

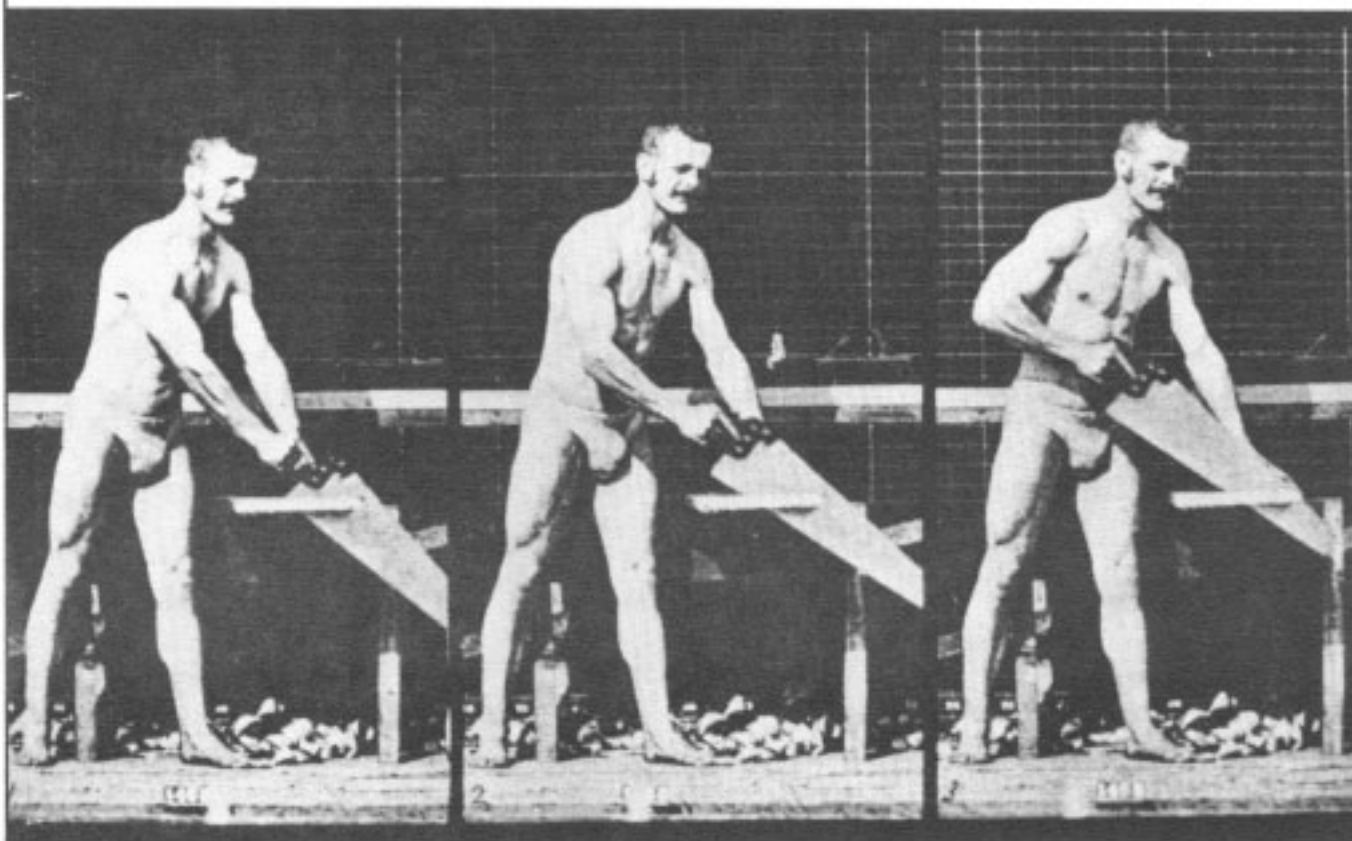
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# *CINÉ-TRACTS*

A JOURNAL OF FILM AND CULTURAL STUDIES

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# cine-tracts

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Please note that there were a number of ERRATA  
in Issue Number 11

Page 47, a line was dropped after par excellence,  
lines 31 and 32: it should read "...has emerged as  
the cinematic structure par excellence, then its pre-  
dominance in the representation as the cinematic  
theme par excellence of German films seems to de-  
mand further exploration."

Page 48, line 15, punctuation should be: "remain a  
subject, produces both"

Page 50, line 25 read "traded" for "traced"

Page 50, line 7, up from bottom, read "mother-  
goddess' for "mother-godness"

Page 51, line dropped after the "truest sense of"  
at line 8: it should read: "is in the truest sense of  
the term "under alien control" (...) After this  
symbiotic state has been dissolved..."

# MADE IN THE FADE

Patricia Mellencamp

In the final sequence of **Sherlock Junior** (Metro Pictures Corp., 1924), Buster Keaton, a projectionist in a movie theater and an amateur detective, awakes in the booth from his dream performance of the dapper hero of the theater's current film, **Hearts and Pearls** (Veronal Film Company). He has literally dreamed himself into the film, earlier on, through a superimposition splitting the dream hero from the dreamer's body: Keaton I sleeps beside the projector; Keaton II looks at the screen in shot 135. In shot 136, after a lap dissolve transforming the actors' bodies, the screen performers turn around and face frontally; they have become the characters of **Sherlock Junior**, the Girl and the Sheik. Shot 137 is a cut to a medium shot of Keaton II framed by the booth's window. Shot 138 shows the Girl going upstairs, followed by the Sheik, and shot 139 is a medium shot of her father's transformation. In shot 140 after putting on his famous porkpie hat, the dream performer leaves the booth and joins the audience watching the film. But that is not close enough; he leaps onto the stage and walks into the "film," actually a framed stage play at this point. This aggressive and unwanted performer is thrown out of the film into the orchestra by the Sheik, then intimidated by the Girl's father. He is rudely rebuffed in his attempts to enter the movie by rhythmic, disjunctive editing in the famous ten shot montage sequence (shots 144-154). After this disorienting, dangerous, and uncontrollable ordeal, replete with lions, speeding trains, mountain precipices and ocean waves, the dream screen devours the "real" screen through a tracking shot which matches the screens' frames thereby merging the "inner" and "outer" films. The projectionist/dreamer's ideal double, the master detective ("the crime-crushing-criminologist," the projection of his desires), finally enters the narrative of **Hearts and Pearls** in shot 175, resplendent in top hat and tails, white gloves and a cane, solves the crime of the pearl theft (a displacement of the watch theft in **Sherlock Junior**) by vaudeville and visual trickery plus astonishing acrobatics, and wins the Girl.

