of both technological innovation and imaginative invention, enter the cinematic lexicon, while others disappear or become anachronistic. Special effects master Dennis Muren's compositing (mixing several visual components in one shot), as Hollywood insider Anne Thompson notes, "makes possible the morphing T-1000 in *Terminator 2* (1991) and the fleet-footed dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* (1993)" (A. Thompson 2005: 2). The use of the **iris** (another edit, a round mask that closes to black, or that opens to begin a sequence, or that encircles an important detail) has even come in recent years to signify "old-fashioned," associated as it is with the silent narrative cinema and with its trademark use in the Looney Tunes. Like language, film opens to different uses or forms. Some films are like stories, others more like novels or serials. Some films seem poetic; others, striving perhaps toward profundity, seem simply nonsensical. Some documentary films want their language to seem transparent, as much of the language of journalism aspires to be, while other films want us to do nothing more than to notice their language, as with filmic explorations of the *avant-garde* and other experimental makers.

The comparison *to* language beloved of some introductory courses in cinema, however, faces serious limits, demonstrated by film theorists over several decades. First, insofar as films involve **screen duration**: they cut out and rearrange time as they unfold in time (and as they unfold in time, in whatever format, remember that they are also dying). Films enlist our sensations, perceptions, and responses in and over time, as much as they appeal to our memories, our archives of what we know and have known, of what we experience and have experienced. They appeal to and become part of our personal and individual histories, and part of our collective lives. They also appeal to our linguistic being, such that what we might attribute to a film experience may in fact originate in our linguistic habits and expectations. I may experience the break-up of my relationship in the terms of melodrama, hurling lines such as "You never loved me!" in imitation of the best melodrama queens like Joan Crawford and Bette Davis; you show your friends the testimony in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) to convince them that the slogan of "never again" (will Jews suffer genocide) is complicated by collective loss experienced variably and individually. Only by making appeals to the way we move through the world, literally our "common sense," does the cinema endure, and only by doing so can cinema *rearrange* those unquestioned ideas, our unexamined relationships to the past, to history. Some films are notable for the way they dislocate time, fragment it, or interrupt its seemingly linear flow: Alain Resnais' films *Nuit et brouillard / Night and Fog* (1955) and *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) crucially contest our understandings of the monumental and personal devastations wrought by the Second World War, in the death camps and in the

bombing of Hiroshima, respectively. But other films also play with history, if in more conventional ways, in order to challenge pious or commonsensical attitudes toward simple ways of understanding the past. *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (Stephen Herek, 1989) gives history over to the little guys, California high-school students who think Caesar is a salad dressing; while *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1996) invents Hollywood history from the perspective of a black lesbian who is searching both for love and for (nonexistent) images of herself in the world of cinema.

Second, cinema's reach is everywhere; its time is its entire past. I suggested in Chapter 1 that if film preservationists were to deposit a fraction of what the cinema has been into an archive, that collection can never represent, as a portion of a dictionary does, a fraction of the elements available for the cinema's future. Cinema, in other words, bears a distinctly different relationship than does language to conceptions of totality: that's part of what makes it daunting (for one can never imagine, much less see, even a smidgen of what has been recorded) but also what makes it powerful, compelling, fascinating. For it bridges a gap between the self and the limitless whole, between what we know intimately and what we can never know. In an oscillation between innovation and industrial co-optation, between invention and repetition, cinema makes itself part of us, literally imprinting itself upon our retinas and lingering there. But also figuratively: we *speak* in the language of cinema, calling celebrity photographers "paparazzi" after the character of Paparazzo in Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960), or challenging an opponent with the line Clint Eastwood popularized in the Dirty Harry films: "Go ahead. Make my day." We *remember* in the language of cinema, summoning our images of Hitler, of John F. Kennedy, of the first space walk, or of true love from its vast archive. We *feel* through the language of cinema, in the bone-chilling effects of the thriller or in the deluges we unleash in the "weepies." Even through these intimate experiences of the cinema, however, we will still never really know what it has been or what it might become; its totality, as our own does, eludes us.

Finally, in understanding the comparison with language to obtain between scholarly approaches to film form and linguistic treatments of grammar – so that we are comparing the study of elements of film form and their rules of combination (shot, sequence, continuity editing or challenges thereto) with the study of elements of a given language and its rules (words, sentences, "correct" vs. "incorrect" usage) – we risk diminishing both film study and our conception of language and its study. We reduce both, in other words, to *normative* analyses, for to study a system and its rules is to reduce a phenomenon in order to make it manageable. Grammar elides other fascinating realms of linguistics: history, texts (philology), comparative linguistics, the philosophy of language, the study of its use, and the like. Film analysis – the name for the study of film as "like a language" through a taxonomy of its form and an examination of its rules – similarly brackets film history, theory, the philosophy of the image, fandom, technological shifts, industrial organization, and so on. Film analysis, furthermore, lends itself most powerfully to the study of narrative film, a dominant form, to be sure, but, as we have seen, by no means the only one.

As the words in bold throughout this book indicate, however, I find some specialized language nonetheless helpful for describing what we see and hear and then thinking deeply about it, just as the ability, I believe, to parse a sentence renders one's own writing more precise and nuanced in order to make an argument. Here in this chapter, then, I condense key areas of film analysis; in the remainder of the book, I visit some of these other ways of thinking through the phenomenon of cinema. The title of this chapter, "The language of film," means, then, to suggest that one learn the language of film analysis precisely in order to say something meaningful about a given film, or about cinema. After reading this chapter, you ought, for example, to be able to identify and describe (and these are all defined subsequently) **rear projection**, the **axis of action**, or a **tracking motif**. The point, however, and to paraphrase Karl Marx, is not simply to *describe* the world you see onscreen; it is to risk having a point in the description. The selection of key terms aims not to offer encyclopedic knowledge or the upper hand in trivia games, but instead to help you begin to think through different issues or questions that various formal strategies present. The question that ought to underlie close analysis, to put it bluntly, is "so what?" What is the function of x or y? What results from the choice of y over x? Why does x leave me cold? Or why does y convince me?

A note for future study: many fine textbooks extend the discussion of film analysis you are about to read. Two of them upon

which many academics and college / university courses rely regularly are David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (1993), and Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience* (2004). Both texts multiply the number of terms I present here, and both acknowledge the paradoxical, if not impossible, nature of any taxonomy of film. In giving names to what we see and hear, that is, we necessarily translate; we represent, in the medium of written language, the sensory experience of watching and listening. (The still images sprinkled throughout this text and others repeat the problem on another register, insofar as they finesse the phenomenon of duration and exemplify in their stillness all that cinema sought to overcome in its illusion of motion. Would that the web overcame the hurdles of copyright so that you could read this with "live" streams.) This summary means, then, to spur you toward more watching, more listening, more reading, more thinking about what you see and hear. That said, there is no other chapter-length summary like it. It moves quickly and might function nicely as a reference to which you may wish to return.

FILM ANALYSIS, THE BASICS: *MISE-EN-SCÈNE*

We start with ***mise-en-scène***. From the French – not a bad language to sharpen if you're drawn to cinema studies – in its initial use it meant the theatrical process of staging. In film study it retains the theatrical overtones, meaning to "put into the scene" and designating all that encompassed by the **frame** (the bounded axes of the image, discussed in the section on "Cinematography;" see pp. 36–42). In the study of *auteurs*, you will recall, it was in *mise-en-scène* that the French intellectuals found the evidence for authorial signatures and individual genius, but it is also in *mise-en-scène* that we often find a palpable manifestation of what we might call in the vernacular the "world of the film," its feel, its attitude toward detail, its sense of its own reality against which we can measure its representations. It thus provides a useful starting point for describing what you're seeing. If viewers of Edward D. Wood, Jr.'s *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959) observe gleefully that the "flying saucer" is in reality a metal pie plate suspended by a visible string, Wood's earnest world of zombies and space travel, like many of the B-films spoofed on television's *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, nonetheless retains its own wacky logic and appeal. Remember, in other words, that "reality" partakes of the *functions* of *mise-en-scène* more than the measurement of its elements against a presumed "real world," at the same time as films summon our experience of living in that real world by way of our reactions and responses. In order to parse out how *mise-en-scène* establishes a film's world through its visual style, it helps to divide its categories. There are six components to *mise-en-scène* if you believe strongly, as I do, that "hair" deserves its very own, to wit: setting (set and props), lighting, costume, hair, make-up, and figure behavior.

SETTING

Setting needn't be constructed, although it often is. It refers to the streets of Dakar in Senegal, the city from which the characters Mory and Anta in Djibril Diop Mambety's film odyssey *Touki Bouki* (1973) begin a journey toward an imaginary France (referenced in the film through Josephine Baker's song "Paris, Paris, Paris," looped on the soundtrack), just as much as it refers to the Los Angeles suburbs in which hundreds of B-westerns allege to have found "New Mexico" or "Arizona." It refers to Victorian London as it is conjured through the smoky, gritty street scenes of the BBC production of Sarah Waters' quasi-lesbian novel *Tipping the Velvet* (2004), as much as it refers to the pop-shorthand version of "London" on offer in *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (Jay Roach, 1999), with its impromptu pre-shagging Elvis Costello number, red telephone booths, and groovy double-deckers. Shooting on **location** – that is, using settings found in the world rather than constructed in the studio – does not mean that the world of the film thus created is not constructed or is simply "realistic." Just think, as the joke goes, of how many apartment windows in films that take place in Paris just happen to feature a stunning view of the Eiffel Tower. Location shooting relies on deliberate choices to enlist the help of already-constructed locales in the production of the film's setting. Wynn Thomas, the production designer for Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), masterminded the painstaking "recreation" of an actual block in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn to use as the

Figure 2.1: Do the Right Thing.
Source: Universal/The Kobal Collection.

film's setting (see Figure 2.1). Another option, frequently used for narrative films with significant budgets, is the studio shoot on a **sound stage** (a built locale in which every variable of light and sound can be calculated to simulate whatever environment a filmmaker wishes to create). Sets are not confined to measurable interiors, such as dwellings or workplaces, but can extend literally into the new worlds of galaxies and universes beyond our own.

If settings often blend found and constructed elements, **props** (short for "properties") help to amplify a mood, give further definition to a setting, or call attention to detail within the larger scene. In Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), stuffed game birds peering down upon Norman Bates and Marion Crane in the Bates Motel define the word "creepy," but they also give away the secret of the film (see Figure 2.2). (I won't reveal it here if you haven't seen the film.) Props can serve an overt narrative function. In an early American narrative film such as D.W. Griffith's *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), the actress Blanche Sweet fends off two robbers who are after a mining company's payroll money, delivered to the train station at which she serves as telegraph operator. The film's punch line comes when the robbers learn that her "weapon" had all along

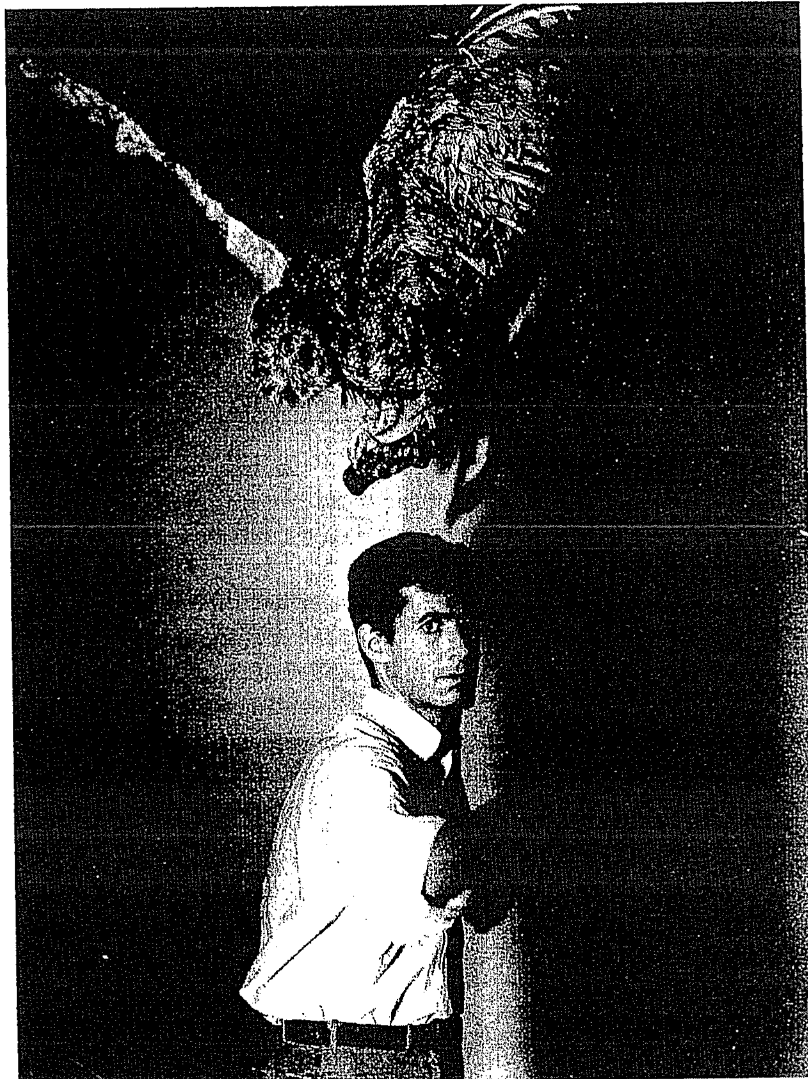


Figure 2.2: Psycho.
Source: Paramount/The Kobal Collection.

been a wrench, masquerading in the dark as a gun. (You may practice your own psychoanalytic interpretation of what this "weapon" might represent at home.) In early prints of the film, Griffith **tinted** (colored) the wrench to stand out against the dusky night, so that

spectators would experience Sweet's captivity as suspense, in fear that her ruse might be exposed. Props can also serve less overt narrative functions, condensing meaning without declaring it baldly. To take another mining example, in the final shot of Douglas Sirk's wonderfully perverse melodrama *Written on the Wind* (1956) Marylee Hadley (Dorothy Malone) strokes a replica of an oil derrick as she assumes the position of family matriarch. In this story of a Texas oil family's debauchery and fall (a precursor to the television serials *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, to be sure) the erect phallus can only be an artificial one!

LIGHTING

Lighting, just as effectively as props, establishes mood and directs attention to detail. Obvious examples of extreme variations in lighting include the German expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), wherein fear and menace reveal themselves through angular sets and ***chiaroscuro*** (bold contrasts between light and dark) interiors and street scenes, or in the post-war American film movement known as ***film noir***, ("dark film"), literally as descriptive of its settings in urban crime and mystery, and figuratively as descriptive of its investigations of shady lives and dark themes inaugurating the post-war landscape. These two examples disclose the extent to which lighting is often naturalized, thought of as emanating naturally from a film's setting. Perhaps because spectators frequently know little about how lighting works, or perhaps because filmmakers now manipulate it so effectively that we are drawn in by the illusion, we frequently overlook its power in the experience of cinema.

In fact, however, even the effect of naturalistic lighting in cinema takes an enormous amount of work, relying upon the repertoire of effects possible through the system of **three-point lighting**, developed during the studio era in Hollywood and largely dominant still today. As the name suggests, the system describes three sources of lighting, and is reliant upon a **key light**, a **fill light**, and a **backlight** in order to balance the lighting for effect in any given shot setup. Also commonsensically, the key light provides the primary or key light source. It tends to illuminate most strongly the shot's subject, and it also tends to cast the strongest shadows. A fill light, which might be positioned near the camera roughly 120° or thereabouts from the key light, literally "fills in" the shadows thrown by the key light. Compensating for the key light's strength and tendency to throw harsh shadows, the fill light softens the illumination upon the subject and its surrounding area. The backlight, finally, comes from behind the subject (in our example roughly another 120° from the fill light) and separates the subject from the background, counterbalancing the brightness of the key light. By varying the intensities and direction of light through the three-point system, filmmakers achieve an astounding variety of effect, from the even **high-key** lighting of the classical Hollywood cinema (wherein little contrast between bright and dark obtains, soft and revealing of detail) to the **low-key** (high contrast, harsh, and hard) lighting frequently used in horror and mystery (including my previous examples drawn from *noir*). In the former case, the high-key style contributes to a worldview that values transparency, clarity, intelligibility; the most extreme example of high-key lighting is the television situation comedy. In the latter case, lighting helps to gesture toward the underworld, the shadowy world, uncertainty, fear, or evil.

Lighting helps viewers to understand setting as well as the characters and actors within that setting. Throwing a light under a character's face, underlighting, creates a spooky or sinister effect, for example, whereas positioning a light behind the subject by **backlighting** may create a halo around the hair, suggesting the character's saintliness. Special kinds of lighting magnify the best that stars have to offer: a **kicker** (backlighting on the subject's temple) reveals chiseled cheekbones, while an **eye light** (lighting from the front, from a light placed on the camera) creates a glamorous twinkle. But films use other cues to build our perceptions of characters, both principal and marginal. **Costume**, in tandem with setting and props, delineates the world of a film and its characters, too.

COSTUME AND HAIR

Genre, a term designating films of a common type, provides an easy inroad to costuming: we can think easily of a cowboy's look as he rides into town in a western, or of a spaceship officer's garb as she sits before a flashing control board in a science fiction film. Because

genre is an effect of repetition, we learn its codes so that we can quickly orient ourselves to the new iteration of a given story. This form of "typing" is not limited to genre films, of course. Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) exploits "**typage**" in order to differentiate the heroic sailors from the rigid and oppressive officers on the battleship. The brawny sailors (actual sailors cast for type) wear white and gleam as brightly as the ship's brass they polish proudly, while the officers' dark uniforms amplify their sinister tendencies and hawk-like preying upon the enlisted men. And Eisenstein's awareness of the importance of **hair** styling reveals itself through the outrageous wig worn by the character of the ship's priest, his outdated fanaticism emblematized in his wild locks. Details of costuming contribute to the believability of a film's world, in other words, but good costume design is not simply about historical fidelity or accuracy. "Unless of course the film requires it, I'm not interested in an exact replica of the period," remarks Sandy Powell, one of the most accomplished designers in film's history. "I look at the period, how it should be, how it could be, and then I do my own version" (Bellafante 1999: 82).

MAKE-UP

Make-up often goes unnoticed in many realist films. Indeed, it became recognized as an art with its own category for the Academy Awards as late as 1965. Epic historical films, such as Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995), or large-scale fantasy or science fiction productions, such as the *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* cycles, clearly draw attention to the role of make-up in creating imaginative dimensions of the film world. But make-up is one of those elements of the larger effect of **glamor**, which by definition remains concealed as a process and as labor. Star images depend upon the idea that stars "naturally" look better than mere mortals, and that their beauty shines forth with or without the efforts of a crew in the make-up truck. In Billy Wilder's brilliant satire of Hollywood life *Sunset Boulevard.* (1950), aging actress Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson, herself a silent era legend) undergoes a barrage of facial treatments, muscle exercises, and the like in the belief that she is on the threshold of a comeback. Wilder reveals how her star image is

constructed through hard work that is then rendered invisible through the mechanics of film stardom. It is of course true that actors are selected for their looks, whether glamorous or not, and that make-up aids in creating surfaces particularly congenial to be photographed. As Robert Towne observes, actors communicate powerfully through their screen presences:

> For gifted movie actors affect us most, I believe, not by talking, fighting, fucking, killing, cursing or cross-dressing. They do it by being photographed. . . . Great movie actors have features that are ruthlessly efficient. . . . The point is that a fine actor on screen conveys a staggering amount of information before he ever opens his mouth.
>
> (Dunne 1997: 160)

If their features are "ruthlessly efficient," that efficiency is augmented by the careful application of make-up for the process of photography.

FIGURE BEHAVIOR

Actors also do, of course, talk, fight, fuck, kill, curse and cross-dress: these various activities the sometimes deadening language of film analysis flattens into the category of **figure behavior**. Since *mise-en-scène* encompasses only those elements "put in" to the scene, figure behavior means to describe the movement, expressions, or actions of the actors or other figures (animals, monsters, animated things, droids) within a given shot. Acting *per se* thus receives little attention in formal analysis, which is instead concerned with the placement of figures within the frame, with narrative motivation for various forms of expression, with the production of affect through the face as an apparent window onto interior feeling or emotion, and with action that contributes to a film's narrative, its cause and effect logic. Danish director Carl-Theodor Dreyer's classic film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) records nuances of suffering and crisis as the martyred Joan is tried and subsequently hanged at Rouen Cathedral. Maria (Renée) Falconetti's performance, considered by many to be one of film's greatest, thus receives formal treatment less in terms of acting *style* than in terms of Dreyer's

manipulation of point of view and use of the close-up of Falconetti's naked face (i.e. without make-up, which he forbade in the service of realism). As David Bordwell has shown in a remarkably careful reading of the film, Dreyer deploys the close-up precisely *not* in order to solicit identification with the martyred Joan, but instead to create a truly divine point of view or perspective of judgment that is distinct from *both* herself and her persecutors (Bordwell 1981).

CINEMATOGRAPHY

To notice any single element of *mise-en-scène* is also to notice an element of cinematography, since everything "put in" to a given shot is recorded by a camera. That camera, in turn, is placed to include some elements and to exclude others (to leave them offscreen in **offscreen space** or **implied space**). That decision involves the act of **framing** the **profilmic** event, or that which lies before the camera; even films that exist independently of a profilmic event (such as those experimental films discussed in Chapter 1) rely upon inclusion and exclusion for every frame. The camera records the shot at a given **camera distance** from the setting and its action. The camera chronicles the action from a fixed or changing **camera angle**. Even a stationary camera establishes and may change focus, in order to emphasize a particular plane or planes within the camera's **depth of field**, the three-dimensional space the camera's lens is capable of recording in focus in two dimensions, according to the shot's role and logic. And the camera's angle and distance may remain constant or change with the **camera's movement** during the shot. Anything to do with the camera, that is, belongs to the realm of cinematography.

Framing can be understood practically as well as philosophically; I find it one of the most important elements of cinema and one that opens onto other aspects of cinematography, following upon the insights of Gilles Deleuze, who notes that "the frame teaches us that the image is not just given to be seen. It is legible as well as visible" (Deleuze 1986: 12). Ronald Bogue, a particularly fine reader of Deleuze's work on cinema, summarizes five elements of framing we can isolate in order to explore its function:

1. In terms of content, it provides information. "The more information that fills the framed image," suggests Bogue, "the more it may be said to be 'saturated'; the less information, the more 'rarefied' the image becomes, until it reaches the limit of the empty black or white screen" (Bogue 2003: 42). If the film I mentioned in Chapter 1, *The Flicker*, represents the rarefied pole, Wes Anderson's stylized 2001 film *The Royal Tennenbaums* works well as an example of the saturated other extreme, crammed as every shot is with detail and visual information.
2. The frame itself, as limiting border, functions either geometrically or dynamically. In the first case, "the frame establishes a fixed compositional grid of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal coordinates" (Bogue 2003: 43) within which elements are organized. In the second, the frame functions dynamically with that which is framed. Hitchcock's framing of the fields of the American Midwest in *North by Northwest* relies on geometric framing; indeed, Hitchcock's own **storyboards**, the drawings that provide a graphic vision of each setup or shot, lay bare his interest in the frame's geometric function. **Canted framing**, in which the horizontal axis appears tilted, can also signal that something is "out of whack," such as Spike Lee's use of the canted frame (also called **Dutch angles**) in *Do the Right Thing* in order to indicate brewing tensions. By contrast, the use of iris shots in a film such as Germaine Dulac's *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (1922) reveals the subjective life of the trapped bourgeois woman of the title. As Alan Williams observes of this "grimly comic" tale, Dulac's use of props and subjective camera divulge the extent to which "the heroine has internalized her oppressive situation so completely that the ways in which she can rebel against it . . . only serve as humorous illustrations of her terrible psychic imprisonment" (Williams 1992: 147–8).
3. The frame both separates and unites the included elements: parts are related geometrically, parts related dynamically. The horizon consistently on display in the genre of the Hollywood western provides an example of the former,

while images of fog or shadows provide movement which can unite what remains within the frame dynamically.

4 Every frame implies an "angle of framing" or implicit point of view. This point of view may have narrative motivation (which I discuss at length soon; see pp. 119–20), or it may provide a puzzle for the spectator to solve or ponder. From whose point of view or from what position am I seeing what is onscreen?

5 The frame both includes and excludes. Every frame determines an "out of field" beyond the framed image. Film critic Noel Burch distinguishes six spatial axes in the out of field: above or below the frame, to the right or left, in depth away from the camera or toward and beyond it. Deleuze proposes, in addition to the spatial out of field, an absolute out of field of *durée*, or duration.

Framing, of course, depends on other cinematographic choices. Every placement of the camera can be analyzed in terms of the distance between the camera and its object(s). Film analysis has evolved an anthropocentric taxonomy for describing distance, that is, using the human body as the reference point for each designation:

- the extreme long shot (ELS), in which one can barely distinguish the human figure;
- the long shot (LS), in which humans are distinguishable but remain dwarfed by the background;
- the medium long shot (MLS), or plan americain, in which the human is framed from the knees up;
- the medium shot (MS), in which we move in slightly to frame the human from the waist up;
- the medium close-up (MCU), in which we are slightly closer and see the human from the chest up;
- the close-up (CU), which isolates a portion of a human (the face, most prominently);
- and the extreme close-up (ECU), in which we see a mere portion of the face (an eye, the lips).

All of these designations can be brought to shots without humans in them, but the language of camera distance relies on a conception of

the human in the frame in order to measure it. The height of the camera and its angle, as I have already noted, are also implicated in framing.

What we see of the object(s) in a given shot also depends upon the manipulation of light and of focus, in turn dependent, as with most types of photography, upon the selection of a camera's **lens** and the **film stock** for its sensitivity to light. Lenses come in different **focal lengths**, selected for their ability to alter perceptions of depth and scale: short focus (commonly called wide angle) lenses, which exaggerate depth (and which bend straight lines at the fringes of the frame, creating distortions such as the "fishbowl" effect); middle focal length lenses of up to 50mm, which avoid distortion and reproduce Renaissance perspective; and long focal length or telephoto lenses, which flatten depth and magnify events at a distance, allowing us to see details from very far away. Unlike these lenses with fixed focal lengths (called prime lenses), zoom lenses allow a cinematographer to change focal length over the course of a single shot; changing, or **racking**, focus in the course of a shot can simulate camera movement, in which we may appear to be closer to an object or person, moving from, say, a medium long shot to a close-up, but in fact the camera remains stationary while the cinematographer adjusts the focal length of the lens. Film stocks vary as to their responsiveness to amount and type of light source; the level of a film's **exposure** depends upon the calibration of light

BOX 2.1: *CITIZEN KANE* (WELLES, 1941)

Depth of field – an element of cinematography – combines with the construction of setting – an element of *mise-en-scène* – famously in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Cinematographer Gregg Toland captured the vast sets constructed to display Kane's opulent life in his mansion Xanadu in such a way as to keep many planes in sharp focus. The combination of short focal length lenses with very light-sensitive or fast film recording **deep space** came to be called, after *Kane*, **deep focus** and was used repeatedly throughout several decades.

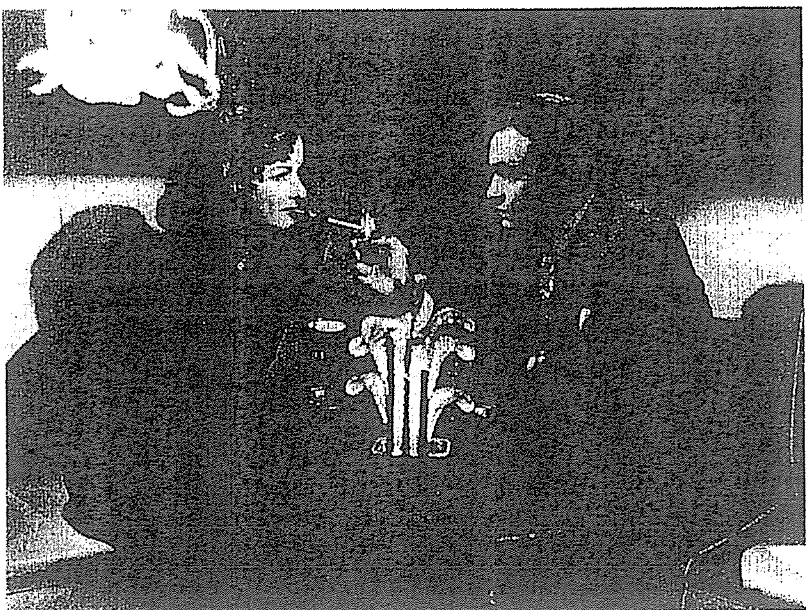


Figure 2.3: The Woman in the Window.
Source: RKO/The Kobal Collection.

source, stock, and **aperture**, which both controls the amount of light to which the film is exposed and also determines **depth of field**, or those planes which remain in sharp focus in a given shot.

Cameras, of course, may move, on trains and in hot-air balloons, sometimes. They are mounted on jet airplanes and carried in pockets. Some are handheld, and some handheld cameras require the complicated scaffold of the Steadicam to give operators minute control and balance. Several forms of camera movement bear specific mention. When a camera rotates on its vertical axis – that is, when it remains stationary but for that rotation – we describe that movement as **panning**, frequently to scan a crowd or establish a vast space. When a camera rotates on its horizontal axis, again – when it remains stationary but for that rotation – the effect is **tilting**, frequently to establish a building's height or a view from a lower to a higher perspective. When the camera is freed from a stationary position, it becomes mobile and reframes, of course, as it moves. Such mobile framing, then, involves a camera which is said to be **traveling**: **dollying**, when it rests on a dolly or some other

form of wheeled contraption (amateurs love wheelchairs, as they are cheap and accessible), **tracking**, when such a dolly travels on actual tracks laid on the set for that purpose, or, less frequently, **trucking**, as the camera rides on a truck or other vehicle on the ground. Such mobile framing can involve movement backward, forward, side to side, or around in circles, and can vary furthermore in terms of speed. When the camera leaves the ground, it is **craning**, frequently on an actual crane which lifts it from the ground to provide aerial perspective. Another famous Orson Welles innovation is the astonishing opening shot of *Touch of Evil* (1958), fully three minutes long, which sets up the locale of Tijuana and the action to follow in an incredible craning / tracking shot. Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) introduces the psychedelic effects of what appears to be (but is not only) a zoom lens adjustment which takes *forty-five minutes* to travel across a room to a photograph pinned on the wall. **Shot duration**, then, becomes an important companion to mobile framing, determined only by the amount of film one can load into a camera's **magazine** for a single shot; duration has consequences for the spectator's relationship to the image such as I discussed in relation to the long take in Chapter 1.

One final aspect of the single shot that bears further mention before I move to the combination of shots through editing is the **process shot** or composite shot. These are created through the use of special effects in order to layer multiple images or strips of film into a single shot. The simple form of such layering can happen in the camera, by exposing a single strip of film twice or even multiple times, creating the effect of **superimposition**. Laboratories can create effects such as superimposition, used often to create "ghosts" or translucent effects, or more elaborate shots, such as the use of **rear projection** or front projection. Developed in the 1920s in order to cut the costs of filming on location, rear projection involved the use of a translucent screen, onto which location footage was projected and in front of which the actors played out the scene meant to take place in that location. Scenes of cars driving in 1930s cinema provide the paradigmatic example, the cause of mirth for spectators now who are alert to the unconvincing depth cues and mismatches in quality of image, lighting, and shadow that often characterize such composite shots. (We think of them now, in other words, as cheesy.) The answer to the degraded image projected from the rear

appeared to lie in eliminating the screen as a mediator from the process. Front projection replaced the screen with a concave mirror, and a projector placed in the same position the camera occupied, throwing the *image* thus created onto a highly reflective screen (much improved with the invention in the 1950s of Scotchlite, a reflective material invented and manufactured by 3M). A beam-splitter was placed equidistant, and at 45°, between the camera and projector, which were situated at 90° to each other. **Matte shots** also combine multiple images into a single shot: static mattes, such as matte painting, replace a portion of the frame with an imaginary world superimposed upon it, while traveling mattes, frequently created through bluescreen processes, allow the actors to interact with the imported setting. Within a single shot, worlds combine.

EDITING

Thus far I have concentrated my discussion on the single shot, itself composed through choices in the areas of *mise-en-scène* and cinematography. Very few films, not even *Wavelength*, contain only a single shot, however; most join many, many shots together. Aleksandr

BOX 2.2: COMPOSITING: BLUESCREEN

A special form of compositing involves the bluescreen technique, in which foreground action is shot against an evenly lit blue background, then replaced by a separately shot background plate through optical compositing. Used most routinely by television weathermen and women (and parodied hilariously in *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* [Adam McKay, 2004]), bluescreen works well for human subjects because human skin has very little blue (or green) color in it, and computer-generated weather maps easily substitute as the background plate. Inventor Petro Vlahos founded his company Ultimatte to build upon his original 1964 version of bluescreen processes and is now producing sophisticated compositing hardware and software for the film industry.

Sokurov's film *Russian Ark* (2002) indeed bears mention as the first feature film shot in a single, unbroken take, while at the other end of the continuum most Hollywood films employ shots fewer than ten seconds in duration. Scholar David Bordwell clocks the shot duration of most Hong Kong action films – typically featuring "spitting, vomiting, nose-picking and vistas of toilets and people's mouths" – at seven seconds (Bordwell 2000: 6). Editing is the general term designating the techniques and logic of joining shots together into larger strings or sequences; there are five different types of edits. The most common is the **cut**, in which the first shot cleanly ends where the second begins; the shots are spliced together using tape or cement. A **dissolve** joins two shots together by blending them, so that the end of the first shot and the beginning of the second shot are superimposed upon the screen for a period of time specified by the filmmaker to the laboratory. A fade may work in either of two directions: a **fade-in** lightens a shot from a black or otherwise colored screen, while a **fade-out** darkens to black. Fades often open and close films: fade to black, the end. The fourth type of edit, a **wipe**, involves a boundary line replacing the first shot with the second: it may be vertical or horizontal or some other sort of whimsical graphic. And you have already encountered the last type of edit, the iris, an opening or closing of the screen to a circle: that's all, folks.

It's not a bad idea to practice noticing editing, both watching for the presence of edits and learning which ones generally do what. Artificial though it is, I ask my students to say the word "shot" whenever they notice an edit while watching clips for a few days; others suggest clapping or tapping a pencil or your shoe. Whatever your preferred method, once you're able to distinguish edits and their functions, you'll discover that you can gain a feel for the pace of editing, thereby accessing the rhythmic possibilities of combination, and for the *function* of graphic, spatial, and temporal relationships between shots. These four areas (rhythmic, graphic, spatial, temporal) provide the framework for most discussions of how filmmakers shape sequences, and it's worth noticing how they work differently across different types of movies. Most films, for instance, conjoin shots of differing lengths together, but some films, and some sequences within films, create *patterns* of combination, producing recognizable rhythms with varying effects. Foreshortening shots can build momentum or suspense, for instance,

while lengthening them can allow for release, meditation, or contemplation. Abstract films rely almost entirely on rhythmic editing and graphic editing to build their temporal and spatial worlds, while principles of graphic combination drive only some decisions in narrative films (although any juxtaposition of one image to another creates a graphic relationship between them). One dominant graphic basis for combination in narrative films is the **graphic match**, where graphic similarities in two shots provide the edit's justification. In narrative films, the temporal and spatial logics of combination tend to predominate, since narrative films build imaginary worlds that are more or less coherent in space and time.

Mise-en-scène and cinematography contribute to the sense of a film's world, but it is spatial editing that literally constructs film space for us, since films join shots together that may have been recorded in wildly different places to construct a sense of connection present only in the film. The continuity, in other words, is produced by and through film itself, an illusion, similar to the illusion of movement produced through the persistence of vision, first discovered before 1920 by the Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov. He undertook a series of experiments in a short film in which shots of the face of Ivan Mozzhukhin (who was a Tsarist matinee idol) are juxtaposed with various other shots (a plate of soup, a girl, a child's coffin). The film's initial audience testified to Kuleshov that the expression on Mozzhukhin's face was different each time he appeared, depending on whether he was responding to the plate of soup (he appeared hungry), the girl (he appeared happy or desirous), or the child's coffin (he appeared sad or grieving), when in fact each instance of his appearance was identical (and the actor was meant to be blank, without expression). The "**Kuleshov effect**" has come for film scholars to describe the fact that, in the absence of an establishing shot, the audience will infer a spatial whole from a portion of space. The broader point, however, is that audiences create connections and combinations from fragments, retrospectively generating cause and effect logics or explanations where none was on offer, or creating continuous space from discrete images. Even in the presence of an establishing shot, such as that of an office building in Los Angeles in *Speed*, which precedes a sequence in which office workers go about their business, there is no reason to believe that the offices are located in that building in the actual world. The elevator, the workers, the

exterior police cars, the interior SWAT team all may have been filmed in different locations or on different sets but edited together to generate "the office building" in the film's first suspenseful episode.

That sequence in *Speed* is an example of a pattern common in commercial narrative film: establishment, breakdown, re-establishment. In this pattern, the film offers a locale, the space in which action is to occur, and subsequently breaks down the space into its component parts, and then re-establishes the locale before moving to a different space. Another pattern, used to suggest simultaneous action in different spaces, is **cross-cutting**, or **parallel editing**, that moves from the action in one space to the action in another and back and forth. Commonly used to generate suspense, "cross-cutting" is the visual equivalent of "meanwhile." These commonplaces of spatial editing, as you can see, also therefore embed temporal relationships, which are augmented by editing that deliberately orients us to a film world's time. For narrative films present us with stories that take place over centuries, over decades, over years, over weeks, over days. Few films, that is, unwind in **real time**, in which screen time corresponds precisely to plot and **story time**. Chantal Akerman's 1976 film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* does so to make an ideological point, as it records many real-time activities of a Brussels widow going about her chores, producing for the spectator a painful and mind-numbing experience, ultimately then awakening them to this woman's oppression. Screen time, usually ninety to 120 minutes for a feature film, more often drastically condenses **story** time (where "story" is the whole world of the film, involving events both given and implied), so that what we actually see and hear (called the film's **plot**) cuts out huge swaths of a film's story. Those swaths constitute temporal ellipses, and temporal editing is both what controls them and what renders plot time intelligible for viewers. Temporal editing, then, is not simply to do with the ordering of events in the plot, though filmmakers do, of course, make decisions about the sequencing of events, the use of **flashbacks** (in which events that took place in the plot past are interwoven with those of the plot present) and **flashforwards** (the opposite case). Like framing, temporal editing invokes exciting questions about inclusion and exclusion, about what kind of cut in time the film seeks to make. Austrian *avant-garde* filmmaker Peter Kubelka remarks of his two-minute

1957 *Adebar* (a structural study of dancers at a Vienna disco set to Pygmy music) that it is a film not to be studied for its meaning but rather memorized; his interest lies in an interval without beginning or end but which is nonetheless seized and experienced as a temporal unfolding.

Most narrative films, by contrast, rely on very explicit beginnings, middles, and ends, and, as I have been suggesting, obey certain conventions in order to keep spectators oriented in time and space so that the narrative may unfold without distraction. The last area that therefore requires discussion with regard to editing, particularly the spatial and temporal editing I have been discussing, is the system of **continuity editing**, the name for the ensemble of those conventions solidified over time and so naturalized that one frequently only observes it as a system when it is violated. This is the system that solidifies in the classical Hollywood cinema, the name for a style of films that obey the strictures of continuity editing and that, furthermore, were produced under the Hollywood studios' profit-driven mode of film production by "serial manufacture" (involving the contributions of many differently skilled makers). Most viewers know its habits or its rules, then, even if they don't have names for them: the **axis of action** and **180° rule**, the **30° rule**, principles of shot combination based on spatial orientation such as the pattern of **shot–reverse shot** or the **match on action** or the **eyeline match**, and control of temporal ellipses through conventions associated with different types of edits and patterns of juxtaposition.

To preserve spatial continuity, editors rely upon patterns such as the establishment, breakdown, re-establishment pattern, but they also build spatial relationships through the maintenance of perspective on the action as it unfolds. Imagine filming a martial arts fight, in which the master and his challenger duel on the side of a lake (as in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [2000]). In order to preserve the spectator's understanding of **screen direction** (what's left, what's right, who's who in the space, and who's heading in what direction), encircle the space with a line, then draw a line dividing the circle into two hemispheres. Now film all of the action on one side of your line, on one side of the axis of action: each time the master kicks, she will move from screen left, unless we *see* her switch places with the challenger. Each time the challenger jumps, he will jump from screen right, with the same exception. By following the 180° rule, always filming from one side of the axis of action, you will keep the spectator oriented, thereby warding off puzzlement that might interrupt his or her immersion in the story. The 30° rule suggests that changes in camera angle ought to be greater than 30°; otherwise, a cut between angles too similar to one another will result in a **jump cut**, an effect exploited by the French New Wave in which a character appears to jump slightly in the frame. Similarly also to the pattern of breaking down space, conversations between characters follow patterns, in which two characters appear in a shot together before an editor will alternate shots of individual characters, returning now and again to the two-shot. This **shot–reverse shot** pattern reminds the spectator that the characters, even if shown alone, occupy the same space (or have a virtual connection, so that telephone conversations work through cross-cutting). And if a character looks toward space that is offscreen, an **eyeline match** dictates that the next shot will show us what the character there sees, uniting expanding screen space and locating characters within it simultaneously. Finally, also to expand screen space, a **match on action** follows a character's action into a new space: we see a character from a home's exterior, responding to a doorbell and opening the door. In a match on action, the following shot finds us inside the home, watching the guest enter the hallway. The goal, again: to orient, to allay anxiety over discontinuity that might detract from the story. It's the same house, the film says; don't worry, we're just inside now.

Continuity editing also works to dispel worries about temporal ellipses. Explicit cues signal shifts in time. Flashbacks may require editing cues such as dissolves or graphic matches (a house now and then), if not titles on screen ("Eight years earlier"). The passage of time forward also follows conventions in the use of edits: cuts tend to suggest continuous, linear action unfolding in time, whereas dissolves and, more dramatically, fades move us from an evening to a morning, or from one week to another. Props help, of course: the old fan-blowing-on-a-calendar trick helped to communicate the passage of significant amounts of time, just as the bold LED display on a ticking bomb helps us understand just how much time our hero has to defuse it. Another way to condense time involves editing together shots of sufficient similarity to create a sense of repetition over time; in a **montage sequence** (as distinct from Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage) a series of news headlines, or a

BOX 2.3: FAMOUS CONTINUITY ERRORS

Fans track continuity errors more effectively than do directors, apparently. Websites devoted to "movie mistakes" keep count (145 for *Spiderman* alone on www.moviemistakes.com!), and clearly the ability to spot errors in continuity develops early on as one learns the grammar of narrative cinema. There is, no doubt, a certain pleasure in mastery involved in noticing a window magically intact after being shattered in the previous shot, a knowingness that is perhaps augmented by the additional awareness of the vast sums of money spent in the making of films meant to wow us with their flawlessness and their capacity for manipulation of the image. A few spotted and reported by fans in *Spiderman* are:

Continuity: The intact windows mentioned above – in the scene where Mary Jane is being mugged by four men, Spiderman throws two of the men into two windows behind Mary Jane. Then the camera goes back to Spiderman beating up the other two guys. When the camera goes back to Mary Jane the two windows are intact.

Continuity: When Peter shoots his web at his bedroom lamp and pulls it across the room, it smashes against the wall and breaks. But when Aunt May is talking to Peter from the door seconds later, the lamp is back on the dresser in one piece.

Continuity: In the scene where Norman is getting ready to test himself he lays down on the bed, fastens himself in and the doctor goes to the computer. However, when it shows him being brought into the chamber he has several electrodes connected to his chest and head.

Visible crew/equipment: When Peter stands up after being bitten by the spider, there's the reflection of the cameraman with headphones on the television set behind him.

Continuity: In the final cemetery sequence, Peter and Mary Jane square off for a little heart to heart, with her touching his face tenderly with her black leather gloves. The camera cuts between front views of both: in hers, her fingers are touching his ear lobe, in his, they are an inch below his ear lobe. In one quick cut of hers, the hand has disappeared completely, then in midsentence, as they cut back to Peter, it's there again.

Factual error: When Harry is talking to Mary Jane on the phone, she hangs up on him and his cell phone produces a dial tone. Cell phones do not have a dial tone.

series of performances, or a series of breakfast table conversations (all of which Welles uses in *Kane*), efficiently compress story time, using, however, little screen time. Keeping spectators oriented in time, these devices insure the smooth unfolding of the story in whatever order seems best suited for its purposes.

SOUND

The fan's final example of an error in continuity in *Spiderman* alerts us to the construction and manipulation not only of visual worlds but aural ones, in all forms of film, and these worlds interact dynamically. Sound, however, engages a distinct sensory realm worth attending to with some specificity, even (or perhaps especially) when silence seems to prevail. Sound, as many critics have taught us, functions in a variety of different ways. Not mere accompaniment to the image, sound actively shapes how we perceive and interpret the image. It directs our attention within the image, and it cues us to form expectations. Just as elements of the image function as motifs, so too do elements or types of sound. Just as images harden quickly into clichés, so too do elements or types of sound: thunder cracks to announce a storm, car tires squeal to signal a criminal getaway, explosions in space make "kaboom" noises, and so on.

Although these examples suggest a wide range of sound elements, in the language of formal analysis there are only three types of film sound: speech, music, noise (effects). Speech is not restricted to dialogue, although dialogue is one of narrative film's most compelling devices, stitching the actor to the character and

rendering that character knowable through the texture of the voice to the audience. Speech in film can serve other masters than naturalism, too: as the great Soviet director V.I. Pudovkin understood, sound may offer a counterpoint rather than an accompaniment to an image, a subjective route to understand an objective visual presentation. Likewise, dialogue links human speech to the broader acoustic world in which we live, to the "vast conversational powers of life," as film theorist Bela Balazs puts it. Speech brings us closer to the subtlety of emotion: a quiver in a child's voice, or an acoustic "close-up" on a belly laugh bring us into intimate association with the lifeworlds the screen portrays.

Since speech frequently emanates from onscreen characters, it is most frequently **diegetic** sound; that is, sound whose source belongs to the imaginative world of the film, sound that is understood to issue from that world rather than ours. Examples of **non-diegetic** sound include **voice-over** commentary (that is, commentary that issues from another world than that depicted on the screen), music that accompanies the image from without rather than from a source within the world of the film (music, that is, which we presume the characters do *not* hear), or noises on the soundtrack likewise there for the ears of the audience alone. The distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound helps us to understand how sounds in narrative film are motivated, how the sound design is constructed. Music can be understood to be non-diegetic, laid over the image for our ears alone as in Cameron Crowe's music-filled *Elizabethtown* (2005), until a shot of a car radio alerts us to the fact that what seemed non-diegetic was in fact diegetic sound (Tom Petty, Elton John, Ryan Adams, Patty Griffin) important to our understanding of the film's characters and their emotional journeys. Music, then, may serve in similar fashion to speech to cue us to emotion, and it can devolve just as easily into cliché; in melodrama, for example, the short, sharp bursts of orchestral music that cue the villain's entry are called "stings." But music may also serve to complicate a film's narrative, such as the paranoid search for the origins of sound in Francis Ford Coppola's film about surveillance, *The Conversation* (1974), or the illegal possession of the woman's voice in Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* (1981). And finally, a musical **score** might stand on its own, as director Sidney Lumet, who generally believed that a score should serve a picture,

BOX 2.4: MAKING SOUND WORK

Another moment from Lumet's chronicle of movie-making illustrates how carefully editors construct sound (and how, sometimes, sound and image *don't* work together):

> The sound editor on *Murder on the Orient Express* hired the "world's greatest authority" on train sounds. He brought me the *authentic* sounds of not only the Orient Express but the Flying Scotsman, the Twentieth Century Limited, every train that had ever achieved any reputation. He worked for six *weeks* on train sounds only. His greatest moment occurred when, at the beginning of the picture, the train left the station at Istanbul. We had the steam, the bell, the wheels, and he even included an almost inaudible click when the train's headlights went on. He swore that all the effects were authentic. When we got to the mix (the point at which we put *all* the sound tracks together), he was bursting with anticipation. For the first time, I heard what an incredible job he'd done. But I had also heard Richard Rodney Bennett's magnificent music score for the same scene. I knew one would have to go. They couldn't work together. I turned to Simon. He knew. I said, "Simon, it's a great job. But, finally, we've heard a train leave the station. We've never heard a train leave the station in three-quarter time."
>
> (Lumet 1995: 184–5)

observes of the great Prokofiev score for Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky*:

> The only movie score I've heard that can stand on its own as a piece of music is Prokofiev's "Battle on the Ice" from *Alexander Nevsky*. I'm told that Eisenstein and Prokofiev talked about it well before shooting began and that some of the composing was started before shooting. . . . Even when I hear the music on a record today, I start remembering the sequence visually. The two, music and picture, are indelibly linked: a great sequence, a great score.
>
> (Lumet 1995: 171)

Finally, "noise" encompasses a world of sound beyond those sounds we think of as "special" effects. As I show in Chapter 3, the world of noise is an intricately built scaffold supporting the broader feel of a film's world. Every footstep, every door slam, every pin drop is engineered in order to produce an acoustic landscape in a given film; not a single element of noise is simply natural or given. If the sound coming from the floor above in a hotel room is audible, it is meant to be audible in order to give our hero and heroine the chance for an accidental encounter; if we hear the voices of our stars rising above the din on a crowded street, it is so that we eliminate the buzz of real human noise to concentrate on their plight. Even ambient sound is recorded in order to be manipulated at the editing stage so as to answer to the sound designer's conception of the final product, whether that conception is edgy or predictable.

Film analysis has terms to characterize variations in acoustic properties common to speech, music, and noise: loudness (changes in volume, sometimes indicated by the perceived distance of the sound source), pitch (the perceived "highness" or "lowness" of a sound), timbre (the texture or feel of a sound; a "nasal" or "whiny" quality of a voice, for example). Further dimensions of film sound include rhythm (beat, pulse, pace, tempo, or pattern of accents), fidelity (the extent to which film sound is faithful, according to our conventional expectations, to its source), and space (not simply whether a sound is diegetic or non-diegetic but how sound shapes the space of what is filmed, how sound creates and defines space). Sound designers and editors manipulate all of these dimensions of film sound through principles of selection, combination, and alteration. Just as you might watch a sequence in order to describe elements of its *mise-en-scène* or the rhythm of its edits, so you might repeat a sequence several times over to begin to understand the principles undergirding its sound construction. And now that you have most of the tools you'll need to undertake formal analysis, put them to test all together: begin to use them to develop an *argument* about the film's formal construction. To do so, you'll want also to situate a film historically, a task I discuss in Chapter 3.

BOX 2.5: SUMMARY

The language of film analysis aids in our task of watching films closely to notice their construction. We may isolate six elements of what is "put in" to a given shot, or of *mise-en-scène*: setting, lighting, costume, hair, make-up, and figure behavior. Cinematography encompasses all that is to do with the camera: framing, angle, focus, movement, and compositing. The five types of edits (cut, dissolve, fade, wipe, and iris) serve different functions in different contexts, whether within the system of continuity editing associated with the narrative form of classical Hollywood cinema or other cinematic contexts. Finally, the three types of sound (speech, music, and noise) actively shape how we work with images. Experiment with readings of brief sequences to practice the terminology: once it comes quickly and easily, start to put it to use!

The Film Experience
An Introduction

Timothy Corrigan
Patricia White
Bedfords/St Martins
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CHAPTER

12

Writing a Film Essay: Observations, Arguments, Research, and Analysis

As a critic, I thought of myself as a film-maker. Today I still think of myself as a critic, and in a sense I am, more than ever before. Instead of writing criticism, I make a film, but the critical dimension is subsumed. I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them. Were the cinema to disappear, I would simply accept the inevitable and turn to television; were television to disappear, I would revert to pencil and paper. For there is a clear continuity between all forms of expression. It's all one. The important thing is to approach it from the side which suits you best. . . .

—Jean-Luc Godard, writer and critic for *Cahiers du cinéma* and director of *Breathless* (1959), *Contempt* (1963), and *New Wave* (1990)

KEY OBJECTIVES

How do you write a paper about a movie? How do you conduct and then use research on a film? For students especially, writing about films is another important experience in their relationship with them. Writing extends the complex relationship we each have with films by challenging us to articulate our feelings and ideas and to communicate convincingly the validity of our response. This chapter will explain

- how to distinguish between reviews and critical essays
- how to take notes on films
- how to organize those notes
- how to choose a topic and develop it into a thesis and argument for a paper
- how to conduct and integrate research sources
- how to turn your work into a polished essay

Writers can be found everywhere in films and film history. In modern movies alone, famous and not-so-famous writers populate and drive many kinds of stories about many kinds of experience. *Mishima* (1985) describes the intense blend of radically conservative politics and restless creativity in the life of Japanese author Yukio Mishima. In Cameron Crowe's semi-autobiographical *Almost Famous* (2000), a young music reviewer, William Miller, encounters rock journalist Lester Bangs **[Figure 12.1]** from whom he receives the advice that motivates his life—to always "write honestly and mercilessly." In *Central Station* (1998), a middle-aged woman, Dora,

sets up a stand in the middle of a crowded railroad station where illiterate people come to have her write letters to their friends and loved ones. Why have writers such as these been such regular and important subjects in movies? The answer is that writing is one of the most fundamental, incisive, and discriminating ways of making sense of the world and our many experiences of it.

Figure 12.1 *Almost Famous* (2000). "To write honestly and mercilessly."

Writing about films is, in turn, one of the most incisive and discriminating ways to respond to this cultural and personal experience that many of us consider central to our lives. After being entertained or annoyed or moved by a movie, most people do not naturally respond by putting their thoughts down on paper. Professional film critics might write regular columns about why particular movies succeed or fail, but most viewers are satisfied with sharing a few casual remarks about a movie with other viewers and a quick evaluation about whether they enjoyed it or not. Few experiences, however, trigger the energies and interests that promote good writing more than going to the movies does. Even a casual experience at the movies usually leads to discussion and sometimes argument, not only about whether a movie is good or bad but about what happened in the film and why. After seeing David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) **[Figure 12.2]**—about a disaffected young man, his strange bond with an odd new friend, and their creation of male "fight clubs" in the United States—two viewers might disagree vehemently about it. One might see it as an incoherent and self-indulgent celebration of macho culture, whereas the other might see a biting satire on consumerism and male identity. As they refine, develop, and muster details to support their positions, each begins to shape an argument. This same process, moving from an opinion or interpretation to a refined argument, is behind most strong essays on films.

Writing about film has been a significant part of film culture since the beginnings of movies. Almost simultaneously with the arrival of the cinema, writers debated the function and value of this new art. Film critics such as Vachel Lindsay (in his 1915 book *The Art of the Moving Picture*) and Dorothy Richardson (in the 1920s art magazine *CloseUp*) wrote passionately about movies in the first few decades of film history. Since then movie reviews, scholarly essays, and philosophical books—by writers James Agee, Pauline Kael, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Umberto Eco, for example—have debated the achievements of individual films and the cultural importance of movies in general. As with other arts and cultural activities, movies inspire a common

Figure 12.2 *Fight Club* (1999). Provoking critical debate.

and fundamental human need to explain one's feelings about and in response to a significant encounter, to shape, clarify, and order those reactions into understanding. In this chapter, we will see how writing about film develops from these needs and inspirations and show how it can become an extension of our fundamental film experiences.

Writing an Analytical Film Essay

Ways to write about film are as diverse as the individuals doing the writing. In 1915, early reviewers and critics often focused their responses to films on the dangerous or uplifting effects that movies might have on women or children. In the 1960s, film was frequently discussed in terms of its political impact or social meaning. Today's writers focus on a range of topics from characters, stars, and stories to new film technologies or historical questions, such as how censorship influences film content.

Personal Opinion and Objectivity

The process of writing about a film usually involves a play between subject matter and meaning. The **subject matter** of a film is the material that directly or indirectly comprises the film, whereas the **meaning** is the interpretation a writer discovers within that material. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), for instance, the subject matter includes the five main characters and their adventures in feudal China. The warrior Li Mu Bai returns to a town where he encounters his soul mate, Yu Shu Lien, the vengeful Jade Fox and her ferocious but naive companion Jen Yu, and Jen Yu's lover, the desert fighter Lo. The interaction of these characters describes a journey through China that ends in love and death. The subject matter's meaning, however, is more complicated than any simple description; the meaning will depend on the film's style and organization, the values and traditions informing it, as well as the experience and thinking of the viewer responding to it. Other films certainly use the subject matter of martial arts combat or the trials of love and honor in ancient China, but *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* creates and elicits more specific meanings for those who have seen it. For some writers, this martial arts tale of love and honor weaves subtle and often complex points about women and their desires and about the importance of love over mastery **[Figure 12.3]**. For other writers, the film transforms its Asian subject matter into a Western take on self-knowledge and sacrifice.

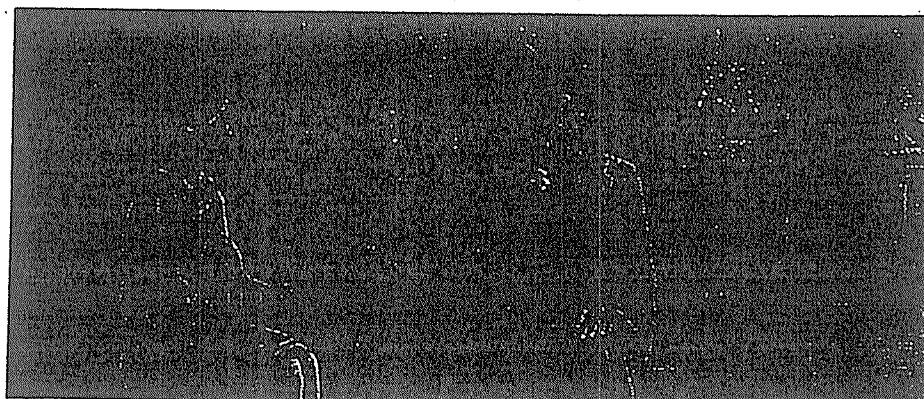


Figure 12.3 *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). Discovering the meaning behind the subject matter.

Figure 12.4 *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). A matter of opinion: suicide or liberation?

The meanings a writer finds in a film are not simply personal and arbitrary. No film can mean whatever one chooses to make it mean, and useful and insightful writing always balances opinion and critical objectivity. **Opinion** or **subjectivity** indicates personal responses and evaluations. **Critical objectivity**, however, refers to a more detached response, one that offers judgments that others would or could agree with but that bases those conclusions on facts and evidence. Good writing about film is a balance of both: your personal views and opinions are where insights and evaluations usually begin, but for your essay to make sense to others, you must convince your readers that your insights have a larger, more objective truth.

An essay that hides behind personal opinion—constantly inserting "I feel" or "In my opinion"—will seem too personal to have any value for others. Writing about *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, a writer may attempt to hide behind a lack of certainty about the meaning: "In my opinion, Jen's final leap off the mountain side is very ambiguous. I think her decision was probably a suicide, but it seemed to me to be a strangely beautiful act" **[Figure 12.4]**. Conversely, writing that relies only on flat, descriptive statements fails to interest readers in its argument and often misses the subtleties of a film: "Jen's leap off the mountain is a suicide. It is a liberating flight into mist." Balancing opinion and critical objectivity, as in the following passage, results in writing that engages and convinces your reader that your insights could be useful revelations for most viewers of the film:

> The conclusion of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is both shocking and uplifting, a combination that disturbs and confuses me, as it probably does for most viewers. This confusion about Jen's motives is, however, part of the strange and mysterious beauty of the film because it asks us to recognize a central theme: the possibility that love and passion can transcend any physical limitations when we have faith in that love.

Identifying Your Readers

Knowing or anticipating your readers is central to writing about film and indeed to all writing, often guiding a writer in balancing opinion and objectivity. If we think of writing about film as an extension of those conversations or arguments we may have with friends about a film, we realize that the terms and tone of our personal discussions change with different people.

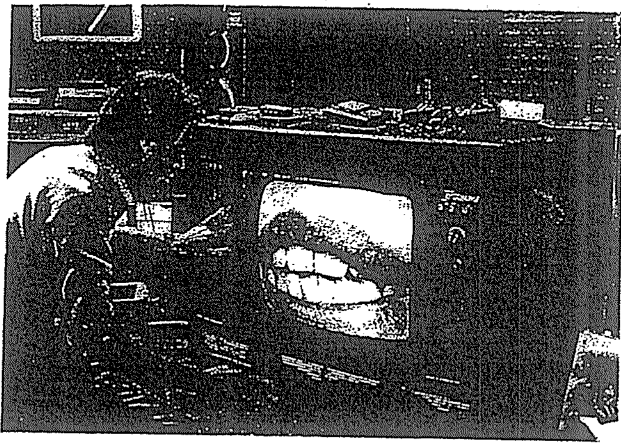


Figure 12.5 *Videodrome* (1983). The finer points of science fiction.

A conversation between two knowledgeable fans of science fiction films would likely presume that they have both seen many of the same films and know a great deal about special effects technologies; their discussion might thus get quickly to the finer points about what makes *Videodrome* (1983) and its tale of mind control through television successful—or not—within this genre **[Figure 12.5]**. In talking about Ken Loach's *Raining Stones* (1993) with an American film buff, a British viewer might have to provide some political and social background—about Manchester, England, where the film is set, about the government of then–Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, or about the particular cultural complications of the protagonist being a Catholic in this British industrial town. Possessing an awareness of your readers is like knowing the person you are talking with: it helps determine the amount of basic information you need to provide, the level of complexity of the discussion, and the kind of language you should use.

The following four questions are useful guidelines in gearing your essay to certain readers:

- How familiar are your readers with the specific film being discussed?
- What is your readers' level of interest in the film?
- What do your readers know about the film's historical and cultural contexts?
- How familiar are your readers with the terminology of film criticism or theory?

For most critical essays, anticipating your readers' knowledge of the film means assuming they have seen the film at least once and, consequently, do not require an extensive plot summary. In these cases, their interest in the film generally means they are not primarily concerned with whether a movie is good or bad or with other general observations. Rather, they want to be enlightened about a specific dimension of the film (such as the opening shot) or about a complicated or puzzling issue in the film (why the races of different characters in the 1987 *Lethal Weapon*, for instance, are important to understanding the action of the film). A good writer works to convince readers that their interests can be deepened and enriched by following the interests of the writer. Knowledge of historical and critical contexts refers to how much your readers may know or need to know about the place and time of the film's appearance. If the film was made in the United States in the 1920s, would information about that period help your readers better understand the film? Finally, determining your reader's familiarity with the terminology of film criticism and theory means choosing language that can efficiently and clearly communicate your argument. Can you assume that a term like *continuity editing* will be easily understood or will you need to define it? In making these decisions about language, keep in mind that overly simplistic language and jargon can equally undermine your analysis.

In most college and university film courses, you will have in mind an audience that is not only your professor but also your classroom peers: intelligent individuals who have seen the film, who share information and knowledge about film criticism, but who are not necessarily experts (to whom

you could tell little). This means you can concentrate on a particular theme or sequence that may have been overlooked by an intelligent viewer. It also means your writing style and choice of words should be more rigorous and academic than the typical movie review.

Elements of the Analytical Film Essay

Two common forms of film writing are film reviews and analytical essays. Aimed at a general audience who has not seen the film, a **film review** tends to be a short essay that describes the plot of a movie, provides useful background information (about the actors and the director, for example), and pronounces a clear evaluation of the film to guide its readers. In contrast, the **analytical essay**, distinguished by its intended audience and the level of its critical language, is the most common kind of writing done by film students and scholars. It typically focuses on a particular feature or theme of a film, provides an interpretation of that material, and then gives a careful analysis to prove or demonstrate that interpretation. Unlike the writer of a movie review for a magazine, the writer of an analytical essay presumes that readers know the film and do not require an extensive plot summary or background information. Although a clear and engaging style is the goal of any kind of writing about film, the writer of an analytical essay often chooses words and terms that can effectively communicate complex ideas and uses the language of intelligent readers of film criticism.

Consider this passage from a hypothetical essay about *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2001) **[Figure 12.6]**, written for a college film course. Whereas a newspaper review might summarize the plot, offer some background information, and employ more casual language, note how this analytical essay concentrates on a specific and subtle argument:

> Joel and Ethan Coen's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2001) is much more than a musical comedy loosely structured around *The Odyssey*. Woven through the distinctive soundtrack, the plot set in Depression-era America, and the comic exaggerations of its characters, the film is a sharp ideological critique of race and class in modern America. Regularly mistaken to be African Americans, the three escaped convicts, Everett, Pete, and Delmar, learn quickly that their lower-class white status binds them most importantly to the fate

Figure 12.6 *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2001). The focus for a precise analysis.

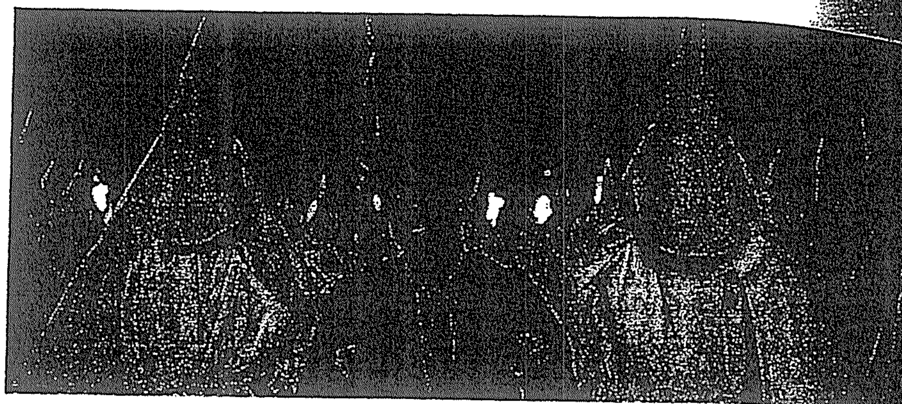
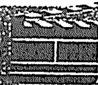


Figure 12.7 *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2001). Race, class, and the meaning of the movie.

> of the black men and women they encounter, and from this predicament the film explores the economic and political power structures that then and now make poverty color blind. Two sequences in particular dramatize this less noticed but more provocative dimension of the film: the arrival of the prisoners at a church to see a movie (a direct reference to Preston Sturges's film *Sullivan's Travels*, in which the Coens found the title for their movie) and the Ku Klux Klan rally where the fugitives rescue their black comrade Tommy.