Although this mid-section of the complex film dramatizes current theoretical work on film (e.g., the spectator as dreamer/performer, mechanisms of condensation and displacement, processes of identification, the "presence" of film and its material apparatus), it is the film's conclusion, the closure of cinema's ritual in shots 352-363, that interests me here. Keaton's dream has ended; the sleeper falls off the projectionists' stool and awakens. The Girl joins Keaton just as **Hearts and Pearls** is concluding with a man proposing to a woman. In a 14-shot series of cuts between 1) medium shots of Keaton looking at the movie (in effect, he looks at us) with the Girl looking down, away from us, both framed by the booth's window, and 2) shots of the action on the screen, the projectionist awkwardly and self-consciously imitates the screen's action: he holds the Girl's hand, kisses it, puts a ring on her finger, then quickly kisses her. As his behavioral model, the hero of **Hearts and Pearls** grants Keaton, the Boy, increasing confidence, at least up to this point. Then the onscreen couple embraces, the screen fades to black. The couple is next shown in long shot; the man is holding babies on his lap. The film cuts to a medium shot of an extremely quizzical, perplexed Keaton, scratching his head in amazement at the fade's ramifications — familial finality. The title, *The End*, within the frame of the **Hearts and Pearls** screen concludes **that** film in shot 364. **Sherlock Junior**, our film (the entire projected frame) lacks the closure of the imprinted title.<sup>1</sup>

This brief moment of cinema's courtship ritual, the endless creation of families, of couples, is a text of theory which encapsulates my argument in this paper and also maps out the landscape of the film body: 1) film's material body of light, grain, sounds and techniques (the optical processes of lap dissolves, fades, and disjunctive editing in **Sherlock Junior** ironically comment on their accumulation of conventionalized narrative "meanings"); 2) figurations of the human body — in narrative films usually figured as "couple"; and 3) the spectator/auditor's body in the movie theater.

Before I analyze these various intersections of the film body, I want to point to another drama staged in the last sequence — the impossible place of woman, "the Girl." *Sherlock Junior*, the Boy, looks, then acts; he is 1) the body capable of extraordinary athletic/comic feats, 2) the source of our comparable amazement at the film's conventions and techniques, 3) the relay of our look at both films, and thus, 4) the origin of comedy. The Girl, her gaze averted from **Hearts and Pearls** and from us, is acted upon. Her single, shy, downcast-eyed gesture, in a flash, exemplifies Teresa de Lauretis' conclusion in "Imaging":

...woman's position is an impossible one: for her no term of reference exists, no appropriable point of enunciation... For historical women the non-coherence, the division of woman in the social, in discourse, lies in her finding herself in a void of meaning, the empty space between the signs, where no demand is possible and no code available: the place of the woman spectator in the cinema... between the look of the camera... and the image on the screen... neither one nor the other but both, in double and opposite identification.<sup>2</sup>

The Girl — "between the look of the camera" of **Sherlock Junior** and "the image on the screen" of **Hearts and Pearls** — represents the female spectator's double bind, in an empty yet potentially "pregnant" place.

In the same passage, de Lauretis asks, "What does it mean to speak, to write, 'as a woman'?" She suggests:

Paradoxically, perhaps, the only way to position oneself outside that discourse is to displace oneself within it, to refuse the question as it is formulated in its terms, or to answer deviously — though in its words, even to quote — but against the grain.

Held within male theoretical discourses, in this paper particularly Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, and bound, like the Girl, by the terms of the films discussed, I will try to employ de Lauretis' tactic. Thus I begin with a parenthetical caution, a few tell-tale signs of "disturbances in the realm" of these discourses. Foucault's formulation of the parameters of sexual discourse in **The History of Sexuality**, Volume I is inviting; yet, the easy match of his system with classic

texts suggests that certain prescriptive limitations are inherent in his historical model. For example, the move of the classic text to closure, a devouring finality of cause-effect logic, is to a degree repeated by Foucault's consuming movement through history to the final explanation Of the last chapter. Equally attractive, yet strangely disconcerting and somehow contradictory, is his assertive exhortation:

We must not look for who has the power in the order of sexuality (men, adults, parents, doctors) and who is deprived of it (women, adolescents, children, patients)... but rather examine processes...<sup>3</sup>

Note that the two parenthetical inserts entail a possible sliding sexual taxonomy, to a degree. However, the first terms of each one, "men," then "women" are gender differentiations, followed by role functions: in the first insert, "men," followed by "adults, parents, doctors"; the second, "women," followed by "adolescents, children, patients." The eliding mark of the coma, rather than a qualifying, challenging mark possible through another form of punctuation, dictates the equation of terms within each parenthesis. Men are equated with authority figures; women are dependent on those authority figures. Granted that the sentence exists to caution us against employing this traditional, often unstated polarity. But at the same time, the code of punctuation plus the book's subsequent absence of sexual differentiation as an historical function of textual reading, and indeed of the writing of history, reinforces the very notion it warns us against. Thus, "female" is to a certain degree posed as an eternal being rather than an historically and culturally constructed entity, a contradiction of the very premise of Foucault's historical reading of sexual discourse: sexuality as a construction, a weapon of power's discourses embedded in social practices. The cost of this dilemma is not insignificant: we lose the distinction and theoretical position of historical rather than eternal woman that feminist critiques want to reclaim. Foucault's initial sketch of his larger project concerning intersecting and competing discourses of power, martialled around sexuality, in the end, and perhaps the beginning, partially slips through social practices, glides by alternative practices, and almost inaudibly lodges in the crevasse of unstated domination. As always or usual, female sexuality is a male fantasy, a voiceless given.

While forcibly and importantly dramatizing the class strategies of technologies of sex, Foucault's symptomatic "term" of absence 1) neutralizes the possible and productive contradictions of sexually different points-of-enunciation (a dialectics of sexual discourse within class structure **and** sexual difference), and 2) by this absence repeats history's oversights of women as well as psychoanalysis' — the infamous and founding "lack" or missing person, the castrated mystery labeled female sexuality... "the empty space between the signs."<sup>4</sup> Although in essential agreement with this history which analyzes processes and practices, my reading and use of this valuable text is hesitant and troubled as a result of these and other such disturbances.

Just as fascinating and intriguing are Barthes' "fragments," "interpolations," and "glittering" ellipses in **The Pleasure of the Text** and other writings.<sup>5</sup> Yet his ease, in relation to cinema, with a posture of disavowal that contains contradictions within a narcissistic and perverse pleasure contract is disturbing. With a mechanism of disavowal in play (grossly simplified to "I'm in the film, yet always outside it"), the classic text is not only a comfortable return to familiar pleasure, but also acceptable and desirable on its own terms. Barthes' double move is seductive, a lure rather than a critique.

Marking as it may an attraction to certain handsome male texts, the term "seduction" (in its Latin sense, "to lead apart" or astray, and its other meaning, "to induce to give up chastity") circulates throughout my remarks, as well as the narrative of the films discussed, as a certain, if concealed, illegality and, paradoxically, as a tactic of textual and personal containment.

A triple seduction (yet another triangulation) — of onscreen couples in classical films, of the audience in the theater, of the critic/theorist by the film text — outlines the film body, tracing "around bodies and sexes not boundaries not to be crossed, but perpetual spirals of pleasure."<sup>6</sup> (Film's first on-screen lure, its very materials — textured figures of light and sound — will not be analyzed, although this area is critical to any conceptual notion of the spectator/auditor's very desire for the film.) The second on-screen objects of desire are figurations of the human body (limited in these remarks to its representations in classic cinema), seduced and captured by the

narrative's inexorable movement to closure — usually the implied consummation of the couple in the brief seconds before "The End," the legal seal of the narrative/marital contract. (I will return to this point in greater detail. Note that in **Sherlock Junior** the pattern of kiss-fade-end is interrupted by a shot of a couple with children, a veritable family made-in-the-fade.) This screened, slightly veiled foreplay of exchange, within history and marked by politics and economics (sexual and monetary), flickers over the spectator/auditor's body which is placed by the film into positions of sense and particularly difference.

However, cinema's pleasure contract is negotiated prior to our first glimpse of the studio's logo and its theme music's sound, the film's first marks of ownership. Our contract is the result of an historical accumulation of recycled fictions, activated and differentiated by publicity, advertising, gossip, the star system of previous roles, and current or past facial fashion. The tacit contract (physically negotiated at the ticket booth) has one condition, the critical clause: the film must narratively and sometimes materially make it for us. In the intense publicity barrage for **The Electric Horseman**, Fonda and Redford were electronically sold in 60 second television ads promising star sex. (The temporal implications of the 30 second version should not remain unnoticed.) The more economically luminous the star constellation, the greater will be the spectator/auditor's investment in the fade to black, the sexual space below the frame, their silences. When Barbara Streisand and Neil Diamond slowly walked toward each other while singing their "hit" song on the 1980 televised Grammy Awards show, the "live" tv audience became apoplectic with ecstasy. The superstars met in center stage. Streisand lightly caressed Diamond's cheek. A standing ovation applauded this miniature narrative of star coupling. We now await, after much delay and publicity, Diamond's return as Al Jolson.

The dating ritual of "going to the movies," cinema's second seduction, tactilely and tacitly conducted in the anonymous, discreet dark of the movie theater, replays the film's foreplay. Darkness is not only the essential condition of the film's visibility, but for Roland Barthes "...it is also the color of a very diffuse eroticism" and the theater "a place of disponibility, with the idleness of bodies that best characterizes modern eroticism." Barthes further describes the movie theater as "urban darkness, a cinematographic cocoon" in which "the body's freedom luxuriates." (Even though we do not accept absolute differentiations between male and female pleasure, the question of whose body is luxuriating and how should be posed.) He then extends the sexual (or sleep/dream) metaphor of movie going: "How many spectator's slip into their seat as they slip into bed, coat and feet on the seat in front of them?"

Finally, in the same essay, he wonders how we enter a movie theater. and replies: "With one exception, we go to movies through sloth, out of an inclination for idleness... granting a feeling of emptiness... inactivity."<sup>7</sup> I will return to the single exception later, but for now it is apparent that in this depiction, the "modern," cruising body is a lazy one, a body desiring absence and the fascination of anonymous negation. It is a neutered body, outside politics, difference, and history, the eternal transcendental "subject" of film theory re-enacting dramas and traumas before the screen's analogical mirror. The adjective "modern" does not sufficiently qualify this "eternal" film audience, no more than do Metz's demarcations between "urban adult" and the "audience of children, the rural audience, the audience with little schooling, the community audience."<sup>8</sup> Although suggestive of differing social conventions, Metz's distinctions are primarily intellectual (e.g. level of education elided into cultural sophistication) rather than historical. The actual conditions of film exhibition (documented, for example, in the essay by Douglas Gomery) — its past of live performances, prologues, orchestras and bank nights (movies' various versions of television quiz shows); film genre mixtures of cartoons, news, travelogues, and features; conducted in an intense darkness which required ushers garbed in pseudo-military uniforms carrying flashlights in sumptuous movie palaces with fetishized, lavish "ladies" rooms and lounges — elucidate an historical rather than timeless audience.

Not only are bodies exchanged as narrative currency and consumed in the movies' ritual, but so are popcorn, Coke, and Dots — the "real" of commercial cinema — in increasingly larger containers. This is the concession of the film text to the exhibitors' profit or economic survival — a conditioning of audiences' senses of smell and taste. (One "concession" stand can now serve "refreshments" to roving gangs of suburban consumers for six simultaneous narratives in mammoth shopping malls.) Commercial cinema martials touch, taste, and smell as well as sight and hearing. Since the popcorn explosion of the 40's, we've become a "modern" version of Pavlov's dog. Movies mean popcorn. The debate over film's status as "Art," intensified between

1930-50, a time of drastic change in the conditions of exhibition, might in some way coincide with the addition of food — "junk" food, equitable with film's "popular culture" status. Without any consideration for this oral aspect of going to the movies (edible **and** Oedipal), Metz writes of voyeurism, **its** safe distance, its justification of the spectator's place: "It is no accident that the main socially acceptable arts are based on the senses at a distance, and those which depend on the senses of contact are often regarded as 'minor' arts."<sup>9</sup> The actual terms of commercial film exhibition turn this position partially back on its theoretical premise. Cinema is a contact sport as well as a spectator sport.

Thus, within theoretical models of the "subject," outside the specific terms of history, the shadow of cinema is figured in the influential writings of Barthes and Metz as illicit yet individually precious, erotically precious. This is cinema's third seduction, of the theorist by the film text — the rhymed, obsessive perfection of the classic text in its voracious symmetry, its comforting predictability, its contracted promise of completion and satiation. As the narrativized bodies make it, we make it. The film bodies, at least for a few moments of fantasy, "live happily ever after," until our next movie. Behind Metz's wall of significant theory (perhaps a wall of Pyramus and Thisbe and Shakespeare) is an uneasiness with cinema's accessible pleasures. For him as for Barthes, going to the movies is an "admissible pastime... and yet that place is a 'hole' in the social cloth, a 'loophole' opening onto something slightly more crazy, slightly less approved."<sup>10</sup> (Are we always **At the Circus** with J. Cheever Loophole?) Barthes eroticizes: "The cinema would be like those bodies which pass by in the summer with shirts unbuttoned to the waist: look but don't touch."<sup>11</sup> This surreptitious, illegal, yet pleasurable academic tender is turned into scholarship as a screen for film's easily gained, idle indulgences. Covered by an overlay of derived theory, commercial film can now be respectably enjoyed, a slightly veiled seduction: a metaphorical and anatomical striptease of materials, of bodies, of narrative trajectories, of sexual proclamation/denial which the theorist investigates with a perverse curiosity, replacing classic narrative's absence of intercourse with terms of sexual discourse in a complicit co-mingling and thereby perpetuating the law of the narrative/marital contract. With these maneuvers of desire, theory, it would seem, is caught up in the same social imaginary, begging Lacan's mirror for an ontological answer.<sup>12</sup> While analyzing and celebrating the pleasure of movies, these arguments can be dismissive of the social ramifications that repetitious pleasure has accumulated and orchestrated. If the conventional, pleasure apparatus of the classic film text is modeled within psychoanalytic theory, not only is there no exit (merely the same prisons) for women, their fantasies, their desire, but even no need for one. After all, it's **only** a movie.