Here, the essay's focus is relatively refined and sophisticated, assuming its readers have seen and know the film and concentrating not on general information, but on a specific thesis about race and class **[Figure 12.7]**. Along with its choice of a polemical thesis (an analysis directed at two particular sequences that may not have been carefully considered by many viewers), this critical essay employs terms (such as "ideological critique") suited to academic writing.



VIEWING CUES: Writing an Analytical Film Essay

- Examine a short critical essay about a film you have seen in class. What subjective versus objective claims does the author make about the film? How does the writer argue in support of his or her opinions in order to justify their validity for readers?
- Prepare to write an analytical essay about a film you have seen in class. First, consider your readers. What defines them? What are their interests? What do they need or want to know about the film?
- What is objectively true in your argument? What might be considered opinion? Write a passage arguing for the validity of your opinion while also eliciting your readers' interest.
- Examine the language of your essay (or another analytical essay). Which words and phrases best identify your intended audience? The level of your analysis? Where could your language be improved or clarified?

IN FOCUS

Analyzing *Citizen Kane* (1941)

For more than sixty years, viewers have responded to Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* with a seemingly endless variety of opinions. Some find it fascinating; others feel it is boring or confusing. The character of Susan Alexander fascinates some viewers; the final sequence in which the camera surveys a large room full of Kane's many acquisitions intrigues others. Any of these opinions about or reactions to *Citizen Kane* could be developed into an interesting and provocative essay about the film, but only if those ideas can be substantiated or proven useful, true, and important—only if, that is, they can be shown to have objective accuracy.

One such viewer decides to write a review of *Citizen Kane* for his college newspaper in anticipation of the film's upcoming appearance at the college art house. Despite the celebrity of the film, the writer presumes that many of his potential readers have not yet seen it and need both information and balanced opinions. He proceeds with a clear sense of what his readers already know, don't know, and need to know about the film:

> *Citizen Kane* is one those movies that everyone talks about but few have ever seen. When it first appeared in 1941, the film was surrounded by enormous hype about the debut of the "boy genius" Orson Welles and his ballyhooed transition from the New York stage to the Hollywood screen. Before the film even appeared, rumors also connected *Citizen Kane* to the life of William Randolph Hearst, the U.S. newspaper mogul, and this too made the movie something of a fascinating scandal. In the six decades since its release, *Citizen Kane* has appeared at the top of almost every list of the "greatest movies ever made" and appears in practically every film course in the world.
>
> Be prepared for a bit of a disappointment. The story is simple enough: played wonderfully by Welles himself, Charles Foster Kane grows, with the help of a windfall fortune, from a boy torn from his childhood home in Colorado into a lonely man obsessed with power and possessions. For me, the story is melodramatic and overblown, and Kane never becomes a very likeable character. What redeems *Citizen Kane*, however, is the construction of the story: different parts of Kane's story are told through the eyes of his friends and acquaintances, and these shifting perspectives create a kind of visual puzzle that the movie never really solves, enlivening an otherwise dull tale.

This black-and-white film is a continuous series of stunning (and famous) shots, such as the opening sequence of dark shots that takes viewers past a "No Trespassing" sign to Kane's deathbed. In our age of computer technology and new-wave television commercials, these images will probably seem less surprising and innovative than they did when the movie first appeared. Yet *Citizen Kane* remains a film to see—if only to judge for yourself whether it is among the "greatest movies ever made."

The same writer later chooses to write the following critical essay about *Citizen Kane* for a film history course. In this case, his readers are his professor and the other students in the class, readers who are familiar with the film and have even read other material about *Citizen Kane.*

Of the many critical essays on *Citizen Kane,* three different perspectives on its meaning dominate the analytical writing about the film: analyses that focus on the mythic character of Kane, discussions of the kaleidoscopic narrative structure that shapes the story, and detailed interpretations of the stylistic compositions (such as the use of deep-focus and dramatic editing techniques). Using the first two types of analysis as a background, I will examine a single, early scene in *Citizen Kane* to demonstrate the legendary visual power of the film. In this scene, *Citizen Kane* crystallizes a family drama of loss and division inseparable from a life lived in dense and complex spaces and perceived from many points of view.

In this tale of Charles Foster Kane's rise to a position as one of the richest and most powerful men in America, the episode in question sets the stage for the entire film. It succinctly describes the sudden wealth of Kane's mother, an unexpected windfall from a deed to a gold mine (mistakenly presumed useless), and her subsequent arrangement to send Charles to be educated on the East Coast. The film's setting is the rustic family cabin in Colorado, with glimpses of the snowy yard outside where the child, Charlie Kane, plays.

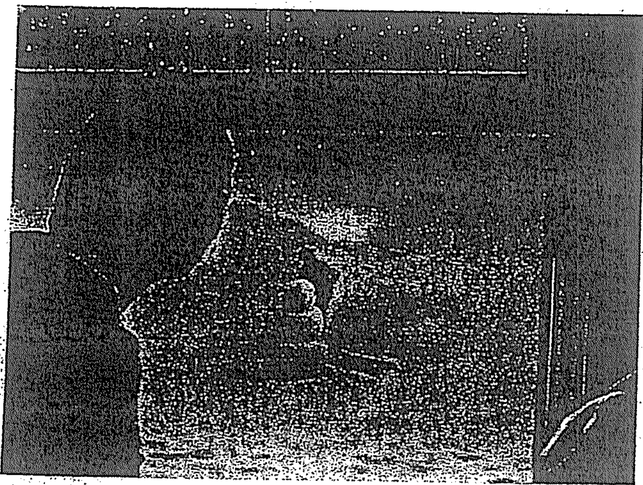


Figure 12.8 *Citizen Kane* (1941). Analytical detail.

In this scene, one shot begins by showing Charles making snowballs in the field, then moves back to show his mother in the foreground watching from inside and, through an open window, the boy building a snowman in the background [**Figure 12.8**]. Here the window frame within the film frame calls attention to how a point of view controls perspective in certain ways, specifically the point of view on the child Kane.

As the shot pulls back further, the frame then expands to include the central conversation about the boy and the money, while the original subject of the shot, Charlie, now becomes a much smaller, background figure in the action and the frame.

The shot pulls back even further, following the mother's movement away from the window, and the frame creates visible tensions and conflicts among the individuals. The stern face and upper body of the mother, Mrs. Kane, dominates the center of the image, flanked by the banker Thatcher, while Charlie's father drifts along the edges of the frame, complaining, "You seem to forget I'm the boy's father." Moments later, Thatcher and Mrs. Kane sit at a table in the foreground of the image and prepare to sign papers authorizing the child's departure, while the father protests in vain in the middle ground and Charlie remains barely visible in the far background playing outside in the snow **[Figure 3.30]**. The rectangular shape of the frame crowds these characters within a tight visual space, even including the ceiling on the top of the frame as a way of further drawing in the space. Positioned between the adult individuals but in the far background is the diminutive shape of Charlie, the subject of their quarreling and plans to remove him from the home. Visually it is fairly clear how power and control are being distributed through this frame: the mother and Thatcher visually overwhelm the father, and the tiny figure of Charles is the impotent object of exchange.

In *Citizen Kane,* Charles Foster Kane grows up to become obsessed with the power of images—paintings, newspaper pictures, images of himself **[Figure 12.9]**. This obsession perhaps acts out his semi-conscious struggle to replace the image of his lost childhood and family torn apart in this early scene in the film. Throughout the remainder of his life, Kane struggles to create, own, and control the people and things around him by imposing his perspective on them—the way the perspective of others controlled him early in his life. The film is also a narrative constructed around the multiple points of view of Kane's friends, wife, and associates, all of whom dramatize how points of view can attempt to frame a man's life as a way of understanding or interpreting that life. The irony and tragedy of Charlie Kane's life is that no one, not even Kane himself, is able to reconstruct the complete picture and harmony that were lost in that early childhood scene.

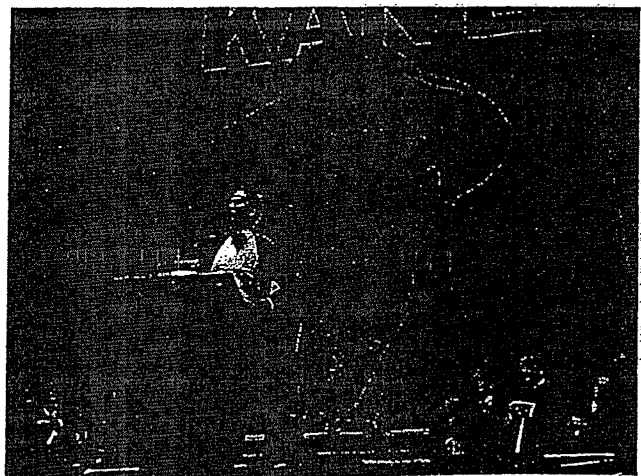


Figure 12.9 *Citizen Kane* (1941). Describing and interpreting.

Preparing to Write about a Film

Despite some common ground, an effective film essay does differ from a casual conversation or debate about a movie. Few writers can dash off a perceptive commentary on a film with little preparation or revision. Most writers gain considerably from anticipating what they will write about and later reviewing carefully what they have written. Few of us casually watch *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1970), a powerful documentary about fascism in France during World War II, and then immediately type a brilliant paper on Marcel Ophuls's use of documentary strategies to expose certain myths about French history or the French Resistance. Like all good writers, you must follow certain steps in preparing to write an essay.

Asking Questions

One of the most fundamental and useful first steps is to try to identify your own interests *before* you view the film. Ask yourself how you think the film might relate to your own background and experiences or what you have heard about the film. Are you drawn to technology or to questions about gender? To a particular filmmaker or period in movie history? To a certain national cinema? What direction of inquiry does your interest point toward? In Howard Hawks's 1938 *Bringing Up Baby*, Katharine Hepburn plays an audacious heiress, Susan, whose pet leopard Baby becomes the foil in her zany relationship with a bumbling paleontologist, David, played by Cary Grant **[Figure 12.10]**. If you are about to see this film, perhaps you've seen other films by Hawks, like *His Girl Friday* (1941), or other films with Hepburn, like *The Philadelphia Story* (1940). Might you consider comparing the two Hawks films or Hepburn's two different roles?

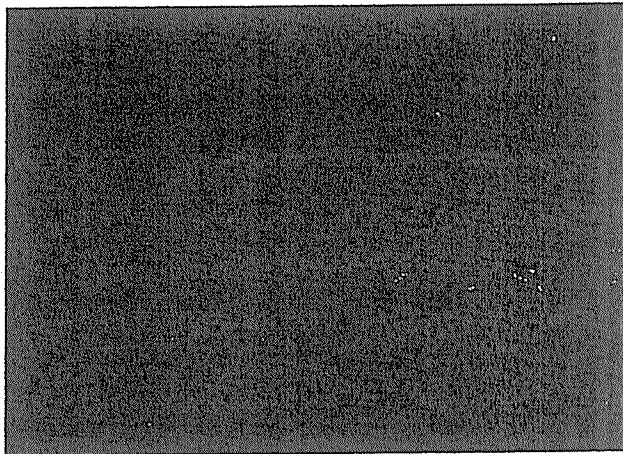


Figure 12.10 ***Bringing Up Baby*** (1938). What to write about?

This sort of preparation is not meant to preclude your being drawn to new ideas and in unexpected directions when you view the film. Surprising discoveries are certainly one of the great values in approaching films with an open mind. While watching *In the Bedroom* (2001), one viewer might become puzzled by how the film seems suddenly to change directions: after depicting the excruciating pain of two parents who have lost a son, the last part of the movie becomes a revenge tale in which the father seeks out and murders his son's killer. For this viewer, what seems at first a slow meditation on inexpressible grief becomes a tense thriller. How do the two parts work together? Does loss always require retribution? Does violence always beget violence? By asking these kinds of questions, you can intellectually interact with a film, sharpening your responses and shaping the direction of your essay.

Taking Notes

Note taking, an essential part of writing about film, stimulates critical thinking and generates precise and productive observations about a film. Whereas most students find it natural to take notes on a biology experiment or on their reading of a Shakespeare play, annotating a film is both awkward and unnatural: it is difficult to write while watching a movie in a darkened room, and most films ask that we constantly attend to them so as not to miss information that passes quickly. Note taking is, however,

absolutely necessary to writing about film because a good analytical essay must produce concrete evidence for the argument—and precise notes provide that support.

The three general rules for annotating a film are as follows:

1. Take notes on the unusual—events or formal maneuvers that stand out in the film.
2. Take notes on events or techniques that recur with regularity.
3. Take notes on oppositions that appear in the film.

For instance, most viewers of *Bringing Up Baby* would note that the sequence involving David and Susan at the local jail stands out as one of the funniest and most unusual moments in the film, with Hepburn pretending to be a hardened gangster's moll. Equally important, however, are those actions or images whose repetitions suggest a recurring theme or pattern, such as David's repeatedly losing his clothes or glasses. Oppositions can be equally illuminating, such as the contrast among the rival women: the goofy Susan, and David's staid fiancée, his scientific assistant.

Each writer develops his or her own shorthand for taking notes on films. The trick is to jot down information about the story or characters that seems significant while also recording visual, audial, or other formal details. Some common abbreviations for visual compositions include the following:

es: establishing shot	**ha:** high angle	**ct:** cut
cu: close-up	**la:** low angle	**trs:** tracking shot
ls: long shot	**ds:** diegetic sound	**ps:** pan shot
mls: medium long shot	**nds:** nondiegetic sound	**vo:** voiceover

More specific camera movements and directions can often be re-created with arrows and lines that graph the actions or directions. The following drawings suggest the movements of the camera:

↗ low camera angle ↘ high camera angle ∿ tracking shot

For example, part of the jailhouse sequence in *Bringing Up Baby* **[Figures 12.11 and 12.12]** might be annotated as follows to indicate cuts, camera movements, or angles.

— mcu of constable and Susan through bars
— ct mcu David

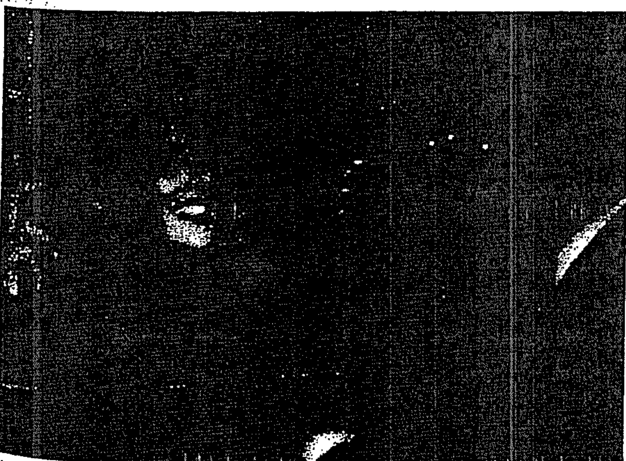


Figure 12.11 *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). "Swinging Door Susie."

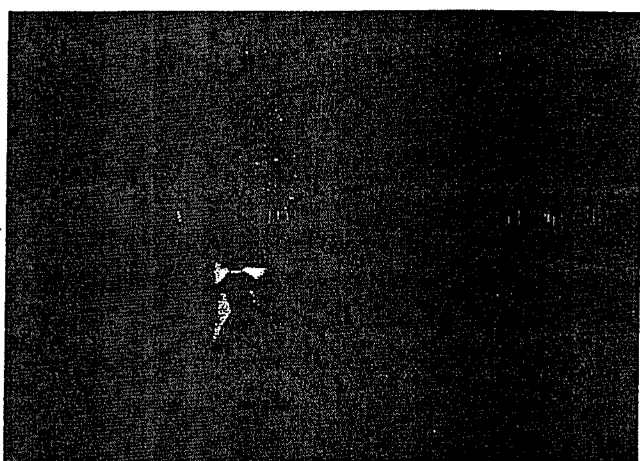


Figure 12.12 *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). An object of analysis.

Later, these notes would be filled in, perhaps by again reviewing the sequence for more details—such as pieces of the hilarious monologue of "Swinging Door Susie." Drawings of shots can supplement such details. Critical comments or observations might also be added—about, for instance, how the organization of the shot composition and editing provides the contrast between the officious and tongue-tied authority figure of the sheriff and the zany and loquacious Susan.

Selecting a Topic

After taking and reviewing your notes on the film, you need to choose the topic for the paper. Because a film offers so many dimensions to write about—characters, story, music, editing—selecting a manageable topic for an essay can prove daunting. Even a lengthy essay will suffer if it attempts to accomplish too much and address too many issues in a limited amount of space. Narrowing your topic in order to allow your argument to investigate the issues fully and carefully always produces better writing. In a five- or six-page essay, a topic such as "fast-talking comedy in *Bringing Up Baby*" would most likely need to rely on generalities and large claims, whereas "gender, order, and disorder in the jailhouse" is a more focused and manageable topic for a short essay.

Although good critical analysis tends to move among different features of a film, we can distinguish two sets of topics for writing about film—formal and contextual topics. **Formal topics,** which concentrate on forms and ideas within a film, include character analysis, narrative analysis, and stylistic analysis. **Contextual topics,** which relate the film to other films or to surrounding issues, include comparative analysis and historical or cultural analysis. As a formal topic, **character analysis** concentrates its argument on a single character or on the interactions between more than one character, while **narrative analysis** chooses a topic that relates to the story and its construction. **Stylistic analysis** offers a wide variety of topics that engage the formal arrangements of image and sound, such as shot composition, editing, and the use of sound.

Although character analysis appears more available and perhaps easier than other kinds of analyses, a good essay about a character requires subtlety and eloquence. Rather than write about a central character, like Susan in *Bringing Up Baby* or the schizophrenic genius John Nash in *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), a less predictable topic might concentrate on a minor character, such as Susan's aristocratic aunt or Nash's wife Alicia, respectively. Similarly, a topic that involves narrative should usually be refined so that the paper addresses, for instance, the relation of the beginning and end of the film or the way a voiceover comments on and directs the story. A paper that deals with a stylistic topic will be more controllable and incisive if, for instance, it isolates a particular group of shots or identifies a single sound motif that recurs in the film. Therefore, one student may find a topic for a paper by examining the role of the various narrators of Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998). Another student may choose to look more carefully at repeated editing patterns in *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) or at the use of framing in Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953). Any one of these topics will grow more interesting and insightful if you continue to ask questions during the entire writing process: How is the character David in *Bringing Up Baby* a product of costuming or shot composition? How do the various narrators in *The Thin Red Line* reflect different attitudes about war?

A **comparative analysis** develops a contextual topic by evaluating features or elements of two or more different films or perhaps a film and its literary source. A comparative analysis might thus contrast Susan in *Bringing Up Baby* with one or more heroines in more recent films, such as Julia Roberts's character Vivian in *Pretty Woman* (1990) **[Figure 12.13]**. A comparative analysis always allows for some common ground in order to link what you are comparing and contrasting (in the above example, heroines). Conversely, **historical or cultural analysis** investigates topics that relate a film to its place in history, society, or culture. Such a topic might examine historical contexts or debates that surround the film and help explain it—for example, the social status of women or the importance of class in 1938 America. With historical or cultural analysis, the pertinence of the topic to understanding the film is crucial (in our example, the role of women is obviously important; the historical status of leopards probably is not).

Figure 12.13 ***Pretty Woman*** (1990). Vivian or Susan: comparing images of cinematic women.

Once a topic has been selected (the more specific, the better), the writer should view the film again. This second viewing allows the writer to refine and build on those initial notes, precisely in terms of the topic he or she now has in mind. The writer who comes to *Bringing Up Baby* with a vague interest in how this film portrays the battle of the sexes might, after seeing the film again, find that she wishes to refocus her topic on how the leopard becomes a metaphor for that battle.

VIEWING CUES: Preparing to Write about a Film

- In preparation for the film you will view next in class, jot down three or four specific questions you want to direct at the film. While viewing the film, ask three or four additional questions about specific shots or scenes. Then, later on, attempt to answer all of your questions as precisely as possible.
- Which events, sounds, or shots in the film stand out as unusual? As most important? As examples of a pattern of repetition? Describe clearly and concretely one or two events, sounds, or shots from the film.
- Select one key scene or sequence to annotate as precisely as possible. Where are the characters positioned? How are the camera and frame positioned? If the frame moves or cuts occur, describe that movement or the exact location of the cuts. How would you describe the sound, including the dialogue? Support your description with a rough sketch, if applicable.
- Review your notes for possible topics to write about. Look for different categories of topics: character analysis, narrative, stylistics, and historical or comparative issues, for example. Do your notes point you in one of these directions? Make a list of possible topics.

woman lounging under the aged oak that opens the film, becomes the object of her own daughter's video recorder. As the child runs toward her mother, we see Orlando now in a bouncing handheld shot that closes in on her face as a tilted out-of-focus image. As the culmination of so many images of Orlando across four centuries, the framed image now seems to deny its own ability to control and capture this character, freeing Orlando as a presence that will not be constricted even by her own daughter and even by the most technologically modern images of her or him.

Although *Orlando* is based on a novel by Virginia Woolf, Potter's stunning adaptation re-creates the essence of the novel as a drama of perception, visual and social frames, and passionate self-assertion. Like other Woolf novels, *Orlando* presents individual character and historical change embracing each other in the changing intensities of human expression. Like other Woolf characters, Orlando is defined not by his/her social or sexual status but rather by the quality of the consciousness through which Orlando perceives and lives those experiences.

Writing a Film Essay

With notes in hand and a topic clearly in mind, writing a film essay becomes a less daunting task. The next step, composing a first draft, will also be less cumbersome because the writer has prepared for the task with a topic and notes. Ideally, the writer should view the film again while working through the following stages of the writing process, in order to sharpen the analysis and confirm details from the film. When a topic leads to a clearly defined thesis, focus, and argument, another viewing of the film inevitably reveals other useful details and leads to new or better formulated ideas and interpretations.

Interpretation, Argument, and Evidence

Whether your topic is a formal analysis of a sequence or a comparison of the narrative point of view of a novel and its filmic adaptation, it needs to be honed and shaped into a precise interpretation and argument. Your **interpretation** is your explanation of what the film or a part of it means. In addition, a good essay must construct a logical **argument**—the presentation and analysis of **evidence** from the film—that convinces readers of the validity of your interpretation. Although different audiences interpret the meaning of all or part of a movie in somewhat different ways, a valid and interesting argument distinguishes itself by the extent to which the analysis of evidence supports the interpretation. Without good evidence, precise analysis, and logical argument, an essay will appear to be simply one viewer's impression or opinion.

Perhaps the single most important element in a good analytical essay is the **thesis statement,** a short statement (often a single sentence) that suc-

cinctly describes the interpretation and argument to be presented and proven, with evidence, in the pages that follow. As a significantly refined and focused version of the topic, the thesis statement identifies clearly the writer's critical perspective on the film and should indicate what is at stake in the argument and perhaps how that argument is important to an understanding of the film. Many excellent theses succinctly anticipate each stage of the argument that will follow in the paper. Usually this statement, which appears in the first paragraph of the essay, undergoes various revisions throughout the writing process. Having a **working thesis,** a rough version of a thesis, in mind as you begin your first draft, however, will help anchor your argument. In its final form, a precise and assertive thesis statement is likely to engage readers' interest in the essay.

As with most films, Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2000) and Stephen Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) both offer a wide variety of topics that could be developed into specific arguments and thesis statements. For *Traffic,* a film about the drug trade that flows from Mexico into various U.S. communities, one student writer considers analyzing either the cinéma-vérité camera movements used in the Mexican settings or the transformation of the central character, a U.S. drug czar who sees his daughter destroyed by heroin **[Figure 12.18]**. For *My Beautiful Laundrette,* a contemporary romance between a young Pakistani man and a male friend involved with right-wing British gangs, the writer weighs the advantages of two possible topics—the developing sexual relationship of the two main characters or the mise-en-scène of the laundrette where the climactic scenes take place. After reflecting on these topics and seeing the films again, the student opts for the second film and develops a thesis statement that demonstrates clear and specific direction: "*My Beautiful Laundrette* looks at contemporary British politics from numerous angles: family politics, sexual politics, racial politics, and economic politics. In the end these various political motifs coalesce and climax in a single space that is both practical and fantastic, the mise-en-scène of the laundrette" **[Figure 12.19]**. As clear and intelligent as it is, this proposed thesis statement will no doubt be revised for the final draft of the paper, as the writing will certainly generate new insights and possibly new issues.

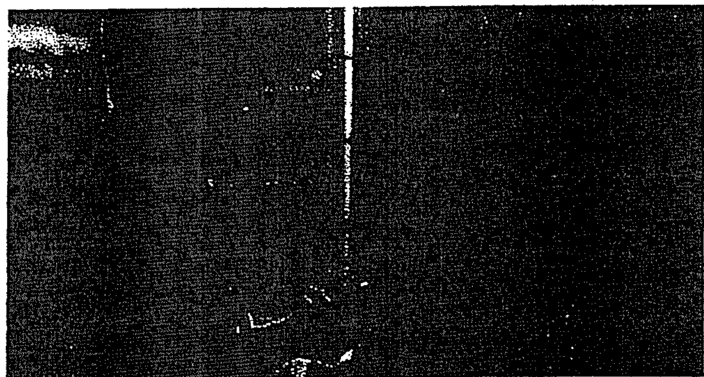


Figure 12.18 *Traffic* (2000): An abundance of topics.

Although some writers prefer other methods of organization, preparing an **outline** results in an indispensable blueprint of the essay, allowing the writer to see and examine the different parts and overall development of the argument as it proceeds out of a strong thesis. An outline can be a simple list of ideas to address or shots and scenes to highlight—such as "weak father figures," "house squatting as metaphor for identity," and "description of the laundrette"—or a more complete (and more useful) list that includes subheadings and perhaps full sentences, which can be used as topic sentences (see p. 494) in the essay.

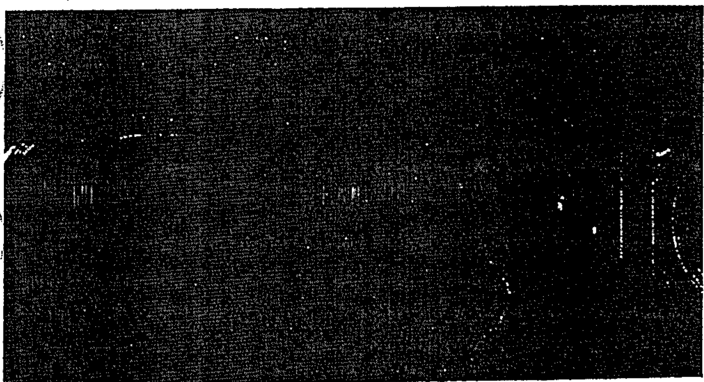


Figure 12.19 *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985). The climactic mise-en-scène of the laundrette.

Here is the detailed outline prepared by the student working on the essay about *My Beautiful Laundrette:*

The Politics of Laundry in *My Beautiful Laundrette*

I. Family politics: the most immediate and complicated type
   A. Fathers and authority
   B. Family traditions and repression
II. Sexual politics: underpins family situations in way that exposes hypocrisy
   A. Heterosexual politics: Nasser, his wife, and his mistress Rachel
   B. Feminist politics: Tania, Nasser's daughter
   C. Gay politics: Johnny and Omar
III. Racial politics: nearly lost in this drama is the way they permeate all other relationships
   A. Johnny, race, and right-wing politics (National Front)
   B. Papa, race, and left-wing politics
IV. Economic politics: where the other confrontations are—presumably and ironically—resolved
   A. Papa as businessman
   B. Salim as drug dealer
   C. Johnny and Omar as laundry entrepreneurs
V. These political motifs coalesce and climax in a single space that is both practical and fantastic: the mise-en-scène of the laundrette
   A. Detailed description of mise-en-scène of laundrette
   B. Pragmatics meet fantasy
   C. Analysis of climactic gathering

As this example illustrates, a detailed outline allows the writer to review the structure of the essay and note any problems with the scope or logic of the argument or with the transitions from one section to another. At this stage the topic should be focused on a specific thesis whose parts develop as logical steps in the body of the paper.

Whether you work from an outline or not, a clear organization and structure are paramount for an effective essay, most notably coherent paragraphs introduced and linked by topic sentences. Well-developed paragraphs, which tend to be four to six sentences long, demand coherence and evidence. The most critical part of a good paragraph is the **topic sentence,** the sentence, usually the first, that announces the central idea around which all other sentences within the paragraph cohere. The remainder of the paragraph then develops the idea stated in the topic sentence and provides evidence from the film as support. In the example from the essay on *My Beautiful Laundrette,* note how the strong and lucid topic sentence that opens the paragraph is then supported by evidence:

In *My Beautiful Laundrette,* the drama of the characters is invariably about space, territory, and, most importantly, home. In the first sequence of the film, Salim and a henchman evict Johnny and another squatter from an abandoned tene-

CULTURAL SPOTLIGHT

From Viewing a Film to Writing a Film Essay

As you grow more confident and practiced as a writer, you will be able to write about films in a fluid motion: watching the film, taking some notes, sketching an outline, and writing the first draft and final essay. Even the most competent writers, however, pause to reflect on their work by consulting a checklist like this one:

1. Review your notes, filling in details where you can. Ideally, view the film one more time.
2. Try to summarize the most important themes or motifs in the film.
3. Formulate a working thesis and argument for the essay.
4. Outline the argument. If possible, use full sentences for headings because they can then become your topic sentences.
5. Develop the central idea of each paragraph with details from the film that support that paragraph's topic sentence.
6. Rewrite your thesis statement to reflect any changes or refinements in your thinking that occurred while writing your first draft.
7. If you are writing a research essay, be sure to use the correct documentation format for in-text citations and the Works Cited list (see pp. 504–6).
8. Revise your essay, checking for large problems such as vague or illogical organization, and proofread for surface errors in spelling and grammar.
9. Select a title that reflects the main argument of your paper.
10. Print out the essay and correct any remaining typographical errors.

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ment building, and for the rest of the film the metaphor of
"squatting" describes the characters' unstable and temporary
relations to the places they live and interact. Although
most of the characters are driven by the idea that, as one
character puts it, "people should make up their minds where
they want to live," places and homes are never more than
shifting locations that always seem to be foreign territory
where one lives uncomfortably. In this sense, "home" is at
best a dream and usually just a temporary convenience.
Nasser's daughter Tania wants to be anywhere but with her
family and is willing to have either Johnny or Omar as a
lover, depending on who will take her away from her home.
In the end, Nasser watches from a window as a medium shot
shows Tania being visually swept off the platform by a
series of trains that rush off the screen, on her way to
another home that she will define for herself.
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Revision, Manuscript Format, and Proofreading

A completed first draft of an essay is not a completed essay. The final stage in writing about film requires at least one revision of the paper, with special attention to manuscript format and proofreading. Last-minute corrections should be kept to a minimum and should be clear and simple changes.

A good revision begins by reading the essay with fresh eyes, achieved best by allowing time away from the first draft before returning to work on the revision. In addition, carefully check **manuscript format,** including margins, title position, footnotes, and other mechanical arrangements on the pages. Typically, the manuscript format for a film essay should follow these guidelines, which are based on recommendations by the Modern Language Association (for more information, consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers,* Sixth Edition, 2003):

- Your name should appear in the top left-hand corner of the first page, along with your instructor's name, the course title and number, and the date of submission. Your title should be centered on the next line.
- The entire essay should be double-spaced, including any quotations running more than four lines, which are indented ten spaces at the left margin and reproduced without quotation marks.
- Leave one-inch margins at the top, bottom, and sides of each page. Indent paragraphs five character spaces or one-half inch.
- Number each page (including the first) with your last name and the page number in the upper right-hand corner.
- Be certain quotations and documentation are in the proper format.

Once your final revision is completed, **proofreading**—checking deliberately for errors or omissions that can be easily corrected on a hard copy—is essential. With any kind of writing, your presentation determines much of how your reader views your work, and an accurate, professional look to your writing can promote an accurate, professional reading of it. Typographical mistakes and other small goofs do not ruin a good essay, but they do undermine it by creating an impression of carelessness.

VIEWING CUES: Interpretation, Argument, and Evidence in a Film Essay

- Try to formulate the specific core of your interpretation for the film you are writing about. Why is that interpretation important? What new light does it shed on the film for your readers?
- Sketch an argument for your paper. What is the logic of its development? What conclusions do you foresee making?
- Write a precise thesis statement, one that describes your interpretation and anticipates each stage of your argument. Is your thesis specific enough, or does it need refinement? Is it sufficiently interesting or polemical so to encourage readers to continue reading your essay?
- Create a detailed outline of your essay. Try to begin each section with a topic sentence that summarizes the issues you will address. Do your topic sentences relate to each other? Do they accurately describe the logic of the essay? Does your outline also include subsections that develop and support each topic sentence with details and evidence?
- After writing your first draft, revise your thesis statement to reflect changes in your thinking. How can you sharpen your thesis to better describe how your argument develops?
- In your draft, look for consistent errors and trouble spots that you need to pay special attention to during revision.

IN FOCUS

Interpretation, Argument, and Evidence in *Rashomon* (1950)

After a reviewing his notes on Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon,* a student writer considers some possible topics. He begins by thinking about the film's unusual narrative structure: as three men, including a priest, seek shelter from a rainstorm under an ancient city gate, they hear the tale of a murder and rape through four different points of view—those of the bandit, the woman, the ghost of the dead man, and the woodcutter. The narrative tension in the film, the writer realizes, develops around the discrepancies in these competing narrative points of view, the result of which is a dark ambiguity about the truth of this violent and tragic event. After seeing the film again and trying to refine his thinking about it, the writer develops a thesis, a clear interpretation of the film:

> In Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon,* four different perspectives contrast four different versions of the truth about a violent attack. At the conclusion of the film, after we have been presented with these various narrative perspectives and the evidence in them, the opening confusion of the three men is even more pervasive, setting the stage for the only possible response to a world defined by egotism and uncertainty: compassion.

The student's next step is to sketch an outline, one in which he uses topic sentences to mark the development of the argument and the places where key evidence will appear:

Rashomon: Beyond Understanding and Evidence

Thesis statement

I. Central to this film is the drama of interpretation and evidence.
   A. Four accounts of same horrifying event
   B. The opening focus on evidence
II. Although more evidence appears through the perspective of the different witnesses, that evidence does not always agree and seems to befuddle a clear interpretation.
   A. Overlaps and inconsistencies in describing the facts
   B. The dagger as key piece of evidence
III. The heart of the fragmented narratives of *Rashomon* is the egotism that fashions those various perspectives.
   A. The bandit's violent sexual desire and the crime
   B. His story of conquest and surrender

IV. Both the wife's and the husband's perspectives are likewise mostly about themselves
    A. The wife's tale of a helpless woman
    B. The husband's tale of honor and self-sacrifice
V. The woodcutter's narrative is more problematic, but equally locked into its own needs for self-justification and protection.
    A. His revised vision: a base and cowardly world
    B. His acknowledging stealing the evidence of the dagger
VI. That each of these perspectives is distorted by different degrees of ethical failures of the individuals telling them indicates both the horrifying indeterminacy of a world determined by isolated egos and the corruption of these perspectives by human egotism.
    A. Natural disaster and moral depravity
    B. Editing and shot compositions add considerably to this sense of confusion, disorientation, and failure to see facts and events clearly.
VII. Although the humane conclusion of the film seems unexpected (and somewhat sentimental), its unexpectedness is what makes the film so engaged with modern times.

After writing his first draft, the writer sets the paper aside for three days before undertaking a careful revision. He proofreads a printed version of the essay and then submits this final copy:

Stillman 1

Fred Stillman
Professor White
Film 101
10 October 2003

Beyond Understanding and Evidence:
The Surprise of Compassion in *Rashomon*

The setting that opens and closes Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* is the collapsed Rashomon gate in the ancient city of Kyoto. Amidst a torrential rainstorm, a woodcutter, a commoner and a priest huddle together, and the first recounts a horrifying tale of rape, murder, and possibly suicide told through four different perspectives that structure the narrative of the film. Seen respectively through the eyes of a criminal, the female victim, the dead husband, and the woodcutter, each of these four perspectives offers a contrasting version of events and the truth of what happened, and each introduces pieces of evidence to support that particular version. Despite having heard these witnesses, however, the priest can only murmur, "I don't understand." At the film's

conclusion, moreover, that opening confusion of the men is more pervasive than ever, setting the stage for the only possible response to a world defined by egotism and uncertainty: compassion.

Rashomon is a drama of evidence and interpretation. As the priest and woodcutter explain to the commoner, the original staging of the different testimonies was a police court trying to gather evidence to determine the truth behind a horrible crime in which a noble woman and her husband were attacked in the wilderness–she was raped and he was killed. Appropriately, the first point of view presented is that of the woodcutter, who follows a trail of evidence through the woods—a woman's hat, a man's hat, a belt, and an amulet case—to the sudden discovery of the dead body of the samurai nobleman, his stiffened arms and hands stretched grotesquely toward the horrified woodcutter in a low-angle shot **[Figure 12.20]**. Shortly thereafter, a man describes how he captured the bandit Tajomaru, emphasizing the discovered evidence of the samurai's horse as well as "17 arrows" and a "Korean sword" found on the criminal. Yet even the seemingly incontestable claim and evidence immediately become subject to doubt when the bandit suddenly denounces and denies the man's interpretation of certain details.

Although more evidence appears through the perspective of the other witnesses, that evidence does not always agree and seems to befuddle a clear interpretation. Most importantly, the significance of a pearl-handled dagger, the weapon that supposedly killed the husband, changes dramatically in the different narratives, acting as an evidential marker to distinguish the interpretations of events.

Focused on the shifting place of this dagger, the heart of the fragmented narratives of *Rashomon* becomes the egotism that informs each perspective. Or, more exactly, each version becomes more about the personal desire and greed of the person explaining what happened than about the factual events and evidence. Appropriately, what initiates the horrendous crime is the violent sexual desire of the bandit, who happens to witness, in a sharp shot/reverse-shot exchange beginning with his awakening eyes, the exposed face and feet of the wife. After that, his entire account emphasizes greed and desire: he deceives and entraps the nobleman by suggesting he will sell him riches

Figure 12.20 *Rashomon* (1950). The mystery of a horrifying death.

from an old tomb, and his leering gaze at the young woman turns quickly to a brutal sexual attack. Not surprisingly, in his version, his desires and demands fulfill the woman she becoming the mirror image of his greed and lust when she ecstatically surrenders to his sexual assault. At this moment, the critical object, the dagger, drops passively from her hand, according to the bandit, who claims to then kill the husband "honestly."

Both the wife's and the husband's perspectives are likewise mostly about themselves. From the beginning, she appears discreet and demure, partly hidden by veils and white make-up and barely moving as she rides her horse through the forest. In her account, she becomes a "poor helpless woman" whose husband turns viciously on her after the assault. Unable to bear his hateful stare, she claims to have fainted only to later discover her dagger in her husband's chest. The husband's narrative, in contrast, paints a picture of his suffering devotion and lost honor, weeping from the grave as he recounts killing himself with the controversial dagger. Light and shadow fill the images of this account, suggesting an ambiguity and lack of certainty even in this testimony by a dead man.

Finally, the woodcutter's narrative is more problematic but equally locked into its own needs for self-justification and protection. After introducing the story at the beginning of the film, he returns to offer a final version that reveals deceptions and lies in his first account. Now, he admits to having witnessed the entire scene, and his subsequent description of the part-clownish, part-terrified fighting of the two men shows a world that is fundamentally base and cowardly, a reflection of his own base and cowardly position in failing to intervene or fully disclose the truth of what he saw. Most disturbing perhaps, he tacitly acknowledges stealing the crucial piece of evidence, the dagger, in order to sell it for personal gain.

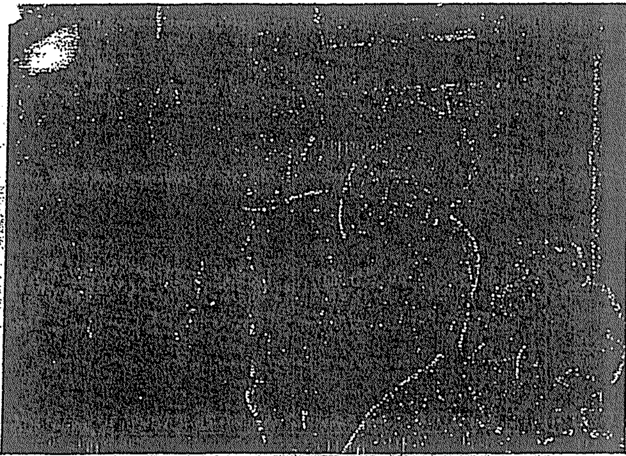

Figure 12.21 *Rashomon* (1950). Trying to make meaning in a chaotic world.

That each of these perspectives is distorted by different degrees of ethical failures on the part of the individual behind it indicates the source of the horrifying indeterminacy and chaos of this world [Figure 12.21]. This is a world described by the priest in the opening as full of "war, earthquake, wind, fire, famine, plague . . . each

year full of disaster . . . hundreds of men dying like animals." Stylistically, the stunning editing and shot compositions of *Rashomon* dramatize this world of confusion and disorientation, in which seeing and understanding seem constantly to combat each other. Witnesses are introduced with a wipe that crosses the screen in one direction or the other, almost violently wiping out the perspective of the preceding account. Within the different accounts, rapid tracks and flash pans re-create the desperately unsettled struggle to discover facts through perspectives that dart across surfaces blocked by branches and leaves.

Within all this moral darkness and despair, however, the conclusion of *Rashomon* suggests a possible way out of the terror and blindness that results from so much visual and narrative ambiguity. In this final sequence, the threesome who tell and hear that tale of violence discover an abandoned baby in the ruins of the gate. The commoner urges them to steal the baby's blankets and clothing because "you can't live unless you're what you call selfish." At this point, a dramatic turn occurs when, in a head-to-head confrontation in the rain, the commoner accuses the woodcutter of hiding his theft of that crucial piece of evidence, the dagger. In dazed silence, the priest and woodcutter stand against a wall. As the rain stops, the commoner suddenly insists on taking the child home with him to his already crowded family. Despite his shame about his selfishness and despite the missing evidence of the stolen dagger, a glimmer of human value returns to the world. Compassion overcomes the evidence of mistakes, and as they all depart, the sun gleams through the clouds and the saved child becomes the emblem of a new future. During this sequence, the priest shouts the fundamental truth so often lost in this violent courtroom, "if men don't trust each other, then the world becomes a hell."

Although this conclusion seems unexpected (and somewhat sentimental), its unexpectedness is what makes the film so engaged with modern times. Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard uses the term "leap of faith" to describe the only possibility for a spiritual faith in modern times. What his term implies is that both spiritual and human faith—the grounds for ethical behavior—often occur *despite* the evidence before our eyes and *despite* the failure of human reason to understand it. As in *Rashomon,* truth and morality may need to leap over the confusion of facts and logic in order simply to do what is right.

While not all writers about film precisely follow all of these guidelines for outlining, formulating a thesis statement, revising, proofreading, and so on, experienced writers almost always do so unconsciously or in abbreviated ways. Keeping a checklist of these mechanics in mind can alleviate much of the anxiety about writing, providing working frameworks that lead to stronger and more interesting essays.

Researching the Movies

While in some critical film essays the writer aims simply to convey a personal response to a film based on critical distance and careful reflection, in other essays the writer wants or needs to use research in order to sharpen and develop his or her interpretation of a film. Research enables the writer to identify significant issues surrounding a film and to contribute his or her opinions and ideas to the ongoing critical dialogue about it. A student intending to write about Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* (1950), for example, may be intrigued by the film but uncertain about her specific argument. With some reading and research about Cocteau, his relation to the surrealist movement, and his work as a poet and painter, she discovers a more specific argument about the complicated role of poetry in the film and the relevance of the Orpheus myth to Cocteau's vision of the modern artist **[Figure 12.22]**. Whether limited or extensive, research helps determine why your essay is important and what critical questions are at stake in writing the essay.

Distinguishing Research Materials

Primary and Secondary Sources There are various kinds of materials that qualify as research sources for a film essay. **Primary research sources**—such as films on videotape or DVD and film scripts—have a direct and close relationship with the original film. **Secondary research sources**—including books, critical articles, Internet sites, supplementary DVD materials, and newspaper reviews—contain ideas or information from outside sources such as film critics or scholars. A student planning to write a research essay on Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) might first view a 16mm projection of that film and then access other primary sources, such as a videotape and script, as follow-ups to the first screening **[Figure 12.23]**. Later research via secondary sources might include film reviews published at the time of release, scholarly essays on Siegel's work, and perhaps a book on 1950s American cinema.

Figure 12.22 *Orpheus* (1950). Researching the complexities of a film.

Various primary sources are an indispensable asset because they allow the writer to review specific scenes on a videotape or DVD or to check the exact dialogue in a published script. With primary sources, however, it is important to keep in mind that they may approximate, but not duplicate exactly, the look of a film when seen in a theater (see pp. 30–33). Videotapes may format images differently from the format used in theatrical screenings, while scripts may represent a simple blueprint from which the actual film dialogue deviates.

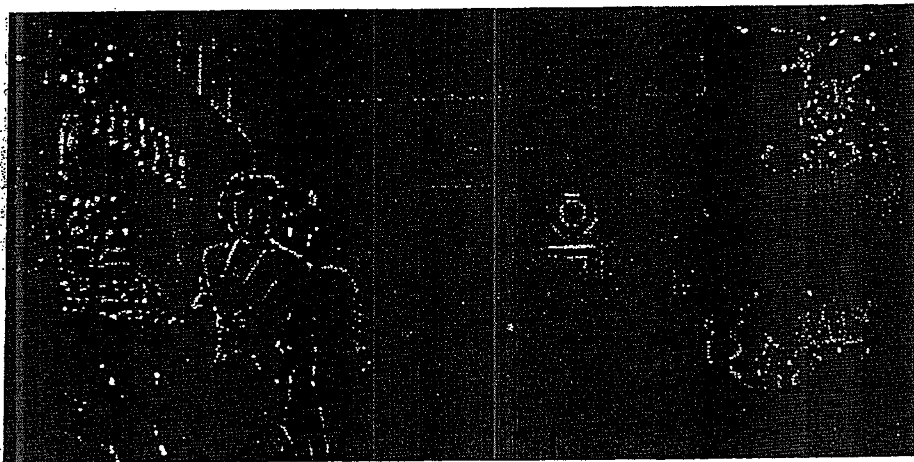

Figure 12.23 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). Following a film from 16mm to videotape to scholarly essays.

Even in our electronic age, libraries and their databases remain the most reliable places to find solid secondary materials. Check such databases as the *Humanities Index, Lexis/Nexis,* and *Comindex* for essays and books on your subject, and don't underestimate the more conventional approach of exploring the library's shelves. Annual bibliographic indexes, for example, identify journal articles and books that may support and broaden your thinking, including especially *The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature,* the *MLA International Bibliography,* and the *Film/Literature Index.* Once you have a topic and a working thesis, you can search for sources relevant to your topic and argument. After checking general categories like "film," "cinema," and "movies," a more precise topic, such as "contemporary Australian cinema" or "sound technology and the movies" will lead you more quickly to pertinent research materials.

In addition to databases and bibliographic indexes, specialized encyclopedias, which identify important topics and figures in film studies, are useful resources for initiating research on a film. Examples include Ephraim Katz's *The Film Encyclopedia,* Pam Cook's *The Cinema Book,* Leonard Maltin's *The Whole Film Sourcebook,* Ginette Vincendeau's *Encyclopedia of European Cinema,* and Amy Unterburger's *The St. James Women Filmmakers Encyclopedia.* Film guides such as these provide factual information about and short introductions to a subject. The entries typically do not offer the sort of detailed analysis or arguments required for a good research paper, but they can suggest pertinent information and issues that can lead to more research and a refined argument.

Internet Sources For students with Internet access, the Web offers useful discussion groups, access to various library and media catalogs, and numerous other information sites. However, with so many Web sites available, the writer must be careful to distinguish among the three kinds of reputable **Internet sources** for film studies:

- sites and databases that provide basic facts about a film and the individuals involved with that film—such as biographical facts about the director, the different running times of a film, and the like
- sites that offer reviews or essays from academic film journals—such as *Film Comment, Jump Cut,* and *Sight and Sound*
- film-specific sites (almost every major film released in recent years has its own Web site, as do the studios and distributors) that provide information ranging from production facts to gossip as well as reviews and interviews

While the Internet is fast becoming an important source for accessing information of all kinds, film researchers and writers must be cautious about the quality of the material found there. One obvious reason for this caution is the difficulty in determining the authenticity and authority of Internet-based information. Unlike material published in academic journals or books, Internet essays and articles may not have been through a review process to determine their value. Virtually anyone can post on a Web site any opinion or any set of facts—often without substantial evidence. When using the Internet for research, therefore, writers need to differentiate substantial and useful material from chat and frivolous commentary. Especially with Internet sources, there are three important rules to follow:

- Determine the quality of the Internet source: Does it provide reliable information and a carefully evaluated argument supported by research? Is the source a refereed publication (one whose material is evaluated by experts) or a reputable institution? Is its information supported by references to other research? What are the credentials of the authors?
- Define your search as precisely as possible. Beyond just the title of a film, focus your search on, for example, "lighting in *Double Indemnity*" or "politics and Iranian cinema." Pursue your topic through the advanced-search option.
- Explore links to other sites. Does your research link you to sites on other films by the same director or to such related issues as the film genre or the country in which the film was made?

Here is a list of Web sites useful for film research:

- *Internet Movie Database* (<www.IMDb.com>): provides detailed information on films
- *ScreenSite* (<www.tcf.ua.edu/ScreenSite/contents.htm>): provides data on films, film conferences, archives, and useful links to other academic cinema sites
- *History on/and/in Film* (<www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/Reading Room/hfilm/contenth.html>): contains conference papers and scholarly essays on a range of film history topics
- *American Film Institute* (<www.afi.com>): offers recent industry news, events, educational seminars, and reviews
- *Library of Congress Motion Picture & Television Reading Room* (<lcweb.loc.gov/rr/mopic/>): provides access to the library's catalogue, the national Film Registry preservation list, and the American Memory Collection of online early films.

Using and Documenting Sources

Writers gather research material in a wide variety of ways: some record paragraphs and phrases on handwritten note cards, while others prefer to type that material directly into their computers, allowing them to sort, move, and insert it easily. In either case, the bibliographic information for quotations should be double-checked for accuracy and should include all of the publication data required for the Works Cited list (and sometimes the Works Consulted section) of your research paper. Just as sloppy technical errors in making a movie (such as a boom microphone appearing in a frame) can undermine the look and effect of that film, inaccurate or careless source documentation will make the research paper look amateurish.

Integrating research material into the text of your paper requires both logic and rhetoric. Sometimes research can be used to locate and describe

how your argument differs from prevailing positions on a film or issue. In this case, the writer frequently identifies one or more opposing positions as a way of highlighting how the essay will distinguish itself: "While Annette Michelson has claimed that Kuleshov's films are best understood as part of a debate with Eisenstein, this paper argues that the French films of Jean Epstein are equally important to Kuleshov's development." Conversely, research can be used to support and validate a point or a part of the overall argument: "Both Patrice Petro and Judith Mayne have produced complex feminist readings of silent-era German films that support my interpretation of *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931)." Yet another possibility is to use research sources to back up the validity of facts or critical frameworks necessary for introducing an argument: "In *The Zero Hour: Glasnost and Soviet Cinema in Transition,* Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky convincingly show that Russian cinema after 1985 returned to the center of the world stage, an argument that will provide the background for my claims about the importance of *Little Vera* (1988) in Europe and America."

Once research material has been gathered, selected, and integrated into an essay, all of the research sources used must be properly documented. There are two kinds of research material that require documentation: **direct quotation** from a secondary source and **paraphrasing** in which the writer puts the idea or observation from another source in his or her own words. When the information is considered common knowledge and is well known to most people, there is no need to document where you found that information. If, however, there is any doubt about whether the observation is common knowledge, always document the source so as to avoid any potential suspicion of plagiarism. For example, a critic's remark that Ousmane Sembène is one of Africa's premier filmmakers and that his films work in a realist tradition would be considered common knowledge by many seasoned filmgoers. But a writer new to Sembène's work may feel more comfortable documenting the source of that information, and, like all writers, should *never risk the charge of plagiarism.* Quotations of dialogue from a film usually does not require documentation.

There are various **documentation formats** for listing authors, titles, and publication data. Here, we will describe the format that is advocated by the Modern Language Association (MLA) and widely used in the humanities. (See the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers,* Sixth Edition, 2003.) The primary components of the MLA format are in-text citations and the Works Cited list. An **in-text citation** is required wherever the writer refers to or quotes from a research source within the essay's text. The in-text citation includes the author's name and the page number. When the author's name appears in the discussion that introduces the quotation, only the page numbers are enclosed in parentheses. Note that p. and pp. are not used:

> As Patricia Zimmerman has noted, filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage and Jonas Mekas "appropriated home-movie style as a formal manifestation of a spontaneous, untampered form of filmmaking" (146).

However, when the author is not named in the introductory text, enclose both the author's last name and the page number, without any intervening punctuation, within the parentheses:

> Filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage and Jonas Mekas "appropriated home-movie style as a formal manifestation of a spontaneous, untampered form of filmmaking" (Zimmerman 146).

The same citation formats are used whether the material is quoted directly or paraphrased:

> Much of the American avant-garde movement experimented not so much with the techniques of modern art but with the spontaneous actions associated with home movies (Zimmerman 146).

When you use two or more sources by the same author in your essay, you must distinguish among them by also including an abbreviated version of the title in either the introductory text or the parenthetical citation: as in "Zimmerman writes in *Reel Families* . . ." or "(Zimmerman, *Reel Families* 146)", respectively. Each source cited in the text must also appear in the Works Cited section with full bibliographic detail.

Another type of annotation is the **content,** or **explanatory, note** which may or may not include secondary sources. These notes offer background information on the topic being discussed or on related issues, suggest related readings, or offer an aside. They should be placed on a separate page after the text (but before the Works Cited list) or as footnotes at the bottom of the page. Thus a writer discussing horror films and Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) might include this text and content note:

> Although *Carrie* focuses on female anxiety and violence, it is difficult to pinpoint a specific audience for this film.[1]
>
> [1]Especially since *Psycho*, horror films seem fixated on violence against women, but there is good reason to consider how both female and male audiences identify with these films. An important discussion of this issue is Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chain-Saws* (3-21).

Full documentation for every source cited in your essay should be included in the **Works Cited** section, positioned on a separate page immediately after the last page of the essay text. Sources that have been consulted but not cited in the text or notes of the essay can be included in an optional **Works Consulted** section, which appears on a separate page after the Works Cited list. (Note, however, that for reasons of space, we do *not* show the Works Cited and Works Consulted sections as separate pages in the essay on p. 513 in this chapter.) Punctuation and other mechanics of the different entries must be absolutely correct. Titles should be typed either in italics or underlined, according to your instructor's preference. Some of the most common types of Works Cited entries include the following:

Book by One Author

Zimmerman, Patricia. *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.

Book by More Than One Author

Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960.* New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

Edited Book

Cook, Pam, and Mieke Bernink, eds. *The Cinema Book.* 2nd ed. London: British Film Institute, 1999.

QUICK GUIDE TO REFERENCING SOURCES

****Important**:** Quotations from primary materials and secondary (critical) sources, whether in print, electronic or audiovisual formats MUST ALWAYS be acknowledged in order to avoid any suggestion of plagiarism (see above). It is NOT enough to acknowledge in your final bibliography the sources used. If quoting extracts from texts literally, these must be acknowledged in the body of the essay through the use of footnotes or endnotes. The library also holds different reference style guides available for consultation.

Different reference styles are admitted; it is important though that you use one style consistently throughout your essay. The basic guidelines below provide an example of one particular style. We will also devote seminar time to citing & referencing in academic coursework.

1) Referencing sources in the body of the essay

To support your argument and avoid generalisation, refer to selected details in the material you have used. Make sure they are pertinent to the point you are making. Use quotation marks and page references, and make sure that quotations fit into the grammatical structure of the sentence in which they are inserted.

When discussing films make sure that you use concrete examples and do not make vague generalisations about them. Stills can be incorporated into essays. If so, please identify them: e.g.:

Figure 1: Kane declares candidacy. From *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941).

Note also that the title of a story, poem or article should appear in inverted commas (' ..'), but that for the title of a book or a film we use *italics*. The FIRST TIME the film appears it must be followed by the director's name (first name then last name), country and year of production, all in brackets, e.g.:

Notorious (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1946).

The first time a foreign language film is quoted in your essay, include both the original title and the English language one. Thereafter refer to the film by the English title only. E.g.:

Nun va goldoon/ A Moment of Innocence (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Iran, 1996)

Footnotes or endnotes should be used mainly for references to articles or books (INCLUDING PAGES), and only rarely for brief comments related to the content of the essay. If the information cannot be integrated in the text of your essay, it is usually a digression and better left out.

An example:

> As Alastair Phillips has noted, the influence of Jean Vigo is apparent in *The 400 Blows.*[1]

---

[1] Alastair Phillips, '*The 400 Blows* (1959) – Youth and Entrapment in the French New Wave', in Jeffrey Geiger & R.L. Rutsky (eds.), *Film Analysis, A Norton Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), p. 555.

2) Reference lists (bibliography / filmography) at the end of the essay

As well as referencing your sources in footnotes, you should include a **bibliography or reference list** at the end of the essay, in alphabetical order (author's last name first), as in the examples below. **All** sources should be adequately referenced, including:

BOOKS (e.g.):

Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art. An Introduction. 7th Edition.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004. or:
Orpen, Valerie. *Film editing: the art of the expressive* (London: Wallflower, 2003).

ARTICLES IN A BOOK

Feuer, Jane. 'The Self-Reflexive Musical and the Myth of Entertainment', in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 441-455.

JOURNAL ARTICLES (IN PRINT OR ONLINE)

Tashiro, Charles. 'Passing for the Past. Production Design and the Historical Film', *Cineaste* 22/2 (2004), pp. 40-44.

Halligan, Benjamin. 'The Remaining Second World: Sokurov and *Russian Ark*', *Senses of Cinema*, 25 (2003). Online. <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/25/russian_ ark.html>. Accessed 1/1/2004.

ELECTRONIC JOURNAL ARTICLE FOUND IN A DATABASE:

Bliss, Michael and Paul Schrader, 'Affliction and Forgiveness: An Interview with Paul Schrader', *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 1. (2000), pp. 2-9. Stable URL: <http://links.jstor. org/ sici?sici=0015-386%28200023%2954%3A1%3C2%3AAAFAIW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2> Accessed 1/1/2004

Editorial, 'Facing East: Iranian cinema as revelation', *Cineaste* 31/3 (2006): 4(1). *Expanded Academic ASAP*. Thomson Gale. Accessed 5/9/2006

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ON THE WWW:

Higgins, Charlotte. 'Director hailed at Cannes faces five-year film ban in China'. *The Guardian*, 5 September 2006. Online. <http://film.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1865012,00.html> Accessed 6/09/2006.

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FILMS IN FILMOGRAPHY

Audition (Takashi Miike, Japan, 1999).

Optionally, production company details can be added (these details can be found at the Internet Movie Database):

Audition. dir. Takashi Miike, AFDF/Omega Project, 1999.

SECONDARY ELECTRONIC/AUDIOVISUAL SOURCES (DVD MATERIALS)

On occasion, you may want to refer to the DVD edition of a film in order to cite the **bonus materials.** E.g.:

Scorsese, Martin. *Gangs of New York* (2002). Director's Commentary. DVD. Entertainment in Video, 2003.

Or, if there is not an identifiable author, list them as **audiovisual sources**, always referring to the DVD edition. E.g.:

Discovery Channel Special: Uncovering the Real "Gangs of New York". In *Gangs of New York* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 2002). DVD. Entertainment in Video, 2003.

Compiled by Belén Vidal
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SECTION 2

cowed is man by the world – whether his superiors, or the depression – that he betrays what he should love. Conversely, Marlene's very magnificence is irreal, and has a tragic overtone. It also has a triumph. Poetic freedom is the mainspring of these wilful, glittering, delirious films.

Bill NICHOLS (ed.), Movies and Methods
University of California Press, 1976

CITIZEN KANE

DAVID BORDWELL

David Bordwell presents a comprehensive, formal analysis of Citizen Kane, *combining a careful examination of cinematic and literary predecessors, narrative structure, and visual and aural motifs with thematic comparison to Welles' other films, primarily* Chimes at Midnight (Falstaff). *Pauline Kael's* The Citizen Kane Book *supplements this analysis with useful historical placement linking Kane with William Randolph Hearst as an old-guard, yellow journalist and the anonymous reporter searching for the key to Kane's life with the emerging faceless collectivism of Henry Luce's empire –* Time *magazine,* The March of Time, *and the rest.*

Originally published as part of an excellent issue of Film Comment *devoted to mise-en-scène in the work of Ophuls, Murnau, and Welles (Summer 1971), Bordwell's article was bracketed by others dealing with Welles' overall career and with some of his other major films. Perhaps for that reason Bordwell makes few allusions to the persistence of the style and theme he locates in* Citizen Kane *throughout Welles' other work (with the exception of a concluding comparison to* Chimes at Midnight). *The concern with power, love, ego, time as consciousness and memory, and the tension between objective fact and subjective meaning are concerns that do seem to recur in most of Welles' films. By focusing with clarity and concentration on this one film, the article builds a solid, utilitarian foundation for further study of Orson Welles. Bordwell's "Addendum, 1975" at the end of the article also provides an illuminating auto-critique of methodological assumptions.*

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The best way to understand *Citizen Kane*[1] is to stop worshipping it as a triumph of technique. Too many people have pretended that Orson Welles was the first to use deep-focus, long takes, films-within-films, sound montage, and even ceilings on sets when these techniques were child's play for Griffith, Murnau, Renoir, Berkeley, Keaton, Hitchcock, Lang and Clair. To locate *Kane's* essential originality in its gimmicks cheapens it; once we know how the magician

does his tricks, the show becomes a charade. *Kane* is a masterpiece not because of its tours de force, brilliant as they are, but because of the way those tours de force are controlled for larger artistic ends. The glitter of the film's style reflects a dark and serious theme; *Kane's* vision is as rich as its virtuosity.

The breadth of that vision remains as impressive today as thirty years ago. *Citizen Kane* straddles great opposites. It is at once a triumph of social comment and a landmark in cinematic surrealism. It treats subjects like love, power, class, money, friendship, and honesty with the seriousness of a European film; yet it never topples into pretentiousness, is at every instant as zestful, intelligent, and entertaining as the finest Hollywood pictures. It is both a pointed comedy of manners and a tragedy on a Renaissance scale. It has a Flaubertian finesse of detail and an Elizabethan grandeur of design. Extroverted and introspective, exuberant and solemn, *Kane* has become an archetypal film as boldly as Kane's career makes him an archetypal figure. "I am, always have been, and always will be only one thing – an American," he declares, and the contradictions in *Citizen Kane* echo those of an entire country. No wonder the film's original title was *American:* like the nation, the film and its protagonist hold contraries in fluid, fascinating suspension.

To unify such opposites, *Kane* draws together the two main strands of cinematic tradition. As both a mechanical recorder of events and a biased interpreter of the same events, cinema oscillates between the poles of objective realism and subjective vision. This tension, implicit in every film (and, as Pasolini points out, in every image), is at the heart of *Citizen Kane.* Faithful to the integrity of the external world, the film is simultaneously expressive of the processes of the imagination. As the ancestor of the works of Godard, Bergman, Fellini, Bresson, and Antonioni, *Kane* is a monument in the modern cinema, the cinema of consciousness.

Since Lumière, motion pictures have been attracted to the detailed reproduction of external reality. Still photography, the literary school of Naturalism, and the elaborate theatrical apparatus of the nineteenth century gave impetus to the documentary side of film. Thus most of the films made before 1940 reflect this sort of objective realism in their *mise-en-scène.* But running parallel to this documentary trend is a subjectivity that uses film to transform reality to suit the creator's imagination. From Méliès' theatrical stylization and cinematic sleight-of-hand come the distorted décor of *Caligari* and the camera experimentation of the European avant-garde.

This tandem line of development highlights the significance of Eisenstein in film aesthetics. He demonstrated that montage could assemble the raw data of the Lumière method in patterns which expressed the poetic imagination. Dialectical montage was an admission of the presence of artistic consciousness in a way that Griffith's "invisible" cutting was not. The audience was made aware of a creator's sensibility juxtaposing images to make a specific emotional or intellectual point. Eisenstein claimed to control montage of attractions "scientifically" (sometimes to the point of reducing metaphor to rebus), but after Eisenstein, a less didactic, more associational montage became a dominant poetic style of the avant-garde.

In its own way, *Citizen Kane* also recapitulates and extends film tradition. On a primary level, it makes sophisticated allusions to several genres: the detective thriller, the romance, the musical, the horror fantasy, the hard-boiled newspaper film, the big-business story, the newsreel, and the social-comment film. But *Kane* is more than an anthology. Testing the Lumière-Méliès tension, Welles, like Eisenstein, gives the cinema a new contemplative density by structuring his material on the nature of consciousness. What Eisenstein does between individual shots, Welles does in the film's total organization. *Kane's* great achievement, then, is not its stylistic heel-clicking, but its rich fusion of an objective realism of texture with a subjective realism of structure. Welles opens a new area to the cinema because, like Eisenstein, he not only shows what we see, but he symbolizes the way we see it.

Kane explores the nature of consciousness chiefly by presenting various points of view on a shifting, multiplaned world. We enter Kane's consciousness as he dies, before we have even met him; he is less a character than a stylized image. Immediately, we view him as a public figure – fascinating but remote. Next we scrutinize him as a man, seen through the eyes of his wife and his associates, as a reporter traces his life story. Finally, these various perspectives are capped by a detached, omniscient one. In all, Kane emerges as a man – pathetic, grand, contradictory, ultimately enigmatic. The film expresses an ambiguous reality through formal devices that stress both the objectivity of fact and the subjectivity of point of view. It is because the best contemporary cinema has turned to the exploration of such a reality that Kane is, in a sense, the first modern American film.

The opening twelve minutes of *Citizen Kane* capsulize its approach and scope. At the very start, Welles uses a basic property of film to establish *Kane's* method and pays homage to the two founts of cinema – the fantasy of Méliès and the reportage of Lumiére.