Within the historical parameters of the classic text, cinema **is** an everyday machine of the ideology of the family. It is an institution which relays and constructs objects of desire, finally reinscribed within the family through film's endless creation of new, youthful couples. The representation of the erotic, promenaded female body — the figure of exploitation — then the denial and containment of that dangerous and unacceptable eroticism by death, marriage, or German Expressionist lighting (of women living alone, i.e., without a man) in *The End* is both the paradox and obsession of classic film. These film discourses of sexuality parallel Foucault's analysis of the historical, rhetorical terrain which I will now briefly and "partially" sketch and then apply to classical cinema.

What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but they dedicated themselves to speaking of it **ad infinitum** while exploiting it as **the** secret.<sup>13</sup>

In film the secret is in the fade to black, protected by the safety and closure of *The End*. Foucault defines sexuality as "the name that can be given to an historical construct... one relay of which is the body that produces and consumes."<sup>14</sup> The on-screen female body is produced as a representation for male consumption 1) by the narrative and 2) through the eyes of the male protagonist, the male spectator. Foucault further describes this historical body, dating from the middle of the 18th Century to the present and foreseeable future, as a class body: "One of (the bourgeoisie's) primary concerns was to provide itself with a body and a sexuality... the endogamy of sex and the body... The bourgeoisie's blood was its sex."<sup>15</sup> Thus sexuality, conducted on the plane of the body, is a particular production, an historical construct, "erected" since the 18th Century by the institution of the family. This version of the family is the locus for a critical con-

juncture between what Foucault labels the "deployment of sexuality" and the "deployment of alliance:" the family, later supported by psychoanalysis, anchors sexuality **and** the circulation of wealth and reproduction within its confines whereas before these functions and discourses had been distinct. For example, the glorious sexed and air-brushed body of Rita Hayworth, fashioned in gold lamé for eroticism (and making money) in **Cover Girl** (the deployment of sexuality), is, in the end, coupled to Gene Kelly's middle-class, Brooklyn body (the deployment of alliance).

The collapse of two separate systems within the family occurs because, among other reasons and other discourses, mechanisms of power and knowledge are now centered on sex. Foucault's analysis of power is of particular interest in relation to classic texts. He defines "power" as "a multiplicity of force relations, a process... a chain... with domination and subordination as its terminal form." In his construct, power is tolerable only on the condition that it mask a substantial part of its operations. "Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its mechanisms."<sup>16</sup> This depiction of an apparatus of sexuality matches analyses of the technical and narrative mechanisms of classical films as well as the relations between on-screen male and female protagonists as poles of the domination/subordination split. To place eroticism within the family and consequently to put woman in her place of subordination within that family is often *The End* of the classical film. It is not insignificant that in order to accomplish this task of power, the apparatus must be masked.

Foucault locates one of power's four major strategies of discourse to accomplish this societal task: the "hysterization" of women's bodies. This strategy constructs the feminine body as "thoroughly saturated with sexuality."

In the process of hysterization of women, "sex" was defined in three ways: as that which belongs in common to men and women; as that which belongs par excellence to men and hence lacking in women; but at the same time, as that which by itself constitutes women's body, ordering it wholly in terms of the functions of reproduction and keeping it in constant agitation.<sup>17</sup>

In classical commercial cinema, the female body is hysterized, sanitized, and narrativized; it is a commodity of endless exchange. In cinema, sexuality becomes image, — framed, fragmented, then unified for consumption.<sup>18</sup> The addition of spoken language, in its historical subservience to the image which it "marries" (paralleling the narrative marriage), only increases the fragmentation more tightly to weld an ideal body. It is significant that "spectator" is the term for an individualized audience, with voyeurism, a perversion, as the acceptable concept describing this spectator's process and position. There is no equivalent psychoanalytic term to describe the auditor's possible perversion. Sound is sexually as well as technically subservient to the fascination of the image. Although she discusses Garbo, Dietrich, Monroe, and West, Angela Carter's "celluloid brothel" contains few Sadeian stories.<sup>19</sup> Her comparative analysis remains on the level of the image rather than sound or language. Questions of enunciation, of address, of the quality of these sultry, distinct voices lustily intoning final pleasures are not raised. As Barthes points out: "The sound formula cannot produce an aural fascination. And yet, it would take very little to peel this sound strip off... a voice whose graininess grinds right up against our ear."<sup>20</sup> Film as an aural striptease with the possibility of a heard sex really perverse. Yet within the dominant terms of vision, in one sense the potency of the visible phallus (including sometimes the female body costumed as phallus), not only is the verbal expression of desire transgressive, but for females (to be "feminine") prohibited, impossible.

As repeatedly stated, then, the main currency of image exchange is the erotically coded image of the sexed female — high-lighted, halo-haired (remember "Halo Shampoo" in the 40's and 50's), feathered, furred, air-brushed by technicolor, costumed, for example, by Adrian, and made-up by men. This concoction circulates through 89 minutes of the film and is then contained/possessed in the privileged seconds of the end by usually a middle class male/husband. The moment of metamorphosis from sexuality to alliance is an immaculate conception, keeping cinema's virginal code intact in the unseen and the unheard of the fade to black — the secret that is sex.

In the celluloid brothel of the cinema, where the merchandise may be eyed endlessly but never purchased, the tension bet-

ween the beauty of women, which is admirable, and the denial of the sexuality which is the source of that beauty but is also immoral, reaches a perfect impasse.<sup>21</sup>

Carter's impasse repeats Foucault's paradox: sex "by itself constitutes women's body," and yet is "lacking in women." Carter's position echoes Foucault in another sense: speaking about sex constantly while maintaining it as **the** secret. Film's solution — fade/family — keeps the secret of sex in the dark of censorship or "romance" while imaging its manifestations in the "agitated" female body. The couple's passage through the film into the fade then into The End (the family) literalizes Foucault's analysis:

It is through sex — in fact an imaginary point determined by the deployment of sexuality — that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility... to his body... to his identity."<sup>22</sup>

Without a word or a sound or an image, cinema places us within the family after a text of foreplay. Cinema constructs a discourse without intercourse (with, of course, the significant exception of pornographic films), a system of power of final dominance/submission without recourse for women. The female body is passed, it doesn't pass; it is agitatively passive. As Barthes so aptly states: "The dramatic narrative is a game with two players: the snare and the truth... nothing has been shown... what is shown is shown in one stroke, and at the end: it is the end which is shown."<sup>23</sup>



HARVEY GIRLS



TOP HAT



THE JOYLESS STREET

THE BIG SLEEP

To return to the process of hysterization, the deployment of sexuality before the alliance in the end, I will briefly analyze the 1940s pin-up, its use in two musicals, **The Dolly Sisters** (Twentieth Century Fox, 1945) and **Cover Girl**, (Colombia, 1944) and her sister, the whore, in several 1920s and 30s films, particularly **Blonde Venus**. The female, "a man-made object disguised as a girl,"<sup>24</sup> is determined by body fashion and censorship codes; its currency has circulated not only through film's history but also through posters, pin-ups, calendars, and paintings. In the 20s and 30s the glamorized face of the femme fatale, with impossibly lidded, drooping eyelids and archly plucked brows, with accentuated, high cheekbones, was copied, prostituted, then punished in brothels with clouds of cigarette smoke and fragmented into jigsaw puzzles of legs, stockings, high-heeled shoes and transparent lingerie. Ann Southern as Joan Crawford as Marlene Dietrich as Greta Garbo were marketed, identical facial copies.

Bodily fashion in the 40s prescribed longer legs, and thus the American pin-up, described so accurately by Bazin as a wartime product, was created:

Physically this American Venus is a tall, vigorous girl whose streamlined body splendidly represents a tall race. Different from the Greek ideal, with its shorter torso and legs, she thus differs from European Venuses.<sup>25</sup>

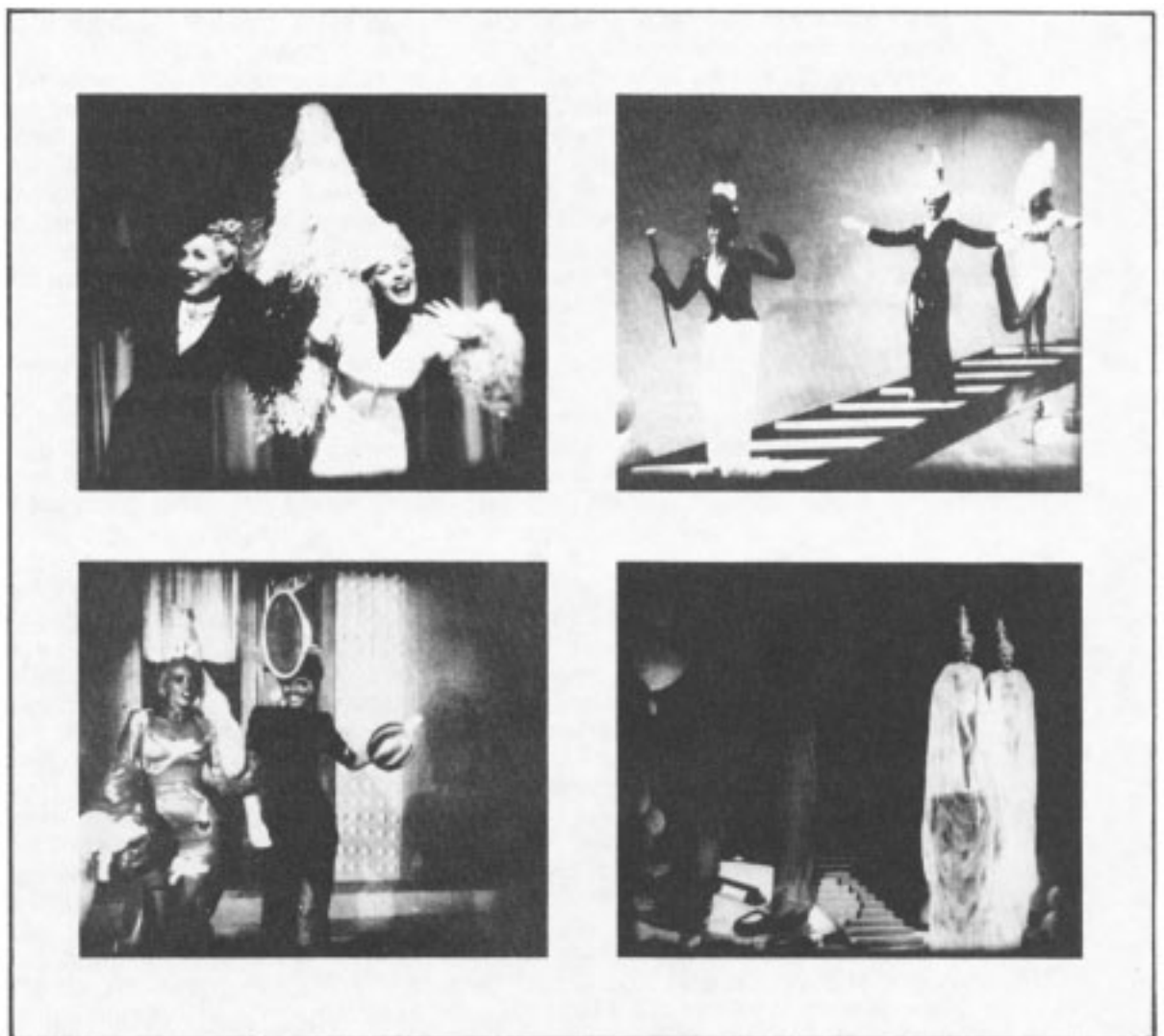
Product differentiation, with made-in-USA the preferred WWII brand enticing the soldiers home, was a military strategy as well as a fashion dictate. In the 1950s the bulbous, breastial aberration emerged, defying gravity's laws and posing the dilemma of the very act of standing. These varying versions of the female body, without detail or blemish, could be reduced to wallet size or magnified on 100 foot billboards. All were intersected by a crucial, unifying feature: an "open friendly smile that discloses perfect, even, white teeth."<sup>26</sup> Although in cinema, a family entertainment machine, they were usually posited within and sanitized by a narrative covering, females were essentially nudes "gradually adorned with ornaments of repeated and suggestive shape until their bodies were defined and penetrated by a cumulative, symbolic overlay."<sup>27</sup> Never really penetrated in classical cinema, the striptease was therefore legal. Yet, these versions of pin-ups straddled pornography, the impossible possession of the stripper, and the girl-next-store, the virgin tease of the everyday ideal. As Carter states:

She sells, not the reality of flesh, but its image and so she makes her living, a successful but imaginary prostitute.... her hypothetical allure and not her actual body is the commodity. She sells a perpetually unfulfilled promise of which the unfulfillment is a consolation rather than a regret. The reality of her could never live up to her publicity. So she retains her theoretical virginity, even if she is raped by a thousand eyes twice nightly.<sup>28</sup>