The camera glides slowly up a fence. "No Trespassing," warns a sign. Immediately, the camera proceeds to trespass. It is a tingling moment, because the driving force of cinema is to trespass, to relentlessly investigate, to peel back what conceals and confront what reveals. "The camera," writes Pudovkin, "as it were, forces itself, ever striving, into the profoundest deeps of life; it strives thither to penetrate, whither the average spectator never reaches as he glances casually around him. The camera goes deeper." Cinema is a perfecting of vision because the eye of the camera, unlike that of the spectator, cannot be held back by fences or walls or signs; if anything interferes with the steady progress into the heart of a scene, we know it is an artificial and temporary obstacle. Thus it is this forward-cleaving movement, begun in *Kane's* first scene, that is completed at the climatic track-in to the Rosebud sled.

Immediately, the imagery becomes dreamlike: a castle, a light snapped out and mysteriously glowing back to life, a man's lips, eerily sifting snow, a shattered crystal, a tiny cottage. Dissolves languidly ink huge close-ups; space is obliterated; the paperweight smashes but makes no sound; a nurse enters, distorted in the reflection. We then see the deathbed dark against an arched

window, and the shot fades out. The sequence is a reprise of the dream-structure of the European avant-garde films, especially *Caligari, Un Chien Andalou,* and *Blood of a Poet.* Welles celebrates the magic of Méliès and stresses, in both the content and the juxtaposition of the images, the subjective side of cinema.

But suddenly, in one of the most brilliant strokes in film, the "News on the March" sequence bursts on our eyes, history fills the screen, and we are confronted with the Lumière side of cinema, reality apparently unmanipulated. The stentorian announcer, the corny sensationalism, the *Time* style, and the histrionic music announce the newsreel's affinity with the popular "March of Time" shorts. (It is still the funniest parody of mass-media vulgarity ever filmed.) Furthermore, since each shot looks like period footage, "News on the March" virtually recapitulates the technical development of cinema from 1890 to 1941. Scratches on the emulsion, jerky movement, jump cuts, overexposures, handheld camerawork, insertion of authentic newsreel clips, the use of different filmstocks and cameras – each frame is historically persuasive. Glimpses of Chamberlain, Teddy Roosevelt, and Hitler are immediately and indelibly convincing. Thus as the first sequence had given us a private, poetic image of Kane, so this sequence supplies the public, documentary side of him. In clashing the two together, Welles immediately establishes the basic tension of *Kane* (and cinema itself): objective fact versus subjective vision, clearness and superficiality versus obscurity and profundity, newsreel versus dream. By making us question the very nature of experience, this clash of forms and styles produces the tension between reality and imagination that is the film's theme.

"News on the March" does more, though. Jumping skittery, grainy, the sequence is the narrative hub of the film, the Argument of the story, simultaneously running through Kane's life and outlining the story we are about to see. It builds our curiosity, plants a handful of clues, establishes the film's leaping, elliptical form, and, anticipating a major tendency of contemporary films, reminds the audience *à la* Brecht's "A-effect" that it is an audience and that it is watching a film.

Structurally, "News on the March" is the whole of *Citizen Kane* in miniature, a subliminal preparation for the narrative to come. It opens, as does the film proper, with shots of Xanadu – this time giving us detailed back-ground information. Abruptly, Kane's death is referred to in the shots of pallbearers, and a montage swiftly reviewing Kane's wealth suggests the summarizing function that the newsreel itself serves in the entire film. Then we are shown two faded photographs, one of Kane beside his mother (hinting at the importance of their relationship) and another of Mrs. Kane's boarding house: these parallel the moment in Kane's childhood when his parents sent him away with Thatcher. That man himself is seen immediately, condemning Kane as "nothing more nor less than a Communist," suggesting his distrust of Kane, which is explored later in the film.

Instantly we are shuttled to Union Square, where a demagogue denounces Kane as a Fascist; and immediately Kane himself asserts that he is only an

American. The quick linkage of these various opinions of Kane establishes the method of the film – a comparison of colliding viewpoints, the conflicting judgments that portray Kane and his life. Bernstein's story, primarily centering on Kane's journalistic career, is paralleled by the section, "1895 to 1941 – All of these he covered, many of these he was." We see Kane's support of the Spanish-American war and Roosevelt's campaign, corresponding to the era presented in Bernstein's story.

The newsreel goes on to cover the material in Leland's narrative: Kane's marriage to Emily, his affair with Susan, and his political career. Then we see the 1929 closure of several Kane papers and Kane's trip abroad in 1935; these shots plug the gap between Leland's narrative and the final stage of Kane's life. Shots of Xanadu return and suggest Susan's narrative. Finally, glimpses of the old hermit on the grounds of his estate evoke the years of decay and loneliness which Raymond's story will verify later. The newsreel closes with the Times Square marquee: "Latest News – Charles Foster Kane is dead."

Thus in eight-and-a-half minutes and 121 shots, the entire progress of the ensuing film is mapped out and an enormous amount of information is given – about Kane, about the climate of the country, about the method of the film. Interestingly, this extraordinary device is prefigured in the "War of the Worlds" radio play, in which Welles and writer Howard Koch molded their narrative to the specific shape of the radio medium. At the beginning, a conventional music program is interrupted by a bulletin announcing a meteorite's landing; the music show resumes, to be cut off again by an on-the-scene-report, and so on. This device made the fantastic plot plausible enough to jam highways with fleeing listeners. Just as "The War of the Worlds" mimicked the form of radio broadcasting to persuade its audience of a Martian invasion, "News on the March" imitates the uniquely cinematic form of the newsreel to corroborate the existence of Charles Foster Kane.

We accept the newsreel's argument too quickly, though. Welles immediately points out that the Kane of "News on the March" is literally only an image. The newsreel's final fanfare is abruptly cut off, the screen goes blank, and we are yanked into the screening room, where we are privy to the shadowy manipulations of 1940 media-men. Their talk dispells the hypnotic authority of the newsreel, reminding us that facts are not the truth, that data can be shuffled in any order. One side of us shares the boss's demand for a key that will impose a pattern on life; the other side suspects that life will not submit to tidy arrangement. Objective fact invites subjective interpretation, and several such interpretations will be supplied in the rest of the film.

Henry James described the structure of *The Awkward Age* as "a circle consisting of a number of small rounds disposed at equal distance around a central object. The central object was my situation . . . and the small rounds represented so many distinct lamps . . . the function of each of which would be to light with due intensity one of its aspects . . ." If we substitute "character"

for "situation," we have a good description of the structure of *Citizen Kane.* The film is like one of Susan's jigsaw puzzles; each piece contributes something essential, but some pieces are missing.

Two parts of *Kane's* structure act as summations. The first, the "News on the March" sequence, maps out the course the film will take. But by the end of the film, the personality depicted in the newsreel has been reduced to mere objects. The second summation, the final scene in Xanadu, balances "News on the March." We already know Kane's life story, but Welles gives us a reprise – the piano Susan played, the "Welcome Home" loving cup, the statuary, the bed from the *Inquirer* office, the stove in Mrs. Kane's boarding house. The camera tracks ominously over these from the most recent to the most remote, backwards through Kane's life, to settle on the symbol of his childhood: the Rosebud sled. The uninterrupted flow of this extravagant sequence reassembles the life that has been presented in so fragmented a fashion.

Between these two summations the film rests. Told from the viewpoints of five different people, the movie uses the thread of the reporter Thompson's search for the meaning of "Rosebud" to stitch the stories together. The sections are for the most part chronological and overlapping; with the exception of Thatcher, each narrator begins his story a little before his predecessor ended and carries it past the point from which the next narrator will begin. Some events, then – such as Susan's rise and fall as an opera singer – are shown twice, but from different perspectives.

Kane's multiple-viewpoint form has a simpler but startling antecedent in William K. Howard's *The Power and the Glory* (1933). In that film, after the burial of Thomas Garner, a railroad tycoon, his story is told by Henry, his best friend – but not in chronological order. When Henry's wife makes an accusation against Garner, he counters with a remembered incident in Garner's defense. As a result, chronology is violated – a scene of Garner ruling his board of directors precedes a scene of young, illiterate Garner working as a track layer – and we are shown the play of conflicting opinion surrounding a famous man's career. Like Kane, Garner is a grand figure, both loved and hated, and Henry is qualified to reveal the private side of a public man. Scripted by Preston Sturges from an original idea, *The Power and the Glory* remains a daring experiment in the narrative method Welles and Herman Mankiewicz would refine.

But Welles brought to *Kane* his own special interest in point-of-view. His first, never-realized project for RKO was to be Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which the narrator Marlow was not seen on screen. It may not be too much to see in this the genesis of the moral complexity Welles infuses into *Kane's* subjective points-of-view. "I believe it is necessary to give all the characters their best arguments," he has remarked, " . . . including those I disagree with."

But *Kane* should not be seen as a *Rashomon*-like exploration of the relativity of fact. At no point does Welles suggest that Kane's story is being distorted, wilfully or unconsciously, by any narrator. In face, we are sometimes made to feel quite differently from the narrator (as in Thatcher's and Leland's narratives) and the narrator's presence is so little stressed during each segment

that sometimes scenes are included which the narrators were not present to witness. There is thus no doubt about the *facts* which are revealed.

The film's complexity arises from the narrator's conflicting *judgments*, their summing-ups of Kane. Each one sees a different side of him at a different stage of his life, yet each takes his estimate of Kane as definitive. To Thatcher, Kane is an arrogant smart aleck who became "nothing more nor less than a Communist." Bernstein's Kane is a man of high principles, with a sharp business sense and a love of the common man. Leland's Kane, only "in love with himself," is a man of no convictions, a betrayer of the masses. Susan sees Kane (in imagery that recalls Caligari and Svengali) as a selfish but piteous old man. And Raymond's story of Kane as a lonely hermit betrays the cold detachment of his own nature. Each narrator judges Kane differently, and each judgment leaves out something essential. As T. S. Eliot puts it in *The Confidential Clerk:* "There's always something one's ignorant of/About anyone, however well one knows him;/And that may be something of the greatest importance."

The effect of seeing so many conflicting assessments is to restrain us from forming any opinions of Kane we might take as definitive. As each character tells his story, the reporter's search for an accurate judgment is taken up by the audience as well. Thompson, whose face we never see, is a surrogate for us; his job – voyeuristic and prying, yet ultimately disinterested and detached – is the perfect vehicle for the curiosity without consequences that film uniquely gratifies. The more we see of Kane, the harder it becomes to judge him; understanding passes beyond praise or condemnation. This complex frame of mind in the audience is central to much of contemporary cinema, from *Vertigo* to *La Chinoise,* and is a major source of *Kane's* originality. Its multiple-narration structure warns us not to look for conventional signals of recognition and resolution. A film that opens and closes with "No Trespassing" and that completes its dialogue with "I don't think that any word can explain a man's life" suggests that the authors mean no simple judgment can be final. The portrait of Kane that has emerged is contradictory and ambiguous. "The point of the picture," Welles has remarked, "is not so much the solution of the problem as its presentation."

The problem may have no solution but it does have a meaning. The structure of the film, while discouraging easy judgments, leads us down a path of widening insight. The newsreel surveys Kane's public career but does not penetrate to his soul. Thatcher's narrative offers us our first clue, hinting at matters of love, childhood, and innocence. Bernstein's story renders Kane sympathetically, suggesting that "Rosebud" may be "something he lost." Leland's narrative prickles with his urge to puncture Kane's reputation, but his invective doesn't obscure a further clue: "All he ever wanted was love." Finally, Susan's narrative demonstrates that Kane bought love from others because he had no love of his own to give. Thus we are led, step by step, to confront an ego bent on domination; like Elizabethan tragedy, the film proposes that action becomes an egotistical drive for power when not informed by love.

Love is the key to *Kane* and Kane. Sent from home as a child, raised by the

cold Thatcher, Kane lost forever the love symbolized by the Rosebud sled and the snowstorm paperweight containing that little cottage that resembles his mother's boarding house. The sled isn't really the cheap Freud some (including Welles) have claimed; although it stands for the affection Kane lost when he was wrenched into Thatcher's world, the sled is clearly not to be taken as the "solution" of the film. It is only one piece of the jigsaw puzzle, "something he couldn't get or something he lost." The Rosebud sled solves the problem that Thompson was set – "A dying man's last words should explain his life" – but by the end Thompson realizes that the problem was a false one: "I don't think that any word can explain a man's life." The appearance of the sled presents another perspective on Kane, but it doesn't "explain" him. His inner self remains inviolate ("No Trespassing") and enigmatic. The last shots of the sign and of Xanadu restore a grandeur to Kane's life, a dignity born of the essential impenetrability of human character.

Part of Kane's love problem is bound up with his mother. Hinted at throughout, this is made explicit in the scene in which Kane, having just met Susan, talks with her in her room. Here, for the first time in a character's narrative, the snowstorm paperweight is seen – on Susan's dressing table, among faded childhood snapshots. Kane tells her he had been on his way to a warehouse "in search of my youth," intending to go through his dead mother's belongings: "You know, sort of a sentimental journey." But now, with Susan's reflection behind the paperweight, he decides to remain here; all the elements are present for a symbolic transfer of Kane's love to this new mother-figure. And when Susan tells him that her desire to sing was really her mother's idea, the transfer is complete. Kane quietly agrees that he knows how mothers are.

Kane seeks love from anyone – Leland, Bernstein, Emily, Susan, "the people of this state" – but the film traces a growing-apart, through imagery of separation, as Kane's life, from the moment he leaves home, becomes haunted by lovelessness. His relations with his wives typify this: the intimacy of the honeymoon supper yields to the distance of the long breakfast table and, eventually, to husband and wife shouting across the halls of Xanadu. The movement is from crowdedness (the busy *Inquirer* office) to emptiness (the hollow vaults of Xanadu); from cheerfulness (Kane as a young editor) to despair (after Susan has left); from true friendship (Bernstein and Leland) through gradually materialistic relationships (Emily and Susan) to sheerly mercenary companionship (Raymond); from a quick tempo (the liveliness of the *Inquirer's* crusades) to a funereal one (the picnic cortege and Kane's final, deadened walk); from self-sacrifice to selfishness; from the brash openness of youth to the cancerous privacy of "No Trespassing"; from intimate joking with Leland to shouts in a mausoleum and long silences before a huge fireplace. Kane's degeneration parallels these shifts in relationships: his contacts with people slough off in proportion to the accumulation of his material goods until, solitary and friendless, only cherishing a cheap snowstorm paperweight, he is engulfed by infinite extensions of his ego.

In the central portion of *Citizen Kane*, then, the various points-of-view balance the stream-of-consciousness of the opening and the detachment of "News on the March." Charles Foster Kane is observed from various angles, making the film more kaleidoscopic portrait than straightforward plot. But the matter is complicated because Kane's character changes with time, as does that of each narrator. Thus the clash of fact and bias, objectivity and prejudice, interweaving through the history of a personality, creates a world that is nearly as complex as reality and yet as unified as great art.

That complexity and unity are achieved in large part by the use of symbolic motifs, which both reinforce the realism of the milieu and accent the subjective flow of the narrative.

Whiteness, for instance, takes on strong symbolic associations. From the beginning, the white window of Kane's castle is a focal point toward which our eye is relentlessly drawn. The white of the window dissolves to the snow in the paperweight. Later, the white of Thatcher's manuscript dissolves to the whiteness of Kane's winter childhood days. The beloved sled is covered slowly by snow at the end of that winter scene; cut to the whiteness of a package wrapping as Charles receives a new sled from Thatcher. Bernstein tells his story of a girl dressed in white, with a white parasol: "Do you know, I bet there hasn't been a single month when I haven't thought of that girl." White suggests a lost love and innocence – "something he couldn't get or something he lost" – but it is also the color of death. The cold whiteness of the marble and alabaster of Xanadu contrasts ironically with the nostalgic warmth of the whiteness of Kane's childhood, and the women in his life – Emily and the blonde Susan, both of whom are first seen dressed in white – have given way to the professional nurse in her white uniform.

Accompanying the whiteness motif is that of the snowstorm paperweight, first seen as it falls from the hand of the dead Kane and smashes on the floor. The paperweight enters Kane's life in that crucial scene in Susan's apartment on the night he first meets her. Later, on the morning after Susan's première, the paperweight can be glimpsed on the mantlepiece, but no attention is called to it. We see it for the last time when Kane, after wrecking Susan's room, stumbles up to it, clutches it, and mutters, "Rosebud." Thus the paperweight links three crucial scenes in the Kane-Susan relationship, in the meantime becoming a symbol of Kane's lost childhood, Kane's treasuring of the paperweight suggests that it recalls both the night he first met Susan and the day he lost his innocence.

In making a film about a man possessed by an overriding egotism, Welles uses acting and dialogue to suggest the legend that the character fabricates around himself. But he also embodies Kane's myth in arresting visual symbols. Xanadu is the primary one: decaying, uncompleted, hollow, filled with objects and empty of love, it embodies the grandeur and tragic shortsightedness of Kane's vision. Its name suggests he is "Kubla-Kane"; Xanadu is indeed "a sunny pleasure dome

with caves of ice." *Kubla Khan* and *Citizen Kane* are both about the recreation of reality by the Imagination; like Coleridge's narrator, Kane tries to incarnate his vision of "a damsel with a dulcimer." The process works for Coleridge and Welles, and the result is "a miracle of rare device"; it fails for Kane, and "the pool becomes a mirror."

Thus the vault of mirrors that encases the aged Kane at the end of the film is the culmination of the *K*-images which enclose him throughout. A *K* surmounts the gates of Xanadu, and is carved in ice at the *Inquirer* party, wrought in metal as a stickpin, sewn in gilt monogram on a bathrobe, and stitched into campaign ribbons. Even Kane's son is seen only as a miniature version of his father. The name, in itself harsh, crisp, and powerful, is constantly pounding at the spectator, from the first sight of the screen-filling title to the final shot of Xanadu with the *K*-gate looming in the foreground. Welles utilizes every chance to flood the screen with a picture of a man filled with his own importance.

Welles also uses musical allusions and motifs to make thematic points. For example, Susan's singing "Una voce poco fa" from *The Barber of Seville* economically evokes the play's themes of youth imprisoned by age and of the abuse of personal authority. Another example is the recurring tune, "It Can't Be Love." Sung at Kane's Everglades picnic, its melody is heard earlier as a mournful piano version in the two scenes with Susan at the nightclub. The repetition ironically links three bleak scenes.

One could trace other motifs: Bernstein in front of a small fireplace over which hangs a portrait of Kane – Kane in front of a larger fireplace on the morning after Susan's première – Kane in front of the colossal fireplace at Xanadu; the repeated associations of Susan and rain; the waltz music accompanying Kane's return from Europe which is heard again, mockingly, in the breakfast-table sequence; the movement from the chilliness of the opening to the blazing furnace of the finale. Each detail, entirely realistic in itself, gathers meaning and force as a symbol.

By now it should be clear that *Kane's* stylistic pyrotechnics are not just meaningless virtuosity, but rather aural and pictorial expressions of the tension between reality and imagination at the heart of the film. Objectively, the wide-angle lens renders every plane of a shot, from the nearest to the most distant, in sharp focus. Thus there is no stressing of one image by throwing its context out of focus; ambiguity increases when all characters and objects are equal in definition. As André Bazin puts it, "The uncertainty in which we find ourselves as to the spiritual key or interpretation we should put on the film is built into the very design of the image." There are scarcely a dozen true close-ups in the film, and most appear at the very beginning, as an abstract procession of images which contrasts with the spatial authenticity of the rest of the film. Montage, which stresses the juxtaposition of images more than the images themselves, always implies the shaping hand of a creator, but the compression of multiple meanings into one shot can seem to efface the director, giving the illusion of unarranged reality. Thus the compositional detachment of each shot corroborates the film's pull toward realism.

Keeping all the action in the frame may suggest a kind of objectivity, but camera angle belies the detachment by expressing attitudes toward the action. For instance, when Kane is a child, the viewpoint is usually that of the adult looking down. But as Kane's career progresses, he is often shot from an increasingly low angle, not only to indicate his growing power but also to isolate him against his background as he becomes more and more lonely. In Xanadu, though, Kane is again seen from a high angle which points out his smallness within the cavernous crypt he has erected. Within the objectivity of the single frame, Welles' angles (unlike, say, Hawks') suggest subjective bias and point-of-view.

Welles' *mise-en-scène* modulates the drama's flow with great subtlety, using angle to indicate patterns of domination. Recall the climactic scene when Kane confronts Boss Jim Gettys in Susan's apartment. Gettys' entrance is as thunderous as a kettledrum roll: Kane, Emily, and Susan are on the staircase, light is pouring out of the doorway, and quietly Gettys' silhouette steps into the shot; for once someone has the upper hand over Kane; Nemesis has caught up with the hero. (In Welles' *Macbeth,* Macduff storms out of a smoking beam of light on a similar mission.) Inside Susan's bedroom, the angles crisply build the tension. First, a shot frames Emily in the foreground, Susan in the middle ground, and Gettys and Kane facing each other deep in the shot. But as Gettys explains the power he has over Kane, he advances to the foreground, dwarfing his rival; Emily says that apparently Kane's decision has been made for him; Kane, in the distance, seems overpowered by circumstance. But when Kane decides to assert his will, the shot cuts to an opposite angle: he dominates the foreground, and Gettys, Susan, and Emily taper off into the background. Then, a head-on shot, with Kane in the center, Susan on the left and Gettys on the right, capsulizes his choice: he can save his mistress or fight his opponent. Welles' arrangement of actors in the frame and his timing of the cuts brilliantly articulate the drama of the scene. The material seems to be objectively observed (no close-ups or first-person points-of-view), but the structure of each shot and the pacing of the editing inject subjective attitudes.

Welles can also use the moving camera to efface the director's controlling hand by choreographing the material in fluid, unobtrusive patterns. Take, for instance, the scene in which the boy Charles is sent from home. (1) In long-shot we see the boy playing in the snow. (2) A snowball hits the sign over the porch. (3) The camera travels back from the boy in the snow, through the window as his mother closes it, and back from her. Thatcher, and Mr. Kane as they advance to the desk, where the papers are read and signed; the camera then follows them back to the window. (4) We are now outside the window, and after the camera travels back to the snowman and Charles, the scuffle between the boy and Thatcher takes place in the same shot. (5) A close-up of Charles and his mother closes the scene. In a sequence of several minutes, we have five shots, two of negligible length. Yet the shots seem realistically observed because Welles has intricately moved his actors and his camera; despite the complexity of the set-ups, we gain a sense of a reality – actual, unmanipulated, all of a piece.

Yet the moving camera can suggest the drift of subjective interest too,

because it is also a tool of discovery. Again and again the camera probes like an inquisitive reporter, nosing relentlessly to the center of a scene, gradually stripping away extraneous dramatic matter. Welles' tracking shots imitate the process of investigation itself – a gradual narrowing of the field of inquiry – so that the progress *inward,* toward the heart of a mystery, becomes the characteristic camera movement. The opening dissolves which draw us deeper into Xanadu; the slow dolly up to the flashing "El Rancho" roof sign and then between the letters to the skylight; the imperceptible closing in on Bernstein as he begins his narrative; the diagonal descent to Susan and Kane meeting on the street; the sudden, curious rush to Susan's door when Kane shuts it; the traveling shot over the heads of the audience at Kane's speech; the implacable track to Kane and Emily standing at the door of Susan's house – all these are preparations for the portentous tracking shots through the costly rubbish of Xanadu, coasting slowly over Kane's belongings to settle on the Rosebud sled – the answer to the quest.

Welles' use of sound is indebted, intentionally or not, to Lang's *M* and Clair's *A Nous La Liberté.* In the latter film, a policeman outdoors saying. "We must all –" cuts to a teacher in a classroom saying, "– work." Welles called these "lightning mixes," in which the sound continues (although from a different source) while the scene cuts or dissolves to a new locale and time. A shot of Susan at the piano in her shabby rooming house dissolves to a shot of her, much better-dressed, at a finer piano in a more elegant house, while she continues to play the same piece. Kane's applause immediately dissolves to a crowd's applause of Leland's harangue. Thatcher says to the child Kane, "Merry Christmas, Charles," the boy answers, "Merry Chirstmas –" and the story leaps ahead seventeen years to Thatcher saying, "And a Happy New Year." Leland's promise to a street crowd that "Charles Foster Kane . . . entered upon this campaign –" cuts to Kane himself in a huge auditorium bellowing, "– with one purpose . . ." Scenes Eisenstein would have linked by visual metaphor Welles links by the soundtrack; Eisenstein would have announced the presence of a manipulating directorial intelligence, while Welles suggests the interlocked imagery of mental-association processes.

We should not overlook Welles' celebrated *tours de force,* those moments of sheer cinematic pluck that everyone cherishes in *Kane.* When Kane, Leland, and Bernstein peer in the *Chronicle* window, the camera moves up to the picture of the *Chronicle* staff until it fills the screen; Kane's voice says, "Six years ago I looked at a picture of the world's greatest newspaper staff . . ." and he strides out in front of the same men, posed for an identical picture, a flashbulb explodes, and we are at the *Inquirer* party. Another famous set-piece is the breakfast-table sequence, in which the deterioration of Kane's marriage is traced in a number of brief scenes linked by a whirling effect (swish pans over the windows of the *Inquirer* building). The music pulsates in the background, rising in tension, and the mounting pace of the cutting gives impetus to the final surprises: Mrs. Kane reading the *Chronicle* and the length of the breakfast table.

These, then, are the techniques Welles drew on in *Kane.* Exciting in themselves, they coalesce into a unified style by expressing the film's juxtaposition of

reality and imagination. The spatial and temporal unity of the deep-focus, the simultaneous dialogue, the reflections and chiaroscuro, the detached use of the moving camera, the intrusion of sounds from outside the frame – all increase the objectively realistic effect. These are correlatives for the way we seem to see and hear in life. The inquisitive camera movements, the angled compositions, the "lightning mixes" of sound and image – these suggest subjective attitudes and the workings of narrators' memories. They are stylistic equivalents for the way we seem to channel our thoughts in life. The cinematic traditions of Lumière and Méliès become surrogates for an epistemological tension. Here are the facts; here are subjective interpretations. Alone, neither has value. Can we then ever know "the" truth? Thompson's final remark "I don't think any word can explain a man's life," the enigma of the Rosebud sled, "No Trespassing," the black smoke drifting into a gray sky – these, finally, unmistakably, convey the film's answer.

At bottom, the film's reality/imagination tension radiates from the hero's own nature. *Citizen Kane* is a tragedy on Marovian lines, the story of the rise and fall of an overreacher. Like Tamburlaine and Faustus, Kane dares to test the limits of mortal power; like them, he fabricates endless *personae* which he takes as identical with his true self; and, like them, he is a victim of the egotism of his own imagination.

Up to a point, Kane's career rises steadily. He is a rich, successful publisher, he has married well, he has a chance to become governor. But his flaw is that he sees love solely in terms of power. His friends, Leland and Bernstein, are also his employees; his wife Emily is the President's niece. He expands his idea of love to include "the people," his aspiration to public office is a confirmation of his confusion of love with power. Thus his liaison with Susan (whom he calls "a cross-section of the American public") represents the pathetic side of his desire, the need for affection which his mother aroused and which Emily could not gratify. Ironically, it is this weakness which undoes him, for in the end, Kane's immense vision of love as power falls tragically short of basic humanity.

The turning point of Kane's life is the confrontation with Gettys in Susan's room. It is the climax of his personal life (Emily or Susan, which will he choose?) and of his political career (the love of "the people" or the love of his family and mistress?). Surprisingly, Gettys turns out to be more sensitive and humane than Kane. He was led to blackmail Kane by the newspaper cartoons Kane printed of him, which humiliated him before his children and, significantly, his mother. Unlike Kane, Gettys distinguishes between attacking a man personally and attacking him politically; thus he gives Kane a chance ("more of a chance than he'd give me") to avoid personal embarrassment. Gettys assumes that Kane places the same value on personal relations that he does.

He is wrong. Up till now Kane has always defined himself by telling others what to do, by bossing Mr. Carter, Leland, Bernstein, Emily, and Susan. Now morality demands that Kane give in and for once define himself by placing others' welfare above his own. But Kane cannot relinquish the role of an autonomous power: "There's only one person who's going to decide what I'm going to do, and that's me." It is the voice of the bully, but also that of the

tragic hero. By sacrificing others to his delusion of moral onmipotence, Kane commits his energy to an idea of himself that has become divorced from human values. How can he accept "the love of the people of this state" when he will not show love for his family and mistress? This refusal of imagination to recognize reality constitutes tragic recklessness, but Kane's punishment brings no recognition. Gettys is prophetic: "You're gonna need more than one lesson."

After his defeat at the polls, Kane's career declines. His image shattered, he constructs a new one: Susan's singing career. He announces, "*We're* going to be a great opera star"; as his alter ego, she may find the public acclaim in art that he couldn't find in politics. At the opera, Kane in the balcony dwarfs the tiny Susan onstage like a harsh god overseeing his creation. From singing lesson to opera rehearsal, Susan is not an identity in her own right, only an extension of himself. But again Kane fails to win the love of "the people"; the public's response to Susan's première is symbolized by the judicious grimace of the stagehand high in the flies. So, when Susan attempts suicide, Kane must change his *persona* again.

The next image Kane constructs is on a mammoth scale. He builds Xanadu, a miniature world, which he stocks with every kind of animal. This parody of God's act of creation gives a blasphemous dimension to Faustus-Kane's galactic vision of power. Yet in the end this god is swallowed up by his own universe. Since he can breathe no life into his creations, he gradually becomes an object like them. Appropriately, the last time we see Kane is as an *image:* a zombie moving stiffly against an endlessly receding tunnel of mirrors, mocking duplications of his own self-absorption. Dying, he can only clutch the icon of love and innocence: his last moment becomes a final assertion of imagination in the face of the ultimate reality of death.

Kane may not be able to reconcile the tragic discord between his inner vision and the outer world, but Welles' creative imagination is larger than Kane's sterile one. The conflicts we noted at the start – between social realism and surrealism, tragic seriousness and comic high spirits, rich detail and complex superstructure – are contained by Welles' broad vision of aspiration and waste.

To my way of thinking, that vision was not permitted utmost scope again until 1965, when Welles completed *Chimes at Midnight.* He has called Falstaff "the most completely good man in all drama," but the film's hero is far from the sentimentalized sack of guts of a (happily, dying) critical tradition. Like Kane, Falstaff is admirable because of his appetite and his imagination, but his fall is observed with no less objectivity. Welles (and Shakespeare) have it both ways: Falstaff is both the Pan of mythology and the Vice of the morality plays, and Prince Hal may love him but he must reject him.

Chimes at Midnight is as morally complex as *Citizen Kane,* but here cinematic traditions are not analogues for epistemological modes. *Chimes'* style and form are translucent, like *The Immortal Story's,* but without that later effort's crude parody of the reality/imagination theme. In *Chimes at Midnight,* Welles concentrates straightforwardly on a set of characters symbolizing the alternatives

surrounding the problem which obsessed Kane: the connection between personal and political power.

Prince Hal must choose among three ways of life – that of king, warrior, and roisterer – as represented by his father King Henry IV, his distorted mirror-image Hotspur, and his adopted father Falstaff. Henry, though regal and commanding, struck in a chilly shaft of light that suggests divine authority, is nonetheless aloof and solitary, entombed in cold gray stone. Hotspur is vigorous and manly, but also crude, hotheaded, and notably solitary. Falstaff is a vulgar buffoon, but he inhabits a glowing world of comradely merrymaking. The three worlds rotate on the same axis: Falstaff lives by robbing, Henry has usurped the throne, and Hotspur seeks to steal the crown from Henry. By a music motiff (Henry summons musicians to salve his illness, Hotspur's trumpeters blast pompously and phallically while he ignores the blandishments of his lovely wife, and Falstaff calls for music to ease his melancholy), Welles suggests that each way of life has become sterile. The whole of medieval England – king, fighter, and déclassé – is sick, barren, dying.

Hal, man of the Renaissance, becomes almost cynically adept in all three worlds. He bests Falstaff at thieving and lying; he wins his father's respect by stately eloquence; and he vanquishes Hotspur in battle. Supreme in all three arenas, Hal becomes their synthesis. Like the sun he compares himself to, he is a source of the power that will revivify England.

Still, he cannot live permanently divided. He must choose among the court, the battlefield, and the tavern. Since possessing the crown permits him to legislate his wisdom in the other areas, he must sooner or later renounce his dissolute life, which comes down to renouncing Falstaff. Hal's "I know you all" speech is a soliloquy in the original play, but Welles makes it Hal's direct warning to Falstaff. Henceforth, fat Jack should expect to be abandoned. And when, in the comic crowning scene at the Boar's Head, Falstaff begs not to be forgotten – "Banish plump Jack and banish all the world" – Prince Hal reminds him of his fate in a reply that reverberates like a thunderclap: "I do, I will."

Since *Chimes at Midnight,* like *Kane,* is about personal and political authority, Welles again creates the drama of power within the shot by means of camera angle. When, at Justice Shallow's house, Falstaff has been meditating on his death, a deep shot shows Falstaff sitting stonily in the distance, for once positively miniscule. Pistol bursts in to announce Henry's death, and suddenly Falstaff lumbers into the foreground, filling the frame, towering like a colossus as he gasps, "What? . . . Is the old king – *dead*?" The shot depicts his vision of the power he has dreamed of. But after the coronation and Hal's repudiation of him, in which angle shots have expressed the new king's sovereignty over his former companion, Falstaff leaves Shallow, walking off into a distant corridor – like Kane, dwarfed by real forces his imagination could not control.

Welles' imagination, though, is large enough to make great art of his heroes' defeats. Joseph McBride has argued that Hal's rejection of Falstaff and his declaration of war with France label him a villain and Falstaff a victim. This underestimates Welles' irony. Hal is a practical politician. Like Kane, he must

eventually choose between political and personal virtue, but (more sensitively than Kane), Hal struggles to keep them distinct, publicly humiliating Falstaff only to aid him privately later. Hal will mock him with Poins, but he will hide him when the king's men come. He will burlesque him before the tavern crowd, but he will give him a post in his army. And even after the rebuff at the coronation, Hal privately (in an inserted text from *Henry V* that originally did not refer to Falstaff) orders his counselors to "enlarge" (!) Falstaff: "If little faults, proceeding on distemper/Shall not be winked at, how shall we stretch our eye/When capital crimes, chewed, swallowed, and digested/Appear before us?" He tempers the inevitable wickedness of his repudiation with a measure of regal mercy. Welles sees public ethical problems as private ones writ large, yet between the two is an irreconcilable tragic tension. Nym summarizes the complexity of the problem as Falstaff lies dying: "The King is a good King. But it must be as it may."

Thus the final words from Holinshed, " . . . and so human withal that he left no offence unpunished, nor friendship unrewarded," reverberating over the shot of Falstaff's coffin, constitute not a sarcastic dig but a sublime irony. *Chimes at Midnight,* like *Citizen Kane,* shows both sides – public good and private misery, heroic ambition and tragic necessity, pragmatic reality and alluring imagination – sympathizing with each but, finally, presenting both honestly. The irony is the richest and most basic one of man's experience, so vast that usually we must split it into tragedy and comedy. That Welles' art is able to serenely contain and transcend both might be the final estimate of his genius.

ADDENDUM, 1975

Written when I was twenty and revised three years later, this essay represents a very youthful effort, and before reading it for the first time since then, I expected to find it the work of a stranger. It is not quite that, for I still agree with many points it makes, but it seems to me now seriously flawed. I am not thinking primarily of the tone of ingenuous adulation (re Welles' "genius"), which seems to me a fault of enthusiasm, but rather of the implications of the argument as a whole. I must then thank the editor for providing me the occasion to criticize my criticism.

At the level of "practical criticism," the essay says some things about *Citizen Kane* which I still believe to be valid. The essay's biggest problems are with what it does not say: that is, in its theoretical naivete and its unacknowledged critical assumptions. To surface such assumptions and to face their theoretical consequences in one's writing seems to me now the most fruitful line of critical inquiry. I want to consider some of the essay's assumptions briefly.

First, there is the general critical perspective taken in the essay. Though the piece makes minor auteurist assumptions (chiefly in labeling the unifying force of the film's system with the director's name), I would call the essay primarily an intrinsic formal analysis. The problem is that I did not face up to the essay's own approach. What conception of cinematic form underpins the analysis? Vaguely New Critical, I think: notions of organicity, variety in unity, paradox,

irony, and sustained tensions crop up throughout – again, without explicit acknowledgement. But what assumptions does one make about the relation between part and whole? What critical language does one adopt to permit one to grasp the aspects one is attending to? Such questions, if answered, could have made the analysis more precise. At times, though, in an astonishing about-face, I dropped formalism and sprinkled the piece with references to some "reality" to which film is related. Trying to pin down the essay's slippery and contradictory notions of "reality" is hard enough, but what I did not see is that cinematic form need not be defined most saliently by reference to extrafilmic reality. Instead, then, of a more rigorous definition of "reality," the essay needs to recognize that conceptions of style and form in cinema can be located by methods which make no appeal to mimetic models. What now seem to me the most fruitful critical approaches – Russian Formalism, French Structuralism and "post-Structuralism" – offer many such conceptions of form which can, with modifications, generate methods of critical film analysis which do not make some "reality" a fundamental component.

Recognizing its formalist perspective and sophisticating its view of the method's use of reality are not all that the essay needs. The act of critical perception doesn't occur via unmediated vision; every analysis requires categories, acknowledged or not. Such analytical categories aren't simply bins for sorting the data already observed; rather, these categories *constitute* the very act of critical perception itself. We see only what we look for. The analytical categories, to my way of thinking now, should be widely varied, including not only theories of film but also categories which are historical and critical, cultural and ideological, aesthetic and philosophical. The *Citizen Kane* essay rests on several such frameworks, two of which I want to pick out. The first is that common one, the binary opposition: here, the subjective/objective dichotomy, pressed down like a cookie-cutter on virtually every inch of the film (with some consequent mashing, especially in the discussion of the "subjective attitudes" behind some rather harmless camera angles). Binary oppositions are useful critical tools, but the wielder must recognize their constrictions as well. A second analytical framework seems to me now much less defensible: those idealist historical categories that rest upon the tired old Méliès/Lumière split (another binary opposition). If there is anything of value in this dichotomy, it is probably the simple difference between arranging material for filming and not doing so. Though *Kane* does, I still think, play admirably with stylistic differences between the newsreel and degrees of abstraction, I'm now unwilling to anchor the film so directly in a questionable reading of film history. The Lumière/Méliès categories seem to me now a Rube Goldberg contraption: useful for seeing how small things can work, but pretty unpromising as a basis for research.

One more critical assumption should probably be brought out. The essay has a vague notion of levels at work in a film: large-scale form (sections two and three), small-scale motivic patterns (section four), stylistic elements (section five), and thematic meanings (throughout, but especially section six). Some such division of the film into levels is part of every critical activity, I now think, and one may as well admit what one is up to. And in attempting (rightly) to account

for as much of the film as possible, I was unwittingly attempting what many Russian Formalist literary critics have shown to be viable critical practice; that of positing an artistic "dominant" around which every component of the work is seen to be organized. The concept of a "dominant" is a useful one, particularly in analyzing classical Hollywood narrative, but what the essay lacks is a possibility of *friction* among levels. Rather than stressing isomorphism between levels, I now think it more fruitful to pinpoint ways in which, say, style works *against* theme or *against* large-scale form. It is this possibility of conceiving levels of form as in complementary competition and displacement (a possibility envisaged by Eisenstein and followed up somewhat in the work of Noel Burch, Roland Barthes, and others) that is responsible for my now finding *Kane* somewhat too tidily "closed" and less interesting than films by Eisenstein, Straub, Godard, Dreyer, Ozu, Tati, Bresson, and others. The moral is, I think, that the critic needs a repository of theoretical constructs and methods which are as supple and open as the variety of films he or she confronts.

Though the critic need not, I think, work out a full-blown theory of film, he or she should theorize about what he or she does as a critic. Recognizing one's assumptions, constructing and acknowledging analytical categories, and clarifying one's notions of what a film is and does can help the reader to engage with the critic's argument more fully. A better essay on *Citizen Kane* would, presumably without sacrificing interest, tell the reader considerably more about how it gets from point A to point B, permitting him or her to check its logical and rhetorical progress. This is not pedantic fussiness, merely honesty.

Notes

1. *Citizen Kane.* 1941, RKO-Radio, 119 minutes. *Producer* Orson Welles for Mercury Productions; *original screenplay* Herman J. Mankiewicz; *photography* Gregg Toland; *art direction* Van Nest Polglase, Perry Ferguson; *editing* Robert Wise, Mark Robson; *special effects* Vernon L. Walker; *music* Bernard Herrmann.

SHOCK CORRIDOR BY SAM FULLER

THOMAS ELSAESSER

This selection comes from the book Samuel Fuller *(Edinburgh Film Festival, 1969). Most of the articles are primarily thematic examinations of Fuller's films, and Peter Wollen's "Introduction," particularly, stresses the thematic preoccupations distributed throughout Fuller's work, whereas Thomas Elsaesser's*

CitizeKane (Laura Mulvey, 1992) - EXTRACT

fascism abroad. Indeed, a victory for the old breed of American politics could herald a victory for a new breed of American fascism. But of course, in *Citizen Kane*, Kane's political career crumbles and falls into ruins, which leads to my second excuse for this essay.

This essay is an experiment in method. I am applying the film theory and criticism of my generation to a film that has been taken through the mill by each generation since it appeared fifty years ago. As the main influences on my thought have been psychoanalytic theory and feminism, both have strongly inflected my analysis of *Citizen Kane*, not just in terms of the content – how the film depicts women and uses Freud – but as a film that challenges conventional relations between screen and spectator and constructs a language of cinema that meshes with the language of the psyche. In applying psychoanalytic theory to *Citizen Kane*, I am using a particular critical approach, concentrating on the film's textual evidence, and I have not tried to deal with the question of how deliberately the themes I discuss were written in by Welles and/or Mankiewicz. To my mind, both the structure of the film and its politics would indicate that they were, but whether in the spirit of a private joke or as serious comment seems hard to decide.

Although *Citizen Kane* is not an obvious candidate for feminist polemic, either for or against, it is interesting to see how the film cuts across conventional Hollywood investment in the visualisation of the feminine, not, of course, in the spirit of feminism but with interesting aesthetic consequences that are relevant to feminism. Feminist film criticism's alliance with psychoanalytic theory helped to create a critical theory of decipherment, which was directed, first and foremost, at the decipherment of unconscious meanings invested in images of women. From this point of view, the feminist critic feels like an investigator, and psychoanalytic theory like a code-book key which can at least begin to crack the cipher. *Citizen Kane* is a film which is built around the pleasures and problems of decipherment not only, explicitly, in the main subject of the film (the journalist's investigation of the Kane enigma), but also in the fact that it builds in a deciphering spectator by means of its visual language and address. And then, its many different levels contain semi-hidden, almost subterranean, themes and symptoms of Oedipal conflict and sexual difficulty which can only be investigated, deciphered and brought into visibility through psychoanalytic theory.

Psychoanalytic theory understands a symptom to be a kind of cipher which appears in the conscious mind but the key needed to unlock its unconscious meaning is lost. From all these different angles, *Citizen Kane* poses a simultaneously unfamiliar and familiar challenge for psychoanalytically influenced feminist film theory. The attempt to figure out a puzzle or decode a rebus not only approximates metaphorically to any analytical process but also harnesses the drive of curiosity generated by the enigmatic. Feminist film theory has had to shift fascination with the eroticised and enigmatic female figure to fascination with decoding the meanings these figures disguise. *Citizen Kane*, however, presents a kind of back-to-front challenge to feminist criticism.

One of the ways in which *Citizen Kane* seems strikingly anti-Hollywood is the absence of the glamour effect generated by a female star. (Toland, according to Barry Salt, was not thought of as a 'good' glamour photographer.) And this absence becomes obvious when *Kane* is compared to *The Lady from Shanghai*, the film that Welles made in 1947 starring his, by then, ex-wife Rita Hayworth. Whereas in *The Lady from Shanghai* the audience shares Michael's fascination with Elsa, and is absorbed into the erotic atmosphere she generates, in *Citizen Kane* it is Kane himself who holds the centre of the visual stage. The scenes in which Susan performs in the opera actually undercut and caricature the figure of woman as erotic spectacle. And whereas, in *The Lady from Shanghai*, the film's central enigma gradually crystalises around Elsa, in *Citizen Kane* the film firmly displaces its enigma away from a simple equation with the feminine. Welles's own towering presence on the screen provides a magnetic draw for the spectator's eye and leaves little space for sexualised voyeurism. This displacement leads into another kind of fascination and opens up a space for the voyeurism of curiosity. Liberated from its erotic obsession with the female figure, cinematic voyeurism is displaced and replaced by a different currency of exchange between screen and spectator.

Curiosity has to have an object, an enigma to arouse it. In *Citizen Kane*, the central enigma of Kane himself is neatly encapsulated in, or displaced on to, 'Rosebud', which then becomes the focus of the journalist/investigator's quest. But the enigma is never solved for the world on the screen, either through the protagonist's investigation or

Thompson opens the Thatcher memoirs, the white of the page dissolves into the snow and the young Kane's figure materialises from the blank screen, as he sleds down the slope, like the inscription of a memory. The film also plays with differences of scale. When Kane holds the little glass paperweight in his hand, it is as though he were actually holding the memory of his parents' log cabin, which also plays its own real part in the *mise-en-scène*. And, as the camera moves through the skylight into the El Rancho nightclub, Susan appears underneath as though she too were enclosed in the space of her memory and mourning. These cinematic images inform and affect each other, shifting their meanings and acquiring and passing on resonances, sometimes with the help of music or repetition, so that they seem to set up a network of links backwards and forwards through the film's narrative chronology and its different layers.

Kane criticism has paid particular attention to the film's mode of address. For André Bazin, engagement between spectator and screen was an effect of the film's composition in depth. Dramatic juxtapositions are composed within the frame, and a shot then lasts long enough for the spectator to work out the relationships between the characters and extract the poetic and emotional implications of the scene. Bazin argued that this kind of composition gave the spectator's eye and mind an autonomy that both montage and the cutting conventions of commercial cinema (especially after the coming of sound) denied: 'Classical editing totally suppresses this kind of reciprocal freedom between us and the object. It substitutes for a free organisation, a forced breaking down where the logic of the shots controlled by the reporting of an action anaesthetises our freedom exactly.'[12] Dudley Andrew argues that Bazin's position on deep-focus style was based on an ethical assumption. It was right, in the moral sense of the word, that the spectator should engage and wrestle with the meanings on the screen and 'exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the images in part derives.'

Noel Carroll, in his article 'Interpreting Citizen Kane',[13] makes a very useful division between critics' responses to the problem of 'Rosebud'. He organises them into two broad groups. One position is that the puzzle of 'Rosebud' has a specific meaning that can be identified to solve the mystery of Charles Foster Kane's life. The other position is that the enigma of human beings is far too intricate and complex to be reduced to such a simple explanation. Carroll argues that both positions can be extracted quite validly from evidence in the film, but then transforms the issue from one of character to one of reading the film. He says:

> I have stressed that the two leading interpretations of Kane's life – the enigma interpretation and the Rosebud interpretation – are simple as well as culturally well entrenched. This is appropriate for the role they play in the dialogical structure of the film. For, if I am right, the point of the film is to involve the movie audience in a conflict of views about life. And in order to be functional in this respect, the views must be relatively simple, somewhat commonplace, and near or on the surface of the work. Recondite or complex views would lack the salience for a movie audience to pick up and enter into debate.

And:

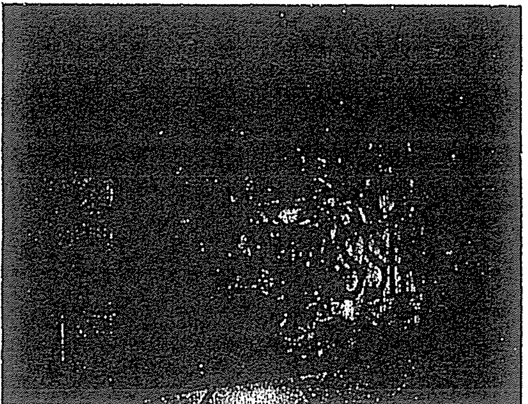
> ... the dialogical structure of the film's narrative also makes possible a level of audience participation in the film – this time, however, by articulating, in manner of speaking, multiple planes in the film's conceptual space ... there is no guarantee that every spectator will be sensitive to this play of interpretation or engage in it. ... Nevertheless, the structural modifications are there, and they allow, rather than mandate, a level of, albeit limited, audience participation of a sort rare in Hollywood films.

Long before he got involved with the *Citizen Kane* project, Mankiewicz had been toying for some time with what he called a 'prismatic' narrative, in which the story of a powerful, contradictory man would be told through the eyes of those who knew him well and whose experiences and perceptions would be at variance. In *Citizen Kane*, five blocks of flashbacks are recounted by five witnesses and Thompson's interviews are organised to tell the story of Kane's life in roughly chronological order. The witnesses, apart from Thatcher who

is no longer an enigma in himself, no longer a character with any relation to flesh and blood. From this perspective, *Citizen Kane* is a celluloid rebus, within which the central enigma 'Rosebud' is first and foremost a clue to the only means of understanding the film's central enigmas; that is, a decoding of its sounds and images. To enable and emphasise exchange between screen and spectator, the film adopts a style suitable for an active, inquisitive spectatorship in which the pleasure of looking is also the pleasure of decoding.

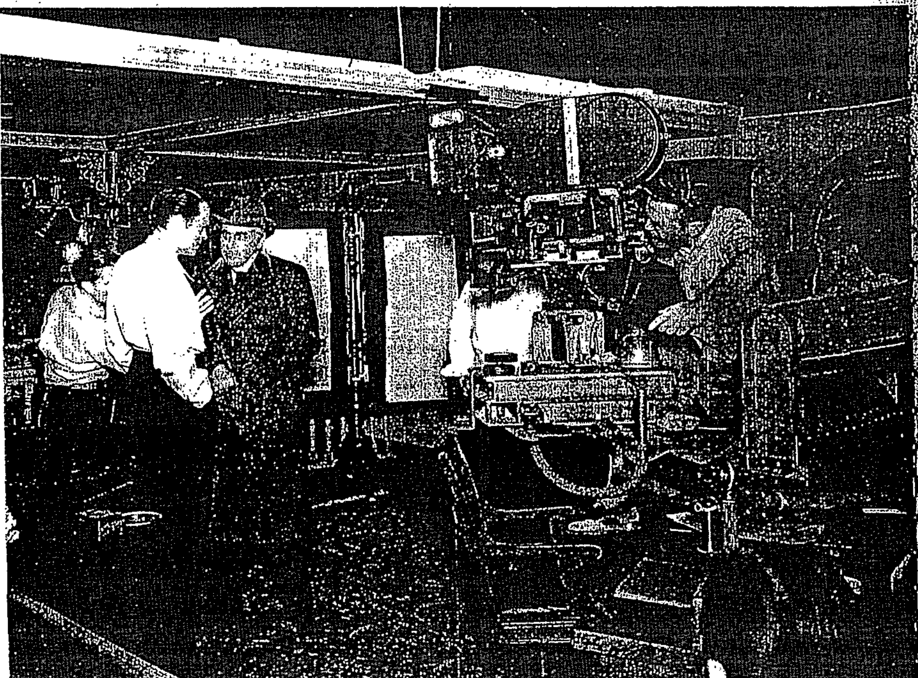
In addition to its play with character, the film sets up other red herrings and false trails that promise an easy short cut to the centre only to fade away. For instance Rawlston, the editor of the 'News on the March' newsreel, dispatches Thompson on his quest with the words 'Rosebud: dead or alive. It may turn out to be a very simple thing.' The next shot shows a poster of Susan's face in close-up, illuminated by a flash of lightning, in a broad hint to the audience at a link between this image and the statement before. The poster can only be seen by the audience. The shot sets up a complicity between screen and spectator that is heightened by a sweeping crane shot, the opening shot of Thompson's investigation. Moving down through a skylight, to find Susan in the enclosed space below, the investigative drive of the camera interacts with the *mise-en-scène* to materialise both the space of the film's enigma and the camera's privileged role in the film's subsequent unfolding of its enquiry into the enigma. But the hint at a snap solution to the 'Rosebud' enigma is too broad and the juxtaposition too obvious. The spectator instinctively rejects such an easy putting together of two and two and suspects they make five. But the film text has made a gesture to itself as a source of meaning and discovery independent of its protagonists. The responsive spectator senses an invitation to start figuring out the enigma with the camera's collaboration.

The film's opening sequence sets up the relationship between camera and spectator and establishes it as one of curiosity and investigation. When the film's title fades from the screen and the initial image takes its place, the audience is swept into the story with an interdiction and a camera movement. A sign saying 'No Trespassing' can be easily seen through the murky lighting; and a wire fence fills the screen, barring the way forward. This sign, although rationalised through its place on the gate of the Xanadu estate, directly addresses



Luce himself. Pauline Kael quotes this piece of dialogue, deleted from later versions of the script, between Thompson and Raymond that dramatises the rivalry between the older and younger generations of news magnates:

> THOMPSON: Well, if you get around to your memoirs – don't forget, Mr Rawlston wants to be sure of getting first chance. We pay awful well for long excerpts.
> RAYMOND: Maybe he'd like to buy the excerpts of what Mr Kane said about him.
> THOMPSON: Huh?
> RAYMOND: He thought Rawlston would break his neck sooner or later. He gave that weekly magazine of yours three years.
> THOMPSON (smugly): He made a bit of a mistake.
> RAYMOND: He made a lot of mistakes.[22]



The style in which Gregg Toland shot *Citizen Kane* also contains an implicit homage to the photographic style of the new photojournalism. Patrick Ogle cites James Wong Howe's comments on the influence of magazines such as *Life* and *Look*:

> Howe felt that the tendency towards crisper definition, greater depth, and occasional use of high contrast was primarily due to a change in public taste 'directly traceable to the growth in popularity of miniature camera photography, and to the big picture magazines' in which the public saw the stark realism of miniature camera photojournalism every week. This change in public taste, Howe considered, had evoked a change in photographic style 'so slowly and subtly that we ourselves have been scarcely conscious of it'.[23]

There is a kind of poetic justice in Welles and Toland's use of deep focus in a film which attacks Hearst. The magnate of newspapers and old-style movies is depicted in a new-style cinematography pioneered by the newspapers' new rival, the photo-magazines. On the level of sound, Welles made maximum use of his own experience of radio, the medium beloved by Roosevelt, to create a texture that had never been heard before in the Hollywood cinema. The deep-focus look had also been pioneered separately, but perhaps coincidentally, by Jean Renoir's Popular Front movies in the 1930s in France and would return, in the view of André Bazin, in the Italian neo-realist and leftist cinema of the late 1940s.

By the time Welles and the Mercury players arrived in Hollywood, Hearst was a major opponent of the entry of the United States into the war in Europe. For the left, the threat of fascism was actual and urgent. The Mercury Theater had one of their most important successes with Welles's staging of *Julius Caesar* (subsequently adapted for radio), in which Caesar was portrayed as a contemporary fascist surrounded by blackshirts and the production was lit to create a Nuremberg look in the aftermath of the Nazi rally. In the eyes of the left, the powerful tycoon's press campaign to keep America from joining the struggle against fascism was tantamount to support for fascism. Holidaying in Germany in 1934, Hearst had visited Hitler and

personal, political and financial careers. And then overlaps and discontinuities break up the flashback narrations. Thatcher's flashback, the first, is divided into three parts: childhood, Kane in the first flush of success at the *Inquirer* newspaper, and Kane after the Crash surrendering control of his empire to Thatcher and the bank. After the Thatcher narration, the film settles down to chronological exposition, but with the Leland narration including events that he could not himself have witnessed, and also including a narration of the opera that overlaps with Susan's. Leland, in this sense, functions more as a raconteur than a straight witness. He has to solve all the problems that accumulate in the middle of the narration, problems that were left pending in the first Mankiewicz script and were worked through by Welles during his rewrite period. The outstanding problem was Emily. Once she had been killed off, Kane's marriage was left without a narrator and Welles's elegant solution, the breakfast montage, is very typical of the streamlining, ordering and shaping that he brought to the script.

The personalised nature of the flashbacks, and their general adherence to chronology, overshadows and disguises the film's underlying dramatic structure. While the narrative is roughly, with some inconsistencies, developed by the linear unfolding of Kane's story, structurally it divides into two parts that cut across the chronological biography with a broad, dominating, binary opposition. Kane's rise and decline separate the two parts narratively, but his relation to male and female worlds separates the two parts thematically. Bernstein tells the story of Kane's dramatic rise to triumphant success; Susan's flashback tells the story of his disgrace and withdrawal. Bernstein's story is set in the competitive, public, male world of newspaper reporting; Susan's is set in the spectacular, cultural and feminised world of the opera and Xanadu. The turning point comes in Leland's narration, which deals with Kane's love life and his political life and the increasingly inextricable connection between the two. The world of public ambition and politics is sandwiched, significantly, between Kane's meeting with Susan and their marriage.

Kane's defeat in his campaign for Governor marks the apex of the rise-and-fall structure and switches the movement of the story. The first part of the film tells the story of Kane the crusader, whose battle with Thatcher – begun when, as a small child, he hit his new guardian with his sled ('Rosebud') – later widens into a crusade, ironically acting out the name of the second sled ('Crusader') that Thatcher gives him for Christmas. In the second part of the film, Kane invests all his financial and emotional resources into Susan's career in opera, so that, in terms of the film's structure, the *Salammbô* production parallels the *Inquirer*. While the *Inquirer*'s triumph led to Kane's first marriage and to politics, *Salammbô*'s collapse leads to the claustrophobic grandeur of Xanadu. Now Kane's massive enterprise is concentrated on buying and importing art treasures to construct an appropriate environment for his retreat into an isolated, palatial, domesticity with Susan.

Whereas in the first section of the film Kane had championed the interests of 'the people' and used his newspaper to expose the vested interests of capitalism, in the second section Susan, who represents, as Leland points out, 'a cross-section of the American public', is imprisoned in the castle:

> SUSAN: Charlie, I want to go to New York. I'm tired of being a hostess. I wanta have fun. Please, Charlie. Charles, please.
> KANE: Our home is here, Susan. I don't care to visit New York.[25]

Susan tells the story of her departure, but Raymond tells the story of Kane's reaction to her departure and the rage with which he destroys her room and her things. This act of uncontrollable violence recalls his childhood attack on Thatcher. Raymond's narration starts to close in, at last, on the by now almost forgotten question of 'Rosebud', dismissed by Leland ('I saw that in the *Inquirer*. Well I've never believed anything I saw in the *Inquirer*'), irrelevant to Susan ('... when the newspapers were full of it, I asked her. She never heard of "Rosebud"'), pop-philosophised by Bernstein ('Maybe that was something he lost'). And, just as the first flashback enacted the scene with the sled, the last flashback returns to it by means of the little glass ball containing a log cabin in a snowstorm. It is the sight of this object that calms Kane's tantrum and provokes the whispered 'Rosebud' that Raymond overhears then, and again at Kane's death. The film puts its own narrative pattern in advance of its witnesses' ability to understand.

The glass ball makes three appearances, one of them at the very beginning of the film, in Kane's death scene; one at the end, when Susan

immediate level. Repetitions create resonance, irony and pathos. For instance, Leland ends his narration with the story of his unfinished review of the disastrous *Salammbô* production. Kane finishes the review in the spirit in which Leland, before falling asleep over his typewriter and a bottle of whisky, had started it.

> BERNSTEIN: Mr Kane is finishing the notice the way you wanted it. I guess that'll show you.

The scene is played out in a three-way drama between Leland, Kane and Bernstein. The three, who formed an inseparable triumvirate in New York in the first section of the film, are meeting for the last time in Chicago. The scene and the sense of failure and ridiculousness that has overtaken Kane is heightened by the memory of Leland and Bernstein's presence when Kane wrote his 'Declaration of Principles' in the first half of the film. When, in Susan's narration, Leland returns the 'Declaration of Principles' torn up, along with his golden handshake, the ghost of the old, abandoned idealism hovers ironically over Susan's attempt to rebel against Kane's control. The scene ends with his shadow looming over her and darkening her frightened face.

There are three scenes between Kane and Thatcher. The third, which does not appear in the original screenplay, shows Kane forced by the 1929 recession to sell off assets to Thatcher. In certain visual and thematic ways it recalls the first scene between Thatcher and Mrs Kane. Then, Mrs Kane signed away her son to the banker; now Kane himself is signing away his newspapers to him. Before he signs, Kane walks far off into the cavernous office and stands under a high window. The composition, with Thatcher and Bernstein framing it in depth, is somehow reminiscent of Kane as a child playing in the snow, in the background of the shot in which his mother signs the agreement with Thatcher. During this scene, Kane says ironically:

> KANE: My mother should have chosen a less reliable banker.[28]

This rare mention of his mother seems to confirm the pattern of symmetry between the two scenes. And the repeated position of the characters draws attention to how often composition in depth is used to

frame Kane in a kind of isosceles triangle, at the apex of the looks of two other people.

Although *Citizen Kane* has a roughly symmetrical structure hidden under the chronological development of the Thompson interviews, one important scene breaks the chronology but adds another dimension to the symmetry: Thompson's first visit to Susan Alexander at the 'El Rancho' bar in Atlantic City. As she refuses to talk, and her part in the story only appears later, in its chronological order, this scene is anomalous. It also seems to break the symmetry that patterns the first section of the film around the public Kane, asserting himself in the male world of journalism and politics. In these terms, Susan belongs exclusively to the second section of the film. The scene is, apparently, yet another of the film's false starts.[29] However, Susan's presence at the beginning adds to the symmetrical resonances between the beginning and the end of the film. Her first appearance, although it has no narrative significance whatsoever, balances structurally with her final appearance, when she leaves Kane. The scene has, however, another structural function. By introducing Susan at the very beginning of the investigation, immediately before Thompson visits the Thatcher Library, the film juxtaposes, in a kind of montage effect, the male and the female strands in the narrative. The *mise-en-scène* sets up a polarisation between Susan and Thatcher, using iconography, connotation and material to suggest a comparison and an opposition between the two. Both scenes are introduced by an image of the character, a poster of Susan and a statue of Thatcher, in a parallel staging but with opposing emotional resonance.

Susan's image is first seen in close-up, a show-girl on a poster outside a bar. The image, made of plywood and paper, is impermanent. Her look, at the camera and over a bare shoulder, is provocative. The camera moves up to the roof and reveals the sign that announces her name and her appearance 'twice nightly' in the 'El Rancho' floor show. Even before the camera, with a crane shot that penetrates the skylight ceiling, discovers Susan, drunk and mourning Kane's death, the scene is resonant with the connotations of tawdry pathos and mock glamour. Thatcher also is first seen in image. His statue, a monument to a formidable and powerful man, is made out of marble, a lasting and expensive material. It proclaims not only his wealth but also his

standing in the world, as the camera reveals an inscription engraved in gold on the plinth, 'Walter Parks Thatcher', and the *mise-en-scène*, the music and the echoes in the sound suggest the connotations of grandeur and intimidation.

In the two scenes that follow these iconographical openings, the gender oppositions are continued in reverse. Susan is served by men. The bar's staff (John, the headwaiter, and Gino) are softly indulgent, bringing her a double highball when she refuses to speak to Thompson. The Thatcher Library, on the other hand, is under the authority of a woman without the slightest vestige of femininity, dressed in a severe suit and with an equally severe, repressive manner:

> Mr Thompson, you will be required to leave this room at four-thirty promptly. You will confine yourself, it is our understanding, to the chapter in Mr Thatcher's manuscript regarding Mr Kane.[30]

While the bar scene takes place at night, in diffused lighting, covered by the (permeable) glass skylight, Thompson visits the Library by day, and voices and footsteps echo round the marble hall. The Thatcher Library sets up multiple connotations of repression. It is like a bank, or a morgue, or indeed, as the door swings shut behind Thompson and into the face of the camera, like a prison. The paralleled *mise-en-scène* and the binary oppositions that suffuse these two scenes break the chronological unfolding of the film and set up a contrasted montage between them. The polarisation between Susan and Thatcher is like a threshold to the scene in which Thatcher takes Kane from his parents. It sets up a prefiguration of the later associations between that scene and Susan's glass snowstorm. But it also sets up a cross-gender association between Susan and Mr Kane, on a social and class level, in addition to the clearer, gendered, association between Kane's love for Susan and his love for his mother. The Thatcher flashback then covers, in three scenes, the whole span of Kane's career, from the first meeting in the snow, to Thatcher's rage at Kane's campaigns against capitalist corruption, to the Crash and Kane's bankruptcy. The last lines in the sequence are:

> THATCHER: What would you like to have been?
> KANE: Everything you hate.[31]

Thompson's first, unsuccessful, visit to Susan has a structural and not a narrative purpose in the film. The binary opposition between Susan and Thatcher sets up a formal premonition of the subsequent binary structure of the film.

The scene of Kane's childhood separation from his parents in the snow presents in dramatic form the strands that dominate the later development of the plot and divide it into two main sections. This scene brings together the dramatic elements that will form the basis of the film's binary structure: the child's closeness to his mother, his instinctive aggression against his surrogate father, and the little sled that comes to stand for what was lost in the Oedipal triangle. The first, male-dominated, section of the film tells the story of the radical, Oedipal, Kane continuing to battle against his surrogate father. The second, Susan-dominated, section shows him isolated from public life and fetishistically amassing things, attempting to fill, as it were, the void of his first loss. When Kane, as an old man, gives his uncompromising answer to Thatcher's question ('everything you hate'), this one line suddenly illuminates the Oedipal element in his political behaviour. The line – the last line of the Thatcher episode – links back to the two previous scenes: Kane's violent reaction to Thatcher at their first meeting, and the *Inquirer*'s campaigns against everything Thatcher stands for. To fight against Thatcher, the banker and old-fashioned capitalist, Kane espouses the cause of those who suffer at the hands of privilege, using as his weapon a new form of capitalist enterprise: the mass circulation newspapers known in the United States as the 'yellow press'.

Kane's first attack on Thatcher with the sled is presented, visually and emotionally, as a response to an adult male who is threatening to separate him from his mother.

> MOTHER: Mr Thatcher is going to take you on a trip with him tonight. You'll be leaving on Number Ten.
> FATHER: That's the train with all the lights on it.
> CHARLES: You goin', Mom?
> THATCHER: Oh no. Your mother won't be going right away, Charles, but she'll . . .