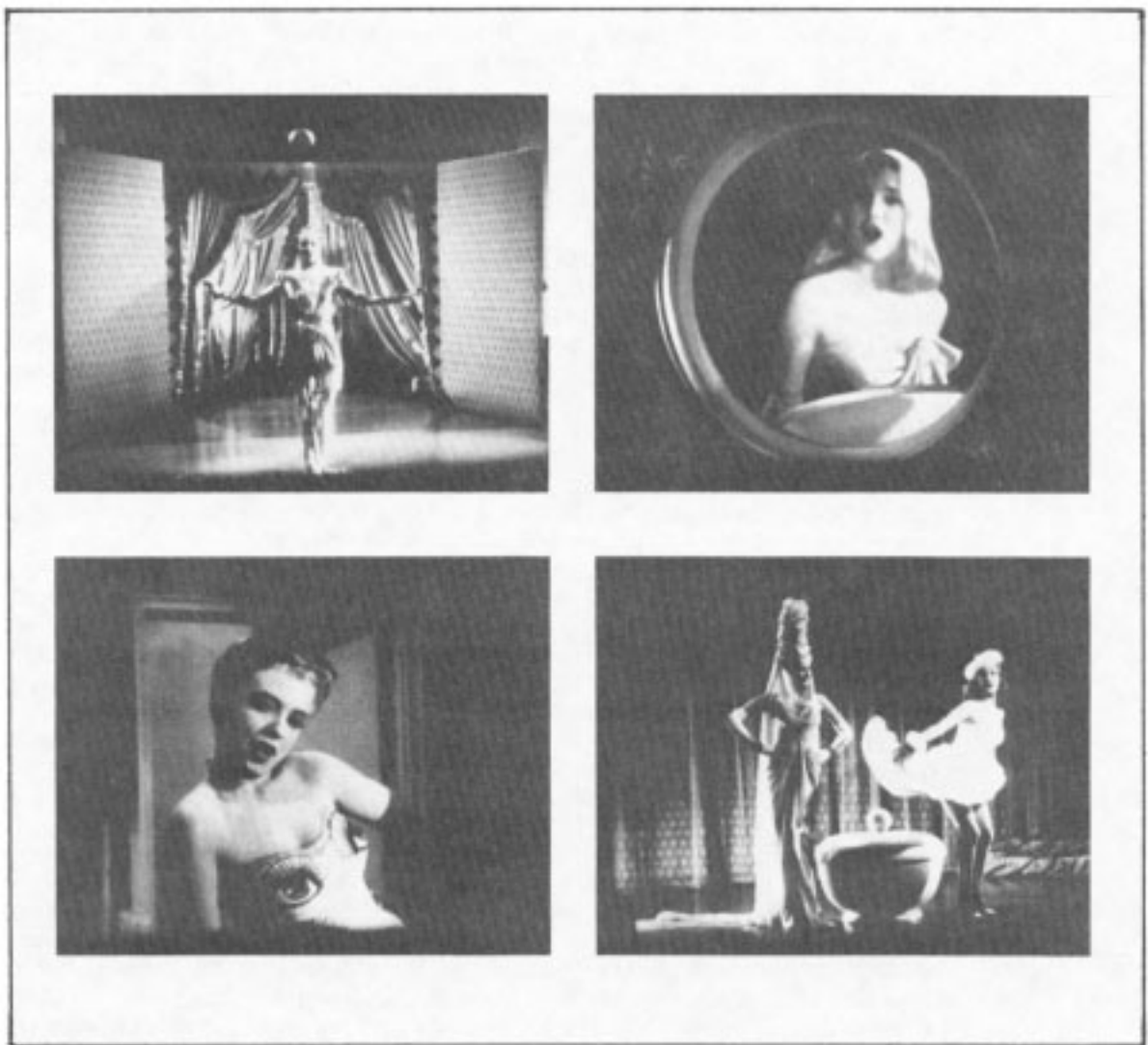
The influence of the drawings of Vargas — from posters for the Ziegfeld Follies, to Hollywood studio posters, to the pages of **Esquire** then **Playboy** — on cinema's concoctions of women was critical, just as were the costume designs of Adrian for Dietrich. It seems that the pin-up has now left the screens of cinema for television. Posters of Suzanne, Farrah, Jacqueline, and Cheryl, angelic clones of the 40s pin-ups, now hang on the walls of children's bedrooms rather than in barracks, locker rooms, or painted on bombs and airplanes. She has been tantalizingly domesticated in this Home Box Office, virginal and awaiting reproduction. Because television series can never end, any sexual relationship she might have must be curtailed, and thus Charlie's Angel's boyfriends are blown-up, burned alive, or imprisoned at the end of each infrequent episode into which they wandered as sexual objects or potential husbands. In today's films women no longer vanish after 21, nor need they be married or murdered in the end. However, the father's discourse is merely masked, a tactic of power. Sex is still the quintessential commodity/mystery, and the male is firmly in narrative control. Jane Fonda has learned about politics, nuclear power plants, horses and personal ethics from, recently, Tom Hayden, Jon Voight, Michael Douglas and Robert Redford. Coming attractions, the attraction of coming, promise more of the same. **All That Jazz** proclaims with s/m flash that marriage to the ideal virgin white bride is possible, in fact desirable, after death. The film finally answers Lacan's and Freud's ontological question: What do women want?

As I stated earlier, **The Dolly Sisters** and **Cover Girl** are literal versions (the literalism of all classical musicals<sup>29</sup>) of the collapse of sexuality and alliance: the deployment of sexuality — the tease of the pinned-up goddess — and the narrative of alliance with male possession at the end. The opening sequences of both films dramatize the look of a middle-class male at the erotic female body. Sexed at first sight. The "girls" move up, from burlesque to Broadway and the Follies. The look at this later, high class body of fashion is less personal, but somehow more legitimate because of the class/wealth of the male lookers and the fetishized respectability of designer clothes. The female entrance into the spectacle of glamour, fashion, and the upper class, with consequent fame and economic privileges is, at the same time, a move away from the possibility of sex, thereby prolonging the narrative by interruptus. The final inevitable return to the male is a double containment, economic and sexual, of sexuality for the family with women out of the labor market. To love, i.e., to be possessed, means negatively for women: not to earn more money, not to be more famous than the male. (The "functions of reproduction" are women's only legitimate "labor.")

In both musicals, these women are literally made by men. **The Dolly Sisters** (Betty Grable and June Haver) are costumed and glamorized by Harry Fox who then accompanies them on the piano in their Knickerbocker Hotel suite as, dressed in black, translucent, furred lingerie, they strip to "Nothin' could be finer than to be in Carolina" for Oscar Hammerstein, the producer. What really makes them, however, is the technicolor cinematography of Ernest Palmer as well as make-up and costumes. They are singing, parading fashion models — in their plumed, tall headdresses resembling images of strutting phalluses.



THE DOLLY SISTERS



### THE DOLLY SISTERS

One could never forget the "DarkTown Strutter's Ball" spectacle with white models in black-face wearing watermelon and Roman candle headdresses. Like **Cover Girl** this film also has a make-up number, with females dressed as lipstick, rouge, Patricia Powder/Patsy Powder Puff, and mascara.

By creating the imaginary element that is "sex," the deployment of sexuality established one of its most essential internal operating principles: the desire for sex — the desire to have it, to have access to it, to discover it, to liberate it, to articulate it in discourse, to formulate it in truth. It constituted "sex" itself as something desirable.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed "imaginary" it not fantasmagoric, these make-up sequences serve as "how-to" manuals for women, suggesting that anyone can (Who would want to?) look like the surrealist concoction that is represented as female sex. At the same time, these spectacles both fashion and operate on male "desire to have it, to have access to it." This double whammy proclaims "sex itself as something desirable."

In **Cover Girl**, Rusty Parker/Rita Hayworth tells Danny McGuire/Gene Kelly (an older, nostalgic Kelly as McGuire "who used to own a club in Brooklyn," returns in 1980, in **Xanadu**), "They didn't like my face," and is admonished by him: "You're gonna be a great star, Rusty, but you gotta get there on your feet, not your face." The film then dramatizes the glamour process: John Coudair,

the publisher, Noel Wheaton, the Broadway producer, make-up men, photographers, and costumes all conspire to make the beautiful more beautiful. The "Cover Girl" musical number begins by lowering a gigantic camera onto a sumptuous Broadway stage set, and then parading and optically printing 1940s "real" cover girls beside their respective magazine covers — each containing a reference to WWII. In the grand climax of this number, Rusty Parker, garbed in gold, clinging lame, slips out of her robe, descends from the clouds down a spiral, vaginal ramp, dances with a male chorus of photographers, and returns to the heavens, the place of goddesses, fame and fortune. However, the first looks — of Danny at Rusty's legs and Harry at Jenny Dolly's legs (the famous legs of Hayworth and Grable) — have not been completed. The ends of the films spiral back; the narrative closes on the family, the couple, and contain or ease the threat of sexuality/wealth loudly and repeatedly proclaimed by the spectacles. The pin-ups have been brought down to earth and made whole by "man." These films illustrate one version of what Foucault labels the hysterization of the female body, constituted solely as sexual yet singularly lacking, incomplete.

Sometimes the female star assumes the actual symptoms of the hysteric. In the last sequence of **Million Dollar Mermaid** (the title indicating that the female body is a mythological creature interchangeable with money), Annette Kellerman (Ester Williams) is paralyzed and lying in her white, hospital bed. Her swimming and silent movie careers are over. However, her "real" love and former manager, Jimmy Sullivan (Victor Mature), the owner now of Rin-Tin-Tin (earlier a boxing kangaroo was replaced by Annette, the "mermaid"), returns, slips a diamond engagement ring on her finger, then kisses her. After a slightly disturbing medium shot of Annette looking out her window, followed by a shot of her view, the ocean framed by the hospital window, The End is imprinted. She might never walk (or move) again, but the couple has been restored. This symptomatic, vicious punishment — the narrative *deus ex machina* enabling the proper couple to couple — eliminates the woman's asset, her economic fortune, in this case, Annette's swimming ability. Cinema cripples women for men, for the narrative pleasure of the couple's restoration.

This pattern also appears in **The Dolly Sisters**: while eloping with a European count, Jenny Dolly is assaulted in their roadster by the soundtrack, a dissonant, musical memory montage of "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," Harry Fox's song, "their" song. As the sound quickens and intensifies in volume, Jenny covers her ears with her hands, thereby driving the car off a cliff and demolishing her perfect face. Fortunately for the spectator's fantasy, her pin-up beauty is completely restored by the plastic surgery of a famous doctor; surgery is no miracle here, merely a more dramatic version of make-up, or women as **really** man-made objects. Unlike the Dora of Freud's case history, Annette and Jenny complete the analysis; crippled but coupled, they live happily ever after.

Foucault's "paradox" (which is also Freud's and Lacan's and Western society's — a pervasive strategy of hysterization, the "par excellence" of men's sexuality with women's "lack" conjoined with women's body as totally sexual) operates on another level through the interchangeability of woman's body with money. Angela Carter's description of Juliette in **The Sadeian Woman** is applicable to the strategies of cinema:

...'ruin,' applied to a man, means financial ruin, whereas, applied to a woman, it means only that a woman has engaged in sexual activity, suggesting an actual parallel between a bank balance and a body. A ruined woman is one who has lost her capital assets, a virgin who has been deflowered and hence has nothing tangible to put on the market.<sup>31</sup>

In German films of the 20s and U.S. films of the 30s, the character of the "ruined" woman proliferates and troubles the family trajectory of the narrative. As the mark and the dollar inflated,<sup>32</sup> the patriarch's ultimate signifier became momentarily limp. In many films, economic systems and patriarchal control were collapsed around the interchangeability of two signifiers: money and the female body. Women's work is sex, legitimately in the home, or illegitimately as prostitute. When the brothel dominates the *mise-en-scene*, the phallus flops. In **The Joyless Street** by G.W. Pabst (Decla-Bioscope, 1919) the clothing store is both bank and brothel where daughters from various classes of families become prostitutes. Sexuality and alliance are thus

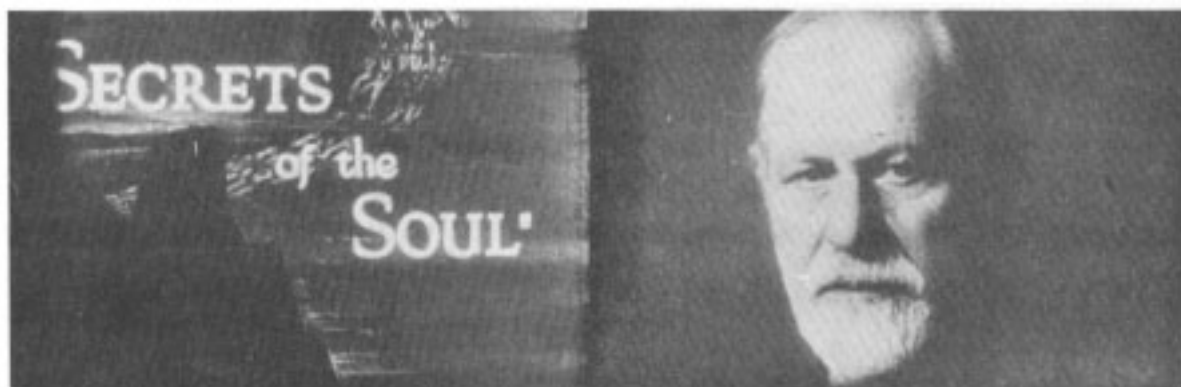
split systems, and disorder is the result. In **Pandora's Box** (Nero Films, 1928), also by Pabst, the eroticism, the expression of desire by Lulu, the prostitute then briefly wife, her very sexual aggression and independence, are so excessive that any linkage between sexuality and alliance within a family is perversely impossible. Lulu's body is a crime, male desire is out of control. Hers is a body that cannot be really married—cannot be salvaged for reproduction, cannot become "mother." The anonymous phallus, the image of the knife of Jack the Ripper, wielded in the end by that stranger who murders her, stops the film, stops the circulation of chaos put into play by Lulu's desire, her body. In the film's last shot, we don't see her face or her body, only the knife, the ultimate signifier. The final penetration is murder, a deathly rape, patriarchy's solution to female desire, to female sexuality.