Citizen Kane (1941)

JAMES NAREMORE

The Magician and the Mass Media

Context

Citizen Kane is an unusually important motion picture, but critics and historians disagree about the nature of its achievement. Some view it as a collaborative product that owes a great deal to the classical studio system; others, including myself, see it as chiefly the work of the young Orson Welles, who was only twenty-six when he produced, directed, cowrote, and starred in the film. Obviously, *Kane* would not look the same nor be so fascinating had it been made anywhere other than RKO in the early 1940s. Even so, a good deal is at stake when we emphasize Hollywood over Welles. To do so is to promote the myth of a "golden age" of studio production and to transform *Kane* into an artifact of the American heritage—all the while forgetting or repressing its controversial politics and artistic difference.

Kane was the direct outgrowth of Welles's work as a prodigious director in the New York Federal Theater and in his own Mercury Theater, both of which espoused leftist, Popular Front ideas. His spectacular success on the stage and in radio during the 1930s was closely connected to major political events of the day—the New Deal, the rise of European Fascism, and the impending world war. His infamous *War of the Worlds* broadcast, which created a national panic, led to a generous contract at RKO, where he was briefly given a remarkable degree of control; as a result he brought the entire Mercury Theater to Hollywood and attempted to create an independent production company analogous to the one he and producer John Houseman had established in New York. Radio drama had made him interested in forms of first-person narration, and perhaps because of the Mars panic created by his *War of the Worlds* broadcast, he was drawn to stories about proto-Fascist demagogues who manipulate the

masses. (The first words his character speaks in *Kane*, after the whispered "Rosebud," is "Don't believe everything you hear on the radio.") He tried to adapt Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, updating the story to reflect present-day Fascism, but when that project proved too expensive he became attracted to the idea of a thinly disguised life of a famous American, told from the "prismatic" perspective of several characters. Hollywood scriptwriter Herman Mankiewicz suggested a perfect subject for such a film: William Randolph Hearst, the multimillionaire newspaper publisher who was regarded as the creator of "yellow journalism." An American imperialist, Hearst had used his newspapers to promote the Spanish-American War and to back various jingoistic causes. When his attempts at a political career failed, he retreated to his magnificent California estate, San Simeon, where he lived openly with his mistress, movie star Marion Davies, and gave fabulous parties for the Hollywood elite. He also established his own film production company at MGM, where he sponsored the quasi-Fascistic *Gabriel over the White House* (1933) and sometimes burdened Davies, a charming comedienne, with leaden, elaborately mounted costume pictures. Meanwhile, the Hearst newspapers opposed FDR and continued to favor reactionary politicians—including, for a time, Hitler and Mussolini.

Part of the impact of *Kane* for its original audience lay in the exhilarating sense it gave of a bright, iconoclastic young director using the means of production against one of America's most wealthy media moguls. But *Kane* would have been of merely topical relevance if it were not also a powerful example of film art. On a purely formal level, the picture is important for many reasons, among them its ingenious juggling of time and perspective, its carefully designed sound track, and its influential use of wide-angle, deep-focus photography. The last of these qualities is especially striking. There was nothing new about elaborate depth of field per se; studio lighting and film stocks in the early 1930s had inhibited its use, but we can find it in earlier films by Charlie Chaplin and F. W. Murnau. What makes *Kane* different from its predecessors is Welles's tendency to openly display the spatial distortions created by photographer Gregg Toland's short lenses, plus his ability to explore the possibilities these lenses offer for long takes or sequence shots. The peculiar exaggeration of perspective in *Kane* is akin to the effects one finds in German Expressionist cinema, where

sets were sometimes built in tunnel-like designs. Space becomes demonic, almost oppressive: shapes bend slightly at the edge of the screen, figures tower above us, and ceilings look unnaturally low, as if they were about to squash the characters. At Xanadu, the rooms are so large that people shrink, grotesquely dominated by their possessions. Meanwhile, the elaborately showy montage sequences (such as the ones depicting Kane's first marriage and his election campaign) tend to alternate with sequences involving only one or two shots, in which camera movements and the blocking of actors within the wide-angle space are deployed in unobtrusive but complex ways.

Welles frequently staged the action along three planes of interest. Consider the boardinghouse sequence near the beginning of the picture. Mrs. Kane (Agnes Moorehead) calls out a window to her son, closes the window, and walks the length of her parlor, the camera facing her and tracking backward until she sits at a table. From this vantage we look down the full length of the room toward the window that frames and encloses young Charles as he plays in the snow. ("The Union forever!" he shouts, just as his mother gives him away to a bank.) Mrs. Kane sits at the right foreground, her face the very image of stern puritanical sacrifice. Just beyond, the officious Thatcher (George Coulouris) shows her a document, while in the middle distance the weak, irresponsible Mr. Kane (Harry Shannon) keeps pacing back and forth and saying he doesn't like turning the boy over to a "gardeen." Dialogue overlaps and several actions occur at once; meanwhile, the faces, postures, and clothing dramatically contrast with one another, just as the blurred, limitless world of snow outside the window contrasts with the sharp, gray interior. After signing the document, Mrs. Kane rises and walks back toward the window, the camera slowly following. She pauses, opens the window, and we cut to a reverse angle, the exaggeration of space caused by the wide-angle lens giving the new vantage point an unusually dynamic force. Mrs. Kane's unhappy face looms up in the foreground as she calls out the window to Charles. Behind her, the banker and the father stand awkwardly, dwarfed by her head.

French theorist André Bazin described this technique as a dialectical leap forward in the language of the cinema, enabling directors to preserve the "realism" and "ambiguity" of dramatic space (Bazin, "Evolution" 33–36). But if Welles avoided analytical editing and

allowed some scenes to play in real duration, he also distorted the spatial and temporal dimensions of the images and kept the *mise-en-scène* under fairly rigid control. Some of the so-called deep-focus shots in the film (such as the scene of Kane typing an opera review) were made not by simple photography but by matte printing, which imperceptibly combined two separate shots. *Kane* is in fact one of the most stylized and "magical" movies ever made, the RKO art department's contribution so great that many scenes look like animation. The real significance of Welles's work was not in its phenomenal realism, but in its defamiliarizing, "strange-making" qualities.

More could be written (and has been) about *Kane*'s witty sound track, which plays with aural perception, and about its gifted ensemble of actors, who give somewhat heightened performances. Suffice it to say that the film declares the director's presence at every turn, and in the process runs slightly against the grain of studio practice. In this sense its style is homologous with its political concerns. And yet *Kane* never seems a narrowly tendentious film. It has a complex attitude toward its central character, criticizing his public life but showing a fair amount of sympathy for his private problems. Throughout, it brilliantly uses the talents and technical resources of RKO, neatly balancing psychological melodrama and political satire. The following analysis tries to give a sense of how it manages these contradictions.

Analysis

There are two snow sleds in the film. As everyone knows, the first is named "Rosebud" and is given to Kane by his mother. The second is a Christmas present from Kane's guardian, Thatcher, and is seen so briefly that audiences are unaware that it, too, has a name. If you press the "pause" button on the DVD edition of *Kane*, you will discover that for a few frames sled number two, which is called "Crusader," is presented fully to the camera. Where the original has a flower, this one is embossed with the helmet of a knight. The symbolism is fairly obvious: Kane repays Thatcher's gift by growing up to be a crusading, trust-busting newspaperman, out to slay the dragon Wall Street. Deprived of maternal care, he turns himself into a phony champion of the people, a phallic overreacher who dies like a medieval knight amid the empty Gothic splendor of Xanadu.

"Crusader" was a tiny joke Welles could throw away in a movie that bristles with clever asides. I mention it because I'm foolishly proud of knowing such trivia, but also because it's a convenient way to point up the duality of almost everything in *Kane*. The title character has not only two sleds but two wives and two friends. The camera makes two visits to Susan Alexander and two journeys to Xanadu; it even shows two close-ups of "Rosebud," once as it is being obliterated by the snows of Colorado at Mrs. Kane's boardinghouse and again as it is incinerated in the basement of Kane's Florida estate. Finally, in the most vivid clash of all, we have two endings: first the reporter Thompson quietly tells his colleagues that a single word can't sum up a man's life, and the camera moves away from him, lingering over the jigsaw pieces of Xanadu's art collection; after Thompson's exit, however, the camera begins tracking toward a furnace, where it reveals the meaning of "Rosebud" after all. In its last moment, the film shifts from intellectual irony to dramatic irony, from apparent skepticism to apparent revelation.

Similar tensions can be seen in the two opening "movements" of the film—a dreamy, Expressionistic portrayal of Kane's death, followed by a newsreel depiction of his life. As David Bordwell has pointed out, Welles seems to be paying homage to the fountainheads of cinematic perception—the fantasy of Georges Méliès and the realism of the Lumières (183). But even though the two modes are placed in dialectical relation, they don't achieve a synthesis; each suggests the voyeurism inherent in the medium, and each leaves Kane an enigma. In the first shot, for example, we see a "No Trespassing" sign that the camera promptly ignores. To the strains of Bernard Herrmann's funereal "power" music, we pass beyond a gigantic "K" atop a fence and progressively nearer to a lighted window in a dark castle, all the while encountering a bizarre montage: monkeys in a cage, gondolas in a stream, a golf course. The castle looks a bit like the home of a sorcerer, its strangeness enhanced by the stereoptic quality of the artwork, which was created by the Walt Disney animators. (The Disney unit worked at RKO in this period, and was ideally suited to design the spooky, compellingly kitschy Xanadu, which seems both a wonder of the world and a monument to bad taste—a fairy-tale castle of the sort that Disney himself would later use to symbolize his theme park.) Our approach to this weird domain is as voyeuristic as anything in a

Hitchcock movie; the camera is drawn like a moth to the lighted window, but as soon as it arrives the light clicks out.

Other forward movements, usually accompanied by dissolves, are used throughout—for example, when the camera twice crawls up the walls of the El Rancho nightclub and moves toward a broken skylight, enabling us to peer at Susan Alexander. Often the movement is blocked or slightly inhibited, as in the climactic moments, when we glide forward over the flotsam of Kane's life and approach the snow sled only to have it carried away by a workman; a dissolve then takes us to a furnace, where the camera continues moving forward directly into the flames, at last coming to rest on the burning "Rosebud." Here and elsewhere, the camera functions as a restless, ghostly observer, more silent and discreet than the journalists who poke about among Kane's belongings, but similar to them in certain ways. Like Kane's own newspapers, the camera is an "inquirer," and the periodic frustrations it encounters (a door closing, a light clicking out, a sled being pulled away) are like teasing affronts to our curiosity.

Our glimpses of Kane's death, shot in the style of the early European avant-garde, hide more than they reveal, tantalizing the audience and then capping the effect suddenly by introducing a blare of music and the "News on the March" title card. Once the newsreel gets under way, we settle into a more logical mode, grounded in presumably objective, documentary facts that provide a sort of cognitive map. But if the private Kane was seen too subjectively and too close-up, the public Kane is seen too objectively and usually from too far away. Welles and about a fourth of the Mercury players had previously worked on the radio version of Henry Luce's famous newsreel series, "The March of Time," and they create a wonderfully accurate parody of its hyped-up journalism, borrowing freely some of its catchphrases, such as "this week, as it must to all men, death came to . . ." (As many critics have observed, the allusion to the Luce press serves to historically expand the film's critique of mass media.) For all its self-important tone, however, "News on the March" offers mainly a compilation of Kane's public appearances, the shots usually filled with scratches and photographed from awkward vantage points. Repeatedly, Kane is shown alongside politicians, aligning himself first with the progressives and then with the Fascists. In his early career he waves and smiles in awkward gaiety, but later he becomes somber and camera

shy. We are told that "few private lives were more public," but are given only a few images of the Great Man's domestic habits. Even "1941's biggest, strangest funeral" is only a brief shot from an awkward angle; the image is grainy (Toland's imitation of newsreel stock is always perfectly accurate), and we see only a few rich mourners in the distance, over the massed heads of reporters. There is an almost comic disparity between the awesomeness of Kane's possessions and the stilted old codger we sometimes see, as if the newsreel were trying to establish him both as a mythical character like Noah or Kubla Khan and as something of a joke. He marries a president's niece and gets caught in a sex scandal; he drops wet concrete over his coat at a public ceremony; he vouches for the peaceful intentions of Hitler. He is so bumbling and foolish that little remains but his wealth, and even that is treated as a believe-it-or-not curiosity. But Welles also invites us to dislike the reporters who poke microphones and cameras in Kane's face. This feeling is reinforced when we suddenly cut to a side view of the newsreel screen: the projector clicks off and the pompous musical fanfare groans to a stop, as if somebody were giving "News on the March" a raspberry.

The ensuing conversation among reporters was shot in an actual RKO screening room. The air is smoky and the reporters sinister shadows, as they will remain throughout the film. Rawlston, the newsreel editor (Philip Van Zandt), is shown from a radically low angle, gesturing against what Welles called a "Nuremberg" light beaming down from the projection booth. He and his yes-men correctly perceive the emptiness of the newsreel, but their solution is to find an "angle." "It isn't enough to tell us what a man did," Rawlston says, "you've got to tell us who he *was*." The solution is a gimmick typical of Hearst's yellow journalism: Rawlston gives Thompson (William Alland) a tap on the shoulder and a shark's smile, ordering him to go out and get "Rosebud" "dead or alive." And yet the audience isn't allowed to feel superior. We, too, have been made curious about "Rosebud," which has the same function for Welles and Mankiewicz as it does for Rawlston. Just as the newsreel lacks impact until some key has been concocted to explain Kane's life, so the movie itself lacks force without an enigma and a nicely punctuated ending. Perhaps significantly, Herman Mankiewicz, Joseph Cotten, and Erskine Sanford (the last two of whom appear later as characters in Kane's life) are barely visible in the shadows of the

room, acting in the role of reporters who scoff at Kane's dying words. Everybody is involved in a dubious pursuit. The opening sections have initiated a search, but they are filled with so many ironies and opacities that they threaten to undermine the project before it starts.

The story now becomes a series of reminiscences by witnesses to Kane's life. In this regard it should be emphasized that *Citizen Kane* is fundamentally different from a film like Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950): it doesn't present separate versions of an unknowable reality, but instead gives different facets of a single personality. Kane's biography is depicted more or less chronologically, through the memories and judgments of five characters who knew him at progressively later stages. We never have the feeling that these characters are distorting the truth (even though Leland recounts domestic events he could not possibly have seen). In other words, for all its interest in subjectivity and psychology, *Kane* has a rational structure; it's a film about complexity, not about relativity.

Thompson's quest is initiated with a thunderclap and a Gothic rainstorm, in comically scary contrast to Rawlston's last words ("It'll probably turn out to be a very simple thing"). We see a garish, dripping poster of a blonde woman, and the camera moves upward, sliding over the roof of the El Rancho and down toward the skylight. Once again the search for "Rosebud" seems tawdry, notably so in a deep-focus shot that concludes Thompson's abortive interview with Susan (Dorothy Comingore). As Thompson steps into a phone booth and closes the door, a curious waiter (Gus Schilling) moves just a fraction to the left and is visible through one of the glass panels, listening in on the conversation. In the distance, Susan is bowed drunkenly over a table. (Marion Davies was known to Hollywood insiders as an alcoholic.) When Thompson completes his conversation with his boss, he exits the booth and tries to bribe the waiter, who comments innocently, "Thank you, thanks. As a matter of fact, just the other day, when the papers were full of it, I asked her. She never heard of Rosebud." Fade out with an ironic, playful chord of Herrmann's music.

Nearly all the fragments of the narrative are structured this way, with a mild shock or a witty image at the beginning and a joke or an ironic twist at the end. The ultimate feeling, however, is inflected by Welles's Germanic staging and by the indirect influence of impressionist novelists like Joseph Conrad and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who

provided a model for the film's prismatic narrative. The Thatcher portion of the film, which grows out of Thompson's reading of the diary, is at first somewhat Dickensian in mood, telling how a poor child rises suddenly to great expectations. Within a few moments Charles Foster Kane is lifted from a snowy playground in front of his mother's boardinghouse and set down at a richly Victorian Christmas celebration, although in both places the atmosphere is chilly and the boy is surrounded by menacing adult figures. George Coulouris (made up to look like John D. Rockefeller) plays Thatcher in broad caricature, delivering his lines at top speed. In a charmingly exuberant and altogether antirealistic montage, he constantly turns to face the camera, muttering in disgust as the young Kane grows up, founds a newspaper, and then attacks Wall Street. But Kane rises only to have an ignominious fall; the narrative as a whole covers the period between the winter of 1871 and the winter of 1929, when Kane, forced by the Depression to turn part of the control of his newspapers over to his former guardian, broods on his failure, telling Thatcher that he would like to have been "everything you hate." Capital, it seems, is always in charge of Kane's life, and the market crash does little more than solidify the power of America's major bankers. At the same time, a nostalgic evocation of the nineteenth century gives way to a somber present.

The portrait of Kane that emerges from these memoirs contains many ironies. For example, he is at his most charming during an early scene in the newspaper office, where his potential danger is underlined. Thatcher, who has been reading a succession of *Inquirer* headlines, lowers a paper containing a scare headline ("Galleons of Spain off Jersey Coast") to reveal Kane sitting at his editorial desk, clad in shirtsleeves, sipping coffee with a bemused, Machiavellian glint in his eye. In the same shot, Leland (Joseph Cotten) and Bernstein (Everett Sloane) enter the frame, Leland taking a cigar from the desk (he is an addict, as we see later) and Bernstein scurrying past on official business. Kane blithely dictates a telegram that echoes one of Hearst's most famous comments to a reporter ("Dear Wheeler, you provide the prose poems and I'll provide the war") and, in a large, climactic close-up, thumbs his nose at Thatcher's warnings ("You know, Mr. Thatcher, at the rate of a million dollars a year I'll have to close this place—in sixty years"). In this scene Kane is generous with money and disrespectful

toward stuffy Victorian authority; perhaps most important, he says he is committed to "the people" as opposed to "the trusts." Thatcher and the elderly editor Carter—a harrumphing old banker and a genteel incompetent—are foils to his rebelliousness, making his yellow journalism and attempt to start a war in Cuba seem like creative energy. But beneath the surface Kane is a totally different sort of character. "The trouble is," he tells Thatcher, "you don't realize you're talking to two people." On the one hand is the pretty young man who claims to represent the public; on the other is the Kane who has investments in Wall Street and knows down to the penny the amount of his holdings ("eighty-two thousand, three hundred and sixty-four shares of Public Transit Preferred"). "If I don't look after the interests of the underprivileged," he remarks, in one of the places where contradictions are reconciled and class loyalty revealed, "maybe somebody else will—maybe somebody without any money or property."

When Thompson exits the Thatcher Library ("Thanks for the use of the hall"), he goes to interview Bernstein, who maintains the spell of Kane's charm. Bernstein talks mainly about the period between the founding of the newspaper and Kane's marriage to Emily Norton (Ruth Warrick), a woman who "was no Rosebud." An apologist for Kane, he is also kindly and unpretentious—the only person who has remembered Susan after Kane's death. Realistic about old age ("the only disease you don't look forward to being cured of") as well as about his position in life ("Me? I'm chairman of the board. I got nothing but time"), he looks spry and at peace with himself, and the setting for his interview is conducive of a melancholy serenity. Bernstein sits in a leather chair, his face reflected in the polished surface of his desk as if in a quiet pool. Here, in a long take that contains some of the most discreet camera movements in the film, he tells a story about seeing a girl in a white dress on the Jersey Ferry (Welles's favorite moment, beautifully acted by Everett Sloane) and reminds us that he is the only character who has been with Kane until "after the end." And yet the kindness and the cozy atmosphere don't conceal the fact that Bernstein is an overfaithful associate from a different social class than Kane. Although Kane later tells Emily in no uncertain terms that the Jewish Bernstein may pay a visit to the family nursery, there remains a significant distance between the two men. Kane and Leland arrive together at the *Inquirer* offices in a hansom cab, dressed in the height of

New York fashion, while Bernstein tags along atop a delivery wagon. Later, at the political rally and at Susan's concert, Bernstein can be seen in the company of Kane's goons. As Kane's financial agent, he is responsible for whatever dirty work needs doing, and he always places personal loyalty above principle. His prosperity has therefore come to him like a tip from his employer.

Bernstein's reminiscences are chiefly about adventure and male camaraderie. We see Kane sweeping into the *Inquirer* and turning it into a twentieth-century paper, meanwhile promising to become a knight-errant for the people, "a fighting and tireless champion of their rights as citizens." Only a few moments earlier, he concocts a lurid news item about sex and murder, telling Carter, "If the headline is big enough, it makes the news big enough." Bernstein acknowledges these warts on Kane's character, but defends him anyway, describing him as a man connected with the destiny of the country; and, indeed, the *Inquirer* newsroom becomes a focal point of social history, where we see the country moving through different stages of liberal democracy, each attempt at progress generating new conflicts and new evils. America passes from the age of the tycoon and into the era of "mass communications," with turn-of-the-century types like Kane being destroyed by the very process they have set in motion.

Leland, whom Thompson now visits in a geriatric ward, is often regarded as the spokesman for the "moral" of the film, but he is as flawed and human as the doggedly loyal Bernstein. The ultimate product of a fading and effete New England aristocracy ("One of those old families where the father is worth ten million bucks and then one day he shoots himself and it turns out there's nothing but debts"), he is an aesthete who despises the capitalists but can never join the workers. A dandy and a puritan, he is very much the "New England schoolmarm" Kane has named him, and the film may be hinting that his involvement with Kane has sexual implications. Mankiewicz and Welles were prohibited from showing a scene in a bordello where Kane unsuccessfully tries to interest Leland in a woman, but even without that scene he seems to have no active sex life. As a young man he barely conceals his admiration for Kane, and when he grows disillusioned there is inevitably a "loose" woman involved. At the big *Inquirer* party, his frowns of disapproval and complaints about the war with Spain are played off against Kane making time with one of the

chorus girls. When the "love nest" with Susan Alexander brings an end to Kane's political career, it is Leland, not Emily Kane, who behaves like a jilted lover.

The two women Kane marries are as much physical and social opposites as Leland and Bernstein, yet in their own way both are connected to his desire to assert mastery. The celebrated breakfast table montage showing the disintegration of Kane's marriage to Emily (whom Leland describes as "like all the girls I knew in dancing school") is followed by the comic toothache scene in Susan Alexander's apartment, the allegro pace dissolving into a sweet, intimate rendezvous. Aided by the least ostentatious, most persuasive makeup job in the film, Welles turns rapidly from an ardent husband wooing a president's niece into a tired businessman courting a salesgirl. Kane sentimentally imagines that Susan has a mother like his own, and the scene where he presides quietly over her "recital" is followed immediately by the opening of his campaign for governor, his sexual conquest linked to his attempt to dominate the populace. In fact, the closing line of Susan's song concerns the theme of power: it comes from *The Barber of Seville*, and roughly translates "I have sworn it, I will conquer."

The ensuing political rally is a good example of how the film creates large-scale effects with a modest budget. The atmosphere is both American and Germanic, the stem-winder of a campaign speech subtly evoking newsreel shots of Hitler's harangues to his political hacks. In place of a crowd of extras, we see a painted, Expressionistic image suggesting Kane's delusions of grandeur and the crowd's lack of individuality. Everything is dominated by Kane's ego: the initial "K" he wears as a stickpin, the huge blowup of his jowly face on a poster, and the incessant "I" in his public speech. He talks about "the workingman and the slum child," and meanwhile the frock-coated men behind him are arranged to resemble the bloated rich of a Thomas Nast cartoon. Occasionally we see Kane's supporters—Leland, Bernstein, Emily, and Kane's young son—isolated in contrasting close-ups; but his political rival, "Boss" Jim Gettys (Ray Collins), stands high above the action, the stage viewed over his shoulder, dominating the frame like a sinister power.

The showdown Gettys arranges between himself, Kane, Emily, and Susan—a private conversation in contrast to the rally—is one of the n[illegible] emotionally tense scenes in the film. There are over a dozen

shots in the sequence, one of them a rather long take, but no close-ups; throughout, the characters are dynamically blocked, with Kane, Susan, and Gettys alternately stepping into complete shadow. Gettys is underplayed by Collins; knowing his power, he behaves courteously to Emily, even though he proudly tells Kane that he is "not a gentleman." "You see, my idea of a gentleman . . . Well, Mr. Kane, if I owned a newspaper and didn't like the way somebody was doing things . . . I wouldn't show him in a convict suit with stripes, so his children could see him in the paper, or his mother." One mama's boy has taken revenge on the other, and Kane explodes, following Gettys out of the room and down a stairwell. "I can fight this all alone," he shouts. ". . . Gettys! I'm going to send you to Sing Sing!" The last words fade weakly into traffic sounds as Gettys exits the apartment building and closes the front door.

Just at the moment when Kane's political ambitions are wrecked, the film shifts into its examination of his sexual life. In fact, the only concrete evidence we are given of his tyranny is his treatment of Susan. According to Ferdinand Lundberg's *Imperial Hearst* (1936)—one of the sources of the film's script and the subject of an absurd plagiarism case against Welles and Mankiewicz—Hearst had employed gangsters to rout his competitors during the newspaper wars of early-twentieth-century Chicago, while Hearst's editors blamed the trouble on "labor agitators." Throughout the early decades of the century, Hearst was a vigorous opponent of unions and child-labor legislation, and his mining interests in Peru were more or less forced labor camps. *Kane*'s only apparent reference to such things is to show Bernstein in the company of hired toughs and to have Leland berate Kane for his paternalistic attitude toward workers. In effect, Mankiewicz and Welles were condensing and displacing the social issues, using a love story to illustrate the character flaws that would presumably make the tycoon a danger to the public. If Susan Alexander is only roughly similar to Marion Davies, that is partly because Welles and Mankiewicz converted her into a symbol of the society at large. As Leland says, she represents for Kane a "cross-section of the American public." When Kane meets her she is a working girl, undereducated and relatively innocent, and his relationship with her is comparable to his relationship with the masses who read his papers. He showers her with wealth, but this merely confirms Leland's remark in the desolated, postelection newspaper office:

"You just want to persuade people that you love them so much that they ought to love you back." Indeed, all of Leland's accusations and prophecies are confirmed in Susan's part of the film. "You talk about the people as though you owned them," Leland says. Kane's treatment of Susan illustrates the truth of this charge and also reminds us of the violence Kane is willing to use to have his way; thus in the last reels, which show Kane retreating more and more from public life, Susan is reduced from a pleasant, attractive girl to a near suicide.

After his marriage to Susan, Kane tells reporters, "We're going to become an opera star," and he hires Matisti (Fortunio Bonanova) to begin the arduous, comically inappropriate series of music lessons. The settings grow more opulent, while Susan becomes increasingly driven and humiliated. As a result, her resemblance to Marion Davies fades. She looks more like those Peruvians toiling at gunpoint in Hearst's copper mines, though she is certainly getting better pay. Notice also that the choice of opera rather than movies for Susan's career is signifi- cant; it highlights the difference in social class between her and the pa- trons for whom she works. In a skillful operatic pastiche composed by Herrmann, we see her kneeling on satin pillows, pitifully frightened and garishly made-up, singing "Ah! Cruel" in a register beyond the ca- pabilities of her voice. Meanwhile, a tuxedoed audience dozes, and, in a trick shot, the camera seems to drift up to the rafters to show a laborer holding his nose and shaking his head sadly.

"I'm not high class like you," Susan tells Kane in an even shriller voice when she kneels again on the floor and reads the Leland-Kane review, "and I never went to any swell schools." She attempts to quit the opera, but Kane orders her to continue because "I don't propose to have myself made ridiculous." In a scene remarkable for the way it shows the pain of both people, his shadow falls over her face—just as he will later tower over her in the "party" scene, when a woman's am- biguous scream is heard distantly on the sound track. Ultimately, however, Susan asserts her own power. Leland has warned that the workingman will not always tolerate Kane's patronage: "You're not going to like that one little bit when you find out it means your work- ingman expects something as his right and not your gift." This is more or less why Susan leaves Kane. In some ways her story may seem to replace political with personal concerns, but in other ways it shows how the public and the personal are interrelated.

Throughout, Kane is presented with a mixture of awe, satiric invective, and sympathy. To Thatcher, he is a spoiled do-gooder who is a menace to business; to Bernstein, a hero who helped build the country; to Leland, an egomaniac who wants everybody to love him but who leaves only "a tip in return." No single response is adequate, and near the end, the disparate judgments take the form of a contradictory emotion. Thompson remarks to Susan, "You know, all the same I feel sorry for Mr. Kane." Susan, the only character we've actually seen Kane victimize, gives Thompson a harsh look and a terse reply: "Don't you think I do?" Her comment crystallizes the film's mixed attitude. In the later sequences, when Kane nearly destroys her, we fear along with Susan, but we also feel Kane's age, frustration, and desire. This feeling is especially strong toward the end, where the most powerful and intense moments—Kane's enraged breaking-up of Susan's room and his discovery of the paperweight—are played off against the predatory Raymond (Paul Stewart) and the vast, mirrored labyrinth of Xanadu. As the psychological inquiry deepens, the tone of the film changes slightly. The comic blackout sketches typical of the Thatcher and Bernstein accounts are replaced by a more grotesque comedy that belongs to Susan—the scenes near the big Xanadu fireplace, for example, with Susan's voice echoing, "A person could go crazy in this dump"; or the surreal picnic, with a stream of black cars driving morosely down a beach toward a swampy encampment, where a jazz band plays "This Can't Be Love" against a matted background of sinister RKO bats borrowed from *The Son of Kong* (1933). Each phase of the story becomes more painful than the one before, until we arrive at the most cynical of the witnesses, Raymond, who is ironically responsible for the most intimate details: Susan leaves Kane, moving down a corridor into infinity and exiting Xanadu to the sound of an enraged cockatoo. (Both shots are impressive uses of optical printing.) In response, Kane blindly destroys her room and remembers his childhood loss.

Thompson never emerges from the shadows, but at the end he becomes a slightly troubled onlooker. Finally, he gives up his search, knowing too much to expect a simple answer. We are in a similar position, but are given, if not a rational explanation, a vision of "Rosebud" that appears to transcend the various witnesses. Here it might be noted that Welles was uneasy about the whole snow-sled idea. He dismissed "Rosebud" in a famous remark, calling it "dollar-book Freud"

and emphasizing that Herman Mankiewicz thought it up. Even so, some of the psychoanalytic ideas that he and Mankiewicz used in the film might have come straight from a textbook. According to Freudian terminology, Kane can be described as a regressive, anal-sadistic personality. His lumpen-bourgeois family is composed of a weak, untrustworthy father and a loving, albeit puritanical mother; he is taken away from the mother during a period of sexual latency and reared by a bank, and as an adult he "returns" to what Freud describes as a pre-genital form of sexuality in which "not the genital component-instincts, but the sadistic and anal are most prominent" (336). Thus Kane is partly a sadist who wants to obtain power over others and partly an anal type who obsessively collects things. A child-man, he spends all his energies rebelling against anyone who asserts authority over his will. He despises Thatcher, and when he can no longer "look after" the little people, he begins to hate them, too. When we last see him he throws a tantrum, like a baby destroying a nursery.

Imprisoned by his childhood ego, Kane treats everything as a toy: first the sled, then the newspaper, then the Spanish-American War. (Notice how the war is depicted as a child's game, with the *Inquirer* reporters sporting little wooden rifles and funny hats.) Toward the end there is Susan, with her marionette-style opera makeup and her doll-house room in a fantasy castle. The final toy, the snowy paperweight, is symptomatic of his need for a self-enclosed realm, immune from change, where he can feel autonomous. The sled burning at the heart of the furnace recalls that same realm, and like the paperweight is linked to his memory image of his mother. After our discovery of the sled, however, *Citizen Kane* concludes with another reminder of our inquisitiveness and a comment on the vanity of Kane's worldly enterprises. The camera retreats from the magic castle, staring at the smoke of corruption that drifts off into the sky, ultimately settling on the "No Trespassing" sign outside the gate. We are back where we began. Even the film's title has been a contradiction in terms.

Conclusion

Kane has become part of American folklore, and its situations keep returning in the news—Richard Nixon secluding himself in San Clemente or Howard Hughes, before his death, owning a retreat in the

Bahamas that he called the "Hotel Xanadu." Before leaving the film, therefore, we need to return to its politics. We might begin by noting that Welles was at least technically correct when he repeatedly told interviewers that Kane was a fictional character based on several turn-of-the-century tycoons. In translating Hearst into a creature of fiction, he and Mankiewicz borrowed freely from the lives of other American capitalists (among them Samuel Insull and John McCormack). They salted the story with references to Welles's own biography, and at several junctures they departed from well-known facts about Hearst, each of them important to the dramatic and ideological effect of the film. For example, they gave Kane a humble birth, which was not true of Hearst or of any other real-life figure to whom he could be compared. Equally significant, because more than anything else it aroused the ire of the Hearst press, they made Susan Alexander into a tormented, unhappy creature who walks out on her supposed benefactor—this in contrast to the Hearst-Davies relationship, which seemed generally happy. Indeed, when death finally came to Hearst, it was very different from Kane's death in the film. He did not spend his last days alone in the caverns of his estate; several years earlier he had moved to the Beverly Hills mansion of his mistress, and he died with her close at hand. His last words were unrecorded.

Most of these changes tend to create sympathy for Kane. As a poor boy suddenly given wealth he becomes less representative of his class, and as a tycoon in the grip of a psychological compulsion he seems doomed and lonely, an embodiment of the cliché that money can't buy happiness. Even so, it should be noted that throughout the 1930s, writers of the left had relished giving Hearst's career the structure of a morality play. In *The Big Money* (1936), John Dos Passos saw Hearst as a "spent Caesar grown old with spending," and in his preface to the biography of Hearst by Ferdinand Lundberg, Charles Beard predicted that the old man would die lonely and unloved. By showing Kane as a tragicomic failure, Mankiewicz and Welles were doing no more than what these writers had done, and when they changed the facts to suit the demands of melodrama they were, in principle, responding to a plea made by Lundberg, who argued that popularized criticism of Hearst's deceptions was badly needed.

In any case, *Kane* clearly does satirize Hearst's public life. It shows Kane's manipulative interest in the Spanish-American War, it reveals

his exploitative "philosophy" of journalism, and it makes several references to his attacks on organized labor. In the election scenes it depicts the corruption of machine politics with the force of a great editorial cartoon. In regard to Kane's so-called progressive youth, the film is explicit in its denunciation, showing his supposed democratic aspirations as in reality a desire for power. We even see him on a balcony conferring with Hitler, an image that colors everything the character does. Equally interesting and more unorthodox, the film brings its own workings under scrutiny. From the beginning, when "Rosebud" is introduced as a cheap means of spicing up a newsreel, until the end, when Thompson confesses the futility of searching out the meaning for a single word, *Kane* suggests that the process of discovery is more important than any pat conclusion. All the while, Welles's manipulation of cinematic technique keeps reminding us that we are watching a movie rather than reality itself.

The political significance of the film was certainly not lost on Hearst, who was alive and kicking—a danger not only because of his publishing empire, which refused to advertise the film, but also because of the power he wielded in Hollywood. As a result of a vendetta by the Hearst press, *Kane* never received the block theatrical booking normally accorded to RKO's major releases. Independent theater managers everywhere were concerned about Hearst's wrath, to say nothing of what they regarded as the potential artiness of the film. Meanwhile, Hearst influenced the FBI to initiate a secret investigation of Welles that lasted for thirty years, during which time he was branded a subversive. *Kane* was recognized by many reviewers (especially in the Luce press, which was Hearst's major rival), by Hollywood professionals, and even somewhat reluctantly by the Motion Picture Academy. At the same time, it made Welles's future in American movies problematic. The paradox—and one of the biggest contradictions of them all—is that Welles had no desire to wreck the motion-picture industry. *Kane* was held to a relatively modest A-picture budget ($749,000). Nevertheless, industry bosses perceived Welles as an "artist" and a left-wing ideologue who might bring trouble. His film may not have been a thoroughgoing anticapitalist attack or a truly avant-garde experiment, but it was close enough to ensure that he would never again be allowed such freedom at a major studio.

Credits

United States, 1941, A Mercury Production at RKO

Director: Orson Welles
Producer: Orson Welles
Screenplay: Herman J. Mankiewicz, Orson Welles, and (uncredited) John Houseman
Cinematography: Gregg Toland
Assistant Director: Richard Wilson
Editing: Robert Wise and Mark Robson
Music: Bernard Herrmann
Sound: Bailey Fesler and James G. Stewart
Art Direction: Van Nest Polglase and Perry Ferguson
Set Decoration: Darrel Silvera
Costume Design: Edward Stevenson
Special Effects: Vernon L. Walker
Optical Printing: Linwood G. Dunn

CAST:

Charles Foster Kane	Orson Welles
Jed Leland	Joseph Cotten
Bernstein	Everett Sloane
Susan Alexander	Dorothy Comingore
Jim Gettys	Ray Collins
Thompson and newsreel narrator	William Alland
Mary Kane	Agnes Moorehead
Emily Norton	Ruth Warrick
Walter Parks Thatcher	George Coulouris
Herbert Carter	Erskine Sanford
Jim Kane	Harry Shannon
Rawlston	Philip Van Zandt
Raymond	Paul Stewart
Matisti	Fortunio Bonanova
Curator of Thatcher Library	Georgia Backus
Kane, age 8	Buddy Swan
Kane, Jr.	Sunny Bupp
Waiter	Gus Schilling
Entertainer	Charles Bennett
Nurse	Edith Evanston
Reporters	Alan Ladd, Louise Currie, Eddie Coke, Walter Sande, Arthur O'Connell, Katherine Trosper, and Richard Wilson

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SECTION 3

Tom GUNNING, The Films of Fritz Lang
London. BFI, 2000

7

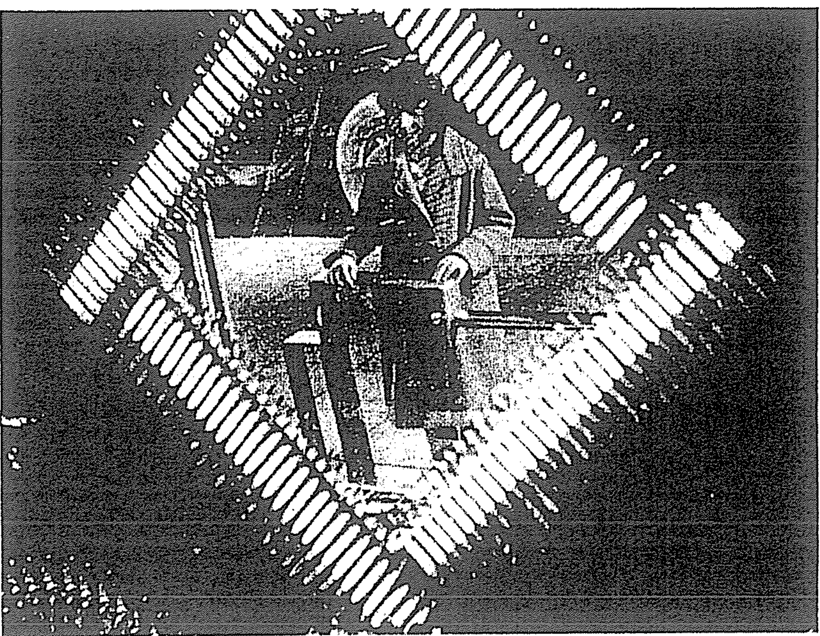
M: The City Haunted by Demonic Desire

'Oh Mother I Am Lost!' The Murder of Elsie Beckmann

Out of the deceitful emptiness of a mirror
A face rises slowly and indistinctly
From the horror and darkness: Cain!
The velvet curtain rustles quietly.
The moon shines into emptiness through the window.
I am alone with my murderer.

Georg Trakl, 'Horror'[2]

If *Metropolis* is the albatross around Lang's neck, *M* remains his most universally admired film. The complexity and originality of its structure, the studied ambiguity and ambivalence of its themes, the power of its images and sound guarantee it a place in film history and film criticism no matter how much canons are abjured or the idea of masterpieces viewed with suspicion. Such status and achievement frequently



freezes critical acumen, although in the case of this film at least three brilliant studies, those of Noel Burch, Roger Dadoun and Anton Kaes, have ventured insights which have deeply influenced my own remarks, and a host of other fine essays and studies have been produced.[3] No critic can hope to propose a definitive or even a thorough reading of this film. But I will approach it in terms of Lang's total *œuvre*, and as a pivotal film, one that turns like a hinge between Lang's silent cinema and sound cinema, and also (I would maintain even more than the film that follows it chronologically, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*) between his German and his American career. *M* ties up a number of themes from the first part of Lang's career (although in some respects – such as the homage to the Expressionist tradition discussed in the last chapter – *Testament* provides the true farewell to Germany and silent cinema), but most importantly it announces new themes and preoccupations.

The structure of *M* is unique, the high point of Harbou's work as a scriptwriter. Rather than being built around a central conflict between individuated characters and/or a heterosexual romance (the classical patterns of narrative cinema and evident in every previous Lang film), *M* takes its form from both process and setting, an interaction expressed in one of the secondary titles sometimes given the film, *A City Searches for a Murderer*. The systematic nature of the search, a rational, goal-oriented process, interacts with the gridded space of the modern city with its networks of communication and intersections already explored in Lang's master criminal films. But like the highly symbolic spaces of his allegorical films, particularly the court of Worms in *The Death of Siegfried* and the urban and industrial spaces of *Metropolis*, the city in *M* seems to possess a will of its own; as this secondary title suggests, it could be seen as the protagonist of the film.

The film's lack of an immediately identifiable protagonist who organises the point of view of the film marks its greatest difference from previous Lang films (even *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* with its mystery surrounding the figure of Dr. Mabuse and his role in the film, ultimately centres on a conflict between Lohmann and Baum). As Noel Burch was one of the first to point out, Hans Beckert could hardly be said to dominate the film's action since he is rarely even seen in the first half of the film.[4] Although a stronger claim might be made for Lohmann's role in the action as the detective who guides us through the investigation, he only enters some twenty minutes into the film, and does not appear in many key scenes (for instance, he plays no role in the apprehension of Beckert, except in the final minute of the film). Lohmann's *doppelgänger* in the underworld, crime boss Schranker, enters the film even later than Lohmann, and although he does organise the decisive action of the film, the capture of Beckert, he could hardly be said to dominate the film or its point of view. Instead the film co-ordinates several points of view, presenting a number of semi-autonomous episodes, all centred around the search for a murderer of children.

The film does pivot around Hans Beckert, but around his absence rather than his presence, around the search for this mysterious and initially elusive figure. This may seem to be merely a ground rule of the mystery genre – the search for and naming of the culprit – but *M* does not truly introduce any doubt about the identity of the murderer. Beckert appears early in the film, although in a manner that stresses the impossibility of grasping him – as a shadow, as a reflection in a mirror. Throughout the film, as Burch has indicated, Beckert plays hide and seek with us, appearing, usually indirectly or obliquely, then withdrawing into the darkness, the realm of the unseen.[5] The film may well pivot around Beckert, but he is the film's blind spot, its aporia, rather than its point of coherence.

Absence imprints this film from the start and determines the way it uses sound and constructs space. Although *M*'s innovative use of sound forms one of the clichés of film history, this universal acknowledgement cannot render its power banal. Key to everyone's analysis of *M*'s sound design is the way a sound can open up an off screen space, imprinting a space we see on screen with the voice or sound coming from unseen space. As Lang moved away from the broad tableaux of the super-films of the 1920s to the more fragmented space found in *Spies*, the uncertainty caused by the way a frame bounded our visual field became a Langian device. Haghi's exit from his office in that film's climax, revealing his previously undisclosed mobility and casting his shadow on the wall after he passes through the frame, shows Lang's ability to play with the frame as a masking device, concealing and revealing spaces, drawing attention to what lies off screen through shadows and off screen looks. But the soundtrack transforms Lang's frame even more radically. At any moment the frame can haemorrhage toward an unseen area simply by including a sound whose source is not seen. *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, as Michel Chion reveals, makes this possibility into an element of the plot – the uncertainty of the source of Dr. Baum's voice.[6] But in place of *Testament*'s exploration of new technologies of voice, *M* explores its spatial dimension, opening seen space into a constant interchange with unseen space.

The first sequence of *M* (called 'The Murder of Elsie Beckmann' by Burch in his useful division of the film into nine parts)[7] stands not only as one of Lang's and Harbou's most sustained achievements in stylistic and narrative mastery, it also serves as a sort of tutor text, introducing the major themes and devices of the film as a whole. Although subject to strong analyses already by Kuntzel, Ropars-Wuilleumier, and Marie (as well as Burch), it still provides the essential entry point for any reading of the film.[8] As Marie has said, 'it is impossible not to analyse the first sequence, due to its fundamental importance for the later unfolding of the narrative as well as the system of signification it develops'.[9] This is especially true of the use of sound. In the recently restored version of *M*, the credits unroll in silence (other than an apparent gong sounding under the title: *Ein Fritz Lang Film*) until we are plunged into darkness with a black screen.[10] The film will emerge from this darkness with its first sounds preceding the image, a child's voice chanting a nursery rhyme:

> Just you wait a little while.

Paradoxically this voice from the darkness has something of the effect of the look at the camera. Located in no represented space, it emerges from the screen in a mode of direct address, speaking in the second person, and tells us to wait for a moment.

The image that soon appears anchors the voice within a space and an action, a small child viewed from above in the courtyard of a Berlin *Mietkaserne*, the tenement blocks with a central courtyard familiar from the drawings of Heinrich Zille. The diminutive child, surrounded by other children, plays a circular pointing game, completing the morbid rhyme:

> The man in black will come after you
> And with his little chopper
> He will make mince meat of you.

She adds, as she points to a child within the circle that surrounds her, 'You're out'. The camera then drifts off to the left, tilting upwards as it moves. As the children's

game edges off screen, the child's voice continues, diminishing somewhat in volume, dividing our visual and aural orientation, visually directed left, towards the direction the camera is moving (for what reason?); aurally, right, back towards the children we still hear. Looking upwards we see through a railing the next level of the tenement as a woman moves through the frame. Her attention is drawn by the children's song and she moves to the railing's edge and calls down in irritation, telling them to stop singing 'that awful song!' adding, 'Can't you hear me?' The child's off screen voice falls silent, as the woman heads into the building, muttering. The camera lingers after she leaves and after an instant we hear the girl's voice begin again: 'Just you wait a little while ...' as the film's first shot ends.

The very first shot not only sets up the play between on screen and off screen sound, it also establishes the roving and exterior point of view of this film. In one shot we view both the children and the woman, but both of them from pronounced angles: the children from above, the woman from below. The camera does not align itself with any character. Further, it has a will of its own, directing us away from the action and making us imagine events off screen through sound cues. Lang does not cut or move back to the children when they resume their game. Instead the camera remains fixed on a frame empty of people. The high angle recalls other Lang compositions (the 'topographical' views, first introduced in *The Diamond Ship*, which abstract space and action by viewing them from above) and operates here as it does in other films to create a strong sense of the camera as an observing presence outside the consciousness of any character. But never has a single shot so elegantly demonstrated the power of the camera frame as the border between the seen and the unseen.

The second shot (especially in the version which restores its opening) continues this play with off screen space and begins to comment explicitly on the role of sound. The woman who reproached the kids in the previous shot enters from the bottom of the frame in a shot of the tenement stairwell, but before her head bobs into the frame we hear her laboured progress up the stairs, her heavy breathing and the banging of the over-laden laundry basket on each step. This brief beginning of the shot (cut in most available versions of the film) situates us firmly in the social and material realism of this film, a portrayal of environment dedicated to the detailed reproduction of the locales of daily life in all their physical and sensual specificity. The space of the stairway – one of the many in-between, liminal spaces of communication through which people move in this film – awaits the woman's entrance: we see it before we see her, although we hear her approaching. The city is made up of these passageways that connect a series of autonomous little worlds. As in the overhead shot of the jewel heist in *The Diamond Ship*, Lang's viewpoint on the city stresses the determinate geometry of these separate yet connected spaces, as a structure which imposes itself on the lives and movements of the inhabitants.

Lang's 'realism' in this film depends on the geometrical structures in which the rhythms of daily life are caught. The way the woman, both hands burdened with the laundry basket, manoeuvres her elbow to ring the doorbell to Frau Beckmann's apartment, provides a degree of observation of social behaviour few previous Lang films could match. (Similarly, to those able to hear and recognise it, the Berlin accent of this woman provides an aural sign of social specificity.) The sound of the bell once her elbow has angled itself properly, her reluctance to put the basket down even for a moment (presumably because it will be so hard to pick up again – sharp-eyed commentators like Kuntzel have pointed out that the woman is pregnant),[11] the automatic way Frau Beckmann takes the basket from her as she opens the door; all of these details of sound and gesture root us in a world recognisable in its solid materiality, yet deeply observed as well, never casual. Like much of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement to which Lang's last German films show an affinity, the effect differs from nineteenth-century realism through its emphasis on non-human patterns, the thing-like nature of reality, its blend of abstraction with the detailed rendering of objects. Lang's use of sound exemplifies this approach. This voice of things renders them much more palpable, but at the same time these sounds are rarely just an attempt to convey the various surrounding sounds of the world. Each sound seems magnified, attracting attention to itself and its source. Thus the woman's heavy tread up the stairs before we see her, the startling sound of the doorbell (the first of many alarming sound signals we hear in this film) carry an almost ominous overtone.

As Lang makes a 180 degree cut in this doorway, transferring us from a focalisation on the pregnant woman to the world of Frau Beckmann (as the first shot transferred us from the children to the woman carrying laundry, setting up a pattern of transfers between characters that will be pursued until the end of the film), Beckmann responds to the woman's complaint about the children's song, saying, 'As long as they're singing at least we know they're OK.' As Robert Bresson has stated, the soundtrack invented silence.[12] Lang understood that sound evokes not only the unseen, the off screen, but also outlines it own negative, the unheard, that which has been silenced. Throughout this sequence, Frau Beckmann will interact with a growing silence, to the silence which equals death.

Frau Beckmann puts down the laundry as automatically as she received it, and resumes her rhythmic labor at the scrubbing board, until its repetitive sound is interrupted by another sound signal, the cuckoo of her cuckoo clock. Burch has described the primary formal structure of *M* as an interaction between continuity and discontinuity – that is, between sequences which are based primarily on spatial discontinuity (usually some form of parallel editing) and scenes which unroll within a relatively unified and continuous scenic space.[13] Whereas the classical Hollywood film of the sound era tends to privilege continuity, made up mainly of a succession of scenes acted out within a basically continuous space and time, *M* privileges discontinuity, creating a series of sequences which intercut actions in different locations. It is not until the police raid on the underworld hang-out that *M* presents a scene that is not intercut with another location. Intercutting continues after that scene (as in the famous alternation between the police and the crooks as each side tries to come up with a method for finding the child murderer), but Burch sees a progression toward a greater reliance on continuous scenes, culminating in the lengthy 'trial scene' at the end of the film where Beckert confronts the mob in one long-lasting continuous scene. The pattern of intercutting to other spaces in *M* begins with this first sequence, as we cut between Elsie's mother and Elsie's (interrupted) journey home from school.

But the moment and means by which Lang first introduces a parallel cut to another space demand scrutiny. In the first four shots of the film Lang has taken us on a tour of the living space of the *Mietkaserne*, moving step by step from exterior to interior, from courtyard, to landing, to stairway, through a doorway and into the Beckmann apartment. Now he embeds this domestic space within the city as a whole, using first sound, then editing, and relying on the most persistent of Langian objects – a clock. Lang cuts from a closer shot of Frau Beckmann bent over her scrubbing board to a shot from her point of view of the ornate cuckoo clock on her wall as she hears it mark the hour of noon. But over the shot of Frau Beckmann's

touchingly kitschy clock (another one of the striking details that capture the milieu of this tenement family), we also hear, a few seconds later, the booming bell of a larger clock, coming from a church or municipal building somewhere within the city space off screen, outside this apartment. Following the sound, Lang cuts from Frau Beckmann smiling and flicking the soap from her hands to a long shot of the city street in front of the school (the sound of the hour being struck now much louder in this public space and mingling with the beeping car horns of passing traffic) as parents stand waiting for their children to emerge.

I have claimed the city could be seen as the protagonist of this film; while this may put undue strain on the term 'protagonist', there is no question that, at least in these early sequences, Lang does not simply use spatial discontinuity as a formal device, but as the strongest means to create a sense of the space of a city, made up of locations separated from each other, but also interconnected. This atomisation of the city is portrayed by the merging of two Langian techniques: the topographic view and parallel editing. Although the topographical view primarily appears as the overhead god-like perspective that Lang adopts in the film's first shot, it also becomes a less literal means of portraying the city space as a diagrammatic, patterned environment, easily figurable in maps and diagrams, highly rationalised and rendered as both clearly visible and ordered. Parallel editing, although sometimes used for suspense (as in the intercutting between Beckert and the mob in the ransacking of the office building), or as an ideological comparison (as in the cutting between the meetings of criminals and police), provides a primary way of creating this urban topology.

As in the technologically interdependent robberies and raids of the master criminal films, Lang creates a modern environment in which every space interacts with and affects every other one. As in Mabuse's first robbery, Lang uses the clock and modern standard time as a way to interrelate this atomised but interconnected space. Thus, as Frau Beckmann hears the chime of the noon clock, announcing the imminent return of her daughter for lunch, we cut to other parents gathered at the school for the same reason at the same moment. As Georg Simmel pointed out, clock time holds together and regulates the life of the metropolis.[14] But although Frau Beckmann shares time and a concern for her daughter with the other people in the city, there is no true communication between them. The shot of parents in front of the school shows people arranged in independent clumps, not talking to each other, not interacting. The brilliance of Lang's urban topography is that it shows people united in patterns, yet alienated and separate from each other. What they share most deeply as city dwellers is their loneliness and their fear.

The chiming of the city clock continues over the next shot of Frau Beckmann tasting the soup she has prepared for her daughter. From this point until the last five shots of the sequence Lang sets up a very clear pattern of shot by shot alternation, but it does not always involve cutting to another location. Lang cuts constantly from Frau Beckmann to a shot associated with Elsie. In some cases he cuts directly to Elsie – as in the shot which follows immediately: Elsie stepping off the sidewalk near her school, nearly being hit by a car that enters from off screen and then being led across the street by a policeman; or the next pair of shots which cut from Frau Beckmann setting the table to Elsie bouncing her ball and her encounter with Beckert as a looming shadow over the *Litfassäulen*, the circular advertising pillar which bears an announcement of his last murders. But sometimes, as in the following four shots, Lang stays within the space of the apartment, intercutting Frau Beckmann (the anchor of the sequence) with shots that do not show Elsie directly, but rather picture *her absence*. Thus we cut from Frau Beckmann cutting up vegetables for Elsie's soup to her point of view of the clock, now showing 12:20. While the earlier shot of the clock announced Elsie's arrival, this one indicates her delay, her *not* showing up at the appointed time. Sounds coming from the landing (off screen) cause Frau Beckmann to leave the apartment in the next shot and go out there. The following shot of two girls running up the stairs once again shows Elsie's absence: she is not with the girls, as they turn and explain in response to Frau Beckmann's off screen question.

The next pair of shots restores the cutting between distant locations as the cut from Frau Beckmann standing on the landing, first looking up towards the girls, then down into the stairwell, then returning inside. She is filmed from a low angle. The following shot shows Elsie and Beckert purchasing a balloon from the blind toy-seller. It is shot from a high angle, as if matching Frau Beckmann's point of view as she looks down into the stairwell, but the match is not only misleading, it is almost cruel. This scene is precisely what Frau Beckmann *cannot* see (think of her final line which ends the film: 'we should keep better watch on our children'). The high angle surveys the scene, but offers only an obscure view of Beckert from the back. The shot ends as he begins whistling his theme, 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' from the *Peer Gynt* suite; Elsie curtsies and thanks him as he leads her off.

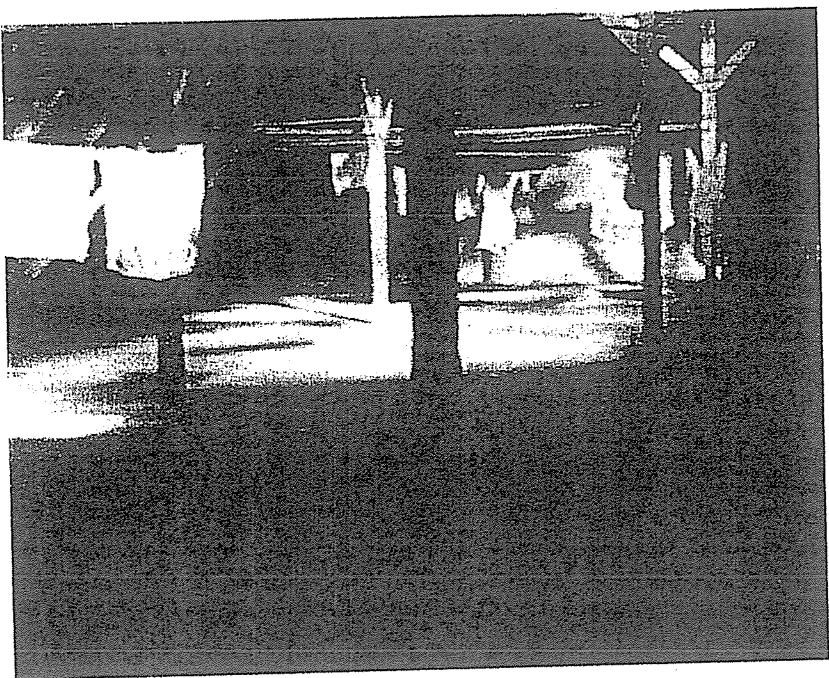
The harsh door bell sounding from off screen opens the shot which returns to Frau Beckmann as she puts the soup tureen on the stove to keep it warm. She crosses to the door, clearly hoping this will be Elsie, only to find a man delivering a new 'thrilling and sensational' instalment of a *feuilleton*. This man has not seen Elsie either and as he continues on his rounds Frau Beckmann walks again onto the landing, ending the shot by looking down into the stairwell. The next shot supplies the point of view shot withheld in the previous pair of shots: a nearly overhead shot of the stairwell, the stages of stairs creating a series of nested quadrilaterals, almost spiral-like in their vertiginous emptiness. This empty shot – empty, that is, of the very thing Frau Beckmann searches for there, Elsie – continues the alternation between mother and images either of her child, her expected arrival, or her prolonged absence. In its stark, almost Expressionistic (yet totally rooted within a realist environment) geometry and abstraction, this shot presents the harshest image yet of Elsie's absence. The mother calls her child's name over this shot for the first time.

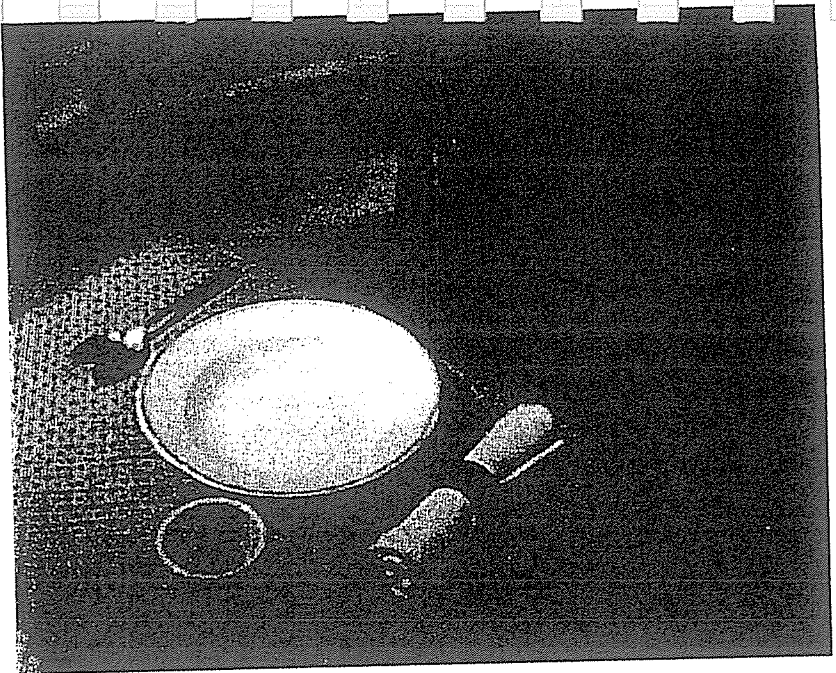
The next pair of shots shows Frau Beckmann's return from the landing, shutting the door to her apartment and looking off screen left. The complementary shot provides her point of view of the cuckoo clock (the third shot of the clock in the sequence), which now reads 1:15. The clock no longer marks an anticipated return and break in the routine of housework, or the first stirrings of anxiety. Frau Beckmann reads on its face not just the time but Elsie's prolonged absence and her own growing fear. With a mechanical indifference that seems almost like mockery, the clock strikes the quarter hour.

The cut back to Frau Beckmann shows her twisting her hands on her apron in anxiety. As if drawn by the sound of a peddler calling his wares outside, she walks over towards the kitchen window, the camera panning with her; she opens it and leans out, calling again 'Elsie, Elsie!' The five shots which follow bring this sequence to its end and break the consistent alternation between shots of Frau Beckmann and images associated with Elsie. Frau Beckmann calls Elsie's name five times, twice in this shot of her at the window, her voice becoming progressively more shrill and desperate, never receiving an answer. The cries cluster over the first two shots, while the last three unroll in silence, the silence which is most certainly death.[15]

The first shot seems almost like a stutter in the film's editing. Instead of Frau Beckmann's point of view outside the building, we see the stairwell again, an exact repetition of the earlier shot, but its repetition makes its dizzying geometry even more insistent and inhuman, bereft of the desired child or any other presence. In the following shot Frau Beckmann's voice penetrates into the attic where laundry is drying (as Kuntzel points out laundry is one of the threads weaving through the sequence).[16] This is a deep, cavernous space (it anticipates the cellar that ends the film as well as the office building attic in which Beckert will hide from the mob: liminal, hollow places where people do not ordinarily gather). Deep in the backgrounds we see a child's playsuit hanging. In its poignancy and its growing bitterness the shot recalls a line from an early Brecht poem: '…in the attic/Where they hang the washing up to dry and let it piss'.[17] Although this space is presumably at some distance from the Beckmann apartment, the mother's voice is heard in growing terror. The next shot returns to the Beckmann apartment, but not to Frau Beckmann, who seems herself to disappear from this film, as if expiring in the last gasp of her call. Instead, we see Elsie's place at table, her spoon, soup bowl and rolled-up napkin forming a perfect still life, like the many geometrically precise arrangements of objects that Lang delights in introducing in this film. But this is not simply an aesthetic arrangement. Prepared with motherly care in anticipation of her child's return, it now speaks only of her absence. Like the empty place left at the table at the inn by the disappearing lover in *Der müde Tod*, the image bodes the presence of death in this emptiness. An uninvited and invisible guest has taken its place at Elsie's table. As Kuntzel says, the emptiness previously glimpsed outside the apartment has now entered into the centre of the Beckmann home.[18]

The final two shots of the sequence move not only outside, but presumably far away. The sequence has moved from a city courtyard filled with children to a





suburban area covered with scrub brush. From off screen, out from some shrubbery, rolls the ball Elsie bounced on her way from school. This shot, looking down at the ground, is paired with a second shot looking up at the sky framed by a utility pole, as the balloon Beckert bought for Elsie (possessing a grotesque humanoid shape, a round head with goggle eyes, a bulbous body and dangling arms and legs) is caught in the power lines. The breeze shifts and the balloon is freed, ascending out of the frame as the shot fades to black. These images present Elsie's murder, an event which, as Lang frequently said, could only be imagined, not pictured.[19] They depict what has happened just off screen, close by, previous to these shots, but very recently. They are, as Lang says, very concrete and material signs of her death,[20] but also of the emptiness that surrounds it, the lack of human agents or victims rendering it not more palatable, but more deadly and chilling. The inanimate motion in these shots, the ball rolling to a halt, the balloon carried by the wind, emphasises their distance from the human. Lang's tendency, especially since *Spies*, to replace people with objects evinces a new degree of pain in this scene.

Frau Beckmann holds this sequence together, provides its centre. But the sequence extends beyond her, stretching towards her daughter as she awaits her arrival. The mother's consciousness stretches through the city, searching out her daughter, but the city evades her knowledge. The clock-time which regulates the city's space gradually becomes a figure of terror, the Destiny-machine which in this film cannot be claimed by anyone completely, least of all the three characters in this first sequence. The city is first imaged as a space of shared sound, the chiming of the clock which aligns people in carrying out their daily tasks. But ultimately the city becomes a space that sound cannot penetrate. Elsie cannot hear her mother's voice calling her from the window, just as her mother cannot see her from her vantage point. The indeterminate place where Elsie is killed (Marie calls it '*terrain vague*')[21]

becomes precisely distance itself, the wasteland, the space of separation that Martin Buber refers to: 'We say "far away". The Zulu has for that a word which means in our sentence form: 'There where someone cries out: "Oh Mother, I am lost."'[22]

But if Frau Beckmann represents the anchor of this sequence (one unfortunately from which Elsie becomes unmoored), the narrative motor, the disturbing element which upsets the equilibrium of daily routine and moves us into the story, from the typical to the unique and sensational, is Hans Beckert, as yet unnamed, except as the *schwarze Mann* (black man, 'man in black') invoked by the children's rhyme. As the anchor to the sequence, Frau Beckmann is visible in nearly half (twelve) of the shots of this twenty-six-shot sequence. In her motherly concern for her child's nourishment and safety, her weary but strong physicality, she is palpably present in the sequence. The *schwarze Mann*, in contrast, is seen directly in only one shot of the sequence (the high angle long shot where he buys Elsie a balloon, which doesn't show his face clearly), but he haunts the whole sequence, permeates it with his absence, his invisible but looming threat.

The introduction of Beckert is justly famous for its dramatic use of off screen space and sound: his shadow looms into the frame, threateningly cast on the police poster describing his crimes and offering a reward for his apprehension, while his surprisingly unthreatening voice compliments Elsie (also off screen) on her lovely ball and asks her name. Besides the cultural association of shadows with evil (and the literalisation of 'schwarze Mann' in this dark silhouette), Lang images Beckert as somehow abstract and insubstantial, in contrast to Frau Beckmann's maternal presence. He does not appear directly in the frame, but only as a shadow and a disembodied voice. Further, this shadow rests upon another indirect representation of Beckert, the poster which describes his deeds. Beckert is a compound of signs of identity and this describes one problem propelling the film story: focusing a range of identifying marks onto Beckert's elusive body, a task achieved only when Heinrich will reverse the situation of this shot (Beckert's dark shadow obscuring the words which accuse him) by imprinting a letter, M, on his dark body.

If Beckert is visible in only one shot, many shots in the sequence evoke him, although not as powerfully as this shadow. Clearly the final shots of the sequence invoke his actions as much as they do Elsie's death (Kuntzel sees the ball rolling to a stop and the fluttering balloon not so much as replacement images of Elsie's death-throes as of Beckert's spasm of pleasure).[23] One of the scandals of *M* lies in the strong relation the children have to their murderer. The first reference to Beckert comes from their mouths as they chant the rhyme the adults do not want to hear. The pleasure the children get from evoking this bogeyman is obvious, and the chant and circle game has a ritual dimension, becoming a chilling invocation of terror. Viewed from above, this circle of children recalls the circular pattern of hands similarly viewed from above in the seance sequence of *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*. The children in their innocence call up this figure who destroys them. I am far from blaming the victims here, since I am not dealing with any normal causality which would carry responsibility. Rather children have a bond with the *schwarze Mann*, as they do with all monsters.

Beckert's pleasure in those things that children love forms part of this bond. Like them, he loves sweet things, powdered sugar and tropical fruit, and most especially toys. His admiration of Elsie's ball, his choice of a balloon that would fascinate any child in its grotesque and comic semi-human physiognomy, all of this joined with Lorre's unique voice and physical appearance mark him as belonging in some way to the child's world of immediate gratification; the exact opposite of the voice of the adult world in the opening shot which calls from above in an irritated voice and commands them to stop their songs and game. Any child would think this woman hated children and that Beckert with his immediate engagement with a child's game loves them. The final shots of the sequence do join Beckert and Elsie through their toys, their games; but Beckert unfortunately is not a true child, but an adult whose only means of penetrating a child's world is through their physical destruction. Nonetheless Lang maintains this unique portrayal of Beckert, as alternately a spirit or demon invoked by the children, somehow insubstantial, appearing and disappearing, and as an overgrown child, simultaneously touching and repulsive, powerless and threatening.

M delivers Lang's ultimate vision of urban space, and that encompasses his vision of modern space. I have traced out a transition in the underlying structures of his German films from the semantically rich references of allegory to the more formal and logical networks of modern space based on surveillance and communication found in the urban thrillers. Do these two models have anything in common? They represent totally different ways of organising the world, one, ultimately religious and the other, secular; one, composed of images and figures that refer back to master narratives such as the Bible or mythology; the other, seemingly bereft of narrative and engaged in a purely geometrical subdivision and mastery of information and populations. But Lang reveals their common abstraction and common reliance on a deathly emptiness. The frozen, airless quality that Benjamin finds in allegory becomes a prefiguration of the modern landscape. The death's head that Benjamin finds lurking behind allegory's emblems, Lang reveals as well in the arrangement of the modern city. As Benjamin intuited a relation between baroque allegory and modernist practices, Lang's career demonstrates the progression from one to the other. Ultimately the modern space of *M*, as the opening sequence shows, is read allegorically as well, as the space which measures separation and death.

It is important, therefore, to deal briefly with the film Lang made between *Spies* and *M*, his last silent film, *The Woman in the Moon*. I find this Lang's least successful silent film, a judgement largely based on fairly conventional criteria, those things for which Eisner also criticises it ('lack of sustained suspense').[24] However, prompted largely by comments by Raymond Bellour, I realised I should try to come to terms with it.[25] I discovered that while the film still fails for me as a dramatic work, it represents an ideal point in Lang's work, an experimental extreme, from which I think *M* both profits – and reacts against. Truly this is a film in which Lang seems to bypass character in favour of a drama of technology. The lack of drama or complex psychology in the characters tips its dramaturgy back towards allegory (indeed the drama that is enacted here recalls medieval allegories about Greed, such as Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale*).

The central set piece of the film, the launching of the rocket, pays almost no attention to personal drama, focusing instead on the pure spectacle of technology. With the countdown to launch making the Langian obsession with time into the literal substance of the drama, the massive crowds of spectators, the constant intercutting of clocks and dials, the slow rhythms of the rocket's approach into position, the roving beams of spotlights, the Destiny-machine emerges from being a background or subterranean force to take centre stage. More than anything in *Die Nibelungen* or *Metropolis*, this seems to be, in fact, the sequence in Lang's work that most anticipates *Triumph of the Will*. The radio announcer standing before his microphone and dramatically narrating the spectacle to the masses who watch in

hyper-enthusiasm – these are the images of mass [illegible] Rutsky noted the lack of in *Metropolis*, if a comparison to Nazi spectacles were made.[26] We see here the masses of *Metropolis* not only pacified but energised, enjoying themselves, having been transformed into spectators of the wonders of technology rather than simply its slaves (but is there a difference?). *M* will provide the flip-side of this vision of united masses as spectators of technology's spectacles, with the image of city inhabitants as isolated, atomised individuals under a regime of terror. The two images present the public and private face of living under fascism as the nightmare of modernity.

In addition, *The Woman in the Moon* is a film about space, in both senses of the word, and therefore Lang's most abstract film. As Jacques Rivette stated, in *The Woman in the Moon* 'the plot primarily served Lang as a pretext for his first attempt at a *totally closed* world',[27] only, instead of enclosure, I would stress the sense of space as total separation, in this film which does paradoxically conflate agoraphobic fear of infinite extension with a claustrophobic fear of entrapment. No other Lang film so thoroughly indulges his love of the diagram, the abstract representation of space. The topographical view from above, the nearly two-dimensional images – not only the actual diagrams and animations in the film, but also the spaceship hurtling across a dark void – the vast expanses of highly illuminated emptiness that form the moon's terrain, all these devices accumulate in this film to create a feeling of agoraphobia, of a Pascalian fear of space itself, of its infinite quantity and extension. If the crowds and radio announcer greet the moon shot as a triumphant moment, the space-travellers themselves experience it in two primary ways; loss of consciousness and terror. Only the old man who goes mad with enthusiasm and, to some extent, the boy, express delight in this voyage.

Lang described his own inspiration for the film as coming from the experience of falling asleep in a train, 'the consciousness to be carried from one place to another without having anything else to do but lie still dreaming'.[28] The key role loss of consciousness plays in the rocket trip to the moon offers experiences such as sleep (and dreams), hypnosis and a consciousness outside of space and time as an analogue of space travel. Even the supposed Langian invention of the countdown recalls certain hypnotic techniques, while the constantly revolving surface of the moon outside the window as they begin to land is almost unwatchable without at least some dizziness (part of my problem with the film has always been that it makes me incredibly drowsy – bored? or something more trance-like?)

Loss of consciousness evokes regression, and the title along with the usual cultural associations of the moon invokes the idea of returning to the mother (notice how the final shot of Helius and Freide alone on the moon as he places his head against her breast recalls the regressive gestures Kracauer analysed in the earlier Weimar 'Street films', which he glossed as 'the desire to return to the maternal womb').[29] But if this regressive fantasy drives the film, Lang seems to express terror rather than comforting submission at this breaching of primal repression. Space travel for Lang entails a space of separation, rather than reunion, and it is this primal terror that drives his characters crazy. The fantasy of returning to the mother evokes the primal trauma of separation. Stated explicitly by most of the characters, it is perhaps most beautifully portrayed when the crew find the boy stowaway and he brings out his comic books to prove he has been studying the moon for a long time. The first images of monsters cause laughter, but the last image of a spaceman parachuting from the moon to earth stops the merriment. Like the fiery brand cast into the lunar cave only to disappear into nothingness, [illegible] mately this is Lang's most inhuman film, but also a revelatory one, outer space becomes his ultimate nightmare: a world made of emptiness and separation where no-one can hear you scream, 'Oh mother I am lost'.

Formed in Fright: The Topography of Terror

> The wasteland grows. Woe to him that hides wastelands within.
>
> Nietzsche

The 'Murder of Elsie Beckmann', the first sequence of *M*, ends with persistent images of emptiness, standing in as images of grief, violence, desire and death, with all three of the suffering and tormented characters – Elsie, her mother and her murderer – exiled from the screen in their paroxysms of sorrow, death and desire – pushed into a space we cannot see, but which echoes through and reverberates within these empty shots. We are left only with places and objects, mementos of the characters we have lost and of the horrors that have taken place. Perverse desire, mother love, childish delight, growing anxiety and terror have snaked their way through the city space Lang has laid out topographically and we are left with this *terrain vague*, this wasteland which grows in the middle of the metropolis.

The following two sequences extend Lang's topographical portrayal of city space, of the interconnections and atomisation of the world of the metropolis, a space gridded and integrated, yet strangely blind to itself, unaware of what happens within it. As Anton Kaes has said, 'Lang's unstated project in *M* – a portrayal of the inherent relation between urban living and danger – is made all the more terrifying by the anonymity and disintegration of the city's social space'.[30] As Kaes shows in his brilliant comparison between Lang and Ernst Junger, for Lang (and here the psychology of Weimar Germany is truly laid bare) city space has become a space of danger and, indeed, of warfare. The city in *M*, as Kaes puts it, is mobilised, that condition of constant fear and readiness which Junger saw as the necessary state of modern man who never moves out of a state of warfare and danger.[31] In *M*, fear simultaneously unites the city in a common emotion, and fragments it, providing, not community, but mutual suspicion.

Like the first sequence, the second sequence of *M*, which Burch nicely titles 'Fear Spreads in the City',[32] begins with sound coming over (or out of) a dark frame, the fade to black which ended Elsie's life and the first sequence. But instead of a child's nursery rhyme we hear the voice of the city, a carefully orchestrated mounting chorus of news vendors, their diverse voices competing with each other and with car horns, announcing an extra edition. The image fades in, showing another high angle shot looking down on a city street as people rush to buy the papers. The second shot, still from a high angle, though somewhat closer to the action, shows a vendor surrounded by people anxious for news, their comments blending with the vendors' hawking. We hear the question 'Who is the murderer?' and Lang cuts to a shot of Beckert, hunched over the windowsill in his apartment, only his back and the top of his head visible.

The sequence shows the sort of sound links and rhymes we traced in Lang's following film *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. As in that film (and indeed in all his

master criminal films) Lang cuts on the question 'Who is the murderer' (in those films the question is: who is behind all this?) to the perpetrator. But whereas in the master criminal films, the cut expressed the power of the criminal, something else is at issue here. Lorre is writing a letter (a sort of confession, yet an anonymous one) to the press (a word he underlines twice, along with the words *I* and *end*), whistling his *Peer Gynt* leitmotiv. The link holding these shots together is the circulation of information through the city by means of newspapers. Like all modern metropolises Berlin is a city hungry for and inundated by information. But the way this flow of information interrelates essentially alienated individuals is attested to by Beckert's letter, his desire to communicate to the press, to participate in this flow of information, yet remain anonymous.

The following shots continue the links between voices, as sentences are continued and complemented by a series of different speakers. Once again the formal device serves to create the topography of urban information. We cut from Beckert's handwritten text to a printed poster giving the details of the latest murder surrounded by a turbulent crowd, jostling for a better view, the sound of a voice reading the poster overlapping with the end of the shot of Beckert writing. Bystanders ask someone in front to read the poster, which a voice does as the camera pulls back through the layers of people. Some descriptions of the film claim the voice of a radio announcer intervenes here,[33] which would continue the theme of the expansion of information through diverse media, but I confess I don't hear this transition. The reading of the poster mixes into another voice reading the same information which in the next shot is revealed to be a man at a bar reading a newspaper (the overlapping dialogue in these shots, sound preceding the actual cut to another shot, underscores the circulation of information).

The following succession of brief scenes which make up this less than six-minute sequence demonstrates the divisive, rather than community-building effect of the information and the fear it breeds. Lang presents a series of vignettes of typical scenes as the city is gripped by fear. This atomistic narrative approach (each scene has different characters and we never see any of them again) further articulates the fragmentary nature of the citizens of the metropolis, not only mutually suspicious of each other, but each absorbed in their own dramas and reactions to the crisis. Yet every scene is overtly linked by overlapping and rhyming sounds. A group of caricatured bourgeois men (looking like a George Grosz drawing brought to life) seated around a bar table listen as one of them reads a newspaper article which emphasises the deceptive nature of appearances ('candy, a toy, a piece of fruit can be the murderer's weapon'), and asks again the question, 'who is the murderer?' The article adds, 'He is one of us. Your neighbor could be the murderer.'

One of the men nods agreement and accuses a man across the table of being the murderer. The angry pair are separated by the other men, and the accused's cry, 'Slanderer!' is picked up by another voice as Lang cuts to an apartment being searched by a detective and a man, the source of the exclamation, enters from off screen, furious that an anonymous letter has denounced him and prompted the police investigation. The detective's voice explaining that they must follow up every lead because 'any man on the street could be the guilty one' overlaps the cut, with the next shot, showing a 'man in the street' as the phrase 'the guilty one' is heard on the soundtrack. Lang presents another vignette as a young girl asks this old man for the time and bystanders view this innocent conversation with suspicion and confront the man. A crowd gathers, getting progressively more excited and accusing the man of being the murderer. The crowd calls for a police officer. Lang cuts to another high angle topographical view, this time of a double-decker bus with a police officer coming down the stairs apparently in response to the call. But this is another example of the misleading links, the delayed comprehension, discussed earlier in relation to *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*.[34] This officer is actually arresting a pickpocket caught on the bus. But our mistake is taken up by the crowd waiting to board the bus. When the pickpocket tells the cop he should be out catching the child murderer, the crowd hears only this word and begins pummelling the pickpocket, assuming he is the murderer. Truly the murderer is 'one of us'. In a succession of scenes, Lang shows four different people accused by their fellow city inhabitants. 'One of us' becomes 'the guilty one'. The anonymous crowd cloaks the murderer from detection, but also renders everyone suspicious.

The following sequence (called by Burch 'Police Procedures and their Inefficiency')[35] presents another topographical view of the city and the process of looking for the murderer by intercutting various sequences in diverse locations. In contrast to the process of gossip, accusation and misrecognition in the previous sequence, this sequence follows a rational procedure, the police investigation. Yet this process gets no nearer to the murderer than the actions of blind suspicion and the same fragmented, alienated population is revealed. The sequence opens by picking up and resolving the elements which began the last one. We see Beckert's letter now printed in the newspaper, returning us to the themes of mass media that opened the second sequence. But a hand holding a pince-nez enters the frame and we are pushed into the next sequence, as a government minister berates the chief of police over the phone about the progress of the investigation. This sequence, the most freely roving in *M* in terms of urban space, will be mediated and portrayed through this phone call.

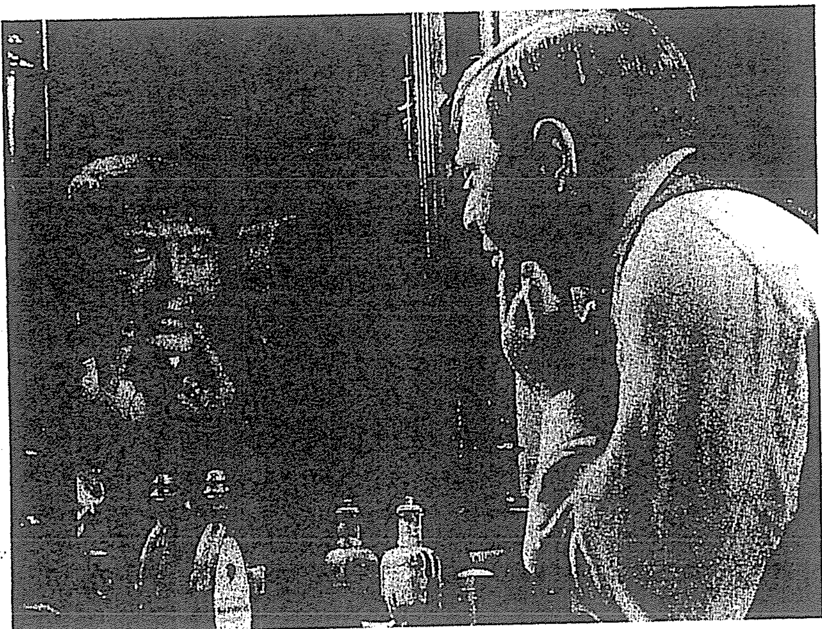
Lang demonstrates again his understanding of the technological nature of the modern terrain. But this sequence contrasts sharply with the phone call which culminates the opening robbery of *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*; it does not narrate a moment of intense suspenseful action. Instead, we watch a conversation between a government minister and a subordinate in bureaucratic hierarchy. The sequence is primarily retrospective, as the police chief describes actions they have already taken, providing a systematic description of police procedure. The phone conversation, linking speakers separated in space, naturalises and accelerates the discontinuity evident in the previous sequences, allowing Lang to cut very freely through space (and presumably time) as the exposition of the investigation converts the city into a series of charts and maps, a rational order designed to discover the anonymous murderer, separating him from the masses he dwells among. Lang capitalises on the telephone's extension through space and its role as a network to make his own connections between separate shots taking place in different locations. The phone call brings coherence to this highly discontinuous sequence through another innovative use of sound: the separation of voice from a speaker's bodily presence. We hear the police chief's voice-over as we see the scenes he describes, an innovative technique for the period. The frequent cuts back to the police chief pull these brief bits together, so that he behaves like a sort of switchboard, directing the audience through the shots with his spoken commentary.

The first section of the phone conversation dwells on the processing of evidence, specifically the murderer's letter to the press which prompts the minister's call. We saw this letter as Beckert wrote it; then we saw it reproduced photographically in the newspaper, part of the circulation of news. Now we see it dissected and analysed, scrutinised for clues it might hold beneath its ostensible message. The sequence

recalls the processing of information in *Spies* and especially Tremaine's telegraph message. But translation here is not so simple, since the enigma lies not in the meaning of the message but the identity and intentions of its author.

The first cut from the phone call to the images that illustrate it presents a shot of a dossier of fingerprints as the police chief speaks of the difficulty in getting clear prints from Beckert's letter. (Lang's sense of humour is wonderfully – if almost subliminally – evident here: the dossier is for a crook known as 'Four-Fingered Ernst' and the blotter shows four prints with an empty space where the print of the forefinger would be!) As the chief describes the need to compare any print with the prints in their archive, a magnifying glass sweeps over this file and Lang cuts to one of the most famous shots in the film, a police officer writing at a desk as an enormous projection of a fingerprint fills the frame above him, numbered lines pointing out key features. The contrast in scale, the man dwarfed by the huge fingerprint, expresses the power of this processing of identity, the print itself a sort of diagram or blueprint of the individual as caught within the police archives of information and its processing.

Then the handwriting of the letter is scrutinised, the chief's voice-over saying it was sent to a graphologist. Lang cuts to this expert pacing and dictating his report to a female secretary (the process of transcribing is omnipresent) as he claims the shape of the letters reveal a perverse sexuality. The close-up of the writing fills the screen as the graphologist's voice-over continues. But as he ties these letters to the personality of an actor ('*Schauspieler*') Lang cuts to the most direct view of the murderer so far in the film. Beckert is still given to us in a mediated fashion, since we see his face most clearly reflected in a mirror. The shot is chilling, as Beckert appears first to admire himself in the mirror (the apparent narcissism matching the graphologist's claim of an actor's personality), his lowered eyelids and half-opened mouth expressing an almost masturbatory pleasure in his own visage. But then he



uses his fingers to distort his face into a wide-mouthed grimace, his bulging eyes widening as well, converting his previously smugly handsome face into a child's mask, the face of a bogeyman. The graphologist summarises that the writing shows undoubted signs of insanity.

This single shot holds a strange position within this sequence. Everything else portrays facts the police chief knows. This shot exceeds his knowledge. The voice-over which accompanies it is not, in fact, that of the chief, but of the graphologist. His voice leads us into it, but this image, in contrast to the words of Beckert's letter, exceeds his knowledge, showing us things he can only hint at. It would be hard to exhaust or even inventory all the energies released by this shot, our first clear view of the film's shadowy title character. Some of the meanings rest on the surface: Beckert is narcissistic; he is insane; he is split in two, like a *doppelgänger* or a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. But his effort to move from a self-image that enraptures him to one which terrifies (him as well?) reaches to the core of his horror. If he is an actor, he is one who performs entirely for himself. In his loneliness, his alienation, the restricted scope and poverty of his anonymous life, he performs spectacular dramas before his mirror. The actor solicits the gaze of others. But M keeps out of sight, hiding throughout the film, afraid to be seen. But alone he displays to himself his own desires. What drama does he perform? Although Beckert is silent in this shot, the only other sound we have heard from him (or will hear from him for many scenes to come) may offer a strong clue. Maria Tatar pointed out that in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Grieg's 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' introduces the sequence where Peer comes to the royal hall of the trolls, who try to transform him into a monster.[36] Although I find her final explication of this wanting, she provides a key insight into Beckert's private drama. Peer comes to ask the king of the trolls for a bride, and must answer correctly the riddle: What is the difference between men and trolls – 'As far as I can see none at all. Big trolls will roast you and little trolls claw you; and we'd be the same – if we dared.'[37] These motifs and Peer's final attempt to escape when the trolls insist on taking out his eyes, all have resonance in Beckert's fantasy life, as we shall see.

What we see in the mirror in horrifying compression is the essence of Beckert's private drama which begins with attraction and ends with repulsion and self-horror. In the private theatre of the mirror Beckert enacts his own transformation into a monster. While he has escaped the gaze of others, he is still imprisoned within his own gaze. This is the most terrifying drama of childhood, the vision of the monster who only appears when one is entirely alone – the bogeyman whom one cannot flee from, because it is one's self. Lorre here is trapped within the reciprocity of his own gaze. He cannot hide from this monster's eyes; the horrifying face that stares out from the mirror is so terrifying because it is a face terrified by itself. The graphologist's analysis of Beckert's handwriting cannot take us into this vision, but Lang/Harbou can, and do.

Lang needs to return us to the prosaic world of the phone conversation after this interior climax, and he cuts back to the minister and then the chief, as the minister demands 'results' and the chief reacts with frustration. The images that follow under his voice-over are more simply illustrative, showing the police stations manned around the clock. The processing of minute details is then shown: a high angle, topographical view of a crime-scene with detectives combing the area, taking photographs, brushing for fingerprints and poking into the bushes. From this rather distant, wide angle view Lang cuts to a close-up of a candy bag handled almost surgically by a detective with forceps. The cut between these two shot sizes is unusual, because it eliminates the focus on the human face and figure which makes

the medium shot the most frequent framing of classical film-making. Lang cuts directly from the topographical high angle long shot to a close-up focused on a fragmentary clue. These are the essential spaces for the police investigation and the following shot literally inserts them into a broad rationalised view of the city under the lens of surveillance and investigation.

As the chief's voice-over continues its running commentary, Lang introduces a chart seen from above at an acute angle. In the centre is a three-dimensional mock-up of the locale where the clue was found, placed within a map of the neighbourhood. A compass uses the crime scene as a centre and describes circles around it, cutting through the city in widening radii. As the chief explains that they interrogated candy shop owners around the site in an ever-enlarging area, Lang cuts to a view of this chart from directly overhead: the crime-scene model becomes the centre of a bull's-eye of concentric circles traced by the seemingly huge compass. These images make literal the topographical view that underlies much of this film and its inherent abstraction. Viewed from above, the city becomes a pattern of lines and forms, intersections and borders, placed within the hard-edged geometry of the compass.

As in the visual abstractions that underlay his earlier allegorical films, these topographical views employ a vision which, like an x-ray, sees through appearances to essential structures. But, as in the technological environments of the master criminal films, in *M* this eye gazes upon a world already suffused with a will towards order and abstraction, the world of the modern city. These images of the city map anchor the logic of this sequence, its ability to coordinate different phases of the investigation as points within a larger plan or system. But the juxtaposition of these shots depicting order to the earlier shot of Beckert making faces in the mirror highlights their disparity. Can this rational order truly encompass the acting-out of horrific scenes of perverse desire? Or does this world of abstract order present the negative of *M*'s fantasy world – a rationalised space where desire is driven underground, made to hide out in the most private and repressed atmosphere, taking on monstrous shapes and distortions?

Even the chief's narration admits the irrelevance of these techniques to the complexities of the case, pronouncing their task hopeless. In a series of three silent shots, a succession of ordinary citizens manning candy stores and snack shops, shake their heads and indicate they saw, or remembered, nothing. The blindness and anonymity of the modern city defeats its rational order of investigation. The final section of the conversation juxtaposes witnesses who did see something, but can't agree on what it was, and images of the police combing the city, walking in closed ranks through the underbrush of parks, checking flophouses and underworld hang-outs. The topographical view of the city persists, but less as an effective tool than an image of the modern world, its archive of facts ('fifteen hundred clues, the documents fill over sixty volumes' explains the police chief), an attempt to make sense of this world, to force it to yield up its secrets.

As I have stated, the topographical dividing-up of urban space may be rendered starkly visible by the search for the child murderer, but it pre-exists it, inherent in the organisation of the modern city. Thus the sense of the extensive atomised and subdivided space of the city appears as much in the middle of the first sequence of a mother waiting for her child to return from school as it does in a police investigation. Lang portrays in *M* a systematic understanding of space and order, precisely the sort of modern space described by Henri Lefebvre, abstracted and subordinated to the needs of power.[38] But Lang also anticipates Foucault, not only in founding this modern space in actions of surveillance and the discursive organisation of the archive, but as thoroughly absorbed into the practices of everyday life. As Anton Kaes has pointed out, Junger's concept of 'Total Mobilization' not only compares the modern society to a state of constant warfare but reveals that these structures are founded on fear, and the terror occasioned by an anonymous serial killer simply throws them into relief. Describing the city-wide search in *M*, Kaes says:

> The mobilization produces a dense surveillance network aimed at making visible what has inexplicably evaded the tightly woven web of controls already in place: criminals and vagrants have identity papers (forgeries are easily detected as the film shows), they are registered and monitored, their fingerprints are recorded; asylums and hospitals keep records of their patients and their medical histories. Telephone lines link the population to the authorities and office buildings have alarm systems directly connected to police headquarters. Plain-clothed detectives control the street, searching in widening circles for every possible clue; neighbors watch each other; parents discipline their children to be wary; and even innocent bystanders are seen as potential suspects. Newspapers and extra editions keep everyone up-to-date at all times.[39]

These techniques of surveillance and order are practised by the whole society, including not only the forces of order, but even the supposed forces of chaos, the underworld.

The famous sequence in which Lang cuts between the meetings of the police and the crime bosses occurring simultaneously on the same subject, the apprehension of the murderer (in Burch's count, the fifth sequence which he entitles – a bit misleadingly since there is no common plan – 'The underworld and the police pull together' – *se concertent* in the original French)[40] not only displays a wonderfully witty cutting on gestures which ties the two groups together, but reveals their shared use of surveillance and control through hierarchialised power. Lang's master criminals have always ruled by their precise organisation and order; they are agents of fear, but not chaos. Although Mabuse's testament will speak of spreading chaos, it is part of a carefully calibrated plan (as Baum describes it, 'logical and indisputable') to attain the mastery of crime, crime as a total system. In a somewhat less theatrical manner, Schranker and his gang organise to restore 'normal' order to the city interrupted by Beckert's murders and the effects they produce. As Roger Dadoun has claimed, in *M* the mob reveals itself as the 'refraction, the imitation, the *counter-relief*' of the legal structures and official codes of power.[41]

Lang undertakes much of this comparison in the form of a parody (most obviously in the stock market blackboard of leftover food in the headquarters of the Beggars' Union where prices fluctuate in a parody of the stock market scene in *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*) inspired undoubtedly by Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera*. The opening of the fifth sequence takes on this parodic form as we see the gang members watching the police raid through binoculars (the surveillance of the underworld surveyed by the underworld) and showing a great concern about the exact time. Displaying Lang's fundamental synecdoches of the technological environment, the pickpocket calls the telephone operator for the exact time, then takes out a half dozen watches and sets them, discarding one which doesn't tick.

Schranker, the crime boss (whose black gloves Lang claimed telegraphed to the audience that he never leaves behind a fingerprint – a perfect example of the underworld as the counter-relief of police procedures)[42] runs the meeting like a chairman

of the board, referring to procedures and assuring proper representation at the meeting of each branch of the professions, as well as corporate concerns about funding and public image (in contrast to charismatic master criminals like Haghi and Mabuse who rule their underlings by mystification and fear as much as organisation), denouncing the murderer as an 'outsider' not belonging to their organisation who is disrupting the normal flow of business. Lang begins the intercutting between Schranker's meeting and that of the police with a perfect match on action as Schranker's sweeping hand gesture and spoken sentence is completed in the following shot by the police chief, as both figures open the meeting to discussion. Initially the intercutting is shot by shot, so that police sometimes seem to answer crooks and vice-versa, as if they actually were planning a common strategy. The cops emphasise the problems already detailed in the police chief's previous phone conversation: the lack of public awareness, the unremarkable everyday appearance of the murderer. Smoke fills the respective meeting rooms as frustration builds. A police advisor locates the problem in the fact that the murderer and victim are linked by chance, part of the anonymity of the metropolis, and the murderer leaves no trace behind. The crooks pick up on this sense of contingency, saying that if the police catch the murderer, it will be by accident.

After a period of silent pacing and smoking in both meetings, courses of action are suggested. Both, in somewhat different ways, rely on the rational organisation of the modern city: the police on the archive of documents, the trace left behind by citizens even when they are determined to leave no clue; the crooks on direct visual surveillance of the city determined by a subdivision of urban space. Lohmann's off screen voice in the police meeting suggests that a person as disturbed as the murderer must have had contact with the law before and must have left a record. A systematic investigation of persons released from asylums and prisons must be undertaken. The crooks for their part decide they must apprehend the murderer by permanently watching every square foot of the city. Lang supplies one of his strongest topographical images, an overhead shot of a map of Berlin as Schranker's black-sheathed hand moves over it, pointing. The problem raised about his plan, however, is the same one solved by Bentham's panopticon: how to watch without being seen. Schranker's solution is brilliant, drawing on the blindness and lack of awareness of the modern city so often raised by this film. Who are the invisible people of the metropolis, omnipresent but never regarded? Its abject members, the beggars!

In this world of omnipresent order, even the abject are organised. Schranker can use the beggars not only because they are invisible, but because they are already an orderly systematic group that he can enroll. The process of assigning each beggar his 'square foot' of the city is shown in a convergence of the two emblems of this modern instrumental system: the map and the archive of identity. Lang's roving camera shows the queue of beggars appearing before a desk; a high angle shot shows another city map, demarcated by lines and figures, as each beggar is assigned a territory. The assignment is then recorded in a log book, giving the territory, the beggar's 'union number', and then his name. As in *Spies*, numbers can replace names, as they record one's identity as a place within an organisation, an archive.

Both investigations, police and underworld, leave a paper trace of their process and use the rationalised divisions of space and information as the scenario and guide for their processes. Lohmann receives in his office the list of patients released from mental hospitals, with a file of reports from every institution and another file giving the former patients' present addresses. However, Lang still indicates the porous nature of this web of information. He cuts from a shot of the list of addresses to an apartment building entrance approached by a detective. Lang shows the name on the doorbell (Elizabeth Winkler) then a close-up of the detective's handbook with a series of names crossed out, as he points to the next one on his list, 'Hans Beckert c/o Elizabeth Winkler Gelder St. 15, 2nd Floor'. The police have found Beckert's apartment and in the following scene will even invade his private theatre, the site of his writing and performances before the mirror. But they will not recognise it. And, even more ironically, at the beginning of the shot of the building entrance, we see Beckert go out just before the detective arrives. Many viewers of the film miss this appearance of Beckert, so anonymous is his appearance.

The seizing of Beckert in the office building by the underworld shows the ease of adaptation of the underworld to the systematic nature of modern order. The crooks even become nightwatchmen, making their rounds through the building so as not to set off the automatic alarm. Their adoption of this routine is signalled by another Langian shot of a chart showing the watchman's rounds and the locations of the time clock which must be punched periodically. This chart in the hands of the crooks is matched by the chart of the building in the hands of the cops when the alarm is triggered (the alarm sounds at headquarters and yields, in successive images: a number code, then a file card – with the building layout and location on the back). The crook's search is carefully timed, starting from Schranker's decision that it will begin precisely at eleven o'clock. He counts off the hours they have to wait, and the sequence opens with the chiming of a city clock (reviving not only the theme of time, but a motif from Elsie's murder). Once the alarm is set off, instead of fleeing in panic, Schranker insists they have five more minutes to finish the job. This temporal order mirrors the systematic spatial search of the building (as if Schranker's subdivision of the city for the beggars has shrunk to this one location), as he assigns people to each floor and area. His commands when the alarm is sounded: 'Five more minutes and six more compartments!' Beckert seized, the building is cleared as systematically as it was searched. Lang ends the sequence with a series of silent images showing no movement: the tied-up watchmen, forced doors, smashed partition, as an eerie quiet and stillness prevail.

Lang's new style of abstraction in *M*, epitomised by the high angle topographical shots, also shapes a technique closely related to these shots, and which will appear in nearly every film he makes after this: a high angle view of a complex, geometrically ordered arrangement of objects. In a sense the still life of Elsie's empty place at the table premieres this new device in Lang's *œuvre*. However, most of the arrangements are more complex and less domestic than this one. The first strong examples appear in the aftermath of the police raid on the underworld hang-out. After Lohmann and his cops have examined the papers of the denizens, booked a few and engaged in witty repartee, Lang shows a detective opening a case left behind by a customer, apparently considered to be incriminating evidence. The case unfolds to reveal an *etui* as carefully arranged as a surgeon's, holding every sort of burglary tool. The following shot pans across an extraordinary display of objects, the detritus of the raid, as hands enter placing new finds into precisely sorted categories: first, tools: a power drill, hammers, saws; then, weapons: automatics, revolvers, brass knuckles and knives; next, objects of value, presumably stolen: cigarette cases, spectacle frames, silverware, watches and jewellery, purses and wallets, furs. What is striking in this shot is not simply the accumulation of goods, but their artistic arrangement into symmetrical rows and stacks – hardly the sort of placement likely to result from a police raid. Lang's own obsession emerges here, as if the arrangements of actors typical of the

allegorical films – *Siegfried* and *Metropolis* especially – had become miniaturised and frozen. Lang now lavishes on objects the careful *mise-en-scène* his monumental crowd scenes received previously.

Our introduction into the Beggars' Hall shows one of these arrangements in the process of formation, as a beggar lays on a table a series of cigar and cigarette butts, precisely sorted according to the length and type of tobacco, symmetrically displayed. Other beggars, engaged in preparing the supply of leftover food, are arranging half-eaten sandwiches with the same decorative impulse. These arrangements reveal several things about Lang's topographic style. First, the primacy of geometry which rules all his German films can avoid a large-scale stylisation by moving into smaller-scale arrangements, while the sense of an abstract order viewed from an overhead point of view remains constant. Second, if Lang moves away from Expressionist influences to influences from the New Objectivity this move is facilitated by his fascination with objects as much as a turn towards greater realism. The objects which bore emblematic and often enigmatic meanings in the allegorical films here become increasingly opaque, material. As Lang stated in a later interview, 'In my films objects are signs, but very concrete signs.'[43] These still-life arrangements speak of a style that increasingly replaces people with objects, such as the reification underlying the horror of Elsie Beckmann's murder – transformed into a random play of objects, a ball and a balloon. Finally, these arrangements recall simultaneously the many diagrams and maps (often they interact with them, as in the still-life arrangement with map discovered on Dr. Baum's desk at the end of *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*) but also the key art of the modern consumer society, the arrangement of displayed goods in shop windows. Such windows also become a motif in Lang's films from *M* on, and the use made of them in this film stands at the centre of this modern topography where people and objects are interchangeable and desire is captured through a careful arrangement of things.

Der Schwarze Mann

> … it forced me, by what means I do not know, to lift my eyes
> and imposed on me an image, no, a reality, a strange,
> unbelievable and monstrous reality, with which, against my
> will I became permeated: for now the mirror was the
> stronger and I was the mirror.
>
> Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*[44]

Who is the murderer? This is the question that organises *M* temporally and spatially as a search for one man an attempt to give a criminal a name and a face; to make a criminal act yield up a personal identity: 'the guilty one'. Yet, as has been pointed out, *M* is not a murder mystery. We, the viewers, gradually learn the name and face of the guilty one, long before the other characters do. Rather than identifying the murderer from a range of suspects, this film traces the process of constructing an identity for the obviously guilty one, giving him both a name and a body. Although it may appear that the crime world's investigation is more successful than that of the police, both actually achieve different parts of the objective. Almost simultaneously the police give Beckert a name and address while the mob mark and seize his body. This process of constructing an identity for the murderer not only reveals the panoply of institutions and processes the modern state and metropolis possess for keeping track of their citizens, but also the fundamental loss of identity on which this modern institution is founded, the overwhelming anonymity and loss of a unique, individualised place within a community that necessitates the machinery of categorisation and surveillance. As in *Spies*, Lang reveals that the fixing and tracing of identity rests upon a previous effacement of the person and the community.

Lang's master criminals play on the labile quality of modern identity through a theatrical use of disguise. But Haghi showed that the best disguise is none at all, the ordinary face of an average man that hides behind the mask of Nemo, 'no-one'. However Beckert performs his transformation from nebbish to monster only for himself and his audience of single little girls. He is in many ways conceived as the antithesis of the master criminal. Mabuse speaks of becoming a giant, a titan; one poster for the premiere of *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler* (possibly patterned on a similar image for both the novel and film of *Fantomas*) shows him as a colossus striding over the city.[45] However Beckert needs no disguise to remain invisible because he is so insignificant and powerless. He cannot command underlings, mesmerise young men and police investigators, make women do his bidding through his charismatic indifference, command technology, or panic the stock market through his control of information. And yet he monopolises the media and terrifies an entire metropolis, upsetting its routines even more than Mabuse's campaign of organised terror. This is the final irony of Lang's German crime films: his least powerful, most anonymous character has the greatest effect.

If the sign of Mabuse or Haghi's power was their apparent omnipresence, their ability to exert their will across a vast terrain through either their criminal organisation, supernatural powers, or their mastery of technology, Beckert's unique ability to evade the forces searching for him comes from his ability to hide. Burch points out that an over-arching 'movement' persists throughout *M*: 'the gradual "unveiling" of the central character' through a series of appearances.[46] Equally importantly, his appearances most often are followed by disappearances, Beckert moving out of visibility. The murderer disappears even more powerfully than he appears, as his absence at the end of the first sequence shows us.

Beckert's initial appearances, as Burch notes, are shadowy, still 'veiled' and strongly visually mediated: he is seen as a shadow, from the back, in a mirror, almost unnoticed as he walks out of frame at the opening of a scene, shot through highly reflective window panes. But his disappearances, his ways of exiting from the scene, become more spectacular and even magical in the second half of the film. After Beckert's first extended sequence in the film (previous scenes had been limited to single shots), the sequence before shop windows which I will discuss later, he withdraws to an outdoor cafe and literally seems to hide from the camera which glimpses him through a hedge. This extremely curious scene consists of a single long-lasting shot (more than a minute and a half) beginning in long shot as Beckert enters the arboured area of the cafe, sits at a table, begins to whistle 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' and orders a cognac. The camera dollies in but stays outside the arbour, showing a rather obscured view of Beckert through the foliage. This unusual framing emphasises both the surreptitious nature of the camera – once again outside the scene viewing it from a distance – its spy-like nature, and Beckert's furtive nature, his hide-and-seek game with the camera. Beckert downs a second cognac, holds his head between his fists, tries to smoke, starts to whistle his theme from *Peer Gynt* again, seems to make his monster face again. Then, when the lights inside the cafe come on and illuminate him, he rises suddenly, pays the bill and

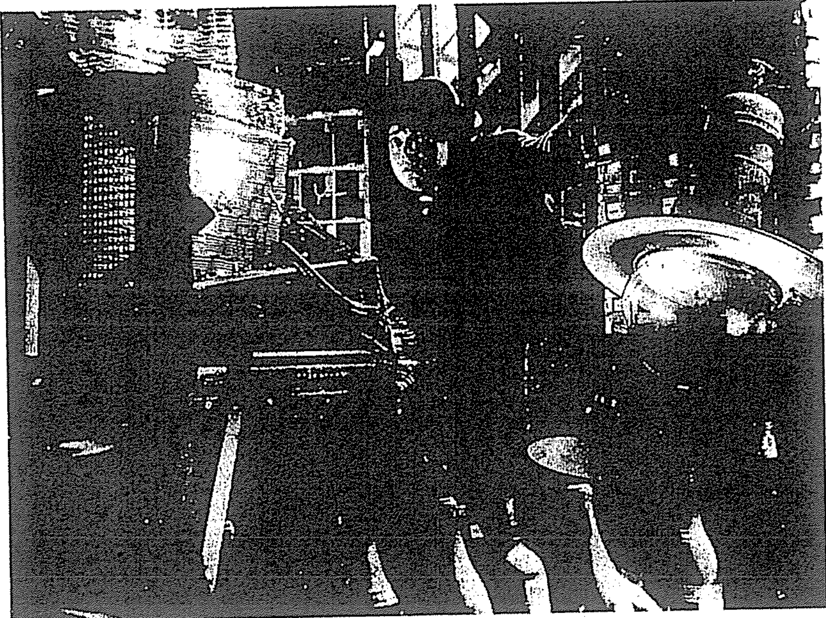
leaves, the camera pulling back just before he emerges – as if afraid to be caught in its compromising position.

Beckert's most impressive disappearing act comes just before his capture. It is preceded by his most elusive appearance (heard, rather than seen), but the one which will seal his fate. Over a shot of the blind beggar who sold Beckert Elsie's balloon we hear the off screen whistling of the music from *Peer Gynt* and see a quickly passing shadow. As he recalls the tune, the blind beggar matches his sharp ears with a young man's, Heinrich's, keen eyesight to glimpse Beckert in the off screen distance. In pursuit, Heinrich seems to have lost him, but then glimpses him through the window of a below street level fruit market buying candy for a little girl. This high angle image recalls the shot of Beckert buying the balloon, one of several *déjà vu*-like images scattered through the second half of this film which recall the first sequence.

This sighting leads directly to Beckert being marked with the chalked-on M, and being trailed as he walks with a new potential victim through the streets of Berlin. After Heinrich reports to the underworld headquarters, Beckert is pursued by a myriad of beggars operating in relays. It is as though once marked with the letter M, Beckert has lost a magical invisibility (whereas before it was only the blind who could recognise him). Beckert seems to realise this as he glimpses the mark on his back in a mirror and immediately turns and stares – briefly, but directly – into the camera. This look at the camera (a rarely used device in this film until the final scene) does not claim enunciatory power over the lens and audience, but rather expresses the embarrassment of visibility, being caught in the gaze of the camera. Beckert now sees his pursuers swarming everywhere, and their shrill, whistled signals seem to come from every direction of off screen space, entrapping him. Lang expresses this with a topographical overhead shot as Beckert is literally cornered, standing in the street with a pursuer on every corner of the intersection. Beckert rushes into the large entranceway of an office building, keenly observed by his pursuers in long shot. But, magically, a fire truck, its alarm bells ringing, sweeps through this frame and seems to wipe Beckert off the screen. After it passes he is simply no longer there.

Beckert seems once more absorbed by the anonymous city within which he thrives. An extensive pan and tilt of the empty courtyard and massive architecture, seems to scan helplessly an impassable barrier that shields him. Likewise, as a bell announces the office's closing time (another temporal signal here, as in *Metropolis*, triggering a mass exit) and the crowd of workers leave the building, the beggars do an extraordinary job of looking each person in the face (they are beggars; they can approach people like this) to make sure Beckert is not among them. The cacophony of voices that fills this space underscores Beckert's complete disappearance, swallowed by the metropolis. Beckert has, in fact, withdrawn into the farthest reaches of the building, its storage attic, where we can just distinguish him, huddled among the abandoned furniture, old ledger books, empty bottles. The watchman, finding the door open, makes a quick patrol and, turning the light out and locking the door, leaves Beckert in his hiding place. In the darkness we barely see his silhouette and can just distinguish his laboured, almost asthmatic, breathing.

Beckert will hide/disappear twice more before he is produced for his trial before the underworld in the cellar of the abandoned brewery. First, when he attempts to pick the lock of the attic and suddenly sees the handle to the door turning, then hears the key in the lock. Beckert tiptoes away back into his attic refuge, returning quickly to turn off the light, leaving the corridor dark and empty until the gang opens the door. He huddles among the jumble of odds and ends, listening to the off



screen voices of his pursuers closing in, his eyes bulging. Then from off screen a flashlight beam illuminates him as he stands up, involuntarily fascinated and terrified, staring into the light. The *schwarze Mann* has emerged from darkness. We next see him in his last (involuntary) disappearing act, as a bundle, carefully wrapped, twisting and struggling, the largest burden carried off by the departing crooks.

The gang tries to find Beckert, to drag him into the light, for only one purpose, in order to eliminate him. As Schranker says (in words the Nazi overtones of which are clear), 'he has no right to live. He must disappear.' Beckert is dragged out of his anonymity in order to be expunged. As Dadoun argues, Beckert is the ultimate reject of this society where even the beggars play an organised role. He is the waste product, the truly abject.[47] Thus he is associated with spaces like the attic storage room where he finds his last temporary resting place among the other rejected objects, or the abandoned brewery with its smashed windows and collapsing roof, appearing like an image from bombed out postwar Berlin. In the organised world of the city the underworld and the police interact like a hand and a glove, but the perverse desire of Beckert truly finds no place, other than a place to hide. He emerges from the darkness of anonymity into the glare of apprehension and identification only as a stage on the road to oblivion.

While the underworld gets Beckert within their sights and marks his body with the sign of Cain, the police tie him to a name and address, an official place within the city, as Dadoun again points out, through the systematic investigation of his rejects, an Ariston cigarette, red pencil shavings, the contents of his waste basket.[48] Lang intercuts the blind beggar's recognition of the Grieg tune with Lohmann recognising the brand of Beckert's cigarette butt ('A-ri-ston', as he writes in the air) in the detective's inventory of Beckert's waste basket. Lohmann is able to relate this bit of trash to the police's archive of facts. Lang cuts from the arcing camera movement which discloses the M imprinted on Beckert's shoulder to Lohmann poring over the inventory of one

of the crime scenes where Ariston butts were found. The next shot returns to Beckert's apartment with a close-up of the window sill on which he wrote his letter to the press (unexamined in the previous search, since the detective concentrated on the perfectly smooth table). A magnifying glass enters the frame and sweeps across the sill's coarse-grained surface. An extreme close-up through the lens reveals the fatal imprint, the trace of the word 'press'.

Thus Beckert is caught between two literal impressions and inscriptions: the M imprinted on his back which renders him visible, and the mark he himself left as he wrote the confession to the newspaper. Like Tremaine's message caught by carbon paper, this shot reveals the unconscious betrayal writing can leave behind without the writer even realising it. The window is opened and the detective wipes it with his fingertip and finds the red pencil shavings – evidence they were looking for. In close-up he brings them, stuck on the tip of his finger, towards the camera lens. Beckert's self-betraying writing seems poised between the preceding and subsequent Lang films, between Tremaine's telegraph message whose impression is read by the spies, and Hofmeister's message etched in another window (also discovered by Lohmann who refers to it as 'window writing') in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse.* Lang cuts from Lohmann's excitement at the discovery to the underworld receiving word of the beggars spotting Beckert. From fragments and memories, from cigarette butts and the snatches of a tune, Beckert's identity has been constructed at last. The police have him as well as the underworld. The detectives only miss him because they wait in his apartment and Beckert never returns home again.

But this accumulation of bits of facts, of the refuse of both normal and criminal society, this name and address taken from the police file and this body marked as a target for elimination – how does all of this relate to Beckert's sense of his own identity? Lang provides us with glimpses of him alone, outside the gaze of others, within the scenography of his private fantasies, as in the shot played before his mirror at home. Perhaps the most powerful sequence of the film occurs when Beckert confronts the image of his desire and his monstrosity on the city street.

In his later confession before the underworld Beckert speaks of his need to wander the streets. Marie has even described him as a *flâneur*.[49] In the sequence which occurs during the first police search of Beckert's apartment, he strolls along a Berlin commercial street munching on a piece of fruit. Up to this moment every view we have had of Beckert in the film has been either mediated (the shadow, the reflection) or from behind. This sequence begins the same way, but will also present not only the first extended scene with Beckert, but our first clear view of him. We see him in long shot on the sidewalk as he casually comes into frame, idly attracted by an elaborate window display, tossing his fruit carelessly into the gutter and taking another from his bag. The next shot gives a startling reverse angle and introduces a new motif in the portrayal of Beckert, shooting him through a window which is itself reflecting another scene and projecting it over Beckert – a sort of natural superimposition. This image is famous and yet still powerful. A medium shot shows Beckert (our best view of him so far – nearly half-way through the film!) as he continues to munch his apple, his attention directed at the window display. The image reflected on the glass in front of him shows us what he sees: an elaborately arranged display of cutlery.

Lang and cameraman Fritz Arno Wagner flaunt their mastery of frames and geometrical patterns in this shot. Beckert's head is haloed by the reflection of a large diamond-shaped pattern of knives pointed inward; his belly is rimmed by a rainbow arc of spoons. It is one of Lang's masterpieces of arrangement and composition, but the effect of superimposition gives it a ghostly quality. These patterns seem to radiate out of Beckert, like the metaphysical force lines emanating from characters in an Expressionist painting. But if the Expressionist influence is here, it has also been transformed. Beckert's expression at this moment is casual, as if unaware of the forces that shimmer around him, or aware of them only as shiny attractive objects, drawing the eye of the passerby. He bends down, as if to look more closely at something in the window. We get his point of view shot of the lower part of the display, another carefully arranged series of diverse objects, cases of knives and small scissors, the lozenge of knives no longer visible in this lower framing.

Lang cuts back to Beckert, seen as in the first shot through the glass, framed within the knife pattern, chewing in apparent contentment as he surveys the wares spread before him. Suddenly he reacts: his eyebrows raise, his face freezes, his eyes stare. Lang supplies the point of view shot, this time showing the area of the window previously out of frame. The lozenge of knives is now seen directly, their glimmering forms sharply surrounding a mirror. The mirror reflects a young girl, perfectly framed by the knives as she, too, gazes into the window display from somewhere off screen. Lang returns to Beckert reacting to this vision: he rubs his mouth with his hand slowly, his fingers pulling down the left corner, so that it approximates the monster face he made in the mirror of his apartment, his eyes beginning to bulge as he stares off screen. A brief shot flashes back to the girl in the mirror, then we see Beckert again, as his eyes close and he rocks on his feet as if losing his balance. He straightens up and stares in front of him, his eyes bulging. The point of view shot shows the little girl just slipping out of the mirror which is left empty, reflecting the street and vacant sidewalk, while her dim reflection moves across the window glass. Beckert, viewed from the back, stands in front of the window, the empty mirror to his right as he looks to the left, the direction in which the girl departed. His face is doubled by its reflection in the window. His fingers twitching, his mouth widening, he begins to whistle his theme as he lurches off to the left.

Beckert's madness, the moment of it seizing him, is portrayed both by Lorre's performance and Lang's succession of imagery. The window display introduced here, and soon to be elaborated further, becomes a motif associated with Beckert's obsession. An essential part of the modern urban scene, 'show windows' were intended to use visual curiosity and fascination, 'to arouse in the observer the cupidity and longing to possess the goods' as one merchandising expert, L. Frank Baum, put it.[50] Beckert's highly perverse and repressed desire is stimulated by the devices of the urban consumer culture. These highly illuminated mini-spectacles were designed to release desire through visual stimuli, channelled towards making a purchase. Beckert responds to the first part of their purpose, the visual stimulation and the arousing of desire, but the object of his desire comes from taboo territory. The reflective quality of the window, and especially the mirror, recall Beckert's performance before his own mirror. His private drama has taken over the public space of the street, with a vision of forbidden desire seemingly conjured before his eyes. The vision is fixed for the moment, but then slides away, as if beckoning Beckert to follow.

Lang has devised this mirrored and highly visual environment so that this young girl can appear to Beckert, not as a creature of flesh and blood, but as an image, an image about to disappear. Beckert's relation to his obsession is an imaginary one, based in a virtual reality in which the superimposition of geometrical patterns enforces a sense of entrapment, of predetermined framings. The knives and the mirror seem to impel Beckert towards his next victim. Further, the scenography of bright shiny objects, reflected light, and Beckert's trance-like reaction suggest a

scene of hypnosis, Beckert being taken over by a will not his own. (In his later con-
fession at the 'trial' he claims he has to obey the evil thing inside him.) As Kracauer
put it, 'Evil urges overwhelm him in exactly the same manner in which multiple
objects close in on his screen image'.[51] But this surrender to an alien will takes the
form of a drama, a performance. Given Beckert's fascination by his own image in
the mirror, his absorption in a world of fantasy, this vision of a young girl has also
entered his private world in which he can play a dashing lover and a terrifying mon-
ster (and probably never play one without the other). The complex of imagery indi-
cates that Beckert in the throes of his madness enacts his own private movie, the
closest he gets to the enunciatory ambition of the master criminals.

The following shot extends this imagery. The little girl has wandered to another
shop window, this time a book store. But if this seems anodyne compared to the
display of knives which threatened to impale her image in the previous shot, the
visual devices of the window are much more aggressive. A large arrow bounces ver-
tically up and down, pointing to a picture in an open book, while in the background
a circle decorated with a spiral spins, pulling attention towards its eternally with-
drawing centre. Such mechanical signs were considered the apex of modern
window dressing, a way to draw strollers irresistibly to your display.[52] Besides con-
tinuing the linking of visual attraction and desire, the spiral particularly evokes
hypnosis. As the girl moves from one window display to the next the camera follows
her, Beckert's whistled theme coming from off screen. This is probably the first
example of the 'stalking' camera movement that became a cliché of serial killer films
in the 70s, as the camera's cautious following of the child parallels Beckert's trailing
of her. The camera seems to obey Beckert's will, extending his timid claim at enun-
ciatory command, but it is interrupted almost immediately as this middle-class girl
runs into the arms of her mother, in contrast to the fate of Elsie Beckmann.[53]
Immediately the camera movement and the whistling stops. The camera then
reverses itself as mother and daughter walk to the left. They pass by Beckert, no
longer master of the camera, huddling, in the doorway, his back turned to them and
to us, hiding once more. Emerging, he gazes off screen at them almost wistfully, the
spiral in the window behind him seeming to emerge from his body. He half
scratches, half caresses his hand as he looks off, then turns and gazes directly at the
camera, our first, though brief view of him full face. His previously described with-
drawal behind the hedge of the beer garden follows.

The next appearance of Beckert also involves shop windows. After Heinrich, fol-
lowing the blind beggar's suspicion, glimpses Beckert and a new little girl through
the window of the fruit market, he watches as they exit and enact a little drama. The
girl curtsies and offers Beckert a candy, he pulls out a knife in close-up, causing
Heinrich some panic. The following close-up diffuses the drama, but only by offer-
ing a substitution: Beckert carefully slices the peel of the orange he offers the girl.
His role as the consumer of little girls as sweet things and cute toys cues us to the
implicit violence in this image. This is the moment when Heinrich chalks the M on
his own hand and, pretending to be just another chance urban encounter, imprints
it on Beckert's shoulder. The beautiful irony of the little girl's solicitous manner as
she returns the potential murder weapon, the knife Beckert dropped when Heinrich
stumbled against him (Marie calls her 'the ideal little Red Riding Hood offering
herself in sacrifice to the Big Bad Wolf'),[54] affirms the bond children seem to have
with this childlike man.

Beckert is now a marked man and his stroll with the little girl is followed closely
by the beggars. But unaware of this, the odd couple proceed arm-in-arm at a
flâneur's pace, pausing in front of a toy store window. This is Lang's most phantas-
magorical setting. He shoots Beckert (and the little girl) from inside the store, some
of the display of toys visible in the foreground, others reflected on the window pane
and seemingly superimposed over the couple as they gawk, mouths open in wide-
eyed admiration. A group of dolls and teddy bears sits in the foreground on the dis-
play case facing outward, like a miniature audience for the joy of the enraptured
pair. Over their heads another mechanical attention-grabber operates, a jumping-
jack whose legs enframe them as they gaze into this child's paradise. If Beckert
remains partly still a child, attracted to children because he is a reject from the adult
world, this would seem to be a moment in which he innocently shares a childlike
fascination with his miniature love-object. His face does not show the trance-like
fluttering of the eyelids, nor does he show any loss of balance or take on his monster
face. He seems simply to enjoy the display, and he apparently asks the girl which toy
she likes best and he beams as she points to one. She seems like the bride that Peer
Gynt entered the Hall of the Mountain King to ask for, the one for whom he is will-
ing to become a monster.

But Beckert is not a child and he is not innocent. His love of children leads, we
know, inevitably to a rage against them, becoming the bogeyman who terrifies and
destroys. He already bears the mark of the murderer, the letter M on his back,
although he has not realised it yet. But as Kuntzel has revealed, it is present almost
subliminally within this scene of toyland. The jumping-jack legs, when stretched
wide apart, form an M above Beckert's head, and, further, one can see another dim
white M, a reflection on the window, as the legs part.[55] The subliminal becomes
explicit in the following shot, from outside the store, as the little girl tells Beckert
he's 'all dirty'. The discovery takes place next to the toy display they just looked into,
in the shop's doorway.

Here a mirror allows Beckert to search for this dirt the girl has spotted. Another shop window is visible on the left, doubled in the mirror. This one displays rows of both full and half masks of what appear to be children's faces. Starkly white and phantom-like, they witness Beckert's discovery of the mark. At first he sees nothing and asks the child where the dirt is. She points to his shoulder. In medium shot Beckert sees the mark in the mirror; straining to see his own back, he reads it with bafflement. A close-up follows of the M. Still the gracious child-bride of the monster, the little girl tries to wipe it off, as Beckert seems unsure what to think. But as he turns to look over his shoulder in the mirror, he glimpses something which truly terrifies him; he turns quickly and shoots a glance directly at the camera.

On this image my analysis buckles with the previous discussion of Beckert's sudden visibility, his discovery of the pursuers, his final disappearance and eventual discovery. The look at the camera, again, is too brief to assert control over the film Beckert's expression of panic forms the opposite of Haghi or Mabuse's amused confidence. But in being caught in the eyes of others, Beckert's fantasy world also collapses, his private movie, his childlike idyll at the shop window, ends. But his idylls always end in horror. The masks and the children's faces that watch him from the windows as he discovers this dirty mark anticipate his description at the final trial of the horrific turns his private movie always takes: 'And I am pursued by ghosts. Ghosts of mothers. And of those children … They never leave me. They are there, there, always, always. Always … except … except when I do it ….' Beckert is trapped in a private drama, a film with continuous screenings which he cannot control or bring to an end. The child always gives way to the bogeyman, the child-bride and her loving mother become vengeful ghosts. He can only live with this horror by becoming a horror himself and eradicating his child audiences. But now he has been recognised by others, who will end his private drama with a theatrical performance of their own.

The People vs Hans Beckert

> Fantastic! Against humanitarian soppiness. For the death penalty. Well made. Lang will be our director one day.
>
> Joseph Goebbels' *Diary*, 21 May 1931, after seeing *M*.[56]

> With a stump of chalk from his tunic pocket he drew a small cross on the palm of his hand
>
> …
>
> As a token of his approval and solidarity would pat anyone who cursed on the shoulderblade, wherupon the marked man, white cross on his back, would be caught by the SA
>
> …
>
> I ran away terrified at home I looked at my back in the mirror to see if it didn't bear a white cross.
>
> Bertolt Brecht 'The Chalk Cross', *Poems 1913–1956*

Beckert's brief glimpse of his beggar-pursuer as he turns from the mirror, then flees in panic abandoning his child-bride/victim, could cut directly to his first point of view shot when he is pushed into the cellar of the abandoned brewery. Falling down the stairs, he turns and screams defiance at his tormentors standing above him, then looks around and becomes silent. The point of view shot shows this grim, subterranean space filled to the gills – the shot pans slowly to include them all – with silent, immobile people seated and staring at him. Beckert has been caught in the gaze of others with a vengeance, the furtive glance of the spy multiplied into a glare of judgement. Burch has pointed out that the film's dominant style of discontinuity in space lessens towards the end of the film. Here in the cellar, the final scene of the film (outside of the two-shot epilogue) stays within a single space and continuous time for nearly fifteen minutes, without a single cutaway to another space.[57]

This return to the uninterrupted scene (with its unity of dramatic space) rather than the sequence (with its intercutting of different spaces) marks the highly theatrical nature of the film's climax. Although this trial is run by outlaws, it not only maintains many of the basic court procedures (another parody of the codes of ordered society appearing in the underworld), such as a variety of testimonies and a presiding 'president', Schranker, it also maintains the theatricality of the courtroom. The cellar overflows with audience, and the scene consists of a series of speeches or performances before them. The basic drama enacted here is the simultaneous establishment and stripping away of the identity of Hans Beckert, murderer.

After Beckert's game of hide-and-seek, and his final discovery, he is, in effect, completely uncovered. Most of our views of him have been mediated by windows, mirrors, views from the back. Now he is displayed frontally with nowhere to hide, stripped of his screens and props, made to confront not only his judges, but his victims and himself. He begins by moving towards the camera after it has moved towards him, his hands outstretched, an ingratiating, if nervous, smile on his face, insisting there has been a mistake. But if Beckert delivers himself to this close-up view, his frame is soon invaded from off screen left, as a hand grabs his shoulder and his expression freezes in terror. The beggar's voice comes from off screen denying there is any mistake. The camera pulls back from the close-up which Beckert dominated, to a wider framing and reveals the beggar holding a balloon identical to the one purchased for Elsie. As he asks Beckert if he recognises it and mentions Elsie Beckmann, Beckert gives a start. Lang cuts 180 degrees to a high angle shot showing the assembled trial members and audience in the background, Beckert in midground gazing up, and in the foreground, in slightly soft focus, the wavering form of the balloon. As it sways in the frame, the balloon alternately obscures, then reveals Beckert's figure standing below.

This is an unbearable moment for Beckert. He backs away from the balloon, stuttering over Elsie's name, 'El … El … Elsie … El', and then shouts denial, 'No, no, no'. But his withdrawal only brings him closer to his judges, as he nearly backs into the table at which Schranker and the other underworld leaders sit. The camera too pursues him as he moves back, seeming to fly in its overhead position past the balloon to keep Beckert in frame. Beckert confronts images from his private drama of monstrosity, the return of the dead. The balloon took on Elsie's identity at her death and seemed to ascend into the heavens. Now it has reappeared in the underworld, an infernal, vengeful presence. It is the visual equivalent of the ghosts of his victims which Beckert will soon confess haunt him continually. But now he is not only haunted by these vengeful ghosts, but confronted by the reality of the mob assembled to judge him. Beckert is caught between them. His backward retreat is interrupted by a shout and a sudden reverse angle cut, and Beckert spins around as Schranker shouts a question about another victim.

The 180 degree reverse angle cutting typical of many Langian scenes of confrontation (such as the meetings with the 'man behind the curtain' in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*) dominates this final scene of *M.* Lorre looks directly into the camera as he responds to Schränker, again claiming he doesn't know these girls, the camera clearly serving as an accuser and witness. Schränker continues to facilitate the dragging of Beckert's private movie into this public space. He displays to Beckert a series of photographs of his victims, ending with Elsie Beckmann. After the first photograph, Beckert again moves backward. But the succeeding photographs are in close-up from his point of view. Unable to distance himself, Beckert first puts his hand in his mouth as if stifling a scream, although the gesture also expresses the orality so often noted in Beckert's character, his infantile regression. At its most primal here, he seems to wish to swallow himself in order to disappear, or to eat the photograph and make it disappear, as he has already consumed the girl herself like a bit of sweetness. After Elsie's photograph (complete with her ball – another *déjà vu* image) Beckert turns and runs. But as Schränker has already told him, there is no way out of here. As in Haghi/Nemo's last performance, space is enclosed on all sides, except the one open to the audience. There is no off screen space into which Beckert can move unseen. His disappearing act no longer works: he is exposed to the glare of visibility and witnesses who remember his acts. His frenzied attempt to get out the doorway is repressed with brutal physical violence, as the voices of the crowd cheer his attackers on, suggesting places to hit him ('his shins!'). Again Peer Gynt's visit to the Hall of the Mountain King is recalled, as Peer searched vainly for a way out and the trolls called out to bar his way and bite and kill him.

Schränker restores order and insists on instructing both crowd and prisoner on the way the order of law will be followed ('we are all experts on the law here: from six weeks in Tegel to fifteen years in Brandenburg'). A long pan over the grotesque faces of the convicts sitting in judgement underscores the parodic tone, the almost carnivalesque inversion of a criminal court. But Lang does not allow us to participate in this carnival with levity. Beckert's anguished and hysterical cries echo through the cellar, until again a hand enters from off screen and pokes him on the shoulder. Here another element of parody introduces himself: Beckert's defence lawyer, picking up his hat in order to tip it in a Chaplinesque gesture of abject dignity. Beckert's demands to be handed over to the police are greeted with ever-increasing laughter from the audience off screen, the child's nightmare of mockery at the moment he is being most serious, pleading for his life. Beckert does not have Nemo's fine-edged sense of irony. He cannot stand being taken for a clown at the moment of his death. Schränker repeats his demand that Beckert must disappear, a term taken up by an off screen voice – 'Yes, disappear!' Beckert's most powerful trick is now being demanded of him, at the same time as any possibility of achieving it has been taken away from him.

Beckert's monologue that follows is simultaneously one of the finest performances in sound cinema and an extraordinary example of writing for the new 'talkie' by Thea von Harbou. As an act of public self-explication and confession, its theatrical nature carries enormous power. In essence, Beckert claims he is not responsible for his acts, that he is compelled to perform them, that he is deeply split in two ('I can't help myself. I haven't any control over this evil thing inside me. ... It's me pursuing myself'). Lang cuts to a medium close-up as Beckert begins by addressing the camera most directly, staring into it with a sudden authority, not at all like his cringing denials earlier in the scene. One thinks of a secondary title the film was sometimes given: *Dem Mörder sieht Dich an*, 'Your Murder Looks at You'.[58] But his eyes shift to the sides as if scrutinising the site of off screen space, the zone of invisibility, as he describes this force that pursues and drives him. As he recounts his plight in vivid terms – he wants to escape and cannot – we realise that his description of his life subject to his compulsion precisely mimics the imagery of the film ('pursued down endless streets') and ends inevitably in the situation he is now in: wishing to flee from the all-powerful, scrutinising eyes, wanting to escape, but unable to. Because he cannot escape from himself, his own self-scrutinising, self-terrorising mirror drama. His private torment has now found its public equivalent.

His impassioned description cannot help but arouse sympathy, and Lang shows several of the audience nodding in understanding or empathy. His monologue brings us deeper into the horror of the drama he is caught in. As he describes his pursuit by the ghosts of his child-victims and their mothers, Lang shows two mothers listening in horror, showing not so much revulsion or anger, as pure terror, clinging to each other and twisting their handkerchiefs, as if Beckert succeeds in getting them to picture his haunted life. These visions are with him 'always, always, always' – except ... except when he does it.

A new motive is given here for Beckert's murders. He commits them in order to stop the infernal repeating drama, the imaginary snuff film on an endless projection loop, to give himself relief, to make himself unconscious. Lorre's pantomime is at its most extreme here, almost painful to watch. His hands have become claw-like and make strangling motions, gestures replacing words ('When I ...'), his face becomes truly demonic, a sort of spasm passing over it. The face and hands collapse and hang limp and flaccid. His now somnolent face claims, 'and then I can't remember anything'. The murder is the blind spot of his torment, the release from the constant images and torture – oblivion. He has reached what Dadoun describes as 'the abyss of total unconsciousness in which he plunges and disappears when he kills a little girl'.[59] Dadoun further glosses with great insight: 'One could say that he disappears, that he dies phantasmically with or within the real death of his victim. It is therefore he that is killed – but it is also he that kills.'[60] As Dadoun says, Beckert dies only in fantasy. In reality he comes back to life, back to consciousness, back to being tortured by his ghosts. It is a scenario Lang will replay in his Hollywood films with Edward G. Robinson, first as comedy (*The Woman in the Window*) and then as tragedy (*Scarlet Street*). One awakes from an imagined/attempted death/suicide only to find the private movie is still unreeling.

Beckert awakes to be immediately confronted by his crime, as an inhabitant of the modern city in which the news is plastered everywhere. Beckert recalls the scene from the opening of the film's second sequence, the crowds gathered to read of the latest crime. And Beckert tells us he is among them: 'I read and I read ...' But like everyone else in the city he cannot locate the murderer, he cannot recognise himself in what he reads. He acts out his compulsion once more, the drama begins again (triggered by the act of reading?). His utter aloneness with this drama ('Who knows what it's like to be me?') and the self torment of both his interior split between demanding monster and terrified slave ('Don't want to ... Must ... Don't want to ... Must ... Don't want to!') and identification with his victim ('a voice screams! I can't bear to hear it!' as he covers his ears and screams at the same time, attempting to close out the sound of his own suffering). He holds his head and cries 'I cannot ... I cannot ...' One shudders to think of the scene from his own childhood, what encounter with what past monster he is accessing, what experience of torture he has

been doomed to repeat as he appears to us now, not as an adult, not even as a monster, but as an abject, suffering, abused child.

There is a sort of anticlimax to the film after this point. Not a failure of dramatic construction, which actually gains increasing suspense as Beckert's fate is debated. But the curiosity, the mystery surrounding Beckert from the beginning of the film, his shadowy oblique existence, has now been exhausted. In Burch's term, he has truly been unveiled before the camera and the audience (of the trial and of the film). He has no more secrets, except the impenetrable ones of human torment and the cycle of cruel madness which both causes it and which responds to it. In effect there is no exit from Beckert's drama. Instead of resolution, Beckert now becomes an object of discourse. Schranker begins by responding to Beckert's performance by taking up a role within it, becoming the monster who wishes to punish Beckert, but who also promises some deliverance in supplying a final end, instead of an endless cycle. He repeats his demand that Beckert be eliminated, disappear.

The argument offered by the defence attorney occupies a curious place in this array of discourse. There is no question that this figure introduced with comic pretensions and self-irony gains considerable dignity and shows true courage as he defends a liberal position: that Beckert is sick and needs to be taken to an asylum, rather than delivered to the rough justice of the mob. Schranker's shrill demand that Beckert 'be snuffed out like a candle' not only recalls Nazi rhetoric of 'living beings unworthy of life', it dwells very much within the paranoid fantasy of Beckert's own madness; the punitive parent. The mocking laughter of the mob as the attorney pleads for humanity directly echoes the response to Beckert when he first appears. The defence lawyer, however, maintains the reflective and deflating Berlin humour so evident in much of the film, as in his opening statement which refers to Schranker as 'our honorable president ... wanted by the police for three murders'. But it is to the lawyer's arguments that the crowd responds with the clearest anticipations (although in 1931 we should perhaps simply say echoes) of Nazi rhetoric. When he refers to Beckert as 'this man', an off screen voice shouts out, 'that is not a man!'

In later years Lang allowed it to be assumed that the film's point of view was that of the defence lawyer, and that *M* was an argument against capital punishment and for the humane treatment of mental patients.[61] In the atmosphere of the film's release this viewpoint was not the most common. Many viewers and reviewers, including liberal or leftist journalists as well as Herr Goebbels, found the film sympathetic to the death penalty and mob justice. In a contemporary review Kracauer attacked these easy interpretations of the film,[62] stressing the ambiguity of Lang's presentation. Lang seems determined not to make a statement here, but to raise a variety of points of view. And indeed it would seem in the aftermath of Beckert's confession no statement is given absolute authority. The defence attorney has rationality, irony and a liberal tradition behind him. Schranker, however, responds to his speech not only with hysteria but also with fear of an endless cycle ('another man-hunt, ... the compulsion all over again and so on and so on to doomsday!').

The emotional response comes from a woman who stands and invokes the dead children and their mothers. She ends with a cry that is taken up by the crowd, 'Ask the Mothers!' This final discourse returns us to the primal pain and separation that opened the film, Elsie and her mother. But this image of motherhood is no longer that of the patient, caring, nourishing mother, but of angry, vengeful mothers, the Eumenides: 'ask the mothers, do you think they will have mercy on him?' It is this question which whips the crowd to the highest point of hysteria, not only shouting, 'Kill him. Crush him' but ready to rush into action, to tear him apart. Having separated Elsie and the other children from their loving mothers, Beckert now encounters the monstrous mother, the mother-murderer. The faces of the crowd as they call for his murder have become distorted and monstrous, like Beckert's own faces in the mirror, or when he acts out the moment of murder and oblivion before the court. According to Dadoun's reading of the mirror imagery in the film, this accords with Beckert's driving fantasy, the union of murderer and victim becoming the symbiosis of mother and child, 'M identifies with the child-about-to-be killed, he identifies with the mother-who-must-murder'.[63] The courtroom scene again delivers itself up to the primal fantasy of Beckert's own murderous cycle, acted out now in public before his eyes.

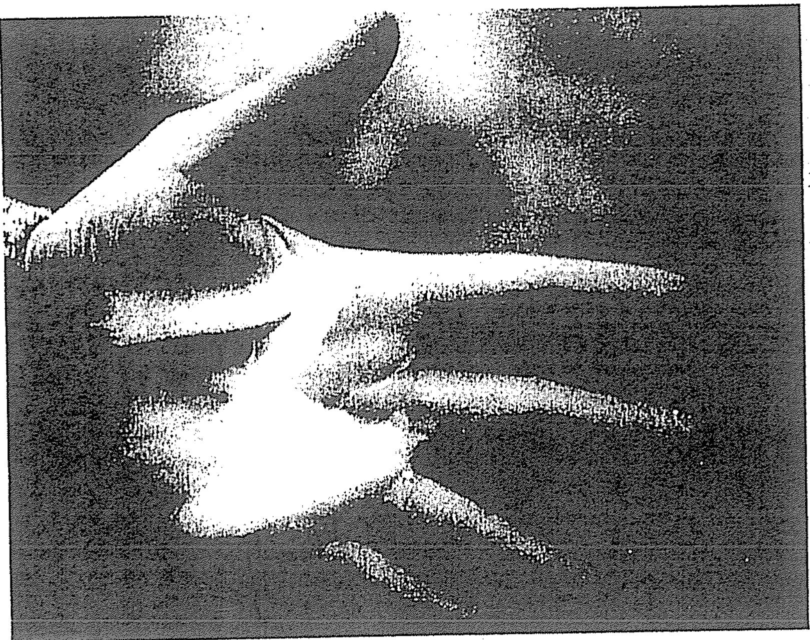
This scene of primal destruction, this *sparagmos* of the guilty one, is interrupted in mid-action by a *coup de cinéma*, another dramatic use of off screen space. The mob rushing towards the off screen Beckert suddenly stops in its tracks. With a look off to the left, they all make the same gesture simultaneously, as carefully timed as the masses in *Metropolis*, raising their hands (except Schränker who pointedly delays his gesture a second), as silence fills the cellar. In the following shot, Beckert looks bewildered until another hand touches him on the shoulder from off screen (the third in the sequence), and an off screen voice declares, 'in the name of the Law'. The apparent restoration of order remains elliptical, dramatic in its effects, incommunicative in its meaning. Lang's final shots emphasise both immediate restoration of order, but also a strong discontinuity. He cuts immediately to a court bench in which the judges sit down to pass sentence, but all we hear is a rhyming complement to the previous voice: 'In the name of the people'. The final verdict is given to the mothers. But the three grieving women who end the film are not the vengeful Eumenides seen in the cellars. The one who looks at the camera and speaks directly to us to end the film is, in fact, Elsie's mother, the caring and nourishing – and now mourning – Frau Beckmann. She says that 'this' (presumably the verdict against Beckert and his punishment) will not bring the children back. And as the image fades into the final darkness of the film she says, 'We, too, should keep a closer watch on our children.'

The return of Mrs. Beckmann, takes the film back to its opening, something images and words throughout the final scene in the cellar seem constantly trying to accomplish. It is, of course, the structure of a murder mystery to try throughout its length to get back to the primal act, to clear it up and make sense of it. But *M* denies us that satisfaction. We do indeed learn who committed these murders and we even learn a great deal about what drives him to them. But the structure of the final scenes works against resolution: the courtroom debate is not decided in favour of any one discourse; the rousing to a primitive violence that demands fulfilment in brutal action is stopped in mid-stride, curtailed; the legal process is stopped in mid-sentence. We are only left with the act of grief and mourning and an address to the audience. One feels Frau Beckmann, in the key address to the camera in this film, makes a request to us we are not sure we can fulfil: to watch, to watch more carefully ...

Like *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, and indeed like all of Lang's German films, *M* exists under the shadow of the Third Reich and the holocaust, one of the last stations on Kracauer's trajectory from *Caligari* to Hitler. The echoes and anticipations of Nazi policies appear everywhere for contemporary viewers of this film: Schränker's leather jacket and cane summon up the image of an SS officer, the rhetoric of final solutions and eliminations of the outsider, the euthanasia of mental patients, Beckert's inscribed M as the star of David – all recall the Shoah. I believe it is as dangerous

to make these associations automatically as it is to ignore them. Simply to assume an identity between Beckert and the Nazi victims is not only extremely problematic, but was also done as a propaganda device by the Nazis themselves. The Nazis banned *M* in 1933, but appropriated a section of Lorre's final monologue in the 1940 racist documentary *The Eternal Jew* to show simultaneously the dominance of the Weimar cinema by Jews (such as 'the Jew actor', Lorre) and as a portrayal of psychotic Jewish behaviour. Goebbels' claim that the film was proto-Nazi ('Lang will be our director') is no more inherently convincing than later claims that the film is anti-Nazi. Kracauer himself recognised the ambiguity of the film, wavering between different attitudes. It is precisely the manner in which the film is pre-Nazi that makes it so complex. The anxieties about modernity and urban life are inventoried. More than ever before Lang grounds these anxieties in the primal fears of ordinary people, a working-class mother rather than a bored countess, a pathetic, childish psychopath rather than a master criminal hypnotist. It is important not to lose the concrete specificity Lang has brought to this film by creating a series of metaphorical substitutions. But as the concrete world portrayed in *M* generated Nazism, it is on this concrete level that the film can speak to us about its heritage.

Within the narrative that Lang fashioned to describe his own relation to the Nazis, whose climax (we have already seen) revolves around *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, *M* also plays a crucial role. Lang claims that the film's working title, *Murderers Among Us*, caused him a number of problems. Anonymous threatening letters were sent and at first the Staaken studio was refused to him as the venue for principal photography. Lang describes the key encounter, once again, in the style of a scene from one of his films. In a heated discussion with the owner of the studio, Lang had grabbed the man by the lapel. Feeling something on the underside, he flipped the lapel over and exposed a Nazi party badge.[64] I make no claim for



the veracity of this anecdote. It seems a bit too dramatic (why would one have to conceal a Nazi badge at the time, anyway?) to ring true. But its scenography employs not only Langian devices but the new concrete 'objectivity' of *M*, the focus on objects. Lang's discovery functions like a visionary scene. He uncovers what lies behind the opposition to his film: the fears the Nazi party had that his title 'Murderers Among Us' referred directly to them, their fear that he, like a Heartfield collage, would expose their monstrous face. But no overlap-dissolve is needed here, no stylised, allegorical imagery: just the object itself, the Nazi badge come out of hiding. As in Lang's allegorical films, the revelation caused a conversion. It was on that day, Lang told Kracauer, that he came of age politically.[65]

Perhaps the most striking thing about *M's* political vision is its mixture of obscurity and terror, an atmosphere which would persist in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, an obsession with fragments, an inability to get a full picture. Although powerful as formal devices, Lang's approaches to the unexpected zones of off screen space in *M* also contrast with the carefully arranged and transcendent visions of the allegorical films, or the grand schemes of the master criminal films. Lang has spoken of his desire in this film to bid farewell to the epic film.[66] But this issue involves more than scale. Lang's vision becomes more barred, more mediated. Instead of visionary clarifications, however dire their message may have been, we see characters whose vision does not so much penetrate the skin of reality as catch their own desires, fantasies and even their own faces, reflected back to them in distorted and monstrous ways. An obscurity and a sort of blindness enter Lang's cinema from this point on. Lang provides a bitter parody of allegory in Elsie's grotesque balloon that ascends to heaven after her death. At this high point in his career as a film-maker Lang questions the possibility of vision and representation, and shows us a world caught in multiplying the images of its own terror.

10 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), p. 60.
11 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 59–60.
12 Reproduced in Bernard Eisenschitz and Paolo Bertetto (eds), *Fritz Lang*, p. 122.
13 Raymond Bellour, 'Le Regard de Haghi', *iris*, no. 7, second semester, 1986, p. 5.
14 Ibid., p. 7.
15 Ibid., p. 5.
16 Réné Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 15. French and Latin versions in *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia/Méditations metaphysiques* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1960), pp. 23, 24.
17 *The Night Watches of Bonaventura*, p. 213.
18 Eisner, p. 394.
19 This encounter appears in the English language print, but is actually truncated in the generally more complete German prints.
20 This connection is less clear in the German version, which locates the microphone in the office of the Japanese spies, Haghi's means of spying on them as they spy on Sonja. The effect is the same, but in the shorter version it is actually more direct.
21 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 48.
22 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', pp. 11–17.
23 Quoted in Frederick W. Ott, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, p. 148.
24 Actually the English language version is more elliptical, while the German version devotes more than twenty shots to the period between Tremaine's awakening and the wreck.
25 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, vol. I, trans. David and Lilina Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 30.
26 According to the English language print. The German simply has him ask for 'a little music, please'.

Chapter 6: *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*

1 Franz Kafka, 'The Great Wall of China', trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 244.
2 This is true of the English language print, the German message does not appear to be in code.
3 Sigmund Freud, 'A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"', *Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, pp. 225–32. This metaphor of Freud's has been the subject, of course, of Jacques Derrida's influential commentary, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.196–231.
4 Nicole Brenez, 'Symptome, exhibition, angoisse', p. 14.
5 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 160.
6 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', pp. 17–20.
7 Michel Marie, *M, le Maudit, Fritz Lang Etude critique* (Paris: Nathan, 1993) p. 34.
8 Brenez, p, 11.
9 Herman Melville, *Moby Dick or The Whale* in *Romances of Herman Melville* (New York: Tudor Publishing, n.d.), p. 857.
10 Siegfried Kracauer reported Lang's claim in *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 66. Lang repeats the story in 'La nuit viennoise, un confession de Fritz Lang', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 169, August 1965, p. 52, and in Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, pp. 63–4.
11 Kracauer, pp. 66–7.
12 For the imagistic aspect of intertitles and words in German Expressionist films, see Philippe Dubois, 'L'écriture figurale dans le cinéma muet des années 20', in Francesco Pitassio and Leonardo Quaresima (eds), *Scrittura e Immagine: La didascalia nel cinema muto* (Udine: Forum, 1998), especially pp. 75–85.
13 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 31–47.
14 Ibid., p. 37.
15 Ibid., pp. 37-42.
16 Jonathan Crary, 'Dr. Mabuse and Mr. Edison' in Russell Ferguson (ed.), *Art and Film Since 1945: Hall of Mirrors* (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), p. 271.
17 Chion, p. 42.
18 Jorge Luis Borges, 'Death and the Compass' in *Labyrinths*, pp. 86–7.
19 Ibid., pp. 17–29.
20 Chion offers an insightful analysis of this and the opening phone call as well, pp. 66–73.

Chapter 7: *M*: The City Haunted by Demonic Desire

1 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 44.
2 Georg Trakl, *Autumn Sonata*, trans. Daniel Simko (Mount Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell, 1989), p. 19.
3 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', pp. 20–30 (original version, with diagrams not included in English translation in *Revue d'Esthétique* special number 'Cinéma, théorie, lecture', 1973, pp. 227–48); Roger Dadoun, 'Le pouvoir et "sa" folie', *Positif*, no. 188, December 1976, pp. 13–20; Anton Kaes, ' The Cold Gaze', pp. 105–17. Kaes' forthcoming book for the BFI on *M* promises to develop the rich insights of this essay.
4 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', pp. 21–2.
5 Ibid., pp. 20–30.
6 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, pp. 17–18; 30–47.
7 Burch, *passim*.
8 Thierry Kuntzel, 'The Film Work', *Enclitic*, vol. 2 no. 1, 1978, pp. 40–61; Michel Marie, *M le Maudit*, pp. 101–16; Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, *Le Texte divise* (Paris: Pup, 1981), pp. 93–104.
9 Marie, p.101.
10 This version, a project of 100 Jahre Kino Europarates and Taurus Films, with image reconstruction by the Munich Film Museum and sound restoration by Donat Keusch and Christian Zajac will be my principle version, although others have been consulted.
11 Kuntzel, p. 41.
12 Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), p. 21.
13 Burch, p. 21, and passim.
14 Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Of Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 328–9.
15 Thus the restored print. Other prints continue the cries over all the shots, less effectively, in my opinion.
16 Kuntzel, p. 59.
17 Bertolt Brecht, 'Utterances of a Martyr', trans. John Willet, in *Poems 1913–1956* (New York: Methuen, 1976), p. 15.
18 Kuntzel, p. 59.
19 Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, p. 86.
20 Ibid., pp. 28–9.
21 Marie, p. 116.
22 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 18.
23 Kuntzel, p. 60.
24 Lotte Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, p. 109.
25 As much for his personal expression of enthusiasm for the film, which I could not take lightly, as for his article, 'La Machine-Cinéma', in *Cinéma et littérature 8: Les Temps des Machines*, Valenca, 1990, pp. 49–55.
26 R. L. Rutsky, 'The Mediation of Technology and Gender', p. 29.
27 Jacques Rivette, 'The Hand', p. 141.
28 Quoted in Frederick W. Ott, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, p. 148.
29 Siefried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 122: photo with caption facing p. 129.

30 Kaes, p. 108.
31 Ibid., pp. 114–15.
32 Burch, p. 23.
33 For instance, Burch, p. 23, and *M, a Film by Fritz Lang*, trans. Nicholas Garnham (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), which is based on the transcription from *L'Avant-scène Cinéma*, no. 39, July-August 1964, p. 20.
34 And identified by Marie, p. 34, as a characteristic of *M*.
35 Burch, p. 24.
36 Maria M. Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 158. My good friend and collaborator Travis Preston first alerted me to the significance of the Peer Gynt play to *M*. I am also indebted to his observations about the relation between Beckert and the children.
37 Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt: A Dramatic Poem*, trans. Peter Watts (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 69.
38 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Blackwell, 1991).
39 Kaes, pp. 114–15.
40 Burch, p. 25; 'De "Mabuse" a "M": Le Travail de Fritz Lang', *Revue d'Esthétique*, special number: 'Cinéma, théorie, lecture', 1973, p. 237.
41 Dadoun, p. 16 (my translation).
42 Quoted in Ott, p. 156.
43 In 'La nuit viennoise, un confession de Fritz Lang', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 169, August 1965, p. 52 (my translation).
44 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), pp. 94–5.
45 The Mabuse poster appears in Gunter Scholdt (ed.), *Norbert Jacques...*, p. 153. The *Fantomas* film poster appears in *1895*: L'année 1913 en France numéro hors serie Oct. 1993, p. 244.
46 Burch, p. 21.
47 Dadoun, p.19.
48 Ibid.
49 Marie, p. 52.
50 Quoted in William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), p. 60. Besides being an expert on shop windows, Baum was, of course, the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.
51 Kracauer, p. 221.
52 See Baum, quoted in Leach, p. 60.
53 Eisner makes the point that Lang wanted 'to say that the ultimate reason for the murders is the unequal distribution of wealth. Frau Beckmann is forever at the tub; hence she has no time to look after Elsie properly or fetch her from school', *Fritz Lang*, p. 128.
54 Marie, p. 53.
55 Kuntzel, pp. 43–4.
56 Quoted in Patrick McGilligan, *The Nature of the Beast*, p. 157.
57 Burch, p. 21, p. 29.
58 See Ott, p. 155.
59 Dadoun, p. 20.
60 Ibid.
61 Higham and Sheenby, *The Celluloid Muse*, p. 123.
62 Quoted by Bernard Eisenschitz in his valuable essay 'Le Production, le tournage' in *M le Maudit un film de Fritz Lang* (Paris: Le Cinématheque Français/Editions Plume, 1990), p. 35.
63 Dadoun, p. 20.
64 The most complete version of this anecdote is told by Lang in Bogdanovich, pp. 126–7.
65 Kracauer, p. 219.
66 Bogdanovich, p. 20.

Chapter 8: You Ought to Be in Pictures: *Liliom* and *Fury*

1 Bertholt Brecht, 'On Thinking about Hell', trans. Nicholas Jacobs, in *Poems 1913–1956*, p. 367.
2 Ibid., trans. Frank Jellinek, p. 131.
3 The weighing of evidence is done well in Patrick McGilligan, *The Nature of the Beast*, pp. 174–81.
4 Curt Riess, quoted in ibid., p. 191.
5 Lang's divorce is detailed in ibid., pp. 181–3.
6 Ibid., pp. 157–8 and 169–73.
7 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', p. 30. Burch's later reflections are on p. 31.
8 Ibid., p. 3.
9 Kristin Thompson, 'Early Alternatives to the Hollywood Mode of Production: Implications for Europe's Avant Gardes', *Film History*, vol. 5 no. 4, December 1993, pp. 386–404.
10 Ibid., p. 388.
11 Ibid., p. 395.
12 Lang tells stories of his adjustments to Hollywood procedures in many places. See, for example, Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, *The Celluloid Muse: Hollywood Directors Speak* (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1969), p. 106; Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, p. 32.
13 Theo Lindgren speaks of these detailed 'scenarios' being used during the Berto of *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. Quoted in Alfred Eibel (ed), *Fritz Lang Trois Lumières*, pp. 72–3. Lotte Eisner quotes Lindgren on the same topic, p. 144. A wonderful selection of these diagrams that Lang prepared for *The Big Heat* has been published in Gerard Leblanc and Brigitte Devismes, *Le Double Scénario chez Fritz Lang* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991). Several related plans are reproduced in Bernard Eisenschitz and Paolo Bertetto (eds), *Fritz Lang: La mise en scène*, for *The Woman in the Window*, p. 281; *Cloak and Dagger*, p. 306; *Rancho Notorious*, p. 357; *The Blue Gardenia*, p. 371; and *Moonfleet*, p. 396.
14 Such sketches, some in Lang's hand, some in those of his art directors, are reproduced in ibid.: *Die Nibelungen*, pp. 78, 82, 84; *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, pp. 90, 152–8; *M*, 149–51; *Man Hunt*, pp. 232, 237; *Ministry of Fear*, p. 267; *The Woman in the Window*, p. 281; *Cloak and Dagger*, p. 307; *Rancho Notorious*, pp. 347, 349, 351; *Moonfleet*, pp. 394–5. The art directors' sketches for *Man Hunt* have been published in Bernard Eisenschitz, *Manhunt de Fritz Lang* (Paris: Editions Yellow Now, 1992), pp. 147–253.
15 Such accounts are numerous. For a sampling, see McGilligan, pp. 243–4, 265 (Henry Fonda); p. 254 (Sylvia Sidney); p. 311 (Edward G. Robinson); p. 338 (Lilli Palmer); p. 359 (Michael Redgrave). Perhaps most vivid is Marlene Dietrich's description in the interview film, *Marlene* (1983) by Maximilian Schell of Lang chalking her marks in *Rancho Notorious*, but doing it based on his six foot stride rather than her considerably smaller one.
16 Manny Farber, 'White Elephant Art vs Termite Art', in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), pp. 134–44; Lang is quoted in Bogdanovich, p. 20.
17 Walter Benjamin, 'Commentaries on Poems by Brecht', in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1977) p. 60.
18 Brecht, 'Jan 19, 1942', *Journals 1934–55*, trans. Hugh Rorrison, ed. John Willett (New York: Routledge, 1996). p. 193.
19 Lang, quoted in Bogdanovich, p. 38.
20 Brecht, *Poems 1913–1956*, p. 131.
21 See details of the pre-production for *Liliom* in McGilligan, pp. 193–6.
22 Ibid., p. 197.
23 Ibid., p. 199.
24 Ibid., p. 201.
25 Bernard Eisenschitz, 'Le Production, le tournage', p. 23. McGilligan, p. 190, seems to cast doubts on whether this script actually dated from this earlier period, which the reference Eisenschitz turned up in *Kinematograph* from1929 should settle (McGilligan, following Eisner had looked for evidence a bit later in 1933). The script for *Scandal in Vienna*, a project of

Anton KAES, M, London: BFI Film Classics, 2000

folklore; serial culture cannot let him die. The rhyme, which we hear three times at the beginning of the film, expresses a fascination with seriality and its deadly logic: the murderer will kill in an orderly fashion, one victim after another, but eventually he will come around to kill you, too. Elimination is the flip side of seriality. The children have turned this macabre nursery rhyme into a ritual of exclusion ('You are out') that perfectly encapsulates the intertwining of serial murder and serial culture.

3

TOTAL MOBILISATION

A studio street. The camera frames a police poster which reads '10,000 Marks Reward. Who is the Murderer?' It slowly pulls back, revealing adjacent posters advertising a boxing match, a comedy stage, a circus, a dance school and a movie theatre showing *Spreewaldmädel*, a popular film at the time. Serial murder had become part of mass culture, qualified to compete with nightly entertainment, with which it shares its serial nature. Detection itself had also become a form of mass entertainment. In 1926, for instance, the police challenged the population to a well-publicised game of finding a person they had sent into the streets with distinguishing marks. There were prizes for the winners. An early silent film, *Wo ist Coletti?* (Where is Coletti?, 1913), showed an entire metropolis searching for a person eager to prove that he could disappear in the city streets. The idea was to train the urban masses to look with a

Muder as media event

sharper eye at their surroundings and, in the spirit of heightened self-surveillance, quickly register deviation and difference.

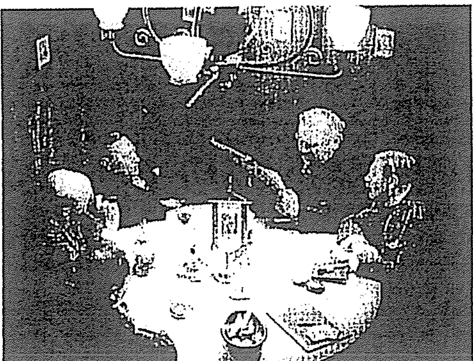
As the camera pulls back farther, a crowd congregating in front of the billboard pillar becomes visible, shoving and jostling each other as they try to get a closer look at the small print on the poster. A clatter of voices is heard, some expressing shock and disbelief, others demanding that those in front read the small-printed text of the poster aloud. Only fragments are audible: 'The terror in our town has found a new ... victim ... Louder, we can't hear a thing ...' Reading about the child murderer on the police poster gives the crowd a curious rush; they cannot get enough. This commotion also recalls the excitement during the first days of the war (captured by photographs and documentary film) when the latest news reports were posted hourly on billboards and distributed as extra editions.

As the camera dollies back in an overhead shot, we see mostly men with hats and overcoats, their backs turned to the camera to emphasise their anonymity. They all look the same, a highly mobile and volatile mass of nameless figures, anyone could be the murderer. In fact, the child murderer himself might be among the crowd standing in the front of the poster, inexorably drawn to the news, at once shocked and mesmerised: 'And afterwards I see those posters,' Beckert confesses at the end, 'and I read what I've done ... I read ... and ... and read ... Did I do that?' Reading about his crimes seems to give him additional pleasure, a pleasure he shares with a million others fantasising about crime and transgression. The scene in front of the billboard shows an agitated crowd ready to let rumour and suggestion transform them into an angry mob. The frame, even though it expands as the camera backtracks, can hardly contain the ever-growing crowd.

Amidst the cacophany, one loud, high-pitched voice becomes dominant, but it is not yet identifiable as the camera lingers over the crowd. Cut indoors to a barroom where an older gentleman reads aloud from a newspaper to his five drinking companions assembled around a table. It was his voice we heard. This sound bridge demonstrates the ubiquity of the news transmitted by sound. The voice, disembodied at first, could easily have been that of a radio, carrying the news everywhere, disregarding distinctions between outside and inside, public and private. The sound continues while the locales change, connecting the diverse spaces and constituting the city as one complex body united and energised by an unceasing flow of information.

The barroom scene is claustrophobic. Shot again from above, with

a spidery ceiling lamp covering the top of the frame, it depicts a *Stammtisch* gathering of friends (exclusively males at that time) in a bar. Their grotesque physiques are modelled after George Grosz's savage caricatures of the self-satisfied, war-mongering German bourgeoisie around World War I. They consume the latest titillating news of the child murderer, as they consume their beer and cigars. The camera cuts to two men eyeing each other, as the reading continues off screen: 'What is he like? Where is he hiding? No one knows. And, yet, he is one of us. Your neighbour could be the murderer.' 'Why are you looking at me,' asks one of them. Within seconds they are at each other's throats, one barking 'You murderer' and the other screaming 'slanderer'. The camera dramatises the aggression through rapid cross-cutting between the two combatants,



Beer, cigars and murder

both wild-eyed and crazed, before returning to its high-angle point of departure, coldly observing how the detection mania ('Who is the murderer?') destroys friendship and community.

The last word of this disturbing scene, 'slanderer', is repeated by a crying middle-aged woman as the film cuts to an apartment undergoing a house search, occasioned, as we learn, by an anonymous letter. The trench-coated police officer explains that he is only doing his duty: 'The police must follow every lead ... any man in the street ... could be the guilty man.' At the word 'street', the camera cuts to an overhead shot of a nocturnal street, where a distinguished-looking old gentleman, wearing a bowler hat and spectacles, waits for a bus and reads the newspaper. A little girl on a scooter enters the frame, asking him the time. The camera cuts away to two housewives and a burly workman, who immediately intervenes when the old man responds to the girl. A heated exchange ensues, caricatured with distorted camera angles: the extreme high angle dwarfs the old man, while the workman, shot from his perspective in extreme low angle, towers over him. The camera comments on the power relationship between accuser and accused by exaggerating their mutual subjective perception and by adding a comic touch that highlights the absurdity of the suspicion.

The altercation draws a crowd and the old man suddenly finds himself under suspicion of being the child murderer. 'You wanted to take off with her, didn't you?' asks the workman. Bystanders scream 'Punch his face in' and 'It's the murderer! It's him!' As they call for police, a double-decker bus enters the frame. A policeman with a pickpocket in tow appears: he protests loudly that the police ought to look for the child murderer instead of harrassing petty thieves like him. The crowd only hears 'child murderer' and starts pressing against the bus, shouting and shrieking: 'That's him ... the murderer!' In the general confusion, the mob shifts its ire to the pickpocket. It does not matter who he is, as long as a scapegoat is found. This scene shows the making of a mob which overwhelms the police as well as the camera. The camera's eye-level position emphasises the chaos; it becomes part of the rabble, shuffling and scuffling in search of the prey which is ultimately no longer visible. This series of tableaux, linked by editing, chronicles a frightening escalation: it starts with a barroom brawl and ends with mass contagion. From scene to scene, distinctions between fact and rumour, suspicion and guilt, civility and violence collapse. Lang's montage shows how mistrust, suspicion and fear collude to create collective hysteria.

....

The ease with which a collective of faceless citizens became a mobilised mass triggered associations of World War I. In August 1914, the entire German nation quickly united to take on 'a world of enemies'. Lang subtly alludes to this memory when his moving camera catches a glimpse of two identical movie posters side by side, advertising the most celebrated contemporary German war film, G. W. Pabst's *Westfront 1918*. We see the posters only for a split second as a man and a child walk by a wall, suspiciously observed by a beggar/spy wearing a bogus sign reading 'Blind' around his neck. Is the man a father with his daughter or the child murderer with a new victim? The beggar does his duty; he surveys the urban

The spectre of the war

battlefield. The allusion to *Westfront 1918*, released exactly a year prior to *M*, served as a temporal marker to emphasise once more the topicality of the movie. It was probably also an industry in-joke, because Pabst's film and *M* were both produced by Nero-Film. But Lang's explicit reference to a war film (he could have chosen other contemporary Nero film posters) gestures towards a more profound nexus between the two films, despite their seemingly different topographies. Is *M*'s Berlin not presented as a 'Westfront 1931', a city in a state of total mobilisation prepared to fight an enemy who had invaded the community?

Overt references to the war experience abounded at the time. 'War in Düsseldorf' screamed the headline of an article in the *Berliner Morgenpost* on 25 November 1929, which detailed the serial murderer's impact on the community:

> All doors are locked, window shades are drawn, no woman, no child would dare to step outside the fortress of their home into the death front of the nightly street. One finds only men in the bars and there is nobody who doesn't have a weapon in his pocket. There is war in Düsseldorf. War of the minds, hearts and fists against the beast in human shape. Against a terrible enemy who cannot be caught, against a master of black magic who remains invisible, shadow-like, spectral. It is a war against a human being that possesses nothing human. It is a war against a phantom.

The enemy as beast and phantom: this vocabulary also reached back to World War I. A flood of war novels, memoirs and picture books, from the far right to the far left, inundated the book market at the time. Erich Maria Remarque's 1929 novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (All Quiet on the Western Front) was the most popular, with more than one million copies sold. In December 1930, the American film adaptation of Remarque's book provoked riots in Berlin. Nationalist forces considered the film a defamation of Germany and succeeded in having it banned until cuts were made. Ernst Jünger's philosophical essay 'Total Mobilisation', which also appeared in 1930, reconfigured the war in terms of labour, discipline and social order. And Lang's *M* contributed in its own way to the trend: it demonstrated the extent to which the war experience was re-enacted in a repetition compulsion which, for Freud, was a symptom of trauma.

In *M*, Lang alludes to scenes well known from war films. The raid on the basement bar, a hangout for criminals, is staged and shot like a military operation. From extreme high angle, the camera observes columns of uniformed and armed police advancing in locked step, reminiscent of infantry marching in formation. Later, one of the gangsters surveys the scene from the same angle through binoculars, as if reconnoitring the enemy's position.

The war was still a living memory in 1931. Lang singles out Emil Dustermann from the long line of nameless beggars as the embodiment of the classical veteran. His wooden leg signifies that he was one of the millions of soldiers who returned from the front as invalids. Limbs were often blown off as grenades and shells exploded, or amputated because of a lack of surgical facilities in front hospitals. These cripples who dotted the streets of Weimar as solemn reminders of the war found themselves outsiders in a

War cripple at the home...

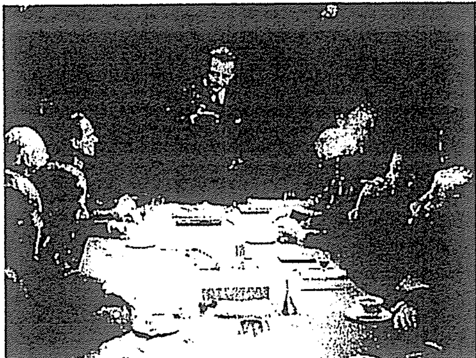
society which sought to repress the national shame of defeat and resented the financial and moral burden veterans imposed. It was not uncommon for war cripples to end up playing the hurdy-gurdy in tenement courtyards, selling papers or balloons, or joining the ever growing army of beggars. Emil Dustermann stands for the continuity between the trenches and the domestic front more than a decade later. In a scene reminiscent of millions of volunteers registering for military service in August 1914, the camera captures the bureaucratic particulars of induction: Dustermann's name and post are meticulously recorded in a close-up of pedantic handwriting. 'Dustermann, Emil' receives a carbon copy of the record.

. . . .

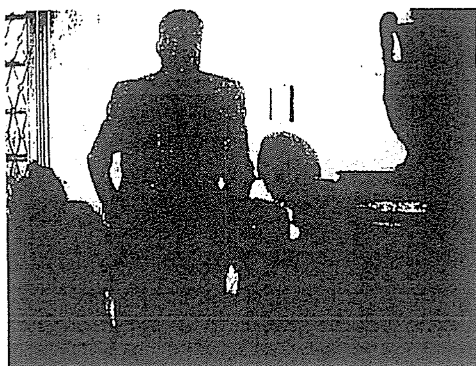
In 'Total Mobilisation', Ernst Jünger argued that the general process of militarisation and mobilisation necessitated by the war did not cease in 1918.[26] Manifest signs of total mobilisation in World War I ranged from the large number of volunteers and reservists to the management of raw materials; from censorship to the fusion of military and political command; from the curtailment of individual liberty to subordination of everything to the dictates of the state. Because war was no longer fought between professional or volunteer armies, distinctions between soldiers and civilians, between 'armies that meet on the battle fields' and 'modern armies of commerce and transport', lost their meaning according to Jünger. Everyone was involved in the war effort – resulting in new technologies of supervision, registration and surveillance which remained (and even expanded) once the war was over.

In *M*, an entire city mobilises itself to wage all-out war against the child murderer. Every resource is activated; differences in class and social status become irrelevant. The editing underscores the mobilisation through seamless cross-cuts between the strategy session of the police and the meeting of the underworld. Sentences begun in one setting are completed in the other. The leader of the crime syndicate continues a hand movement begun by the police president. Both meetings, sites of concentrated thinking and heated debate, are enshrouded in heavy clouds of smoke which make the two spaces all but indistinguishable. While the editing establishes the common goal – the capture of the child murderer – thick smoke blurs differences of status and position. Smoking among men establishes a curious commonality which even includes Beckert, who betrays himself by leaving three cigarette butts at the crime scene as evidence. In addition, smoking

A gesture begun by the master criminal ...



... is continued, in a match-cut, by the chief of police



Criminals as phantoms

triggered associations of the war (or more precisely the war film), where the consumption of cigarettes was a means to combat anxiety. Not surprisingly, Schränker, the most callous of all, does not smoke, while Lohmann, expansive and compassionate, is unimaginable without his cigar. *M*'s inordinate focus on smoking points to a society under unbearable stress.

Mobilisation makes visible the tightly woven web of controls already in place. Criminals and vagrants have identity papers (as the film shows, forgeries are easily detected), they are registered and monitored, their fingerprints are recorded and analysed with the latest technology.[27] (The Berlin Police had more than a million fingerprints on file in 1930.) Asylums and hospitals keep medical records. Telephone lines link the population to the authorities and office buildings maintain alarm systems connected to police headquarters. Plain-clothes detectives search in widening circles for every possible irregularity; neighbours watch each other; parents train their children to be wary and every person in the street is seen as a potential suspect. Newspapers and extra editions keep the public current at all times. Not only photography and film, but also law, medicine, architecture and pedagogy had, for more than a decade, been tirelessly involved in improving techniques and technologies of surveillance.

With a relentlessly panoptic resolve and detached 'cold gaze', the camera itself becomes a participant in the process of mobilisation. It emulates the police and the underworld – it surveys the terrain and tracks the suspect. The relationship between the camera and the policing eye is repeatedly invoked. When Beckert walks into a street café, the camera, like a detective, lurks behind the trellis. As Beckert leaves, the camera pulls back with a jolt as if it wanted to escape detection. To be effective in surveillance, the camera itself must remain invisible.

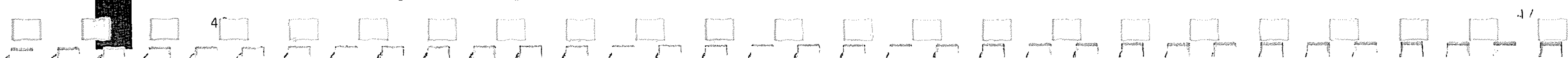
Schränker's plot to catch the child murderer is to occupy the city with an invisible army of spies, enlisting them to observe all citizens at all times. He says: 'Every square inch must be under constant surveillance. No child may take an unnoticed step.' Instead of resolving a crime after it is committed, which is the method of the police, the underworld opts for crime prevention. The price, of course, is high: total surveillance and mobilisation, a voluntary fascism motivated by fear of violence.

Who can be stationed in the streets and remain invisible? As soon as Schränker answers his own question – 'the beggars!' – the scene shifts to the beggar's union headquarters, where his plan is already being implemented. The abrupt cut and implied time ellipsis underscores the

Cartography as surveillance ...

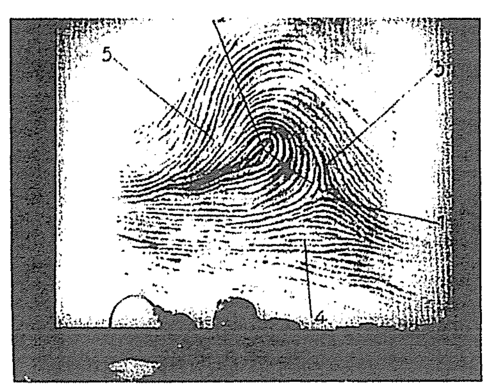
... and capture

impressive power of Schränker and his gang to impose their will as soon as the decision is made. In iconography reminiscent of Pabst's rendering of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* (which had opened only three months earlier), Lang's film finds beauty in the simple but offbeat life of the beggars. The highly mobile camera (apparently hand-held) explores the large space of the beggars' meeting place, using uncoordinated quick pans to focus on some colourful detail and conveying a sense of picturesque authenticity. The corpulent boss of the Beggars' Market yanks a steaming sausage from a pot and takes a bite, then he counts sandwiches in twos – he is obviously preparing food for the troops of beggars en route to their surveillance posts. The camera pans up to a huge blackboard reading 'Prices for the Evening of the 16th'. In a parody of the stockmarket (which had crashed less than two years before), the fluctuating prices for every sort of



sandwich are listed. Comical touches abound: from the signs on the wall of the Beggars' Union – 'No Credit Given' and 'Begging Not Allowed' – to their obsessively scrupulous bookkeeping. Bureaucratisation has percolated down to the lowest strata of society, a passive mobilisation, as it were, which keeps a tight grip on everyone and everything.

The camera pans up to an upstairs makeshift office where beggars wait in line (a motley group which includes a dwarf) to receive their street assignment. Schränker, dapper in a leather coat and with a cane, stands by and watches. An insert shot of a street map marks the places where children have been murdered. A subsequent series of shots shows the various places where the beggars are employed. Facilitated by telephone, telegraph, press and radio, the city under surveillance has become a complex communication and information network, a fully transparent and rationalised collective.



Technologies of investigation and classification

The film's obsession with surveillance also addresses the deep-seated fear of an expanding urban population. The ease with which Beckert was able to hide, even after he had been branded by the sign 'M', must have scared the contemporary audience. Berlin more than doubled in population by the end of the decade; it had reached 4.5 million inhabitants in 1930. Attempts to control and discipline these masses included insistent endeavours to survey, classify, categorise and supervise them. Vision and surveillance foster discipline and control. 'Traditionally,' writes Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, 'power was what was seen … disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility. … It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection.'[28] For Foucault, the perfect disciplinary apparatus enables a single gaze to see everything all the time. For Lang, however, even a single panoptic gaze could not comprehend, let alone discipline and contain, the psychopathological Beckert. While Lang examines the nexus between total mobilisation, surveillance and social control, he also insists on an unknowable remainder, a resistant scintilla which defies categorisation.

. . . .

The return to war in literature and film of the late 1920s and early 1930s was itself a symptom for increasingly militarised political reality. Private quasi-armies and militant commandos of the extreme right and left engaged in what the Nazis called the 'Politics of the Street'. The psychological wounds of the Lost War and the Treaty of Versailles still festered beneath the democratic surface, as if the battles had been carried from the Front into the midst of German society. In 1931, one could readily view the pursuit of the child murderer as a war between organised crime and the police. Excluded in this struggle was the government, represented by the Minister, who is far removed from the action. He appears only once in the film, calling from an unknown location, complaining about the public relations disaster of the unresolved murder case. The police president must remind him of the citizens' right to write letters to the press as they wish. When the Minister becomes impatient, he is politely rebuffed: 'Herr Minister, you do not seem to understand …' – a phrase that sums up the film's sceptical, even dismissive attitude towards governmental help. The over-eager general public is also shown to be useless. Inspector Lohmann denigrates it with venom and disdain as a bunch of slanderers and ignoramuses. The police president

laments that no fewer than fifteen witnesses have given contradictory accounts of Elsie's walk home from school. A cutaway (listed as 'testimony 1478') shows two of them at a police station. They are unable to agree about the colour of Elsie's cap, shouting each other down, while the camera exposes their agitated faces and staccato voices: 'It was red, Inspector.' 'No, it was green.' 'Red.' 'Green.' 'Red.' 'Green.' The camera exaggerates the comedy by cutting between them more and more rapidly. This comical scene undermines any hope for concrete assistance from the public at large.

Help would come from battle plans. Lang shows two competing strategies and it is part of the film's viewing pleasure to watch which of the two will triumph. Will it be the police under the command of the jovial and cunning Inspector Lohmann, who (at least at first) enters the urban battlefield like Sherlock Holmes, looking for clues and relying on logic and reason? Or will it be the crime syndicate under the leadership of Schränker, the criminal with class, who decides to seize the city and place it under total surveillance? Lang captures the two operations by showing the same city map twice. While the police draw concentric circles around the crime site, signifying the methodical procedures of their ever-widening investigation, Schränker puts his black-gloved hand over the map, suggesting force and terror.

Organised crime in Weimar was a central part of Berlin's urban scene, open and widespread, feared but tolerated. At the core were the so-called *Ringvereine* (ring clubs), gang-like organisations (not unlike Chicago's Mafia) and a shadow police force that 'protected' businesses in exchange for extortion money. They controlled the entire semi-criminal underworld – prostitution, gambling and drugs – and they also lorded over Weimar Berlin's world-famous decadent nightlife, a huge industry. They ran the beggars' union, controlled the sale of guns and managed 'professional' break-ins. Originally founded in 1890 as social organisations for ex-convicts, their numbers swelled after the economic depression. In 1929, more than fifty groups were joined in a central 'Ring' for Berlin. They sported colourful and ironic names such as 'Evergreen' and 'Forget-Me-Not'. They could afford the best lawyers in town and provided an ongoing source of urban entertainment in their mostly non-violent struggles with the police. (It was part of their lore that they would avoid murder – Lohmann uses this to his advantage when he interrogates Franz, the hapless criminal left behind in the break-in.) Organised crime inspired writers and film-makers, providing, as in Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, an only slightly distorted mirror of society. It was a sign of class among Berlin's bohème to be associated with them. Gustav Gründgens, who plays Schränker in *M*, was in fact an honorary member of one of these ring organisations.

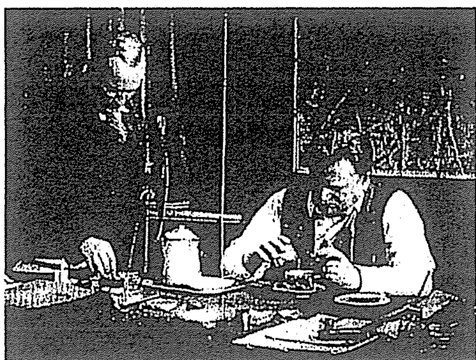
Structured like small companies, with a charismatic figure as leader (Schränker with gloves and a cane, or Mackie Messer in Pabst's *3-Groschen-Oper*) and with strict rules (penalties for missed meetings, for instance) and procedures (Schränker runs his meeting with representatives from various ring clubs like a manager), these ring clubs clearly resembled legitimate businesses. As Lang's film illustrates, the police ventured into the underworld only in times of crisis, after a particularly daring heist or in response to public pressure. The papers, ever hungry for sensational news, ran vivid reports about crimes, making heroes of both criminals and detectives. Police and underworld had become players on the public stage, locked in an ongoing cat-and-mouse game.

Lang appealed to the public's enjoyment of crime culture when he modelled his break-in into the office building after the stunning and widely publicised coup carried out by the Saas Brothers in 1929. These master criminals had cut a hole through the ceiling of the safe deposit area of Berlin's Disconto Bank, gaining access to valuable jewellery and coins. (Most of the loot was not claimed as loss by the owners for fear of being charged with tax evasion.) Despite a lengthy police investigation, hard evidence was lacking to convict them. The public relished the battle between the ultra-cool brothers and the convivial but ill-starred police inspector. Upon their release, the brothers and their clever lawyer held a press conference, celebrating the defeat of authority with champagne unwittingly providing further fodder for Joseph Goebbels' propaganda mill, which continually accused Berlin's police president of being incompetent and soft on crime. (The fear of police ineptitude also drives *M*.) The sympathies of the public lay by and large with the master criminals. Lang shows, in an admiring touch, a professional break-in artist loosening his fingers like a pianist, as he readies to pick a lock. Berlin's most brilliant lawyers were eager for publicity's sake to defend the underworld, if its members came to trial at all. As a saying went: 'You become "frei" if you come to Dr Frey' – a pun on the word *frei*, (i.e. free) and a reference to Dr Frey, a prominent defence lawyer for organised crime in Berlin. It was part of the criminal chic (and maybe the beginning of today's intertwining of law and mass culture) that Frey has a bit part in *M*: he plays a gangster.

The police, underfunded and reduced in numbers as a result of the Versailles Treaty, tried hard to overcome their authoritarian image and to gain the sympathy of the public. In December 1929, for instance, the Berlin police president invited the public to mingle with the officers at a police ball. The public, so unusually wooed, responded by wanting to help the police whenever possible. They became amateur detectives, spies and informers – a development Lang's film condemns in no uncertain terms. (Hitler's police state profited from a highly self-policing society being already in place.)

Police Inspector Lohmann represents the prototype of a detective whose class and status were not so far removed from the small-time crooks whom he supervised. As the film demonstrates, a 'working' relationship between underworld and police developed in which Lohmann played a stern but fair and understanding father to his unruly (and only slightly transgressive) children. His large body ungainly, his clothes rumpled, his appearance unkempt, he addresses the crowd of small-time crooks and prostitutes at the raid: 'Come on now, children. Let's be reasonable.' The gangsters in turn call him Papa Lohmann. He remains unruffled, even jolly as he deals with everyday criminality, displaying his superiority vis-à-vis folks who have forged IDs. The camera, in the meantime, explores the various hiding places: one man emerges from behind the counter; another, slightly embarrassed, from the women's bathroom. None escapes. The police are shown to be efficient in their normal operations – as if to highlight the insuperable difficulties they have, by contrast, with the anonymous child murderer. In the style of a police education film, *M* shows the result of the raid: the camera pans slowly over an amazing array of tools (a leather briefcase containing a complete housebreaking kit is opened for a camera close-up) and a large assortment of weapons. Lang is fond of such inventory shots (we see similar ones after the office building break-in); they reinforce the film's documentary dimension and hint at the astonishing size of the underworld's semi-military arsenal.

The film does not allow identification with Inspector Lohmann. Although he elicits sympathy as a dedicated folksy detective who eats and sleeps in his office, several scenes interrupt any closer alignment. An extremely low-angle shot displays a distorted view of his legs and genitalia, a repulsive prospect that undermines any authority and dignity he might have possessed. It comes at the lowest point in his investigation, after the identity of the murderer has been established, but the culprit seems to have vanished. The camera suggests that the futile search for the


Lohmann under siege

child murderer has taken a physical toll; appearances no longer matter to him. When he hears that the underworld has caught the killer, his cigar drops from his mouth. But when the gangster's information offers a lucky break, he goes to a washroom and puts his head under the faucet. The progress of the investigation registers itself on his body.

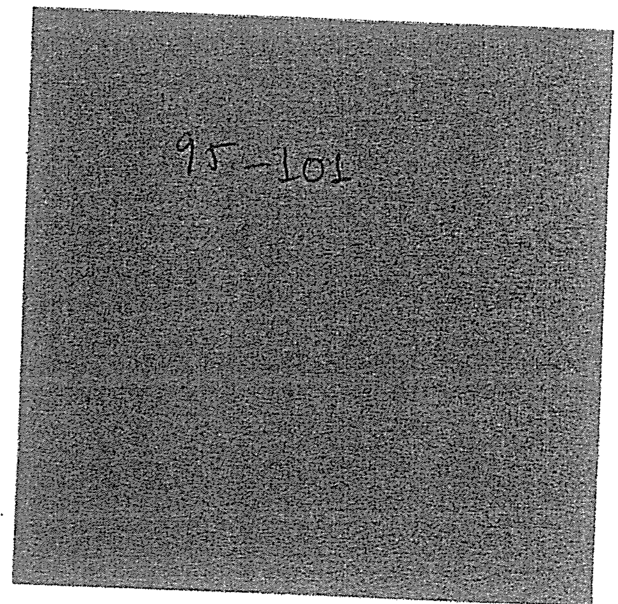
Lohmann is also shown to break the law when it furthers his cause. He scares Franz with a bogus murder charge to force a confession. In a brief cutaway, we see the guard, supposedly dead, enjoying a huge meal of blood sausage and wheat beer. Using Heinrich Zille, the popular caricaturist and photographer of the Berlin milieu, as his guide, Lang often indulges in Berliniana in this film – a powerful counterforce here to his otherwise abstract tendencies. The editing reveals that Lohmann is lying, fabricating a murder which the omniscient camera immediately repudiates. Lohmann's violation of the law parallels Schränker's torture of a guard who refuses to cooperate. The film shows how both sides break the law in their pursuit of the murderer. The city – like Germany itself under Heinrich Brüning in 1931 – was no longer governed by rule of law, but swayed by the pressure of the mobilised masses.

4

BEFORE THE LAW

What does a serial killer look like? Gazing at himself in the mirror, Beckert distorts his face and grimaces. Why? To see if his visage could be recog-

Timothy J. CORRIGAN, A Short Guide to Writing about Film, Longman
6th Edition, 2007



SAMPLE ESSAYS

This first essay, written by a knowledgeable film student, examines Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) primarily as part of a tradition of German cinema and within the larger context of German culture and politics of the early thirties (Figures 22 and 23). Observe, however, how formalistic questions and auteurist assumptions also play a role. In the second essay, a student who

Figure 22 The normal man-on-the-street becomes a menacing reflection of himself in Fritz Lang's (*M*) (1931).

began only with an uneasy feeling about a film's portrayal of women, demonstrates an ideological approach to *Ordinary People* (1980). More precisely, her essay is a feminist reading of the movie: It is less concerned with what the film intends to say than with what it does say about how women appear in a male-dominated society. Note that this "reading against the grain" of the film nonetheless remains very close to the images and actual story.

M. Trillo

The title is a specific and accurate description of the paper's content. The opening is general but engaging.

The Reflection of M: Germany as a Culture of Crisis

Fritz Lang's 1931 M is a suspenseful and horrifying tale of a psychotic child murderer. Its technical accomplishments alone make it worthy of attention: an economic and imaginative use of sound, sophisticated

Figure 23 The mirror images of *M*.

crosscutting editing, and graphic compositions which are sometimes as detailed and evocative as paintings. Because of these accomplishments, M will probably always appeal to audiences of different generations and from many different countries. But for my purposes, Lang's film is most intriguing as a reflection of a turbulent German society in the early thirties.

A question or problem is stated—which leads to a clearly announced and focused thesis.

Whether consciously made in this way or not, M seems to work as a mirror image of the rise of fascism in Germany, but in reflecting that rise, the film may be most important as an attempt to expose it to the German audience that was so involved in fascism and its growth.

A brief but pertinent discussion of cultural and historical background.

German culture in the twenties and early thirties was, as is well known, caught in a crisis. The gradual collapse of the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1933 created a society that seemed to live in a kind of chaos or disorder, a chaos that was economic, social, and psychological. Poverty, unemployment, and depression became widespread realities, and the stable sense of a personal identity once found in a German tradition and a very ordered society seems to have been destroyed by the catastrophic defeat of World War I.

The background material is related more specifically to artistic traditions.

This general disorder and instability are reflected in many of the major cultural trends of the period. The nightmarish dream paintings of Norwegian Edvard Munch are the very influential emblems of a whole school of German expressionist artists whose focus was on the dark, turbulent world beneath the quiet surfaces of everyday life. Freud's writings also became more and more important during this period. This increasing importance is especially appropriate since his work discusses the dark unconscious below men's and women's conscious life and also sketches a civilization full of secret discontents (Willet).

The source for much of this information is cited.

The German expressionist cinema of the twenties was likewise concerned with this crisis and its depiction. As Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte Eisner have shown,

The cultural and historical context is further focused on two key film movements, highlighted with references to particular films and two scholarly sources. Throughout this paragraph, the writer reminds his readers of the original title and thesis ("the crisis"). Likewise becomes a useful transition word in the topic sentence.

some of the most important movies made during this time depict a "haunted screen" reflecting much of the unstable reality of the society. From The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari to Nosferatu, the Vampire, many of these films seem regularly to be about madness and destruction, and even in the realistic "street films," the settings and plots describe a world that is collapsing into ruin. In the tyrants and madmen that often control the chaos in these movies, many viewers have seen the foreshadowing of Hitler, the Caligari who would step in to use the insecurity of the crisis as a vehicle for massive destruction (Kracauer, Eisner).

The first sentence works as both a transition ("these") and a topic sentence, pointing to the analysis of the single film in question. Very short summary of the film's central theme.

These motifs are central to M, which draws from that expressionist tradition in which Lang himself worked during the twenties. The central character Beckert (Peter Lorre) is a man possessed by something he cannot control, a mad compulsion to murder children. Beneath his placid and calm exterior and in the midst of everyday life, the insane killer begins to throw the world into disorder. Stylistically, the film draws on both the expressionist and the "street realism" traditions of German film. The insanity is shown, on the one hand, in a number of expressionistic shots, like the spiraling staircases that indicate entrapment and a dizzying lack of perspective. Conversely, there is the street realism of social poverty and underworld life which gives M a kind of documentary look at times. Unlike in some expressionist films, it should be noted, it is difficult to

Still focused on the film, the writer connects formal and stylistic questions to the larger culture and social history. Conversely connects discussion of two German film traditions that inform the movie.

distinguish in M between the dream world of psychological chaos and the social chaos of the street. Or to put it in terms of the story, Lang makes it difficult in this postexpressionist movie to say whether Beckert is an evil madman or a victim of some force that runs through the whole society.

Topic sentence reasserts central thesis and introduces analysis. Specific, concrete examples are described, along with the precise technical detail from the film.

The movie makes this confusion and the crisis it implies fairly explicit at times. The balloon, which becomes the symbol of one of Beckert's victims, has a pudgy human shape, and its resemblance to Beckert's shape might suggest a connection between the killer and the victim. The law and order of the police who search for Beckert are, through Lang's parallel crosscutting, identified with and almost indistinguishable from the underworld crime mob that searches for Beckert, too. Lastly, there are the carefully orchestrated mob scenes (as during the final trial), which nonetheless appear as hysterical and bloodthirsty as the pathetic murderer seems.

A personal reflection is inserted—one that intelligently expands the themes of the film.

(In these instances, I can't help but think of the murderous actions of the Nazis in the name of law and order or of the perfectly ordered crowds of soldiers who became the machines of war.)

A transition and summary ("There are, then"), which then moves to the central point of the essay: mirror images.

There are, then, a number of double images or double reflections in M that seem to muddle the questions about a society in crisis. Where does the crisis originate? Where is the order, and where is the disorder? What is the nightmarish dream, and what is the reality? This double image and the questions it provokes are most apparent in the character of

Beckert, specifically in the number of times that he and the audience are made to examine his image. Frequently, Beckert examines himself and sees himself in mirrors, searching out the madman that exists somewhere inside him. At one point, Lang shows Beckert looking in a shop window, where the image of Beckert is contained in a frame within the film image—a frame made by a reflection of knives laid out in a diamond shape inside the store. Here, the normal man-on-the-street becomes a menacing reflection of himself. Later, Beckert discovers he has been found out and exposed by seeing a reflection in another mirror image that reveals the telltale "M" on his back.

More concrete description that attends both to what is seen and how it is formally presented.

What the reflections expose in these different shots and scenes is not exactly the same thing. Yet, in each, it is the dark side, the disorder, the murderous impulses of self (and society) that are sought out and discovered. In most of these mirror images, furthermore, the camera places the audience at an angle so that it seems to participate in that reflection—looking either over Beckert's shoulder or directly into the reflection itself. Just as the film builds up a strange sympathy for the madman Beckert, these mirror images seem to force an audience to view its own darker side in the reflecting images of a psychotic killer.

The writer expands his analysis of certain themes and formal strategies (the crisis contained in the "mirror images") to describe how the images on the screen address and challenge the audience.

If M is, then, like other German films of the late twenties and early thirties, an indirect reflection of a German culture in crisis, it is also more than a simple

Some further summary that condenses (but doesn't repeat) the argument.

reflection. Combining the two traditions of expressionism and street realism, it makes nightmares real and reality a nightmare in a manner far more disturbing than most other German movies of the time. Perhaps this is what the German authorities recognized when they forced Lang to change the original title, A Murderer Among Us, because they thought it was too politically provocative. When Lang fled Nazi Germany a few years later, he probably realized, however, that no movie, even one as powerful as M, would be enough to stop the tyrannical darkness that was surfacing in the streets of Germany.

A dramatic broadening of the main points of the essay, but this time in terms of the history of the filmmaker, the auteur behind the film.

[New page]

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SECTION 4

Isabelle VANDERSCHELDEN, Amélie,
London: I.B. Tauris, 2007

3 Postmodern style and Jeunet's signature

'Jeunet has a knack for finding visual answers to narrative problems.'[1]

'I cannot understand why a film should be ugly to be moving.'
J.-P. Jeunet[2]

Anchored more in popular culture than in the literary or theatrical traditions, *Amelie* offers spectacular entertainment, and promotes a playful, yet perfectionist approach to film-making. Relying on meticulous preparation and coordinated production values, the film combines high-tech cinematography, elaborate *mise-en-scène* with a quaint retro atmosphere. This chapter analyses the aesthetic choices that characterise *Amelie*'s visual style, focusing on cinematography, the manipulation of colour, the role played by special effects, and discusses the use of sound and the evocative soundtrack. It argues that Jeunet's distinctive cinematic style not only embraces postmodern film-making trends, but also re-creates a timeless Paris, which has contributed to the success of the film.

Amelie's visual feast: *mise-en-scène* and special effects

The film combines lavish images and effective cinematography. The sets have been carefully colour-coordinated, and unsightly flaws have been deleted – there are no graffiti, or litter in *Amelie*'s Paris. In the early 1990s, *Delicatessen* had been acclaimed for its innovative, almost prototypical use of cinematography and technologies, which 'explode[d] the realistic principles of artistic representation',[3] and *La Cité des enfants perdus* pioneered the use of new digital software for postproduction.

Jeunet often quotes three key cinematic influences to his style: (1) Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) for the playful side of

film-making; (2) Stanley Kubrick and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) as an aesthetic influence; (3) film animation for its potential to push back the limits of what is possible in cinema.[4] Considering that Leone's cinema is often labelled 'mannerist, baroque, spectacular, exhibitionist, performative, carnivalesque, camp, cartoonish, "pop formalist" – a cinema of effects rather than meanings, of playful excess rather than classical expressiveness',[5] it is easy to understand its appeal for Jeunet. Kubrick helped him to realise that cinema can use shot length, music or ellipsis to create stunning visual and sound effects.[6] And, finally, apart from its impact on characterisation, animation directly inspired the sets and visual freshness of the film. For instance, a number of dramatic devices and visual effects in *Amelie* recall the spirit of *Tex Avery* cartoons and Jacques Tardi's distinctive graphic style.

While revealing some continuity and coherence in the influences underpinning Jeunet's films, *Amelie* explores further the screen representation of fantasy, the transposition of animation and *bande dessinée* techniques to the cinema, and the application of a precise personal aesthetic project. The unusual imagery of the film, enhanced by the use made of state-of-the-art digital technology, confirms Jeunet's reluctance to 'reproduce the everyday reality without discrepancy ('décalage'), or to film what he doesn't like'.[7] This goes some way to explain the specific *mise-en-scène* strategies that contribute to the construction of his artistic signature.

Mise-en-scène *and composition*

Amelie's carefully composed images not only serve the semi-fantasy world of the film but also clarify the narrative. As a critic once noted, 'Jeunet has a knack for finding visual answers to narrative problems: for him, an image, be it for an instant, will always be more telling than dialogue.'[8] These visual answers comprise the use of still images to explain precise situations. For instance, through the mediation of the girl in the Renoir painting, Amélie is made to project her own emotional state onto the mysterious gaze of the young woman with the glass. Although occupying a central position in the painting, this character seems to be absent from its narrative, just as Amélie is central to the plot of the film, but appears lost and isolated. The painting is therefore overtly integrated into the *mise-en-scène* to convey information, and even to trigger the narrative progression, since it functions as a catalyst for the heroine's confessions to Dufayel.[9] However, in most cases, Jeunet's images complement rather than replace the dialogue (or the voiceover), in a display of surreal effects (see digital effects section).

A series of explicit core principles that inform Jeunet's approach to *mise-en-scène* are applied to *Amelie*. The first of these, often quoted in interviews, states that 'every shot should be composed like a painting'.[10] Specific pictorial influences are discussed in the section on colour, but the impact of the analogy with painting extends beyond evoking a painter's style or colour

scheme. It affects the construction of each frame and imposes strict discipline during shooting. For all the artistic skill that this filming strategy demonstrates (elaborate editing and camera mobility), it also runs the risk of creating static, de-contextualised vignettes, which tend to encapsulate the characters in their fantasy world. For example, when Amélie blissfully walks across the Pont des Arts, the blurred background and use of slow motion contribute to the stylisation of the scene. However, in an earlier bird's-eye shot of her lying in bed, the zooming in, combined with a 360° movement of the camera, had brought an initially static image to life, suggesting the heroine's inner turmoil.

Because of Jeunet's animation background, it is not surprising to find that the second principle should emphasise the graphic dimension of the image.[11] From the storyboard stage to the composition of the scenes, the frames are carefully chosen by the director himself, as are the intricate camera movements. There are many examples of fast-forward zooming recalling animation technique. Wide-angle lenses are preferred, and the camera is often placed near the ground or close to the actors. In addition to influencing the choice of set, the 25, 20 and 18mm focal lengths modify perspective and depth of field.[12] Not only do they distort the straight lines towards the edges of the frame, but they also exaggerate the distance between foreground and background planes, making the sets look more imposing, especially when the use of lighting preserves the definition of the background.

Wide-angle distortions are used for close-ups, in which faces fill the screen and appear to loom into the camera. Because the heightened perspective can make faces bulge in an unflattering way, Jeunet and his director of photography, Bruno Delbonnel, had to find the best-suited lens for Audrey Tautou's features. The result was convincing, as Amélie's distinctive close-ups not only stress her cartoon-like nature, but create a form of intimacy and favour a feeling of complicity between character and spectator. Moreover, as the actor's gaze is almost head-on into the lens, the camera becomes 'inquisitive, almost peering into the actor's soul'.[13]

Long focal lengths have occasionally been employed in the film to create a contrast in the few scenes when the characters look through binoculars – for example, as Dufayel observes Amélie from his flat, or when Nino catches a glimpse of Amélie at the Sacré-Coeur. In addition, crane shots, involving intricate camera movements and heavy equipment, enhance the impression of isolation, particularly in the scenes featuring Amélie in the station, or when she is skimming stones into the canal. A number of high-angle shots also contribute to provide an omniscient viewpoint on Amélie's actions, including spectacular bird's-eye shots, when she goes into the sex shop, near the carousel, or when she is reading the concierge's letters.

More generally, the camerawork illustrates a playful approach to film-making, reinforcing the light-hearted, cartoon-like tone of the film. A favourite technique involves camera tilting. Several shots start from a low angle in Orson Welles style, the camera gradually moving up to reveal a character, as

is the case in the scenes with the mysterious red-shoed man, or when Nino is looking for photographs. Occasionally, the character enters the frame a few seconds after the shot has started, creating surprise effects recalling Sergio Leone. This is particularly effective when a fidgety Nino appears on the left side of the screen near the carousel below the Sacré-Coeur, unsure of what to expect, and again later, when he misses the appointment with Amélie in the station. In the latter, the complex camera movement ends on a close-up of his nape. Nino is clearly looking for something, and suddenly the camera captures his thoughts, embracing his point of view: he has recognised the red shoes in the booth.

Another playful manifestation of *mise-en-scène* is the use made of mirrors and glass. The numerous mirrors in the café, the glass partition on which Amélie writes the menu, and the train windows in which her face is repeatedly reflected all symbolically enhance her isolation. As for the frosted glass appearing in various scenes in the metro, the station and Dufayel's flat, it enhances elaborate lighting effects. Similarly, the diegetic use of the painter's video as he is filming Lucien enables a shot and reverse shot to be viewed in the same frame through the television screen.

The guiding principles and *mise-en-scène* strategies deployed in *Amelie* achieve more than a mere display of self-conscious expertise and mastery of the medium. By mimetically echoing narrative elements, they fully contribute to the construction of an inventive style that blends diverse influences and a personal vision of cinema. For example, a rotary 180° movement of camera is used to visualise Nino's surprise at discovering the identity of the man in the red shoes, literally turning his head upside down. The numerous special effects discussed below offer more illustrations of mimetic visualisation.

These strategies fully participate in the success of the film. They are at once innovative and effective, as the light-heartedness felt by audiences indicates. However, it must be emphasised that they promote film-making as a deliberate process of manipulation of images, in which effects are staged rather than captured on film, thus breaking away from the spontaneity values inherited from the New Wave (see Chapter One). Moreover, this type of cinematography cannot be dissociated from the use of digital technology, which is integrated into the *mise-en-scène* throughout the film.

'Interpretation and control': the potential of digital images

If special effects are not the primary trademark of French (and European) cinema, they were used effectively in a number of popular French films in 2001 to achieve a range of effects – enhance realism, create stunning imaginary worlds, or produce spectacular effects (see Table 2 in Appendix 2). In *Amélie*, 123 shots in total were manipulated in order to 'correct the sets, interpret reality and control images'.[14] The film was mainly shot on location, and then modified in postproduction to produce a semi-realist décor, which is not the same as creating and compositing entirely digital images.[15]

Amelie perpetuates a ten-year fruitful collaboration between Jeunet and the French special effects company Duboi.[16] It was they who developed digital software specifically designed for cinema, and were responsible for the special effects of the film as well as the digitisation work. The 'Dutruc' multiplatform software package, a 794,000-line special effect application with a paint tool, colour-chooser and cut-manager, was pioneered on *La Cité des enfants perdus*, and 'Duboicolor', designed in 2000, was tested with *Amelie*. In the same way as a colour printer, the latter combines the different technologies used for the digitisation process. It enables real-time colour-timing, the inclusion of superimposed images and special effects without losing the colour definition. These tools tackle the main digital processes used in *Amelie*, namely manipulation and grading of colour, insertion of special effects and editing.

'Cinematic impressionism': manipulating colour

Central to the aesthetic originality of *Amelie*, the use of colour forms part of a conscious directorial strategy, carefully orchestrated with the technical team. Bright use of colour enhances the 'feel-good' atmosphere of the film and its glowing visual style. It brings to mind in turn Tim Burton's atmospheric fairytales (*Batman* 1989, *Edward Scissorhands* 1990, *Sleepy Hollow* 1999), the surreal worlds of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) and *12 Monkeys* (1995),[17] and the 1950s escapist Technicolor musicals of Vincente Minnelli. Strategies include contrasting saturated colours and sepia tones, as well as resorting to black and white for vintage newsreels (Tour de France), archival footage (the dancing one-legged man, the Russian film)[18] and Jeunet's own pastiche scenes (Amélie's memorial on television). The switch to black and white also signals certain incursions into the intimacy of the characters, as illustrated in the childhood flashbacks of Bretodeau and Nino, or in the visualisation of the characters' likes and dislikes.

The chromatic patterns of *Amelie* are directly inspired by paintings, drawing from a variety of styles and periods of figurative art, from Impressionism to contemporary artists. A familiar Renoir masterpiece of the Impressionist period, *Le Déjeuner des canotiers/The Luncheon at the Boating Party* (1881), plays a key role in the film. Apparently, this particular painting was chosen because it had a number of characters and interconnected gazes, which made it easy to imagine stories about them, but also, more pragmatically, because it was free of rights. Beyond the fact that Renoir lived in Montmartre, the essence of Impressionist art is to capture and represent happiness, which this painting exemplifies with its rich, warm colours. *Le Déjeuner des canotiers* thus has natural affinities with *Amelie*, and it is appropriated by the film through Dufayel's incessant attempts to recapture its characters' lives and looks, year after year. It thus comes

to symbolise the creative process of the artist, and brings up the issue of visual signature.

Impressionist painting more generally has inspired the brightly-lit sets and warm colours of *Amelie*, especially in outdoor scenes. Furthermore, Jeunet's visual style has been described as 'cinematic impressionism',[19] in an attempt to link the digitally produced colours in his films with the distinctive techniques of Impressionism in painting, and also the avant-garde cinema of the 1920s.[20] Although this comparison may on first consideration seem excessive, a closer look at the film's images and sets reveals some striking coincidences, such as the fascination for recreating the light of station halls and the reflection of water in the canal (Claude Monet), Montmartre's cobbled streets (Toulouse-Lautrec) and its traditional cafés (Paul Cézanne).[21] However, it can be problematic to associate the naturalism underpinning Impressionist painting and a film with Jeunet's style in *Amelie* because of the overt manipulation of images and pastiche representation of Paris.

Another pictorial source of inspiration for *Amelie*'s visual style is Juarez Machado, a contemporary Brazilian painter whom Jeunet accidentally met in Montmartre.[22] In particular, his 'Hôtel Costes' series and the 'La fête continue' collection exhibited in 1997–1998 in Paris prompted the warm interior colour schemes of the film, mixing rich reds, oranges and browns.[23] Finally, although a less overt influence, the work of American painter Edward Hopper inspired certain angular suburban house façades, quaint staircases, as well as the use made of warm colours in some shots to enhance the depth of field.[24]

As the film poster prefigures, the dominant hues in *Amelie* are red and green, often complemented with golden yellow. Omnipresent in the film, red acts as a focal point within most frames, and a recurrent motif – for, among others, the dwarf's hat, the throbbing heart, the sex shop, the café's façade, the man's shoes, Amélie's clothes and her home. In her flat, the set-design blends warm shades of red and orange, creating a safe and cosy atmosphere. More generally, for other scenes shot indoors, red is combined with rich golden browns, often used in seemingly monochromatic tones, and suggesting a subtle retro atmosphere, not purely through sepia fading (the concierge's lodge and Dufayel's flat, the café and the stations). Brightly-lit golden hues also bring out many outdoor scenes, enhancing the light-hearted tone of the film.

If red is a recurring motif throughout the film, it is repeatedly contrasted with various shades of green, expressing different moods: the canal St Martin is depicted as a restful sun-lit green spot, while the glo-green effect in the metro scene with the blind man, the spooky fluo-green in the ghost-train, or the khaki tones in Collignon's flat suggest more eerie atmospheres. In addition, in Jeunet's colour chemistry, 'the gold and the green harmonise with the range of other colours, outside the range of traditional colour chemistry'.[25] In other words, an originality of the film is to combine tones that are not traditionally complementary. These combinations produce enchanting effects

that enhance the innocence and simplicity of Amélie's world. They stimulate the imagination or trigger memories (Christmas decorations for example). Rich colours also bring out the cartoon and fairytale atmosphere, thus distinguishing *Amelie* from the gritty realism of a number of French films made in the 1990s. From a more technical perspective, if colour contrasts are facilitated by digital tools, their effectiveness also relies on the preliminary work done on set. This is particularly true of the scenes shot in the café, for example, with bright neon lights, warm hues and glittering copper bar, which all enhance the lively feel of the place. To ensure continuity of lighting, a canvas frame blocking out sunlight was placed outside the broad windows.[26]

Although some fine-tuning took place in postproduction, 90 per cent of the lighting effects were achieved during the main photography.[27] Just as all the colours had to appear on the rushes before they could be highlighted digitally, the light consistency could not be altered in postproduction.[28] This is why Delbonnel added filters to capture the expressiveness on the actors' faces, and control changes in natural light. Projectors were used to create different effects: in the ghost-train scene, for instance, the backlighting enhancing the cobwebs was combined with contrasting patches of light and dark to create a surreal atmosphere. For interior scenes, the possible loss of secondary hues in postproduction was anticipated by adapting the lighting: 'For the painter's flat, I systematically re-lit the blue tints or blue objects to preserve some of the secondary colour effects on film.'[29] Similarly, blue spots regularly appear in interior scenes, to add intensity – electric blue lampshades in Amélie's flat, and the blue television screen at Dufayel's.

The work on colour was completed in postproduction using digital timing processes (also called digital mastering or digital colour grading): 'We changed the skies, we put in clouds. I wanted an explosion of colour – the yellowish, Ektachrome-style look was part of my concept from the beginning.'[30] The entire film was digitally processed, which improved colour consistency and facilitated the insertion of the numerous special effects. The Duboi team

Figure 4: The ghost-train scene.

and the editor were often present on set to advise on the potential for postproduction modifications in relation to colour grading and lighting continuity and other effects. These manipulations produced a series of poetic, magical and symbolic effects, masking the boundaries between fantasy and the real world.

Colour was not just used for aesthetic purposes, but was also explored in the thematic content of the narrative, for instance through the painting motif. Dufayel and Lucien are associated with colour. The former endlessly copies the subtle tones of his master Renoir, himself recognised in his time as an innovator in his experimentation with colour. The latter, on the other hand, offers a more naive rendering using bright primary colours, which correspond to his infantile personality. The painting scenes at Dufayel's thus playfully mimic the work of Duboi's colourists and their computerised palette, metaphorically linking the work of the painter and that of the film-maker.

We have seen how digital colour adds expressiveness and chromatic continuity to the visual style of the film. Yet, by mixing sepia and saturated hues, it also blurs temporal markers, and favours a sense of timelessness often associated with postmodern cinema. This self-conscious use of colour revives the paradox of high technology serving a retro nostalgic visual style, which had been a distinctive feature of the *cinéma du look* of the 1980s. Similarly, *Amelie* contrasts colourful animation and advertising aesthetics with more monochromatic nostalgia. This helps to create a rich palette that draws its originality, and many would say 'poetic expressiveness', from hybrid influences (cinematic, photographic and pictorial), and a combination of skills blending traditional techniques and high-tech processes.

More generally, *Amelie* illustrates the significant changes in the treatment of colour in film in the digital age. Not only does it open up new possibilities, but it also extends directorial control to an aspect of film-making traditionally left to the technical crew, and adds another dimension to the concept of *mise-en-scène*. However, it must be stressed that digital colour grading remains an expensive process that significantly affects production values, and revives the debate around the relationship between art and financial considerations. The choice of digital technology conditions the artistic decisions made regarding colour effects, and becomes even more relevant in the case of special effects.

Digital magic: the special effects of Amelie

As illustrated in films as different as *Les Visiteurs* (Jean-Marie Poiré, 1993), *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994), *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998), *Le cinquième Élément* (Luc Besson, 1997) or *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), computer-generated imagery (CGI) can effectively enhance realism, create stunning fantasies or stage spectacular effects. It also facilitates the visual representation of magical and symbolic effects. In *Amelie*, digital special effects become an integral part of Jeunet's mode of representation, used 'to push back the limits of what is possible', and 'to renew the cinematic language'.[31] They become an additional source of inspiration and creative stimulation.

Before considering specific examples from *Amelie*, the classification devised by Christian Metz in the 1970s[32] can help to organise different types of special effects into three categories. The first category, 'visible effect', breaks the illusion of reality in favour of fantasy and spectacle. Examples of effects include 3D animations, morphings and warpings, which, in transforming and distorting shapes, complement the use of deforming short lenses. Metz then distinguishes between 'invisible tricks' that the viewers can sense but cannot explain, including blue-screened scenes, and composite shots merging several layers of images, and 'imperceptible effects' that can neither be seen, nor guessed unless they are disclosed. These include some mechanical effects, and digital processes such as deletion or touching-up.

Even in the digital age, it remains relevant to distinguish traditional 'mechanical special effects' or 'live mechanical tricks' realised during the shooting from 'digital visual effects' performed on computer in post-production. Both methods were combined in *Amelie*, requiring the presence of two distinct teams, Les Versaillais and Duboi, and implying a form of collaboration emblematic of Jeunet's style, namely the blending of reality and artifice, of craft and high tech.

Provided by Yves Domenjoud and his team, known as Les Versaillais,[33] the 15 mechanical effects include the floating glasses and tablecloth in the prologue, the crockery moving on the café shelves and the scene with the perfume cap in Amélie's bathroom. Elaborate systems involving fans, vibrators, invisible chutes and springs were deployed, highlighting a perfectionist attention to detail, as this account of the procedure for the bathroom scene confirms:

> With clockwork precision, the perfume cap escapes the hand of the heroine, bounces between her feet before hitting the skirting board of the bathroom. A tile falls off, revealing the hiding place of a child's treasure. This scene is full of tricks. The Plexiglas cap slides into a small chute, and goes straight into the tile. A device makes the tile vibrate until it falls off. For that scene alone there were several tests in a lab, one day of preparation in the studio and another for the shooting of the scene.[34]

Such elaborate operations find an echo in the film narrative: Amélie's revenge on Collignon involves devising similar mechanical schemes, such as tampering with electrical appliances. Her DIY schemes thus recall the various forms of 'bricolage' that also characterise the film-making process.

Duboi's digital special effects, supervised by Alain Simkine, comprise examples of Metz's three categories (see Table 3). Some shots were manipulated on a computer, for example integrating matte-paintings to filmed images to create animal-shaped clouds. Similarly, backgrounds were merged with blue-screened shots, when Amélie beholds Paris on the roof, for instance. These 'invisible effects' are purely aesthetic improvements, illustrating

Jeunet's taste for effects that last a few seconds. They all contribute to the sense of detail which characterises the film. As it was difficult to achieve seven bounces in front of the camera when skimming a stone on the canal, Amélie had a little help in postproduction thanks to the compositing technique. The ricochets in the water were reworked, so as to bounce at the right moment in line with the camera.[35]

In other cases, objects and characters were transformed and animated using visible special effects, providing visual answers to narrative requirements. The crocodile with which Amélie plays as a child is a 3D animation. The suicidal goldfish is really thrown into the water, but its reflection underwater is reconstructed digitally using the Maya 3D process to introduce an elusive sad expression in the close-up of the eye.[36] The animated paintings of the goose and the dog have been modelled into 3D, creating fantasy effects designed to bring a smile to the spectator's face. Because the main difficulty was to re-create the texture of the painting before animating it in 3D, this was done with a morphing.[37] A similar strategy was used for the pig of the lamp-base, which comes to life, talks and turns the light off when Amélie goes to sleep, thus introducing an extra narrative viewpoint.

The most spectacular examples of visible special effects are the supernatural animations borrowed from cartoon aesthetics, which enhance the magical nature of the film. They include the 'throbbing heart' and 'melting into tears' metaphors that literally visualise Amélie's emotions and dramatise ` turning the film into pure spectacle.

Table 2: Digital visual and special effects in *Amelie*

Type of effect	Number of occurrences found in *Amelie*	Selected examples
Blue-screened shots	15	Magpie at Amélie's father Nino in Afghanistan Amélie peering at the city's skyline Amélie and Nino on scooter
Composited shots	35 (including animations)	Visual illustrations of Nino's hobbies in sex shop e.g. Father Christmas ringing bell Amélie's dreamed life with Nino The four talking photographs
2D and 3D animations of objects	6 main ones	Sad-eyed goldfish Animated pig lamp The four animated photos

Type of effect	Number of occurrences found in *Amelie*	Selected examples
Computer-generated model objects or signs	5	Talking paintings of goose and dog Key visible through Amélie's clothes Crocodile toy Amélie's heart Superimposed inlays (arrows, text, etc.)
Morphing/warping	3 main ones	Blind man's happiness in halo Amélie's throbbing heart Amélie dissolving into tears
Matte paintings	12	Animal-shaped clouds Collignon's parents' house Garden gnome photographs Nino in Afghanistan
Accelerated shots [and]	23	Credits scene Composition of caretaker's letter The overhead metro shot Afghanistan montage Scooter ride, etc.
Slow-motion shots		Amélie on Pont des Arts Amélie as Zorro Bald man walking in station Ghost-train scene Lost marbles in school yard, etc.

Table 3: Metz's classification of special effects applied to Jeunet's films

	Visible effects	Invisible effects (not seen but guessed)	Imperceptible effects (neither seen nor perceived)
Technical live special effects	Live light effects (camera filters, artificial lighting)	Creation of model buildings or objects to replace real ones: wires, springs, vibrators or live	Invisible cables in the café Chute to direct the perfume cap's trajectory

	Visible effects	Invisible effects (not seen but guessed)	Imperceptible effects (neither seen nor perceived)
		tricks (moving table-cloth and glasses in prologue; vibrating cups in café)	
Digital post-production special effects	Morphings and warpings	Blue-screened shots to introduce several 'layers' (dreams, flashbacks)	Deletion of unwanted objects in public places
	3D animations and computer-generated images	Compositing and insertion of objects, images	Colour grading process (touched-up skies)
		Touched-up skies	
	Some colour effects (saturation)	Matte paintings	
	Talking photos	First stylised shot of café façade	
	Acelerated/slow-motion shots	Gnome photographs	
	Inlays (arrows, text)		

The flexibility of digital editing

As well as special effects, some innovative digital editing applications using Duboicolor were pioneered for *Amelie*. The images were scanned and transferred to a computer for the non-linear editing:

> The arrival of digital technology, which wasn't around for *Delicatessen*, has changed everything substantially. For *City Of Lost Children*, we were able to do all of the special effects in digital. Now, with Amelie, we did the cutting in digital. We didn't cut the negative. I think we're entering a new period of filmmaking that's analogous to switching from black-and-white to colour, or from silent to sound. The medium is completely flexible now, and it's not bound by anything. If you imagine something, you can do it.[18]

Non-linear digital editing extends the possibilities of image composition and facilitates the insertion of special effects. Speed of movement can be manipulated, introducing slow motion to create the surreal atmosphere of the ghost train for example. Conversely, accelerated shots simulate a compression of time and provide light comedy effects. They also dramatise the narrative, by adding pace and stylisation to the construction of the concierge's love letter for example, or by enhancing the feeling of exhilaration when Nino and Amélie ride around Paris.

These strategies are combined with more traditional editing and punctuation marks: a split screen combines two simultaneous spaces (the light signals at the window in two parts of Paris); a horizontal wipe suggests the passage of time (teddy bear in the snow); a vertical wipe marks an elliptical change of space from the station to the café (when Amélie arrives at her father's, and for the visit to Collignon's parents); and fade to white is used as a punctuation mark to close certain sequences, for example when Amélie, and then Nino, discover the identity of the photo-booth stranger. These devices serve different purposes in turn dramatic or aesthetic, and contribute to the poetic and dreamy atmosphere of the film.

Beyond generating spectacle and fantasy, the numerous manipulations and special effects mentioned in this section affect the authenticity and realism of the film. In some cases they can compromise the reliability of the filmed image. For instance, viewers may start wondering which shots are touched up, and which vintage video footage really is taken from authentic television programmes, or whether it was re-created and aged artificially for the occasion, just like the concierge's letter in the story. However, as many visual effects are designed to be imperceptible, they become difficult to trace. The audience would not be aware of the majority of the subtle aesthetic corrections and playful details added in postproduction, were it not for interviews and DVD commentary.

The use of sound

Amelie's visual style may well have attracted most of the critical attention, but the soundtrack constitutes another crucial element of the success of the film. If Yann Tiersen's waltz, which serves as theme to the film, has now become world-famous, other sound elements beyond the musical score also contribute to its identity, including dialogue, inventive sound effects and the role of the voiceover narrator.

Figure 5: Digital editing: constructing Madeleine Wallace's letter.

Dialogue, wit and Mots d'Auteur

As suggested in Chapter Two, communication is not the forte of most of the characters in *Amelie*. The main protagonist was never offered the chance to express herself as a child, and her attempts to start a conversation with her taciturn father when she has something on her mind are doomed, as this short dialogue illustrates:

(Father is cleaning the gnome.)

(Amélie) – *Dad, if you found a precious relic from your childhood, how would it make you feel? Happy? Sad? Nostalgic? What?*
(Father) – *I did not have the gnome when I was a child [...]*
(Amélie) – *No. I mean something you hid like a secret treasure...*
(Father) – *I should varnish him before the autumn.*

As a result, Amélie often prefers not to intervene in conversations unless absolutely necessary. She often observes and listens passively, as her visits to the concierge's lodge, and to Collignon's parents, illustrate. More importantly, she seems to lose all her communication skills in key moments, as when she meets Bretodeau in a café, and Nino at *Les Deux Moulins*. Conversely, Lucien's emancipation from Collignon's overbearing attitude passes by a verbal flow of humorous rhyming insults, 'Collignon tête à gnons' (big moron). In both cases, Dufayel, the painter, acts as a mediator, with whom both Amélie and Lucien can open up and express themselves more freely.

Humour often characterises the dialogue. For example, it is conveyed through Lucien and Amélie's obsession with 'Lady Di' – he wants to see a star named after her, she uses the pretext of a petition to canonise Lady Di when she calls on the various 'Bredoteaus' listed in the directory. The dialogue also brings secondary characters to life, as shown by Georgette's distinctive accent or Lucien's childish delivery. In this respect, it is typical that Gina should assess Nino's character by asking him to quote the endings of traditional proverbs,

Figure 6: The travelling gnome.

arguing that 'someone who knows his proverbs can't be all bad'. In addition, the film contains numerous *mots d'auteur* in the form of rhyming couplets, puns, aphorisms and witty lines such as the street prompter's cue 'at least, you'll never be a vegetable as even artichokes have hearts'. They are often untranslatable but have significantly contributed to the success of the film in France.

The dialogue of *Amelie* is self-conscious, but it is designed to produce precise effects and trigger memories. It places the film within the tradition of popular French screenwriting, often associated with Poetic Realism,[39] and also with more recent trends such as the *policier* films written by Michel Audiard, or the comedies of the Splendid group. This gives the screenplay its popular quality, through a series of fragments of simple, matter-of-fact conversations reflecting the characters' lives and preoccupations. Yet *Amelie*'s dialogue can intrigue viewers, especially foreign ones, as it has little in common with their experience of more introspective social realism, or the intellectual less accessible wordiness associated with the French '*auteur*' films of the 1990s. A typical example of this is the use made of the omniscient narrator.

The role of the narrator

The role assigned to the narrator (André Dussollier) is significant and original. Although never visible, his presence in voiceover mode is explicitly felt from the first shot, highlighting his omniscient status. His first function is to explain Amélie's personality by providing an insight into her unusual childhood. In the way of an authoritative documentary voiceover, he informs the spectator of her emotions and thoughts – thus complementing the information provided by the plot and images.

However, the narrator in *Amelie* is not entirely reliable, and his interpretation of facts can be questioned. He acts as both conscience and commentator, providing factual but also subjective information. Unlike the supposedly impartial narrator of a documentary, he seems to have a vested interest in the well-being and happiness of the character. His clockwork precision, sense of detail and knowledge of the future may be seen as excessively domineering, hence suspect. On the one hand, he acts as a guardian angel or benevolent 'God figure' following his protégée, on the other hand, the trivial but seemingly scientific information that he provides seems to bring together unconnected random events emphasising contingency and placing Amélie's life within a chaotic universe.[40]

In many respects, the voiceover brings in an element of subjectivity, which could be assimilated to the voice of the director himself, who openly admits his desire to control everything. The constant interventions of the narrator can be compared to Jeunet's own filming method, and read as a metaphorical inscription of authorial discourse within the film, imposing authority over the story. They also function as a cohesive device within the narrative, as does the musical score written by Yann Tiersen.

Accordion and waltz in Montmartre: Yann Tiersen's score

Undoubtedly, music is a crucial component of *Amelie*'s mood, and a key element of its popular success. And yet, Yann Tiersen was chosen in circumstances not dissimilar to the chance events that punctuate the film. Jeunet heard a Tiersen album (*Le Phare/The Lighthouse*, 1998) in a friend's car, liked it and, as a result, approached the musician. He selected several existing tracks and tested them against the images of the film before commissioning Tiersen to write the remainder.[41] Ten out of 18 tracks of the *Amelie* album were composed in 2001, including the main theme 'La Valse d'Amélie'. Tiersen read the screenplay but did not see the film before he composed these tracks. In any case, he claims that he cannot write music to illustrate images. This approach fitted in well with Jeunet's working method, as it allowed him to pick and choose the extracts that he wanted more freely.

Tiersen occupies a special place on the French musical scene.[42] Formally trained at the *Conservatoire*, he is a multi-instrument artist who began composing in the 1990s, after moving away from his classical training to become involved with the rock scene (influenced by post-punk bands). His debut instrumental album *La Valse des monstres/The Monsters' Waltz* was released in 1995, followed by *Rue des cascades/ Waterfalls Road* in 1996. Both provided several pieces for the *Amelie* soundtrack, for instance, 'La Valse des monstres' is played as Amélie re-creates Madeleine Wallace's letter. Although these two albums were little noticed by the critics or the public, they contributed to Tiersen being increasingly present at festivals and on regional stages – in particular in his native Brittany, where he made a name for himself thanks to his innovative and versatile stage performances. In 1998, his third album *Le Phare* reached a wider audience before providing another three tracks for the film, as did 'Tout est calme' in 1999. Tiersen also composed music for short films and plays, and contributed to various film soundtracks. For instance 'La rupture' appears in *Alice et Martin* (André Téchiné, 1998), and 'Rue des cascades' is the theme tune of *La Vie rêvée des anges/Dreamlife of Angels* (Erick Zonca, 1998).

Sometimes compared to Michael Nyman and Pascal Comelade,[43] Tiersen has developed a style that draws its inspiration from various popular and classical sources. Like many artists of his generation, he uses traditional instruments such as the mandolin, the guitar and especially the accordion, which contribute to the retro sound of his music, but also, as Phil Powrie has pointed out, as a marker of community often associated with Paris in cinema.[44] Tiersen's music has a timeless quality that matches *Amelie*'s mood and its romantic love motif. In addition the soundtrack reinforces the nostalgic atmosphere that characterises the film. Making extensive use of the accordion and of waltz tempos, it is delicate and emotional, but also repetitive, obsessive and intriguing. Used as the central theme, 'La Valse d'Amélie' is deployed in different instrumental versions, echoing the motif of the merry-go-round, but also evoking a bitter-sweet melancholy. It recalls the French popular tradition of accordion music of the 1930s and 1950s, but it also signals the renewed interest in acoustic music at the end of the 1990s exemplified in France by young artists such as San Severino or Mano Solo.

Music in *Amelie* fulfils several functions. On the one hand, as a non-around complement to the narrative, it echoes in turn Amélie's happiness, her emotions and her mobility as she travels round Paris. On the other hand, two 1930s classic songs are integrated diegetically into the film. The jazzy 'Guilty' (1931) is heard as background music in the café scenes, and Fréhel's 'Si tu n'étais pas là' (1934) is played on the blind man's old gramophone in the metro scene, retaining the authentic crackling sounds associated with old records.

Both self-consciously nostalgic and contemporary, Tiersen's soundtrack thus falls into the category of 'postmodern' music, thus complementing the visual features of the film. It also reinforces the retro mood of the film and, more specifically, a sense of loss and the nostalgia for bygone times. This is highlighted by the motifs of absence and loss that are central to the narrative of the film and to Tiersen's music. Released in 2001 the album *L'Absente/The Absent Woman* provided two pieces for the soundtrack of *Amelie*. However, unlike Jeunet, who puts forward his nostalgic fascination for the past, Tiersen tends to reject the nostalgia associated with his music, on the ground that he does not feel drawn towards the past, but rather looks towards the future. One element that links Tiersen to Jeunet's world, though, is the fact that he composes music to 'channel emotions, pin down moments and create his own landmarks'.[45]

The 'retro minimalism' of Tiersen's music may initially appear to contradict the fascination with new technologies that characterises *Amelie*. However, Tiersen recycles retro rhythms and melodies such as the waltz and the foxtrot, experimenting with them and creating his own arrangements. In this respect, his creative process is comparable with Jeunet's, whose cinematic style relies on recycling retro atmospheres digitally to create a personal world that, as Powrie argues, is made of 'nostalgic retrospection' and uses pre-existing recycled music.[46] Both the musician and the director resort to 'bricolage', which is essentially a postmodern form of creation.

Tiersen's music is perceived as unusual because it departs in an original way from the mainstream rhythms of pop music and 'easy listening'. In the 1990s, he was linked with 'alternative' musical circles, which promoted a craftsman-like eclectic conception of music as culturally authentic, especially in their stage performances. This movement has increasingly been mainstreamed due to the success and institutionalisation of the java/waltz motif in recent forms of French *chanson*.[47] Yet, Tiersen's music is also conservative because it re-appropriates the ethnocentric conventions of the nation's past, in a way that is not dissimilar to the integration of blues or reggae within American culture. This mixture of originality and conservatism identified

in Tiersen's music also largely applies to *Amelie*, just as his trajectory from alternative to mainstream music echoes Jeunet's evolution from *Delicatessen* to *Amelie*. For all these reasons, what started with the chance meeting of a film-maker and a musician who construct distinctive worlds of their own turned into the effective fusion of two modes of artistic expression to produce *Amelie*.

A profusion of sound effects

As ambient sound conditions the mood and rhythm of *Amelie*, it is worth considering how other forms of non-verbal, non-musical sound effects are used in the film. Diegetic background noises, such as a steaming coffee machine in the café, ringing telephones and funfair music, punctuate the film. Some of these sounds illustrate an image, such as the exaggerated effect of the movement of the clock hand for example. Other sounds come from off-screen sources, which implies that viewers are left to imagine the source. These include church bells (of Sacré-Coeur?), trains in the distance, and other noises which evoke a village-like atmosphere. For example, for a fraction of a second, a crow is heard when Amélie is at the grocer's. Interestingly, these sounds, which (wrongly?) suggest spontaneity and randomness, tend to contradict the artificial manipulation of the images to achieve specific effects. In fact, the DVD commentary tends to confirm that they are mostly consciously added in post-synchronisation.

Non-diegetic sounds are assigned other functions. They highlight the playfulness of the film and its collage structure, as the example of the concierge's letters illustrates. As Amélie reads them, a male voice is introduced into the *mise-en-scène* and a number of sound illustrations can be heard in the background, evoking the places where they were written: we hear in turn a train, church bells and a military clarion. Later, when the concierge reads the letter recomposed by Amélie, fragments borrowed from the original letters resurface, including the sounds that accompanied specific sentences. A playful Jeunet takes the pastiche and collage activities to extremes of precision and sense of detail. The letter is fake but its fragments appear to be authentically reproduced, even though the DVD commentary suggests that they do not strictly match.

Only about five per cent of *Amelie*'s sound was post-synchronised. Some non-diegetic sounds and sound special effects were added at the editing stage to reinforce the continuity of the action. These often act as punctuation in the film grammar, marking the opening or the end of a scene. As Dudley Andrew puts it, 'Most of *Amelie*'s shots are marked with distinct beginnings and ending points to allow neighboring shots to couple in a train of micro-occurrences. The soundtrack emphasises this tactic, as virtually every scene and many individual shots conclude with audible finality.'[48] These include diegetic sounds such as trains and birds,

as well as noises and cartoon-like mimetic sounds. Characteristically, the non-diegetic music does not always stop when a scene ends, it overlaps into the next scene smoothing the transition process and acting as a cohesive device.

There are times in the film when sound effects become fully integrated into the narrative, clarifying the action. For example when Collignon's feet do not fit into his slippers because Amélie has swapped them for a smaller size, it is through sound effects that his dismay is expressed. Similarly, at the end of the film, when Amélie imagines her future with Nino, daydream and reality merge with the muffled sound of the bead curtain in the kitchen. This is immediately followed by the rational explanation of the cat's meow. In this case, the aural effect precedes the image. In a more traditional way, some sounds reinforce a climactic moment in the narrative. Amélie's discovery of the box in the wall recess is dramatised by a loud 'whooshing' sound, while the theme music serves to highlight the character's emotion and excitement. More cartoon-like whooshing sounds are introduced into the soundtrack, suggesting movement and speeding up the narrative. These emphasise Amélie's spatial mobility, and serve to establish transitions between scenes, or to signal a change of location.

The role assigned to sounds and music in *Amelie* extends far beyond the merely decorative. An important element of the *mise-en-scène* and narrative stategies, the soundtrack fully contributes to the construction of the distinctive atmosphere associated with the film. As a synthetic conclusion, the close study that follows illustrates how the various sound and visual properties discussed above combine to form a typical sequence of *Amelie*.

The blind man scene

The 'blind man scene' brings together the motif of solidarity and dazzling use of cinematography. It starts with a happy Amélie walking in Paris, having anonymously returned the box of toys to Bretodeau and witnessed the consequences of her scheme. As the narrator informs us, this fills her with 'a strange feeling of absolute harmony' and 'an urge to help mankind'. The first opportunity appears in the form of a blind man who needs help to cross the street and make his way to the metro.

This sequence shows how the loosely constructed plot allows for digressions to punctuate the narrative to underline the sense of local space and community. In this case its function is to offer a visual feast anchored in everyday life. The initial shots highlight the stylisation of the city, although the scene is filmed on location and based on a form of reality. On the Pont des Arts, soft lighting is used, suggesting that Amélie is in harmony with the city. A tracking Steadycam camera moves around her as she walks over. Its fluid movement together with the use of slow motion emphasise her light-hearted mood and communicative happiness. This contrasts with the change of pace,

marked by brisk editing and increasingly frantic camera movements as the scene progresses towards its climax.

The blind man is introduced in two stages, repeating a strategy already used for Nino and Amélie. The camera is initially placed near the ground, showing his feet, the white stick and the kerb before moving up to his face. A spectacular zoom forward on Amélie is meant to capture her point of view and intention to help the blind man. The express tour of the street is marked by fast cutting and rapid changes in the focus of attention, which literally take the viewers for a ride, influencing or confusing their viewing experience. For 30 seconds, they are transported into another world, just as the blind man becomes a part of the world of those who can see. The scene ends on a spectacular effect. A flash of light coming from the sky literally envelops the blind man, visually illustrating the warmth that he felt for a few seconds, by being included into the lives and small pleasures of ordinary people that he cannot see.

The effectiveness of the scene owes a lot to the soundtrack which combines verbal elements, diegetic sounds evoking a buzzing local community, non-diegetic music and sound effects added in postproduction. Amélie's comments bring a synaesthetic charm to the scene, associating traditional food with colours, odours and flavours (melons, roast chicken, lollipops and ice cream). In the first part, the familiar accordion theme associated with Amélie and Paris serves as a form of narrative punctuation, used whenever she has successfully performed a good deed. Further on, the fast rhythm of the track 'La Noyée' lends itself well to the frantic 'guided tour'. As for the enchanting buzzing atmosphere of the street, it is suggested by rustling sounds, bringing a magical touch to daily routine. For the first time the shy and withdrawn Amélie is able to express herself uninhibitedly, and she feels at home among the 'little people' of Paris.

Paris and its 'little people'

Paris has often been fantasised cinematically as a romantic and mysterious city, and N.T. Bihn's recent book *Paris au cinéma* refers to the Paris of *Amelie* as a fairytale city.[49] Jeunet's film joins an impressive series of classics set in Montmartre over the years: *French Cancan* (Jean Renoir, 1955), *Les 400 Coups* (François Truffaut, 1959), *Zazie dans le métro* (Louis Malle, 1960) or *Lautrec* (Roger Planchon, 1998) to name a few.[50] This fascination with Montmartre is not limited to French productions, as over the years, international cinema too has yielded to its appeal in productions as diverse as *An American in Paris* (Vincente Minnelli, 1951) and *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001). However, Paris, in *Amelie*, is more than merely a décor, and this section examines how it is represented and what role it plays in the narrative.

It is predominantly the *Paris populaire* in the French sense of 'Paris of little people' that is being explored via Amélie's travels in and out of the city. This is nevertheless contrasted with brief, but regular incursions into the suburbs, when Amélie visits her father. Apart from short scenes at Notre-Dame, at the canal Saint-Martin, on le Pont des Arts, in la Foire du Trône, and in Bretodeau's Rue Mouffetard, *Amelie* is mainly set in the emblematic Montmartre.[51]

Montmartre and Paris's popular heritage

Rich in contrast and local colour, Montmartre is a multicultural district situated to the north of the city. Built on a hill dominating Paris (la butte), it forms the 18th Arrondissement, extending to the west towards Les Batignolles, and touching to the east the popular area of la Goutte d'Or. It is bounded in the north by the district of Clignancourt, and to the south by Pigalle from Place de Clichy to Boulevard Rochechouart. Because of their proximity, Montmartre and Pigalle are often amalgamated by tourists, and considered as the two sides of the same coin, the former known for its traditional village atmosphere and its artistic heritage, the latter for its nightlife and more sleazy reputation (strip-tease clubs, sex shops and prostitutes). In *Amelie*, we are only presented with daytime Montmartre, if we leave aside the heroine's short visit to a Boulevard de Clichy sex shop, which is clearly not part of her world.

Montmartre projects a multiple image, combining a colourful, bohemian lifestyle with an historical and artistic heritage. In the first place, it is viewed as an artists' quarter, immortalised at the end of the nineteenth century by such illustrious residents as Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Poulbot, Van Gogh, Verlaine, Zola and Satie. This artistic tradition has been perpetuated in the twentieth century by major artists like Utrillo and Picasso, and to this day, Montmartre remains associated with (street) artists, galleries and studios. To some extent, Pigalle, too, retains connections with the artistic sphere with its theatres and music-hall shows. Once branded a centre of decadent entertainment with mythic cabarets, like Aristide Bruant's *Le Lapin agile*, and music halls like *Le Moulin rouge*, it has developed into a tourist red-light district and notorious centre of nightlife.

Montmartre remains a major tourist spot, with its winding cobbled streets and squares, boutiques, cafés, artist galleries, and particularly the Sacré-Coeur basilica, which dominates the city. As a result, it has a special place in the collective imagery associated with Paris, for French people as well as foreigners.[52] Having lived there since he moved to the capital in the 1970s, Jeunet's representation of Montmartre reflects his own ambivalent perception of the place, as the picturesque and magical part of the capital seen by the outsider that he once was on the one hand, and the centre of a village-like community that he has now become integrated with on the other.

Key locations of Amélie's Montmartre

Shooting *Amelie* in a busy part of Paris like Montmartre was not an easy option, especially for a first experience outside studios. Jeunet was helped by the fact that he could use colourful real locations that did not require too much additional set design. For Collignon's grocery located in a recessed angle of the Rue des Trois-Frères, the existing shop 'Au Marché de la butte' only underwent minor alterations. Linking Pigalle to the old Montmartre, the 'real' café where Amélie works, *Les Deux Moulins* in Rue Lepic stands strategically halfway between two cultural landmarks: Toulouse-Lautrec's *Moulin Rouge* and Renoir's *Le Moulin de la Galette*.

Amélie's flat is fictitiously located in a traditional Parisian building, complete with concierge and indoor courtyard at number 56 of the same Rue des Trois-Frères. The interior was re-created in studio for the shooting. Special emphasis is placed on the stairs and landings leading to the different flats, which feature in several scenes, recalling the imagery of Poetic Realism. However, in *Amelie*, these are used mostly as spaces of encounter and exchange linking the residents, and as a pretext to complex cinematography. In *Le Jour se lève*, conversely, the staircase is assigned the important dramatic function of providing the only access to the recluse hero. It links the room (prison) with the outer world, and provides a confined public space where many characters discuss and comment on events.

As transit places between Paris and the suburbs, train stations feature prominently in the film, primarily as meeting points for Amélie and Nino. Blending shots of the Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est, which are in reality half a mile apart, the film re-creates a semi-fictional station that epitomises the semi-realist representation strategy of the film based on bricolage and hybridity. Most scenes take place inside, fully exploiting the large spaces of hallways, tracks and platforms, and the natural light effects of glass-panelled roofing and semi-circular glazed façades. The use of glass and metal structures emphasises the urban context of the film and evokes the Paris of Gustave Eiffel.

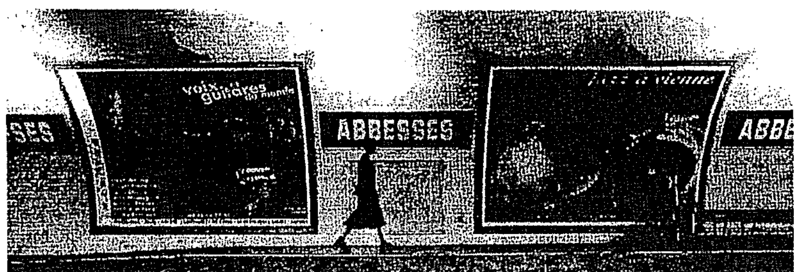

Figure 7: The Metro station Abbesses.

Chosen partly for their distinctive styles, the local metro stations too participate in the narrative. With its blue plates, tiled walls and colourful period posters, the Art Nouveau station of 'Abbesses' provides a striking setting for ordinary routine, as does the unusual entrance of 'Lamarck-Caulaincourt' set into the hillside. The open-air station of La Motte-Picquet Grenelle, where Amélie places the 'Wanted' fliers, is identified by its metallic stairs and frosted glass panels. As for the more conventional shots of the aerial metro, they symbolise Amélie's increasing mobility across the capital, as the game of hide-and-seek between her and Nino develops.

The contradictions of a stylised, timeless Montmartre

Although shot mainly on location, *Amelie* mythologises Montmartre at least as much as it captures its reality, resorting to elusive truth, selective fragmentation and cosmetic changes. In many exterior shots, the modern urban elements that do not fit in with the fairytale atmosphere of the film have been deleted. The result is an idealised representation of Montmartre as a clean, non-threatening version of Paris, a playground with funfairs and merry-go-rounds, championing a convivial village-like atmosphere.[53] Public places become potential social meeting points, and settings for adventure and romance. Safe and consensual, the Paris of *Amelie* promotes a popular narrative. As Sallie Westwood and John Williams argue in *Imagining Cities*, 'Popular narratives [...] actually *domesticate* the city, taking out the *risqué* element and making it safe.'[54] Even the indirect reference to Pigalle's nightlife is 'domesticated' in the subdued scene of the sex shop, in a conscious effort to preserve the amusingly 'cute' spirit of the film.

Many images evoke working-class, popular areas, and resuscitate a past imagery rendered familiar, for example, by the artist Robert Doisneau, a close friend of Prévert. His photographs, taken in Paris from the 1930s onward, often feature ordinary people at work or in a family context. Doisneau places the emphasis on movement and spontaneity, and captures daily routine or special moments, with optimism and humour.[55] His photographs have contributed to promote a popular image of Paris and ordinary people, and for years they have been reproduced on posters, cards and calendars, sold all over the world. *Amelie*'s imagery too tries to reproduce this ordinariness and spontaneity, in the street, in the microcosm of the café, or in the concierge's lodge with its clutter of objects from another time.

By blending shots of the present-day Montmartre with a variety of recycled past images, *Amelie* (re)constructs a timeless Paris,[56] and activates two contradictory impulses that feed the aesthetic representation of the city. On the one hand, the film is driven by a realist impulse legitimised by the authenticity of location shooting and an anchoring into daily routine. On the other hand, the locations go through a stylisation process facilitated by colour manipulation and the introduction of special effects. Temporal markers are

voluntarily blurred, and as a result, the image of Montmartre presented in the film is ambivalent, bringing to mind at once an undefined past and a glossy tourist brochure. The scene with Collignon in the middle of the night, for example, features the shadow of a tall façade, which recalls the popular Paris of Poetic Realism, mythologised by (rather than filmed in) exceptional sets designed in studios.[57] Other shots perpetuate the tradition of staging the city's rooftops, angular buildings and cobbled streets.

The residents of this 'village-in-the-city' are colourful 'little people' – the regulars of a bar, the local grocer and his assistant, the concierge, the painter, but also cameo figures like the beggar who does not work on Sundays and the sex-shop assistant. They promote a popular sense of community, which is not dissimilar to that explored in another film set in Paris, *Chacun cherche son chat* (Cédric Klapisch, 1996).[58] In both cases, the plots, designed to help the two heroines in their identity quest, emphasise the relationship between space and community, as well as nostalgia for the past. The latter, however, contains an explicit denunciation of the destruction of popular Paris and the uprooting of the local population by trendy new residents, which anchors it in today's real political context. Conversely, the urban myth presented in *Amelie* is not socially grounded into the present reality (ethnic and sexual diversity, drug-dealing, etc.). It simply pays tribute to the little people of an idealised Paris.

The tension between realism and stylisation in *Amelie*'s Paris is further complicated by Jeunet's ambiguous comments: 'I tried to work outside as if I was on a stage. We modified a lot of the reality. But it was important that the film take place in the Paris of today, not in some kind of timeless dimension. For example, we changed things on the walls, got rid of graffiti, added signs.'[59] Jeunet does not acknowledge the timelessness of *Amelie*'s Paris, but confirms the 'staging' of his exterior scenes to control the filmed images to make them fit with his own idealised vision of the city. Whether intended or not, the 'modifications' that he describes in interviews do prevent a realistic representation of today's Paris, and result in a degree of stylisation.

In *Amelie*'s stylised world, time is an elusive concept. Here, Philip Drake's study of 'retro' trends in recent Hollywood cinema offers a useful point of reference. Drake argues that '[retro] film narratives can dramatise the relationship between past and present, constructing a memory of the past through the recycling of particular iconography that metonymically comes to represent it'.[60] Retro films mobilise specific codes, including the 'memorialisation' of the past and its re-imagining within the present. The essence of the retro film is timelessness, a fusion of past and present, or in Drake's words, 'a playful deployment of the past in the present'.[61] In the case of *Amelie*, this past/present ambiguity feeds the narrative. For example, Amélie's quaint world is linked to an (imagined?) past, yet it remains connected to the present reality by bringing the real-life events of 1997 into the fictional narrative. Similarly, Tiersen's soundtrack combines retro rhythms and instruments with the more modern repetition techniques of the 1990s.[62] In both cases, a fusion of past and present operates, which draws upon an undefined timelessness that appeals to the collective popular memory. It blurs the distinction between the real and the myth, the past and the present, to generate a sense of stylised *pastness*, relying upon mediated memory and selectivity, or in James Austin's words, 'a past emptied of its content but retaining the gloss of the attractive surface'.[63]

The artificial recycling of virtual past atmospheres and individual memories encourages nostalgia. Various recycling strategies are employed in *Amelie*, including pastiche, collage and quotation, to bring to life Amélie's memories of her own childhood, the concierge's past, the painter's experience and Collignon's father's youth. These point at postmodern aesthetics and encourage the eclectic creation of new out of old: the fake letter that Madeleine Wallace receives from her late husband represents a case in point. Amélie borrows the idea from a real-life event related in the newspaper about a post-bag lost in a crash in the 1950s and recovered years later. As Ginette Vincendeau noted, 'The device could stand as an image of the narrative itself, with its collage structure, sentimentality and fake ageing.'[64] Moreover, the scene is filmed using accelerated shots, which symbolically enhances the compression of time and history.

The nostalgic appropriation of Paris in *Amelie* has enchanted, concerned or angered the viewers, and become one of the most critically discussed elements of the film. However, by recycling and stimulating the collective memories fed by many past pictorial and cinematic sources, and by bringing in his own personal imagery of the city, Jeunet has successfully created an enticing postmodern cityscape, which contributed to the success of the film, and is part and parcel of his aesthetic signature.

Jeunet's postmodern signature

In some ways, *Amelie*'s postmodern quality strives to reconcile the contrasting traditions of Hollywood and French cinema. But in others, Jeunet's distinctive style dissociates him from both. If he does import into his film a number of Hollywood high-tech production values, he moves away from its practices, which limit directorial control. More importantly, although he is influenced by the legacy of Poetic Realism, he overtly dismisses that of the French New Wave. His references to Truffaut are anecdotal quotations (the fly visible on screen in *Jules et Jim*) or playful winks (the flight of pigeons), which happen to match *Amelie*'s imagery.[65]

The film's commitment to spectacular aesthetics can also be read as a reaction against the gritty realism of French cinema in the 1990s, and the critics' stigmatisation of beautiful images as suspect: 'Some people argue that the aesthetic side of a film can be at the expense of emotion,

but as far as I am concerned, I cannot understand why a film should be ugly to be moving.'[66] In this, he echoes the positions of Besson, Beineix or Leconte, who have also been denigrated for producing spectacular surface effects rather than achieving the personal commentary on the world associated with *auteur* cinema. Jeunet's animation background and advertising aesthetics point at the legacy of *cinéma du look*. But *Amelie* also recalls other postmodern films of the 1990s, especially *Lola Rennt/Run, Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998), which had first experimented with distinctive *mise-en-scène* strategies found in Jeunet's film, such as the use of the clock, the role played by the city space, the fast editing and the use of black and white as a narrative device.

Amelie celebrates the triumph of imagination over realism, highlighting a number of curious analogies between Jeunet and his main character. They both exist in fantasy worlds rather than reality, preferring childish games and playful treasure hunts to more direct confrontations with the real world and the present. Both express themselves by practising collage and pastiche, recycling existing images and memories thanks to technology. Just like Amélie in the film narrative, the impulse of Jeunet's creativeness is a combination of his own imagination and his playful disposition, both being fed with memories accumulated over the years: 'My world is that of childhood and I don't try to conceal it. [...] I like the playful, Meccano box side of cinema.'[67] Striving for immediate effects often associated with immaturity and childhood, the film negotiates a balance between calculated effects and emotion, magic fantasy and controlled mechanical processes.[68] It combines the values of personal cinema with state-of-the-art digital special effects, drawing equally upon the legacy of French cinema and transnational commercial practices. These paradoxes reinforce the postmodern nature of the film, not just in its narrative and genre mixing suggested in Chapter Two, but also in its distinctive use of visual imagery and music, which were the focus of this chapter.

In addition, *Amelie* rejects the superiority of classic art over popular culture. It brings together images of all sorts and origins (posters, videos, newsreels, adverts and paintings), which are appropriated to be consumed again, initially by the characters and, by extension, the viewers (Renoir's painting, the concierge's letters). These beautiful images are primarily designed for consumption, as are the profusion of objects in Amélie's world. The film displays a fetishist fascination with collections (the photo album, the treasure box) and quaint objects, assigning to them symbolic or dramatic values. For example, the marshmallow machine in the final scene can be seen as the *mise en abyme* of Amelie's lack of ideological depth, and an overt acknowledgement by Jeunet of the playful nature of his film. This is complemented by a series of 'confectionary' metaphors used in reviews to evoke the film's 'sugariness',[69] that is to say a colourful and sweet pleasure that melts and disappears. This tends to be contradicted by the fact that the film hit an emotional chord

with many viewers and triggered an ideological debate. It confers to images (even glossy ones) the power to generate plural meanings.

While confirming the hybridity of Amelie, this chapter has revealed the coherence underpinning the film, as well as correspondences between style and narrative. For example, it has exposed analogies between the manipulative schemes of Amélie and the special effects of the film; mimetic echoes between the circularity of the narrative and the use of music; and comparable metaphors of 'bricolage' in the storyline and the film editing process. Through parody, mimetic self-deprecation, and a *mise en abyme* of the film-making process within the narrative, form and content combine to provide a comprehensive insight into Jeunet's signature. *Amelie* started as an original personal project, and became a phenomenal popular success. It is now time to consider the circumstances of its reception, without which this critical study would not be complete.

Notes

1 A. Ferenzci, '*Un long dimanche de fiançailles*', *Télérama* 2859 (27 October 2004).
2 E. Frois and J.-L.Wachthausen, 'Jeunet: j'ai le sentiment d'être mort en 14', *Figaro*, 27 October 2004.
3 J. St Clair, 'Celebrating reproduction', *Iowa Review*, 2001, Web review, http://www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/reviews/justinstclair.htm, accessed 13 December 2003.
4 Tirard: 1997, p.122.
5 A. Martin, *Once Upon a Time in America* (London: BFI, 1998), p.10.
6 Jeunet in 'Take 5: Which films inspire you more' Website, http://movies.channel.aol.com/feature/take5/jeunet.adp, accessed on 6 January 2005. See for example the scene with the blind man in the Abbesses metro station, in which the resounding music was inspired by Kubrick, according to the DVD commentary.
7 P. Rouyer and C. Vassé, 'Entretien Jean-Pierre Jeunet: dans une autre vie je suis mort à la guerre de 14', *Positif* 525 (November 2004), pp.8–12 (p.10).
8 Ferenzci: 2004.
9 See Garbarz's analysis, 'La Recolleuse de morceaux', *Positif* 483 (May 2001), pp.29–30. Cinema's relationship with painting is very present in contemporary cinema, e.g. *La belle Noiseuse* (Rivette, 1991) tackles the relationship between the artist and his model(s); in *Les Amants du pont neuf* (Carax, 1990) a visually impaired Michèle expresses herself through art.
10 Jeunet, in Pride: 2001.
11 See Frois and Wachthausen: 2004.
12 See Bruno Delbonnel's interview in D. Maillet, '*Un long dimanche de fiançailles*', *Technicien du film* 548 (October 2004), pp.34–38 (p.36).
13 Delbonnel, in Bergery, 'Cinematic Impressionism', *American Cinematographer*, December 2004, p.61.
14 Jeunet in Lavoignat: 2000, p.13.
15 Jeunet's project differs from Pitof's in *Vidocq* (2001), the first fully digital feature film, the latter relying almost exclusively on flashy stylistic achievements.
16 The special effect laboratory Duran was founded in 1983 by Pascal Herold and Bernard Maltaverne. In 1991, Duboi, a sister company specialising in cinema digital special effects and film processing, was founded. With about 50 staff, Duran-Duboi had by 2001 produced the special effects of over 300 films, pioneering digital equipment for colour grading and digital editing, 3D animations and website design. Their postproduction complex situated

near Paris contains 245 editing suites. The company experienced serious financial difficulties in 2003, which were partly overcome with their participation in high-profile projects including *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* in 2004. See E. Maillot, 'The Very Special Effects of Duran-Duboi', *Label France* 43 (April 2001), Website http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/label_france/ENGLISH/ART/duran_duboi/page.html, accessed on 7 February 2004.

17 Gilliam and Jeunet know each other. Gilliam was even asked by the US distributors of *Delicatessen* to present the film in the credits to help the marketing. Jeunet considers the main common ground to their respective films to be the fact that they invent a different world from their own. See joint interview in J.-P. Lavoignat, 'Magic circus', *Studio Magazine* 54 (October 1991), pp.83–85 and 138.
18 They are mostly borrowed from the regular Canal Plus programme 'L'Année du zapping'.
19 Bergery: 2004, pp.58–69.
20 For a discussion of Impressionist film, see I. Aitken, 'Into the realm of the wondrous: French cinematic impressionism', in *European Film Theory and Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).
21 References to Impressionist motifs and colours are even more evident in *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (golden cornfields, les Halles, Gare d'Orsay…).
22 Machado's workshop is in Rue des Abbesses.
23 See Libiot: 2004. Examples of paintings that directly recall the colour schemes of *Amelie* can be seen on Machado's website, http://www.jmachado.com/en, last accessed on 12 November 2004.
24 For example, the staircase in Amélie's block evokes the '59, Rue de Lille' series. See S. Voiturin, 'Amélie Poulain fabuleusement sublime', *Sonovision* 451 (May 2001), pp.14–17 (p.14).
25 Delbonnel in Clanet and Deriaz: 2001, p.9.
26 F. Reumont, 'Le Destin de l'étalonnage numérique: Bruno Delbonnel, chef opérateur', *Technicien du film* 511 (May 2001), pp.25–28 (pp.26–27).
27 Delbonnel interview 'Kodak on film', website' http://www.kodak.com/US/en/motion/forum/onFilm/delbonnelQA.shtml, accessed on 18 October 2004.
28 Jeunet, in Rouyer and Vassé: 2004, p. 11.
29 Reumont: 2001, p.26.
30 Jeunet in J. Calhoun, 'Amélie: fabricating a new French fable', *Entertainment Design*, 1 January 2002.
31 Tirard: 1997, p.124.
32 'Trucage et cinéma', in *Essais sur la signification du cinéma* 2 (Paris: Klinsieck, 1973), re-produced in R. Hamus-Vallée, *Les Effets spéciaux* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2004), pp.64–65.
33 See full credits for a precise breakdown of duties of the special effect and digital visual effect teams. See also Voiturin: 2001, pp.14–17.
34 Voiturin: 2001, p.14.
35 Private conversation with Bruno Delbonnel (June 2004).
36 A. Hémery, 'Alain Carsoux: le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain', *SFX*, May–June 2001, pp.42–44.
37 Carsoux in Voiturin: 2001, p.16.
38 Jeunet in S. Tobias, 'Jean-Pierre Jeunet', *The Onion A.V. Club*, 31 October 2001, Website http://avclub.theonion.com/avclub3739/bonus feature1_3739.html, accessed on 24 September 2003. For more information on digital timing, see J. Silberg, 'The right timing', *Millimeter*, 1 November 2002.
39 See G. Vincendeau, 'The art of spectacle: the aesthetics of classical French cinema', in M. Temple and M. Witt (eds), *The French Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2004), pp.147–148.
40 This argument was developed in W. Everett, 'Fractal films and the architecture of Complexity', *Studies in European Cinema*, 2, 3 (December 2005), pp. 159–172.
41 The music rights were bought for FF 1.35 million.
42 The biographical information is drawn from 'Yann Tiersen: Biography' (October 2002), http://:www.rfimusique.com/siteEn/biographie/biographie_6250.asp, accessed on 29 September 2004. See also P. Powrie, (2006) 'The fabulous destiny of the accordion in French cinema' *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*, P. Powrie and R.Stilwell (eds), (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) pp. 137–151.
43 M.-H. Martin, 'Tiersen gagnant', *Nouvel Observateur* 1798 (22 April 1999).
44 Powrie: 2006, p. 137.
45 P. Brambilla, 'Yann Tiersen, le Breton qui suit sa vague', *Construire* 23 (4 June 2002), world Wide Web http://www.construire.ch/SOMMAIRE/0223/23extra4.html, accessed on 29 September 2003.
46 Powrie: 2006, p.147.
47 In France *chanson* is distinguished from other music, as a type of music that promotes lyrics and a message. For more information and a reflection on retro trends and hybridity in recent French music, see D. Looseley, *Popular Music in Contemporary France* (London: Berg, 2003), especially pp.48–49.
48 Andrew: 2004, p.41.
49 N.T. Bihn with F. Garbarz, *Paris au cinéma: La vie rêvée de la capitale de Méliès à Amélie Poulain* (Paris: Parigramme, 2003), pp.203, 215; V. Descure and C. Casazza, *Ciné-Paris: Vingt balades sur des lieux de tournages mythiques* (Paris: Hors Collection, 2003).
50 Other films are located in different districts, for example *Sous les toits de Paris* (René Clair, 1930), *Hotel du Nord* (Marcel Carné, 1938), *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (Leos Carax, 1991) and *Chacun cherche son chat* (Cédric Klapisch, 1996).
51 For more information on Montmartre, see L. Chevalier, *Montmartre du plaisir et du crime* (Paris: Payot, 1995).
52 See G. Weisberg, *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp.1–3.
53 Vincendeau: 2001, p.25. See also Moine: 2004, p.155.
54 S. Westwood and J. Williams (eds), *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.11.
55 See, for example, the caretaker's lodge, the shop windows…
56 For example, E. Ezra talks of a 'timeless décor', emphasising the role of attractions and funfairs that she reads as 'an invocation of another temporality, one that appears to privilege contingency over predictability'. 'The death of an icon', *French Cultural Studies* 13: 3 (October 2004), p.302.
57 Andrew: 2004, p.41. Even *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier, 1937), mostly set in Algiers, evokes the nostalgia for the popular Paris of Place Blanche, and the music hall tradition with the singing character of Tania, interpreted by the same Fréhel who features in *Amelie*'s soundtrack.
58 In this film, the main protagonist, Chloë, another single young woman, discovers the colourful members of her local community while looking for her lost cat in the streets of the 11th Arrondissement.
59 Jeunet in Pride: 2001, pp.52–55.
60 P. Drake, 'Mortgaged to music: New retro movies in the 1990s Hollywood cinema', in P. Grainge (ed.), *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.183–201 (p.183).
61 Drake: 2003, p.189. See also Friedberg: 1994, p.3.
62 For P. Powrie, the visual effects in *Amelie* 'immobilise the past as a present-past', and Tiersen's music 'mobilises and emotionalises the past in an affectively-charged past-present' (2006 p.150.).
63 Austin: 2004, pp. 281–299 (p.290). Pastness was used in the context of nostalgia by Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991).
64 Vincendeau: 2001, p.24.
65 See D. Andrew's analysis of *Amelie* in relation to the New Wave. Although he initially links the outdoor shooting in *Amelie* to *Les 400 Coups*, he argues that Truffaut or Bazin would have hated the film for reasons ranging from excessive closure, intricate editing, showy style to a lack of authenticity (2004, pp.35–37).
66 Frois and Wachthausen: 2004.

67 Frois and Wachthausen: 2004.

68 Andrew: 2004, p.38. See also Moore (2006) for a detailed analysis of the role played by technology and the mechanistic view of the world painted in *Amelie* (pp.9–19).

69 See S. Johnston, 'Jeunet's light touch casts a spell', *Screen International*, 11 May 2001, p.23. See also references to 'choux pastry' in P. Preston, 'Soft choux shuffle', *Guardian*, 7 October 2001, and 'candy coated' in R. Kempley, 'Amile: candy-coated, magically delicious', *Washington Post*, 9 November 2001.

Ambivalence to Technology in Jeunet's Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain

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Although at one level Jean-Pierre Jeunet's Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain *is a sweet, attractive film about a young Parisian doing good deeds, it also offers a compelling analysis of the role of technology in our modern lives. The film paints a world where machines and a mechanistic worldview are appealing because humans have a desire to control their destinies but threatening because humans value freedom. The work of French social theorist Jacques Ellul is especially useful in analyzing these facets of the film as technology and freedom were consistent themes in his various books on the modern milieu.*

Keywords: *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain; Jean-Pierre Jeunet; Jacques Ellul; technology; ambivalence; power; freedom*

Aesthetician Casey Haskins (2001) once described the Holocaust tragicomedy *La Vita È Bella* (1997) as a Rorschach test. In general, audiences—even American audiences, a group with a notoriously low threshold of acceptance for non-English-speaking cinema—loved the film. Many reviewers also found it highly appealing. But a few dissenters were so venomous in their reactions that Haskins felt simple matters of taste could not sufficiently explain differences of opinion.

Interestingly, a similar Rorschach-like experience was occurring at the time of Haskins's writing. In this second instance, the cinematic experience was Jean-Pierre Jeunet's (2001/2002) *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*. For the most part, audiences loved the motion picture. It was a top box-office draw in Europe and soon became the highest-grossing French language film in United States history. Along with popular success, many critics praised the film's form and content. But those who reacted negatively did so in ways that were quite acrimonious. In the United States, one critic stated that the "film's nostalgia is as leaden as its whimsy, and even more toxic" (Dargis, 2001). Another said that the film had an "aggressive, in-your-face romanticism that's noticeably lacking in genuine warmth" (Turan, 2001). Some of the strongest negative reaction was from French reviewers. Most circulated among these was that of Serge Kaganski (2001), who suggested that the far right *Front National* could use clips from the film in support of its political discourse.[1] Reiterating this sentiment, Frédéric Bonnaud (2001) said that the film "depends on a profoundly reactionary impulse—the reinstatement of a cliché snapshot image of France in order to reaffirm its enduring value" (p. 38).

As with Haskins's analysis of the reaction to *La Vita È Bella*, there seems to be more involved here than personal taste. In the former case, Haskins argued that *La Vita È Bella* addresses important issues about aesthetics and politics in subtle ways that are inclined to bring out the kinds of polarized reactions that did in fact arise. In the case of *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*, there is little in the film that points directly to issues of aesthetics and politics. However, a recurring theme is the interrelationship between technology and power and the ambivalence we feel toward both. Coincidentally, Jacques Ellul, a French cultural theorist, offers a compelling analysis of technology and power. Though his work was much more widely accepted in the United States than in his home country (Ellul, 1990, p. xii; Troude-Chastenet, 1994/1998, pp. 19, 29), Ellul's theory of technique offers special insights into what makes *Amélie* uniquely French in its outward imagery but not-so-uniquely French in its subtle message about an increasingly technocratic world. Ellul's work—along with the writing of Neil Postman, who extends it—also gives us a view of the

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film that should leave viewers both charmed and offended simultaneously.

Amélie, Pas Jolie

Although aesthetics is not a fundamental theme in *Amélie*, the concept of beauty is not completely lacking from its content or from the discourse that developed around it. In fact, beauty (even if artificial in nature) was a key point of friction. Director Jean-Pierre Jeunet purposely strove to shoot Paris as a place of beauty. But this beauty was a significant source of malaise among the motion picture's detractors.

Jeunet's film manages to show viewers the Paris of their dreams. Through a combination of careful location scouting, skillful control of sets in the shooting process, and digital manipulation of the footage obtained on location, the director was able to create a Gallic capital that mixes the best of various epochs and elides the worst of all of them.[2] In the City of Light Jeunet portrays, we see the economic prosperity of a modern business center that is part of the powerful European Union, but we do not see the dingy suburbs that have been created to house the poor who are attracted to its prosperity. Similarly, we see the wonders of modern transportation, but we do not see city streets that are packed with cars. And we see blue skies not sullied by the exhaust of millions of locals and tourists who want to quickly maneuver through what was once, to use contemporary parlance, a medieval "gated community."

It is this manufactured beauty of the film that has raised the ire of many of Jeunet's harshest critics. For some audience members, the director's view is far too simple and unthinkingly uplifting. For others, Jenet's film is a thinly veiled piece of reactionary propaganda that encourages viewers to think that the solution to social problems is a return to a romanticized past, particularly a romanticized past that existed before the development of a diverse capital city. Kaganski, in particular, felt that Jeunet whitewashed the city, especially what the critic saw as its "*polysémie ethnique, sociale, sexuelle et culturelle*" (Kaganski, 2001).

What is odd about this and other critiques of *Amélie's* charm is that they seem to overlook (possibly because of the film's surface beauty) its darker, more ambivalent tones. Similarly, the charge that the film is rife with reactionary romanticism misses the hesitancy the filmmaker has toward his subject. One need look no further than key elements of the plot to see this. Consider the following: *Amélie* is a film about a little girl who is raised by cold, distant parents. One parent dies when the daughter is quite young, leaving her to wait out the last years of childhood with the other, who is increasingly reclusive. When the girl becomes a young woman and does break out into the real world, she lacks common social skills and struggles to fit into the broader community. Quite by accident, she one day discovers that she can assuage her own feelings of communal ineptness by doing anonymous acts of benevolence toward others. Eventually, however, she is forced to confront her own isolationism, and she falls in love. Who is the object of her affection, the man who can rescue her from her problems? The guy working the front desk at a local porn shop.

Although the ending of the film might attenuate some of the bleakness of this plot, it does not eliminate it. Clearly, the director is painting a picture of an imperfect world. In spite of this, many audience members found the film upbeat and enjoyable, leading to the film's success at the box office. And some observed the pleasing imagery of the film and had a different reaction, finding it overly saccharine. One review went so far as to say that "watching *Amélie* is like taking a sticky shower in honey" (Fauth & Dermansky, 2005).

Though a minority, a few perceptive reviewers managed to see the darker side and the balance of the film. Lucy Dallas provided one of the most trenchant observations among popular reviewers of the work. In her own words, "The film lives and dies by the audience's association with Amélie, who has, it must be said, the makings of a sociopath—very pretty, but a sociopath none the less" (Dallas, 2001, p. 19).

Academic researchers also provided more depth in their analysis of the motion picture. As such analyses are always "readings" in which the scholar attempts to focus on a particular thematic element, areas of attention varied greatly. A large number of these essays appeared in journals devoted to the analysis of contemporary French culture, where scholars made allusions to important issues, such as iconicity and visual technologies (Ezra, 2004), the enjoyment of small pleasures in daily French life (Scatton-Tessier, 2004), and *Amélie's* relation to the cultural politics of kitsch (Westbrook, 2002). However, nobody focused primarily on the issues of technology and power in the film. This is a real shame, as applying the ideas of Ellul and Postman helps us understand how the film is more than mellifluous escapism or reactionary propaganda.

Technology, Power, and Remorse

In contrast to what many viewers perceive to be the Pollyanna vision of the world portrayed in

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Amélie, the oeuvres of Jacques Ellul and Neil Postman have often been perceived to be bleak and pessimistic. Although there are significant differences in their views, and their perspectives will necessarily be simplified here, Ellul and Postman both paint a picture of Western humanity in all its glory and fault.[3] Both envision a world that is captive to technology at tremendous cost to human freedom.

Ellul provided the foundation for this analysis in his classic book, *The Technological Society* (1954/1964). A worthy summary of the work has been provided by Clifford Christians (1976, p. 3), who once stated that Ellul's recurring concern is not machines but "machineness," the tendency we have to emulate the machine and to carry that emulation to all areas of our existence. Ellul himself writes of this, saying,

> From this point of view, it might be said that technique is the translation into action of man's concern to master things by means of reason, to account for what is subconscious, make quantitative what is qualitative, make clear and precise the outlines of nature, take hold of chaos and put order into it. (p. 43)

Elsewhere, he writes, "For, wherever a technical factor exists, it results, almost inevitably, in mechanization; technique transforms everything it touches into a machine" (p. 4).

Where Postman jumps onto Ellul's bandwagon is this concept of the universality of machineness. In *Technopoly* (1993, p. 51), Postman argues that in a short period of history, technology moved from the realm of science, to the realm of labor, to every other realm of human existence. He sees this intrusion in the fields of medicine, education, even in our religious establishments. In all of these realms, a transition occurs where the primary goal soon becomes efficiency.

Both of these authors see this change as occurring within the sweeping flow of Western civilization. Ellul (1975/1978) notes that the seeds of technique were already evidenced in the Greeks and the Romans and their "will to power" (p. 71). The agape force of Christianity held this attitude in check for a period of time but could not do so for long (p. 72). Technology provided too much allure. Human self-interest (for example, the desire for comfort) led the masses to side with technique (Ellul, 1954/1964, p. 55). In the theorist's view, we are now at the point where our surrender to machineness has left us with nothing but a "drab, insipid unfolding of implications, an interplay of forces and mechanisms" (Ellul, 1975/1978, p. 81).

Postman (1993) sees a similar progression. For him, "tool-using cultures" shifted to technocracies with the realization that "knowledge is power" (p. 38). Technocracies arose with the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution but managed to keep alive symbol systems and checks on technology. In the beginning of the 20th century, however, the era of technopoly arose, an era in which technology eliminated any alternative to itself (p. 48). All facets of life became subject to it, and any system of thought that is not mechanistic became suspect.

We should note that both authors fully understand the draw of technology, its power to mesmerize people. As a whole, humanity has gained much by harnessing the powers of the world. What both see occurring if this desire to control is not itself controlled, however, is a loss of freedom. Succinctly,

> The free individual inevitably became a force moving outward to dominate the world and others, but the same individual was also, and inseparably, bounded and imprisoned by his methods and the mastery he had achieved. He could do nothing, save in a totally coherent way. He made the appalling discovery that he had created for himself an inner limitation, namely, the necessity of applying rational method to everything he undertook and everything he claimed. (Ellul, 1975/1978, p. 35).

What Ellul is communicating is that at a certain point, the West realized that it engaged in a tradeoff. Most of us are enamored of the tremendous material benefits reaped by the use of technology in the production of food, housing, and clothing. We even see benefits of mechanization in realms that could be seen as more purely cultural production (for example, the fact we can buy a CD with music from a country halfway around the world). At the same time, we all feel a sense of ambivalence with this progress, realizing that each time we take a step to make our world more efficient and productive, we also take a step toward a world in which we ourselves are a smaller and smaller part of a massive machine.

Although few viewers were conscious of it, the march of the technological society and our ambivalence toward it can be seen in the context and content of *Amélie*. Jean-Pierre Jeunet's own background and approach to making the film, as well as its story and its production values (whether intentionally or not), can easily be placed within a thematic framework of technology, power, and ambivalence.

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Amélie in Context

Some clues to the technological dimensions of *Amélie* lie outside its text. There are clues to its nature and meaning in the work experience of its maker, the international nature of the film, and its use of digital technologies to achieve its effects.

Although we often think of France as the land of the auteur, a bold individual who is in love with cinema as a means of self-expression, Jean-Pierre Jeunet breaks this mold. To start, Jeunet's love for cinema appears to come from a love of film technology and film imagery, not with the expressive powers of the medium. As he explains it, a family friend once brought a Super 8 movie camera to his house when he was a teenager. Perceiving this was all that was needed to make films, Jeunet went to work for the phone company to save up for his first camera (Bear, n.d.). Once he obtained it, however, he did not begin his magnum opus and struggle as a starving artist until he was able to bring it to fruition. Instead, he made a good living producing commercials and music videos (Austin, 2004; Dudley, 2004). In the 1990s, he gained a reputation that allowed him to work in feature film—though he did not cease his work in advertising—codirecting two highly successful products with Marc Caro.

Jeunet's success in his homeland created more opportunities for him. Or to put it more succinctly, it abolished national boundaries and opened up new technological options for the director. In the mid-1990s, he was offered an opportunity to direct an American production, *Alien: Resurrection*, a big-budget Hollywood film that Austin (2004) describes as being "chock full of typically 'American' special effects" (p. 289). The paycheck from this project also allowed Jeunet the complete freedom to return home and make a "very French film," a film that eventually became *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* (Austin, 2004, p. 289).

But the information above raises a significant question: Would one expect a film director who entered the medium through the demimonde of advertising, spent time working in Hollywood, and became captive to the power of digital production to make a "very French film"? The broad international success of the film in question suggests the answer is no. Perhaps a better way to understand the success of a film that is produced by an international director well trained in advertising and equipped with the latest technological gadgets is that it allows the director and the audience both to meditate on the mechanized mindset of the early 21st century.

Amélie in Content

Although few critics noted it, *Amélie* is riddled with images of technology and is a film that itself is set up to operate in an almost machinelike way. One observant writer did sense this and described it as follows:

> Indeed, from the very first frames of the film … the story presented seems so deterministic, so overtly causal, that I thought to find the name David Hume in the credits for the screenplay. Causation may or may not be the cement of the universe, but there's no getting away from its importance here. (Kerr, 2001, p. 67).

Frédéric Bonnaud (2001) offered a similar description, saying the film "never strays from its predetermined course" (p. 38). Manohla Dargis (2001) puts it in even greater technological terms, saying that Jeunet is "more of a watchmaker than a poet of the heart and soul."

One need look no further than the opening images of the film to grasp that technology and technological thinking are a significant part of it. As the screen fades from black and we hear accordion music, we also hear a narrator describe the setting of a quiet street in the Montmartre district of Paris. The focus of the description is a fly that hovers over the road. Many audience members focused on the music, some finding its Frenchness pleasing, some finding it clichéd. What these observers overlooked was the narration. This is not just any description. It is a description that is the product of a scientific worldview. The scientific family of the insect is offered, as is a calculation of the amazing number of wing beats per minute the creature can sustain.

Those viewers who did notice the narration might have thought this is a film about chaos theory. Perhaps the fly's wing beats will cause some significant event halfway around the world. After all, a recurring theme in the film is destiny. But this is not a film about a world of chaos; it is a film about the power of technology to change the world. Accordingly, shortly after the narrator pauses, an automobile surges forth and smashes the insect.

To swing our thoughts back to the idea of chance and chaos, the narrator explains two other events that are occurring at precisely the same time as the fly is destroyed. But a final event is of crucial importance, a spermatozoon of Amélie's father reaching an ovum carried by her mother. As the narrator explains this

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event, it is not shown as an act of God, as a feat of magic, or even as a mystery of nature. Rather, it is shown as a lab experiment. A microscopic close-up shows one sperm (circled as if in a biology lecture) moving past the rest to meet its destiny. Continuing with this scientific view of the world, Amélie's mother is next shown as she blossoms in pregnancy. Her setting is not the comfortable surroundings of a home, preparing for the arrival of a baby. The image revealed is of a naked woman in profile, standing in a sterile (ironically) setting, with time-lapsed photography to show her gestational development. When Amélie is finally born, she is revealed to the world in a clinical close-up of the birthing experience.

One might note from Ellul's and Postman's perspectives that this introduction—all occurring before the credits—describes an early world of technique. In less than a minute, we have images of two important facets of the modern world: the machine and science. In the early development of technique, these were mostly applied to the world external to humans. They were concerned with making our world comfortable. As Ellul describes it, most of this occurred in the 1800s, and the material production of the machine and science gradually swayed most to embrace what they saw as empowering. Even Marx, thought by some as the rabble-rouser of Western civilization, preached the "liberating nature of technique" (Ellul, 1954/1964, p. 54).

In *Amélie*, though, after the introduction of this world of material technique, the credits fade and another world appears. It is a world not just of technology (or technique, to use Ellul's term) but of human technology. Having already mastered physical production—the efficient manufacturing of goods—we are at a stage where mastering humans through technique is of utmost importance. And the director reveals that Amélie's parents are reflective of this mastery.[4] It is interesting that one is a doctor, the other is a teacher. In *The Technological Society* (1954/1964, p. 22), Ellul suggests that two key areas of "human technique" are medicine and pedagogy.

There is certainly a narrative rationale here, not just a symbolic rationale, for the choice of the parents' professions. But the narrative rationale leads to even greater symbolism. Amélie's father sees her primarily as one of his patients, and he does so technologically. As the narrator explains, little Amélie has little contact with him other than a monthly checkup, a checkup that is mediated by a stethoscope. Notably, Postman (1993) reveals in *Technopoly* that the stethoscope was invented in France and was the site in which technology made significant headway into the medical profession, greatly changing the way people think of an erstwhile humane discipline. As he describes it, the stethoscope was a significant change in medicine because of the interposing of an instrument between the patient and the doctor (p. 99). In the case of our young heroine, the technology led her father to limit his analysis to her heart and ignore all else. And so excited was the little girl by the infrequent attention of her father that her heart beat irregularly anytime the stethoscope reached her chest. Myopically (and technologically) focused on the heart alone, dad presumed his daughter was unhealthy and unable to survive in a harsh world. She needed protection in their home.

At home, however, was the pedagogical arm of human technique. Mom is shown to interact with her daughter the way a bureaucratic French *institutrice* would treat a whole classroom full of students. She delivers information, expecting her daughter to properly respond to it. One scene, where the mother is shown teaching, demonstrates this quite forcefully. In the original French dialogue, the point is for Amélie to recognize how sequences of letters are pronounced differently depending on whether they form verbs or other parts of speech. The little girl has already figured out two things, though. One is that language is a system with rules. The other is that if she does not follow the rules, she can control her mother.

This element of control is reiterated throughout these scenes of childhood, with one scene in particular worthy of extra attention here. After a failed attempt at providing companionship through a pet (a goldfish that becomes suicidal in this environment), Amélie's parents provide her with a camera as a means of entertainment. She enjoys the apparatus until, one day, she takes photos at what turns out to be—by pure coincidence—the scene of a car accident. A bystander tells the little girl that her photography was the cause of the accident.[5] She returns home mortified at the possibility that she has such power and that the power might have negative effects. The next shot in the film shows the result. Amélie sits frozen in front of a television screen, where the evening news is aired. A series of tragedies is revealed on the news, and the little girl thinks that she was their cause.

In the next scene, we find this tension released in that Amélie is informed she was the victim of a ruse. Mechanism does not stop here, however. She wants revenge, and she has already learned that the world is a place of cause and effect. To torment the man who fooled her, she sits on his roof with a radio, listening closely to an important soccer match. He is below, unaware of her presence, intently watching the same

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match on television. Each time that a climactic moment occurs in the soccer match, Amélie disconnects his television antenna and he loses his view of the action. Thinking this fate, the man screams, beats his TV set, and eventually beats himself. Amélie sits on the roof fully aware that fate has little to do with it. She lives in a world that works like a machine.

Immediately after this, Jeunet shows us fate and machineness in conflict again. Sensing her daughter's lack of socialization, Amélie's mother goes to Notre Dame Cathedral to light candles in supplication for another child. In itself, this action connects with broader themes of the film and dovetails nicely with insights from Ellul. In his theological works, he stresses not only the freedom of man but also the freedom of God. Humans' tendency is to want to put God in a box or, in the case of prayer, to use a mechanism to get Him to give them what they want (Ellul, 1970/1971, 1987/1989).[6]

Jeunet, making a joke of all of this, uses this opportunity to eliminate our heroine's mother. A tourist from Quebec who is determined to end her life jumps from the top of the cathedral at the same time Amandine Fouet exits its portals. The suicidal tourist's leap ends Amélie's mother's life, which in turn causes Amélie's father to become a recluse. He spends large amounts of his time building a mausoleum to his former wife and later becomes very attached to a garden gnome that he plants firmly atop the structure.

From here, the film provides an ellipsis to Amélie's adulthood. Time is shown to pass quickly after her mother's death, and soon we see a young woman leaving the home with bags packed. Although in one sense Jeunet's time lapse is an appropriate way of dispensing with a period of time he feels unimportant for the plot of the film, in another sense, it is representative of another subtle element of the film and its orientation to technology. One way of reading this shortened transitional period is that Amélie never really grows up. This can precipitate a positive reaction, as it appears to have done for much of the audience. We enjoy watching an impish adult version of Amélie meddle in the lives of other characters who are representative of various problems of adulthood. Looked at more critically, however, we can see the main character as a representative of what Stivers (2004), on the basis of earlier conceptualization by Ellul, has referred to as a "technological personality," puerility being a key aspect thereof.

Once Amélie is shown in her adult life, we see this puerility more clearly. We might note, for example, that at first she seems completely oblivious to the problems of others—much as children often are not aware of the difficulties besieging their parents. In this instance, the childlike character is in fact oblivious to her own condition. She is completely detached from her own existence, though she seems content in living vicariously through others and also in observing the mechanics of the world around her. As example of this first phenomenon, the young woman has no love life and is shown to be completely uninterested in sex, yet she can spend much time giving serious contemplation to the sex lives of others (a fact revealed quite graphically by Jeunet).[7] As example of the second phenomenon, one of her favorite pastimes is to attend the local cinema. She experiences this very differently than other audience members, though. In fact, she spends much of the time in the theater turned away from the screen, analyzing the reactions of the other viewers to the power of the image. And when she does turn to examine the image itself, she focuses on things that nobody else does. She focuses, for example, on the technological insufficiencies of the medium, such as a beautifully composed shot from *Jules et Jim* in which a fly chose an inopportune moment to enter the frame.[8] Of course, should an insect have entered the frame of the current film, the director would have digitally erased it. But such was not possible in 1962. The other area on which Amélie focuses her attention is moments when technological potential exists and people do not use it efficiently. Amélie tell us directly—she looks into the lens and speaks to us—that she detests how in some old American films, characters are shown in cars with rear-screen-projection to make them appear to be moving but the driver pays no attention to the road whatsoever, making the technology of the time lose its power.

Power and technology (especially media technology) are significant elements in the film, and they all come together at a key turning point that occurs next. As Amélie continues to live her quiet, mostly vicarious life, one night she sees a television news bulletin about the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Ezra (2004) has pointed out that Diana serves as an iconic figure in the film. More important for our purposes, however, is that Diana's death demonstrates the vicarious life experienced through attention to celebrities. Stivers (2004) describes this as another part of the technological personality, stating, "Only celebrities appear to be fully human. Getting to know them appears to be an end to a mild but endemic loneliness" (p. 493). Monsieur Dufayel, a neighbor of Amélie's, so depicts her while discussing the painting *Le Déjeuner des Canotiers*. Describing the anomic girl holding a glass in the center of the painting (and Amélie, too, as she stands in the background of this shot in the film with a glass also in

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her hand), he states, "She'd rather imagine a relation with an absent person than to create one with those who are present."[9]

And there are clues in the film that a mechanized world is in itself the source of this difficulty in relating, a key theme in the work of Ellul and Postman. At the level of material technique (getting things done for the sake of productivity), people must be taught to act like machines. Raymond Dufayel is himself an example of this in that he is secluded indoors, separated from the rhythms of the natural world, and engaged in a repetitive action.[10] Another example is seen in the father of the grocer, Collignon. Having worked all of his life as a ticket puncher, he finds he cannot stop the repetitive activity of using his machine. Quite apropos, Postman (1993, p. 14), has suggested that the old adage "to a man with a hammer, everything is a nail" can be applied to any technology. To a man with a ticket puncher, everything is a ticket. And in this instance, Madame Collignon complains that her husband nervously goes to the garden each night and perforates anything in sight, most unfortunately her favorite laurels. Elsewhere in the film, this theme is reiterated when Amélie is riding in a train and attempting to understand a line of prose scribed by Hipolito, the struggling writer who frequents her cafe. When she reads the line out loud to a train attendant, he looks blankly at her and simply says, "*Ticket, s'il vous plaît*."[11]

The intimation is that mechanization in work leads to mechanization in relations. Of course, we are often comfortable with such relations because of the surfeit of superficial contacts the modern world thrusts on us. These contacts demand little action on our part and save us energy (both physical and emotional). Ironically, though, in this instance such a relation serves as a catalyst for Amélie Poulain. Gazing at the televised image of the aftermath of Princess Diana's fatal automobile accident, she drops the cap to a perfume bottle, and it rolls across the floor to reveal the location of a hidden compartment where a small box of mementos is stashed. Lying in bed that night, Amélie realizes that someone has lost these objects and that by finding the owner and returning them, she will be doing a great service.

After going to great lengths to discover who might have left the box in her apartment, Amélie sets out to return it and make its owner, a now middle-aged man named Dominique Bretodeau, happy. Yet she does not do what many of us would expect in this situation. We might think that once knowing his address, she would contact him to let him know who she is and what she wants. Then she could visit his home, give him the box, and talk to him about her experience (and how it intersected with his).

But this is too much human interaction—and not mechanistic enough—for someone with a technological personality. Amélie wishes Dominique Bretodeau happiness. She also wishes her own happiness. But she is scared to death of interacting with him at too personal a level.[12] Therefore, she sets up a delivery system for the box. She watches Bretodeau until she learns his routine. She then plants the box in a phone booth that lies near the path of that routine, and she calls as he passes and lures him to find the mementos.

When Bretodeau opens the box, Jeunet follows a preestablished leitmotif. The director shows items related most intensely to other people's direct experiences, not those of Bretodeau. In fact, many of the experiences are those of celebrities. On top of the items in the box is an old black-and-white photo of Just Fontaine, a renowned French soccer player who scored 13 goals in the 1958 World Cup. Next in the box is a small toy cyclist. As its owner is reunited with it, we see a black-and-white image of a child playing with the toy but doing so while listening to the radio. At first, this makes no sense. But then we see stock film footage of Federico Bahamonte, a Spanish cyclist who was famous for his power to pedal up the Pyrenees in the Tour de France. These images, along with several others associated with items in the box, bring tears to the eyes of their owner, who had long forgotten them. They are, of course, tears of joy and an indication of Amélie's success.

This initial success in benevolence presents a pattern for several other intermingled vignettes that follow it. Amélie sets out to bring happiness to a number of broken people who surround her. Among these are her father, a colleague at *Les Deux Moulins*, Monsieur Dufayel, and the concierge from her building. For the most part, Amélie's attempts at doing good manifest two tendencies. The first tendency is that her efforts do not alter the reality of the beneficiaries' existence. That is, Amélie does nothing to change the material conditions of the people she helps. Instead, she simply encourages the persons to look at something new or to look at something in a new way. The case of Madeleine Wallace (the concierge) is probably the starkest example of this. Amélie borrows a stack of old love letters from the woman's apartment and creatively edits them to concoct a long-lost letter revealing to Madeleine that her husband loved her even after he ran away with his secretary. The second tendency obvious in these acts of kindness is that Amélie needs some form of communication technology to accomplish the

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task of bringing joy to people. With the exception of her matchmaking with Joseph and Georgette, she cannot create happiness without the aid of telephones, cameras, photocopiers, and television images.[13] In each case, she carefully crafts a "reality" with these machines that changes people's demeanor.

What few observers seem to have noticed in all of this is that the fictional character known as Amélie seems to morph from a representation of the technological personality to another representation, the representation of the successful film director in the digital age, perhaps even a representation of Jean-Pierre Jeunet himself. Hence, when Andrew Dudley (2004) of *Film Quarterly* described Jeunet's attention to detail in the film, we could easily replace the name "*Jeunet*" with "*Amélie Poulain*." Dudley wrote,

> Controlling every element of sound and picture, determining it all in an unalterable script and storyboard, Jeunet engineered his fantasy with the precision of a watchmaker, each shot milled to move into position so as to engage the subsequent shot without friction. (p. 38)

Frédéric Bonnaud (2001) shared similar reactions about the director that could just as well be held to the director's character, stating that Jeunet reverted to "facile tricks" to "maintain the audience's submission"(p. 38). Moreover, Bonnaud felt that the large part of the audience who submitted freely to these tricks did so because they had been beaten over the head with them in commercials.

Bonnaud's supercilious reaction shows that he did in fact miss the obvious correlation taking place between Amélie and director Jean-Pierre Jeunet. But he also missed another. He missed the connection between the other characters in the film and the audience for the film. Specifically, he and other critics have failed to sense Jeunet's subtle uncertainty about media manipulation and our own complicity in that manipulation. We are not "beaten over the head" with television commercials. And we are not beaten over the head by Jeunet's film. We are wooed to enjoy both in the same way that we are wooed to the technological world in general.[14] The technological world does bring us pleasure. And in the same way that we may have ambivalence toward the mechanistic systems we put in place to deliver our physical sustenance in the form of three square meals a day, we have ambivalence toward the mechanistic systems we put in place to deliver emotional sustenance in the form of books, magazines, CDs, and other cultural products. We know we are being manipulated, and as much of the manipulation entails cajoling, we enjoy it, at a certain level. As van der Laan (2004) suggests, relying heavily on Ellul's work, the media in the technological milieu work through a process of temptation and seduction, not through brute force.

The seduction and our willingness to succumb to it is one element of our ambivalence. And this ambivalence is revealed throughout the film in the director's choice of colors. The dominant colors on the director's pallet are green and red. Of course, in Western cultures centered around the automobile, green means go, red means stop. When presented with both, we feel a sense of confusion, indecisiveness, or ambivalence.[15]

Notably, ambivalence is driven home at the film's close when Amélie, the great media magician, has manipulated all others to happiness but is uncertain about her own happiness. Monsieur Dufayel attempts to sway her to seize the opportunity for her own happiness, but she is hesitant. In fact, at this point of the narrative, she imagines a propaganda film (or counterpropaganda film) wherein it is stated that Dufayel's meddling will not be tolerated. Interestingly, it is only when Monsieur Dufayel uses a telephone and a video camera to communicate with Amélie that she finally capitulates and seeks her own happiness with Nino, the man from the porn shop who she likes but is afraid to tack to.

As noted earlier, this pleasant resolution to any perceived darkness in the film may explain the overriding positive reaction most viewers had to it. But careful consideration of the climax and denouement reveals a bleakness that subsists, and such consideration can lead us to question our pleasant reactions. To start, we might wonder why audiences so easily embrace Amélie and Nino's relationship and how much faith they can place in it. As example, an astute viewer might wonder why a borderline sociopath heroine can suddenly find happiness in a relationship when she has shown no propensity for doing so earlier in the story.

When looked at this way, we realize that Amélie's happiness is no different from that she created for other characters in the film. There is no indication of a fundamental change in the world around her. And there is no indication of a significant change in her as a character. But suddenly we are expected to believe that she has secured a happiness that will last. Jeunet shows his hesitancy even as we accept this happiness. When he reveals the "happy" couple snuggling in bed, he shoots them from an angle that is almost identical to one he showed us earlier in the film. However,

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the last time he used this camera angle showing Amélie in bed with another man, she was shown to be completely detached from the experience. With Nino, she seems to be content, but the repeated point of view makes us wonder.

Also making us wonder is the fact that Jeunet chooses to place the new couple in a world without conversation. When Nino finally enters Amélie's apartment, he begins to speak, but she quickly puts her hand over his mouth. From this point to the closing credits, neither says a word. Such is not shocking when we put the concluding scenes in the context of the film as a whole. The heroine created a world where image mattered more than anything else. Even as the two key characters come together, image is more valued than spoken word. This also makes sense when we continue an analysis from Ellul's perspective. In his work *Humiliation of the Word* (1981/1985), he laments the fact that humanity has begun to see the image as more important than the written and the spoken word. Postman (1993) reiterates this idea in *Technopoly* and adds a dimension by distinguishing the role that advertising has played in the image's rise to importance in our society. He specifically suggests that advertising and the technological graphics revolution of the late 1800s greatly increased our culture's respect for image, even image that is completely irrational.

And it is with a series of seemingly incoherent (or irrational) images that Jeunet ends the film. This series of shots, in fact, mirrors the montage that occurred before the opening titles. The director begins the sequence at the *Foire du Trône*, where a taffy machine makes taffy, its mechanical arms in constant motion. At this exact instant, a young man sits, reading a magazine in which he learns there are more links in the human brain than there are atoms in the universe. Meanwhile, a group of Benedictine priests play badminton at Sacré Coeur. As they play, the narrator reveals the precise temperature, humidity, and barometric pressure. Amélie and Nino take advantage of the weather to go for a lengthy ride on his motor scooter.

The film ends, then, with images of a world that is invaded by technology. As noted above, this is a series of images that is similar in structure but different in tone from the series that opened the film. Machines still have tremendous power. Science provides vast strands of information (sometimes seemingly beyond our comprehension). Unlike in the opening scene, however, the machine is not seen as being destructive, and the immenseness of our knowledge is not a source of mourning. In fact, men of God are seen to be playing within this world, even if it is measured to precise dimensions. And if men of God can play, should not Amélie and Nino go and do likewise?

Conclusion

Amélie paints a world in which much is predetermined and life seems to move forward with machine-like precision. The argument presented in this article is that such a picture of the world generates ambivalence. Humans sense discomfort at the idea of being part of a machine but also happiness, recognizing that machineness offers opportunities for control. The film also paints a world in which changes in image can lead to changes in happiness. Happiness, however, is not shown to be transcendental or profound and in many cases seems rather temporary. Appropriately, as has just been shown, the unknotting of the ambivalence in the film is not really an unknotting at all but simply a willingness to look at something other than the knot that confounds us. One might say that it is a willingness to enjoy amusement.

Of course, Ellul and Postman both expressed great interest in the subject of amusement, seeing it as an integral phenomenon in the technological world (Ellul, 1990; Postman, 1985). As shown in this article, their perspective is apropos to a discussion of *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* because it illuminates a specific aspect of the film and offers a very different view of it from the perspectives held by many who were either besotted or offended by it.

Those who were besotted by the film failed to see its darker side, in many ways missing a provocative discourse on the power of technology and human compliance to it. They loved the quaint Parisian setting, the quirky characters, and the childlike resilience of its protagonist. They failed to consider the technological prowess that creates such a cinematic setting, the manipulation that surrounds much of the quirkiness, and the sociopathic dimensions of Amélie's puerility. Paying attention to these dimensions of the film leads to greater enlightenment, even if doing so might take away from our immediate enjoyment.

Those who were offended by the film also failed to see its darker elements. They had unmet expectations to see other images, however, and in doing so held demands of it that fell outside of its thematization of technology. Many of these critics were blind to Jeunet's subtle indications of the frightening power of technology. And their narrow focus on the simplistic, almost retro view of life that serves as a backdrop to the picture kept them from seeing the richness of certain themes that do wrestle intently

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with contemporary public issues. Indeed, certain alterations to the film that would presumably placate these critics (for example, increasing its polysemy) might simply muddy the themes the director had adequately developed.[16]

Granted, one thing demonstrated herein is that the director cannot bear to carry the themes through to the end of the film. He meditates on the challenges of living in a technological society but eventually succumbs to a narrative resolution that abandons that meditation in favor of escapist amusement. Anyone who has read the work of Ellul and Postman knows that this is always a temptation. If their assessment of technological society's threats to human freedom and humanity in general are true, how to react to those threats is almost incomprehensible. Perhaps understandably, then, *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* is a tremendously enjoyable film that can help contemplate the possibility of human freedom in the modern world, even if the director eventually chose to abandon that contemplation and leave us amused in his own work.

Notes

1. Kaganski (2001) did not mention FN by name but referred to possible use of the film by "le démagogue de La Trinité-sur-Mer," an obvious reference to Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the movement (and presidential candidate for the party in 2002).

2. Jeunet discusses all of these elements in the bonus features of the American-release DVD of the film.

3. To my knowledge, a thorough analysis of the similarities and differences between Ellul's and Postman's thought has never been written. Maley (2004) provides some insights into the common Weberian heritage of the two theorists. Gladney (1991) offers a brief critique of the ethical orientations of both. Rose (2003) provides a critique of both authors' work but does not provide a thorough contrast.

4. Worth mentioning here is the fact that Amélie's family names have in themselves an indication of the struggle between freedom and control, issues of great importance to Ellul and Postman. Her father's name is Poulain, which in French means "colt" or "foal." Her mother's name, on the other hand, is Fouet, which means "whip."

5. Ezra (2004) insightfully notes that this is also a foreshadowing of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, who had a car accident while being chased by paparazzi.

6. A similar image of theology as mechanics occurs when Amélie returns Nino's lost book of photographs later in the film. She leaves them with a woman who knows Nino, and the woman proclaims that he was about ready to pray to St. Anthony (literally, light candles to St. Anthony) to procure the safe return of the album.

7. Living vicariously is a theme revisited often in the film. Certainly it has something to do with Monsieur Dufayel's (the glass man) repetitive rendition of *Le Déjeuner des Canotiers*. And Nino, Amélie's eventual love interest, collects other peoples' experiences and works at a place that is the site of vicarious experience par excellence.

8. Dudley (2004, p. 35) makes reference to this "fly on the wall" and even chose to interview the cinematographer of the earlier film, Raoul Coutard, to get his take on the use of the shot in *Amélie*. According to Coutard, the natural lighting for the shot developed suddenly one morning, and the crew quickly assembled to take advantage of it. Once the shot had been taken, there was no reason to reshoot it because the lighting had changed significantly.

9. My translation. The original is, "*Elle préfère s'imaginer une relation avec quelqu'un d'absent plutôt que créer dés liens avec ceux que sont présents.*"

10. A relative had given him a video camera as a gift but instead of using it creatively, he focused it on a clock that sits across the street from his apartment. Dufayel is thus the epitome of the worker who is on a time clock, painting one copy of the same painting each year.

11. Jeunet reemphasizes this as he segues to the next scene. In that scene, Amélie talks to her father. When he asks how she is doing, she responds by revealing a host of fictional problems (for example, that she recently had an abortion), but he does not hear a word of what she is saying.

12. This is reaffirmed later. After Amélie returns Bretodeau's belongings, he sits down at the bar next to her and attempts to strike up a conversation, but she declines.

13. Worth noting, perhaps, is the fact that the medialess manipulation of Joseph and Georgette is the one act of benevolence on the part of Amélie that seems not to last. Their lightning romance turns sour before the closing credits.

14. The script of the film hints at the way the media have power but are also subject to human whim. Amélie has two very different ideas about the phantom of the photomaton. In speaking with Raymond Dufayel, she comes to the conclusion the phantom is an all-powerful ghost because of his ability to create and sustain an image. Later, in talking to Nino, she states that the phantom needs to woo people (literally in this case, as he must lean to their ear and say *woooooo*) who have their picture taken and in doing so risks the danger of getting caught. Of course, by the end of the film, the phantom does get caught, much to the pleasure of Amélie and Nino, and we realize that the phantom of the photomaton is simply a technician.

15. Alfred Hitchcock used red and green extensively in *Vertigo* (1958) to reflect the psychological nature of the vertigo phenomenon and its relation to dominant themes in the film. He also used the "vertigo shot" for this purpose, a shot where the camera's physical movement gives us one sense of direction while its optical manipulation (through zooming) gives us another.

16. Postman (and to a lesser extent, Ellul) sees polysemy as a horrible byproduct of the technological society. One of the main points of *Technopoly* is that we now live in a world that is overrun with ideas and imagery, to the point that communities no longer have the ability to eliminate information and interpretations. This creates what he calls an "improbable world" (Postman, 1993, p. 56).

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The new wave's attachment to place is 'proto-regionalist' in the way that the formalist utopianism of high modernists is 'proto-political' for Fredric Jameson. Certainly, Demy and his cohort show only a glimmer of political consciousness at this time regarding the regions, but a perhaps more interesting subtextual relation to place is inscribed in their form. In other words, their form speaks symptomatically, but they have not articulated a regionalist analysis or rhetoric. The new wave does, however, lay the grounds for the regionalist film-makers of the 1968 generation. Despite influences from the new wave, however, this later cinema never recaptures the dynamic tensions that permeate *Lola*, springing as it does from a liminal moment where French society was still ebulliently transforming itself but beginning to look back at what it was losing. With characteristic wit, Demy captures this tension in *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*, when the young sailor Maxence (who resembles Frankie and Michel) repeats several time that he is going 'on leave in Nantes' (in French 'en perme à Nantes') a pun on the word 'permanent'. 'Perme à Nantes', however, is only temporary, and (to extend the pun in English) 'leave' emphasizes departure rather than return. There is no doubting Demy's fixation on his home town of Nantes and surrogate port cities, but his is anything but a regressive nostalgia yearning for true permanence or stasis. *Lola* is always on the move, racing after its desires. In it, nostalgia is modernized, no identity is fixed, and the origin is tantalizing, but elusive and finally unlocatable.

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Le Petisme: flirting with the sordid in Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain

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Abstract

The happiness carefully constructed in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain/Amélie (2001), finds its roots in the recent French phenomenon of a return to minuscule pleasures of daily life, le petisme. Petisme is first a reaction to and a concern about everything that is gigantic or growing in France, that is, globalization, crime, ordinary violence, unemployment, hypermarkets, and the loss of individual identity in the technological age. Petisme bears homage to the little things. It prioritizes the local, the immediate, that which can be quickly rectified, and implies a diversion from the larger issues. It centres on the familiar, resulting in a withdrawal into oneself. It involves an interest in the 'fait divers' or usually sordid, current local event. Jeunet's film taps into this need for a diversion from a mistrust and growing malaise in a France facing the rise of globalization, increasing cultural diversity, a growing lack of confidence in governmental institutions, public security and an unstable economic climate. As this article demonstrates, Jeunet's film remains well anchored in its socio-historical and cinematic period, exploiting the same issues of loneliness and isolation found in recent French new social cinema.

Keywords

Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain
Jean-Pierre Jeunet
petisme
faits divers
French film

Enthusiasm in France surrounding Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain/Amélie* (2001) has focused primarily on the film's ability to make its audiences feel good. Critical reviews have often drawn on the film's potential to evoke a certain happiness present in everyday life. The happiness carefully constructed in *Amélie* sparks from the female protagonist's active intervention in the lives of her co-workers, neighbours and family, just as much as it finds its roots in the minuscule pleasures of daily life, *le petisme* (Mermet 2003: 279). A relatively new French word (formed on the 'petit', or small), *petisme* refers to a reaction to the national concern about everything that is gigantic or growing, that is, globalization, crime, ordinary violence, unemployment and the loss of individual identity in the technological age. *Petisme* bears homage to the little things. It prioritizes the local, the immediate, that which can be quickly rectified, and implies a diversion from the larger issues. It centres on the familiar, resulting in a withdrawal into oneself (Biais et al. 2003: 53). *Petisme* implies an attraction for everyday scenarios, situations, obstacles and news. The happiness associated with *Amélie* develops from this recent phenomenon.

I argue that this happiness functions as a diversion, a distraction or avoidance of reality. The viewers' pleasure derives from the heroine's mischievous antics and revenge; satisfaction arises from her rapid potential

elimination of others' misery and frustration. Souvenirs, games, disguises, imaginary friends and secret collections distract us from the background of deformation, malady and isolation haunting the film. Infantile actions become a valorized means of achieving immediate gratification. They provide a means of escape for the female protagonist (and for the viewer), allowing for a regression to a time before adult responsibilities and behaviours. This happiness is, however, inseparable from the angst and mistrust that foreground the film; it grows from the loneliness found in an increasingly individualistic French society in which 7.3 million persons live alone (Mermet 2003: 149). This emphasis of small pleasures and malaise reveals the extent to which *Amélie* is anchored in its socio-historical and cinematic period.

(Un)happiness

Amélie first appears as light entertainment, especially when compared with other contemporary French films displaying a fascination with the sordid and banal existences of everyday life. In Carlos Pardo's February 2000 article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* on the then recent French cinema, originally published anonymously in *Libération* in 1999, the journalist and film-maker criticizes a certain tendency among French directors who revel in 'despair, decadence, impasse, powerlessness and murder' (Pardo 2000: 28). Pardo's task in this socially engaged article is twofold. He criticizes recent French film-makers who create cinematic scenes which become true advertisements for their films. These scenes and expressions facilitate the sale of the film and, at times, supply a shock-value effect composed mostly of graphic violence and sex. This mixing of genres, of publicity and product, results in a solipsistic self-referentiality: 'We sometimes ask ourselves if certain scenes have not been made uniquely for the preview' (Pardo 2000: 28).

Pardo's article illustrates through comparison the ways in which films of the mid-to-late 1990s by Breillat, Dumont, Grandrieux, Kassovitz, Noé, Ozon and Zonca 'darken into a sordid naturalism and stay fascinated with decline, hopelessness and defeatism [...]. Fundamentally, their fascination with the abject and sordid reveals an undeniable hate of the people' (Pardo 2000: 28). In fact, it is not so much the content of recent films by these directors that is at issue, but rather the *ways* of filming and valorizing gore, repulsiveness and the lurid in a realistic cinematographic style. Though the films mentioned explore diverse subject matters and approaches, just as they demonstrate different styles of film-making, they are all marked by a realist aesthetic accompanied by 'a very ambiguous social and political discourse' (Pardo 2000: 28). They are part of a French cinema of the 1990s which has been described as social renewal by film critic Franck Garbarz and new poetic realism by Martine Beugnet (Beugnet 2000; Garbarz 1997). For Phil Powrie, this renewed interest in the social and the political is a new social cinema developing from a 'postmodern attraction to representations of the ordinary, establishing ties with the social cinema of the 1930s and the realist cinema of the 1970s; the aura of spectacle has become the ordinary of the everyday' (Powrie 2002: 81). This sordid naturalism, which Pardo sees in *La Vie de Jésus/The Life of Jesus* (Dumont,

1997) and *L'Humanité/Humanity* (Dumont, 1999), *Assassin(s)* (Kassovitz, 1997), *La Vie rêvée des anges/The Dreamlife of Angels* (Zonca, 1998), *Sombre* (Grandrieux, 1998), *Seul contre tous/I Stand Alone* (Noé, 1998) and *Les Amants criminels/Criminal Lovers* (Ozon, 1999), among others, show how film-makers are exploring a malaise in contemporary France, a malaise stemming from an unstable economy, rising rates of delinquency and crime, and a shift away from traditional values of family and religion. It is a microscopic examination of misery, awkwardness and identity crisis, a fascination in each other's base behaviour and bad luck; it comes from film-makers who no longer curse or fight against the society in which they live, but who (may) loathe their condition as human and living beings (Caviglioli 2003: 45).

Superficially, the fictional day-to-day in *Amélie* is far from the brutality of Ozon's *Les Amants criminels* and Noé's *Seul contre tous*, the rape and murder of a young girl in Dumont's *L'Humanité*, and the boredom and violence of adolescence of his *La Vie de Jésus* or of Kassovitz's *Assassin(s)*. At first sight it seems impossible to compare the lives of Jeunet's protagonists with the desperation portrayed in *Rosetta* (Dardenne, 1999) and with Isa's and Marie's destiny in Zonca's *La Vie rêvée des anges*. Jeunet's neighbourhood recalls few concerns of public insecurity or the questionable behaviour of public institutions which attempt to preserve urban safety, so clearly exposed in Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995). The disillusioned decors of *Rosetta* or *La Promesse* (Dardenne, 1996) of dirt, empty petrol tanks and *sans-papiers* appear initially to have little in common with *Amélie*.

Undeniably, Jeunet's Montmartre is a neighbourhood without socio-economic hardship, without crime, without the racial or religious issues of contemporary France. In his world, the homeless do not even beg on Sundays. But just below the surface lies a plot preoccupied with angst, isolation, loss, sickness and death and a myriad of dysfunctional and lonely neighbours including a recluse, an alcoholic and a hypochondriac. What differentiates *Amélie* from other films mentioned above is that Jeunet weaves the human condition into a (false) sentimentalist story of a heroine out to provoke happiness, out to fix things. Like a new product, marketed for a needy public, Jeunet tells us, 'Amélie will change your [desperate?] life.'

It is quite fitting that an interview with Jeunet should be entitled 'Magnificent Obsession' [*sic*] because most of the film's characters are just that, obsessed (Pride 2001). They have developed neurotic pastimes and elaborate collections. Some have hobbies that structure their lives. Others relieve stress through repetitive gestures. Pleasure in *Amélie* comes from childhood habits and everyday adult tasks, mostly through the obsessive (re)ordering of objects, arrangement of things and fantasy. Comical biographies, focusing on the small solitary pastimes, show ways in which characters find pleasure and displeasure from everyday occurrences. Larger social concerns do not exist. While Amélie's father likes to remove wallpaper, shine his shoes, meticulously vacuum and organize his toolbox, her mother obsessively cleans and repacks her handbag. She enjoys waxing the hardwood floors with her special slippers, and watching ice-skating competitions on television. As a child, Amélie invents imaginary

friends, enjoys sliding her hands in sacks of grain, breaking through the caramelized surface of a *crème brûlée* and skimming pebbles on the canal, immediate pleasures experienced alone. As an adult, she likes watching others at the movies, being with others, yet without any direct social interaction. Happiness is either an affair of individuals and things, or it is constructed through play. In this world, as the rest of the film demonstrates, we are alone together.

A sense of control and security comes from an obsessive mastering of ordinary situations: Amélie's father scrutinizes her health by performing a thorough monthly medical examination and her mother schools her at home. Just as likes stem from activities performed alone, so dislikes entail chance events and the presence of others. Here, it is the question of urinating next to another, comments on sandals, swimming trunks which stick embarrassingly to the skin at the public pool, a stranger's touch, and the irritating traces of unwanted contact with things, such as hands shrivelled by bath water and pillow marks left on the face after a night's sleep. In Amélie's family, contact with others either induces stress, embarrassment or disappointment, even a suicidal pet goldfish.

In Jeunet's Paris, people are alienated in their domestic space. They spend time in front of their televisions, find pleasure in dark movie theatres, peep shows and fun houses where people participate or watch alone in the dark. Individuals communicate through machines and mechanisms such as cassette players, telephones, cameras and video recorders. Joseph and Nino use Dictaphones to trace human expression. Garden gnomes facilitate the expression of thoughts and emotions. Letters and flyers fuel seduction. Protagonists converse through visual media. Some obsess over fixed images of others, yet have few relationships. Most interact merely through the exchange of things, usually lost objects that imitate the human form or return the gaze. Paradoxically however, the characters' lack of healthy interpersonal communication skills creates a homogeneous community. As in numerous French films of the late 1990s, there are neither nuclear families, nor stable couples in *Amélie*. The plot often builds on couples breaking up, reuniting or individuals mourning a lost partner. In fact, family holds no central role in any of the films mentioned. In many cases, such as in *Amélie*, *La Vie de Jésus*, *L'Humanité*, *Romance* (Breillat, 1999), *La Vie rêvée des anges*, friendship replaces family. In *Rosetta*, *La Vie rêvée des anges* and *Amélie* in particular, female protagonists come from single-parent or dysfunctional households, where roles are reversed within familial structures and daughters care for parents while trying to get by themselves. Are we then to believe Jeunet when he states this digitally 'cleaned-up' version of Paris's tenth *arrondissement* and of some eighty of the city's sites bring to fruition his first positive film (Pride 2001: 53)?

It is difficult to agree with Jeunet's claim that *Amélie* is a fully positive work when every element of his inhabitants' daily lives from childhood to adulthood is tainted with loneliness and unhappiness. Even childhood memories evoke painful events. Amélie loses her mother at an early age. She endures a stress-inducing monthly physical from her father. Nino is bullied by his classmates; 'whereas Amélie was deprived of contact with other children, Nino could have really managed without it', says the voice-

over. The schoolmaster humiliates the young Bretodeau who has just lost all the marbles he won. Whether in flashback or present time, loss permeates the film. It involves treasured objects as well as mobility, intimacy and loved ones. It stems from the accidental and unpredictable side of life in an increasingly individualistic society. In *Amélie*, loss simultaneously alienates and brings people together; it gives birth to Amélie, 'the do-gooder'.

Loss and loners

Without Amélie's transformation, Jeunet's film would be just a slice of life in the lives of the lonely: the retired widow, the single girl, the hypochondriac, the ill-natured grocer, the invalid, the jealous ex-boyfriend, the frustrated writer, the shut-in and the alcoholic concierge. It highlights loners who have lost normal daily contact with others or who have suffered from such contact and have become, consequently, recluses. In this instance, *Amélie* is not unique: numerous recent films highlight protagonists who are marginalized and spend most of their time alone. Audrey Tautou also stars in Laurent Firode's 2000 film *Le Battement d'ailes du papillon/Happenstance*, where, as is the case in *Amélie*, she is an active female protagonist on a quest; and like *Amélie*, the film deals with the need for social recognition, mischievous revenge, popular superstition, loneliness, illness and old age. Both films also exploit the consequences of individuals' everyday choices that create a ripple effect of random actions. What differs in *Amélie* is that Jeunet has created a marginal character who has perfected a system of mediated communication, a resourceful coping plan. Amélie intervenes, yet without directly addressing a problem or a desire. She provides what is lost or escaping our knowledge. She fixes small problems. She cannot solve unemployment, but arranges for a man to see his grandson. She gives us a quick fix, repairs what (we did or did not know) was broken and is an immediate remedy to every man's daily life. Amélie, the domestic good fairy, grows out of the daily loneliness that she attempts to efface.

Amélie may function as the element of hope, an incarnation of Lady Diana and Mother Teresa on the local level, in the *petit quartier*; however, this hope can never be divorced from loss. Images of Amélie's conception are coupled with a short scene of an elderly man erasing the name of his deceased best friend from his address book. The accidental death of Lady Diana inadvertently initiates the trajectory of our heroine.

Loss characterizes all those mentioned thus far, whether it be death as in *L'Humanité*, *La Vie rêvée des anges*, *Les Amants criminels* and *Sombre*, loss of love in *Romance* and *Sombre* or even *L'Humanité*, lack of hope in *Seul contre tous*, *La Vie rêvée des anges* and *Rosetta*. In such films, film-makers dissect human behaviour, offering graphic, and at times, grotesque, depictions of individuals in precarious and sombre situations. These films are not, however, unique. They are part of a stream of realist 1990s French films similarly motored by loss such as Patrice Chéreau's film of mourning and movement *Ceux qui m'aiment prendront le train/Those Who Love Me Will Take the Train* (1997), *Le Battement d'ailes du papillon* and *Marius et Jeannette* (Guédiguian, 1997), where it is question of employment, or Cédric Klapisch's *Chacun cherche son chat/When the Cat's Away* (1996), in which

the entire plot revolves around the search for Chloé's cat. Marginalized in one way or another, the protagonists of these films grapple with loneliness, as in *Amélie*.

Loneliness, of course, is the central paradox in recent years in French society, as well as in most Western cultures. Never have the means of communicating rapidly and efficiently been so available to the masses and never have the risks of 'excommunication', through exclusion and marginalization, seemed so pervasive (Mermet 2003: 57). In a society experiencing economic instability, the possibility of becoming marginalized is even greater. A fascination for films based on the everyday lives of those on the fringes of society is another shared theme in recent French cinema. This voyeuristic curiosity for others' day-to-day actions is best emphasized by reality television exposing *real* stories of *real* people in *real* situations, as witnessed in France with *Loft Story*, *Pop Stars* or *Star Academy* (Mermet 2003: 22). This permanent presence of ordinary people eliminating others for lack of particular skills, affiliations or alliances pinpoints a growing anxiety of adaptability, competitiveness and social elimination in an increasingly individualistic society.

In a society that values physical and social mobility, we also witness a preoccupation with the fear of the *loss* of attributes. Sickness and death remain central to plots in *Amélie*, *La Vie rêvée des anges*, *Rosetta*, *La Promesse*, *L'Humanité* and *La Vie de Jésus*. For example, in *Le Vie rêvée des anges*, Isa visits the comatose Sandrine. In *La Vie de Jésus*, the main protagonist, Freddy, suffers from epilepsy while a secondary character, Michou's brother, Cloclo, is immobilized and dies of AIDS. In both cases, a one-way communication is established; others speak (through words and gestures) to those hospitalized and remain unsure of being understood. In *La Vie rêvée des anges*, a car accident kills a mother and relegates the daughter to a coma, just as in *L'Humanité* a car crash causes the protagonist's fiancée and child's death. Jeunet also integrates this preoccupation with the loss or hindrance of mobility in numerous characters: a blind man, a boss who limps, a neighbour who suffers from a rare bone disease. Even Amélie supposedly suffers from a heart problem which forces her parents to forgo travel. Televised images such as a dancer with a wooden leg, a baby swimming, a horse and the cyclists of the Tour de France and a soccer game reinforce a preoccupation with movement. Physical mobility provides a means of escape and a certain level of autonomy, as seen in long sequences of people on foot or motorcycles in *La Vie rêvée des anges*, Pharaon's exhausting bike ride in *L'Humanité*, Freddy and his friend's long moped rides in *La Vie de Jésus*. Perhaps the clearest example highlighting mobility and bodily comfort in contemporary French cinema comes from Dominik Moll's thriller *Harry un ami qui vous veut du bien/A Friend Like Harry* (2000) where an old car without air-conditioning provokes a murderous plot. In *Amélie*, movement and its contrary, stagnation, dominate. For the most part, obsessed characters or those unable to find the right medium for self-expression are sedentary, associated with one particular physical space, such as the Parisian barfly and unpublished author of the local café, the alcoholic concierge, the recluse or the retired widow. Whereas certain protagonists never go beyond the mere stereotypes which

places propagate, others escape compartmentalization by frequenting diverse areas in the city (Gina, Nino and Amélie) and, at the film's end, those who travel about achieve emotional balance (Hipolito, Amélie, her father and Nino). The final sequence of Amélie and Nino, filmed at high speed, in which the two travel through the streets of Paris on his scooter, brings together the stereotype of romantic closure and the dynamic complex of emotional well-being and mobility.

As certainties diminish, the body tends to take on an increasing importance. It is no longer maintained merely to attract or seduce, as we see in the highly-stylized films of the 1980s *cinéma du look* (Vincendeau 2001: 24). The cult of the body, which has its roots in the 1980s, has developed progressively into a perception of the body as a means to achieve immediate physical pleasure and personal balance (Mermet 2003: 69). The body is viewed both as a way to attract others and to achieve well-being. Those simple and immediate corporeal pleasures suggest a regression to an earlier stage of childhood, a turning away from adult responsibilities and uncertainty. The preoccupation with bodily functions and malfunction, suffering and mortality, is coupled with a growing interest in the bodies of others. Such voyeurism takes several forms in contemporary cinema, illustrating a fascination for the natural body and the ordinary. Graphic images of sexual intercourse remain a common element of those films that comprise a so-called cinema fascinated by the sordid. The extreme close-ups of intercourse in *La Vie de Jésus*, Leos Carax's *Pola X* (1998), Breillat's *Romance* or even staged copulation in *L'Humanité* all recall an influence of the 1970s-pornographic style of 'unglamourized' (Powrie 2002: 82), crude images of sexual activity in which sex appears as a series of coldly robotic and repetitive motions. Likewise in *Amélie* sex appears also as a mechanized, but comical game. Objects move, lights flicker and cappuccino machines produce steam during Joseph and Georgette's sex scene, in a scene which recalls Jeunet's *Delicatessen* (1991). Sex organs and sexualized bodies become childish entertainment. Penises are plastic, wrapped in boxes and kept in view behind the counter. Young women leisurely serve coffee and dance in a back-room peep show. Orgasms are serialized. Amélie, who does not enjoy sex, satiates her sexual curiosity by imagining how many people are having orgasms at any given moment.

In most of the above-mentioned films, protagonists are, somehow and to some extent, hindered from freely expressing their desires. In *Seul contre tous*, the daughter is autistic. In *L'Humanité*, the protagonist Pharaon speaks little and appears to be living in a state of perpetual shock. Maria in *La Vie rêvée des anges*, refusing to confide in Isa and becoming increasingly more isolated, jumps eventually to her death. In *Romance*, Marie is dyslexic. In *Amélie*, fathers do not speak to their daughters. Communication among protagonists occurs through a circuit of images, messages, riddles, and quotations. Even the waitress Gina's interrogation of Nino to see if he is suitable for Amélie is mediated by French proverbs in which evidence of one's shared cultural heritage provides proof of acceptability and character. Revenge comes not from verbal confrontation, but from the manipulation of objects or electricity. Things provoke emotion, memory and reveal affiliations. As Mireille Rosello states, we are in a

system obsessed with the incessant consumption of commodities (Rosello 2002: 4).

Amélie presents the margins of a society where the gratuitous exchange or recycling of objects, and not consumption, holds an important role. It is primarily a film about recovery. The subplots of Bredoteau, Nino, Madeleine Water, the concierge and Amélie's father build from the recovery of sacred objects, whereas those of Georgette, Amélie's father and, to some extent, Amélie herself entail a restoration, however temporary, of healthy social activity. People do not create, but recreate, reconstruct and rearrange. They glean traces of the presence of others, those alive and those lost. Nino is a loner who collects photos of human footprints in concrete, tape-recorded samples of odd laughter and discarded identity photos. 'The Glass Man' pathologically repaints Renoir's *The Luncheon of the Boating Party*. The need of others' presence is, thus, fulfilled through human image; the gaze is returned through a medium. The obsessive collecting of photos and repainting of the Renoir allows the reconstructors to create fictive relationships. Thus, images of strangers replace the presence of family and friends. The exchange of money, video-cassettes, boxes, satchels and the manipulation of household items, garden gnomes and electricity relay disapproval and affection. Paintings, groceries and lottery tickets give pretence for relationships to develop.

Everything local reassures in *Amélie*, replicating a nostalgic view of a more traditional French neighbourhood, a universally accepted, exported version of the capital. In this instance, Amélie may be perceived as a calculated reaction to films like *La Vie rêvée des anges*, *L'Humanité*, *Rosetta*, *Les Amants criminels*, among others, in which little if any clarification of the past is expressed and concrete future plans are relatively non-existent. Here, plots exploit the immediacy of the protagonist's present situation. The past provides no solace. Extreme close-ups replicate a suffocating present or the immediacy of pleasure. Flashbacks are few. Beginnings start in mid-action; endings give little closure. At a time when extended families offering advice and support are rare, protagonists stagnate; some stumble blindly without definite future goals. Such would also be the case in *Amélie*, were it not for the presence of the crafty heroine. Amélie is first and foremost linked to the past. Her birth and biography are set out for the viewers so that we can better understand her present behaviours. Her retro-coif and garb identify her with the tailored silhouette of the likes of Chanel, yet with a modern touch (she wears Dr Marten-like shoes). Amélie reactivates memory for both Bredoteau and 'the Glass Man'. She rewrites a love affair for the concierge. In fact, Amélie's quest begins with the verification of past facts, forcing neighbours to prove the accuracy of personal memory and records. Amélie does not really transform people herself; she propels them backwards, providing a necessary distance for them to reconsider their existence so that closure and behaviour change may take place.

It goes without saying that television and video have taken a central role in the lives of the French, although nowhere near to the extent we witness in the United States. In general terms, television discourages interaction among people, though it may provoke discussion, bring people

physically together or even give the illusion of 'togetherness'. In *La Vie rêvée des anges*, *L'Humanité*, *La Vie de Jésus* and *Amélie*, protagonists sit alone, favouring the screen above discussion. In Jeunet's film, television holds a key role in the recognition of individuals and communication for 'the Glass Man' and the heroine. In fact, Jeunet announces the protagonist's rebirth as local do-gooder by incorporating imaginary television footage of Amélie's national funeral, done in the style of televised magazine *Étoiles et Toiles* with presenter Frédéric Mitterrand. Amélie's thoughts and daydreams, usually exposed in cinema through voice-over or dream sequences, are conveyed through televised images or fictional documentary-like sequences. Amélie's projection into the lives of Lady Diana, Mother Teresa and the likes of Florence Nightingale reinforces the need for a recognition not found in the family unit or comparable social group. The genius in Jeunet's film is his balance of the virtual and physical worlds. Protagonists seek traces of the human body through the manipulation of media (audio and video recordings, painting, photography, etc.). The personal use and appropriation of media devices become a means of self-expression in a world of individuals who find it difficult to communicate.

Le fait divers

The strongest thread linking *Amélie* to those films emphasizing a sordid naturalism is the exploitation of one of the most popular elements of the written press, the French *fait divers*, originating from *fait* (fact of action) and *divers* which not only indicates the diversity of the acts, but more importantly, the story's ability to entertain the reader *(divertir)*. The *fait divers*, or 'current local event', events such as an accident, disturbance, crime, suicide, disappearance, fire, regional flood, draws on and creates curiosity for others' dismal situations and exploits an exaggerated interest in graphic accounts of sex, violence and crime in general. It often remains anchored in the local, and thus of little importance to the majority of readers, yet because it draws on universal sentiments, fears or curiosities, it allows for the reader (or viewer) to appropriate the interests of a localized group. Through curiosity alone, one comes to identify with a particular individual or group. Popular in its tone and accessibility, these stories link to the *roman noir* often based on such sordid local events. The boundary between a *fait divers* and an *événement* (an event) is, at times, difficult to grasp and relies on a much subjective interpretation; differing from a *fait divers*, an *événement* touches upon the political, economic, scientific or cultural nature of things.

The inquiry into the rape and murder of a young girl that fuels the plot in *L'Humanité* or the murder of a young *beur* which ends *La Vie de Jésus* may fall under the heading of *fait divers*. Media coverage of suburban violence and the beating of a young *beur* by the police which provides the background in *La Haine* is another example, although here the media coverage of this localized incident attempts to turn it into a cultural event. In *Romance*, the protagonist's blowing up of her apartment in which her husband is sleeping would constitute a *fait divers*, just as the heroine's possible suicide at the end of *Rosetta* or that of Marie in *La Vie rêvée des anges* would be more local incidents than of national news. Scenarios developing

from *faits divers*, whether real, such as *Les Amants criminels*, or fictional, often build into detective stories or other quest narratives, leading to films, such as *L'Humanité*, fascinated with a microscopic view of our base behaviours and angst.

Amélie is influenced by numerous real *faits divers*. A suicide from the top of the Notre Dame, a rare event, kills the heroine's mother. A garden dwarf is gone, possibly liberated by the infamous Garden Gnome Liberation Front. The concierge, Madeleine's husband, robs his employer and flees the country with his mistress. A supposed postal bag found near Mont Blanc years after the crash of a plane brings mail long past due. In addition, Amélie's trajectory develops from, and as a reaction to, a cultural event, the death of Lady Diana in September 1997, which would have otherwise remained a *fait divers* had it not involved a woman very much in the public eye. The presence of *fait divers* in *Amélie* links perfectly to *petisme* in that these current events, presented in a comical fashion, entertain.

By reducing loss and personal tragedy to a series of seemingly unrelated incidents, Jeunet shifts the viewers' attention away from the incidents themselves. What we experience is a mere *zapping*. This zapping reduces the impact of each event by disconnecting the image from its original context. Flashes of aircraft and car crashes, a suicide, the death of an international figure, violence in schools, homelessness, begging in the metro, malaise in public spaces, and the presence of graffiti merely touch upon strong concerns of contemporary urban French society. This zapping reflects Jeunet's approach to the construction of his film, in which actual footage was gleaned from the television series '*Le zapping de Canal +*', providing a concentration of images shown on French television on a particular day. The director recuperates sequences and *faits divers*, just as protagonists salvage and exchange objects, and recreate with found images.

It is not surprising that Jeunet's film celebrating the *petit quartier populaire* should exploit the *faits divers*, since the history of Montmartre recalls an attraction for sordid stories in a close-knit popular community living on the margins of the French capital. The film draws on two veins: one which offers nostalgia and a polished unrealistic version of Parisian life, another which taps into a renewed interest in the social and a sordid voyeurism of the late 1990s. It draws on; yet does not wallow in, the same symptoms of a social malaise expressed in these recent naturalist films. *Amélie* combines an attraction to aestheticism and to ordinary people in common situations, creating a fabulous story of misery and glory in ordinary lives. It offers a close look at our vulnerability, albeit with a sentimental lens. Jeunet's controlled mixture of nostalgia and caricature, zapping us through an everyday riddled with accidents and obstacles, creates a quick-fix remedy serving as a very ambiguous alternative to a reality increasingly marked by individualism.

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