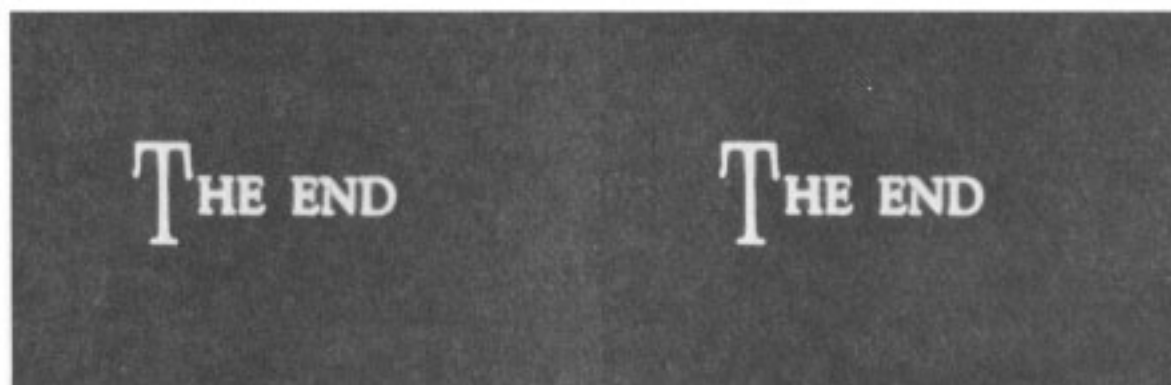
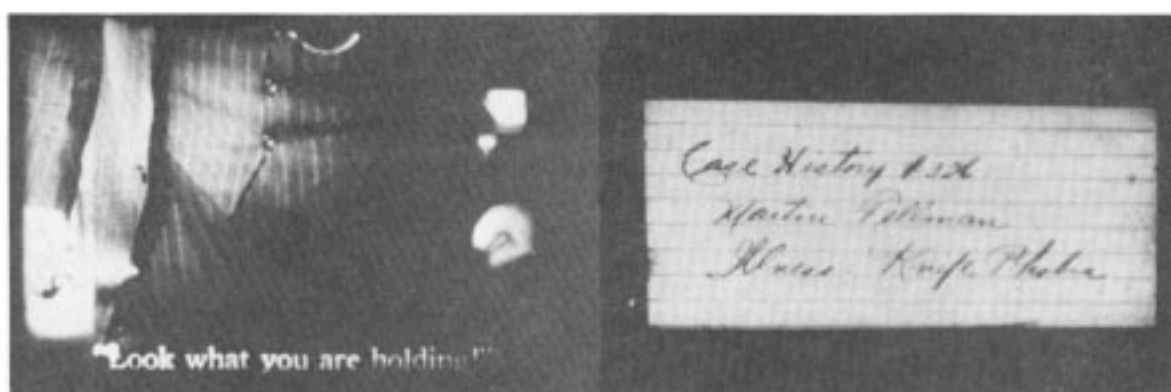
**Blonde Venus** (Paramount, 1932; Josef Von Sternberg), unlike the two Pabst films, is an only momentarily troubled case history of the family (perhaps due to the U.S. demand for happy endings, resulting in many German films adding on "happy" epilogues for the exported version). Cleverly disguised as mother, Marlene Dietrich moves as Helen Faraday from the ruffled, curtained domestic space of stitchery and husband-care to the erotic spectacle, a place of performance par excellence. After her first night club performance with her new stage name, the catchy "Helen Jones," in which the famous, luminous face and undulating body emerge from a gorilla costume in a perverse striptease complete with a chorus of slave girls and black orchestra leader, there is a critical superimposition: a "backstage" shot of a check for \$300 over her face, a fleeting, almost subliminal shot which draws "a parallel between a bank balance and a body." She entered the spectacle of devouring and desirous male eyes (in other words, got a job as a singer) to save her middle-class, radium poisoned husband (Herbert Marshall) by paying his \$300 fare to Europe for a cure. (It is significant that earlier in the film, he tried to sell his body to science, but was only offered a pittance.) Her real object of desire is her young son, Johnny, whom she repeatedly bathes in this film laden with water imagery as memory traces of a primal scene: the film's opening sequence in which the swimming, presumably naked swimmer/water nymph is spied on then spoken to by the soldier/husband, and the spectator.

Upon the return of her now cured and jealous husband, she is accused of infidelity and admits it, thereby instantaneously becoming an unfit mother. Helen Faraday flees with her son. Her husband, the police, and finally a judge in a courtroom, in a series of lap dissolves through an ever seedier, increasingly "Southern" mise-en-scene, find her guilty and Johnny is taken away from her by the law, her husband. She has been investigated by the narrative, proven guilty in the spectacles of female performance, and found sexual. In a powerful metamorphosis, she becomes the phallus: a performer in white top hat and tails, patting chorus girls and shaking hands with the patrons. Every gesture of hand, shoulder, glance and tilt of the head is subtly unfeminine in this section of the film. The female body is completely sublated in phallic desire.

Enough of fantasies of female power. This is a Hollywood genre film, a "woman's film" no less. Like all inbred conventions, Oedipus wins in the end. Helen returns to Johnny's crib, to the family, to the primal scene which opened the film, and to Johnny's bedtime story of an earlier sequence. For the second time through words and pantomime, the family re-enacts the story of the first meeting of the showgirl and the American soldier in the forest glade. This version of the story is significantly different from the initial telling which ended with Johnny falling asleep before the conclusion, i.e., his very conception. The second and last story is prompted and directed by Johnny who has now successfully passed through the Oedipal drama and is constructed in the identity of the symbolic father. He manipulates the narrative from his crib; for this story he is awake although feigning sleep. The very last shot of the film is an extreme closeup of Johnny's fingers turning the music box, the sound which will keep the story of his parents, his conception, going.

Feminist theorists have argued that this constant exchange and return is a problem. However, as Pabst states in **Secrets of a Soul**, there is an answer:





But perhaps Omar Sharif's recent statement in **Gossip** magazine is the cure, narrative's solution: "I wish I were impotent. Who wants to go through all of that anymore, once you've had enough women." As Foucault states: "In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king."<sup>33</sup> Perhaps he might want to retract the castrating implications of this metaphor of the guillotine. For although he cautions against the use of power bipolarities, like Barthes' system, there is a sense of the encompassing spiral which devours itself.

Barthes writes that "Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories?"<sup>34</sup> Adrienne Rich might reply:

I call you from another planet  
to tell a dream  
Light-years away, you weep with me  
The daughters never were  
true brides of the Father  
the daughters were to begin with  
brides of the mother

And, in another poem:

But I can't call it life until we start to move  
beyond this secret circle of fire  
where our bodies are giant shadows flung on a wall  
where the night becomes our inner darkness, and sleeps  
like a dumb beast, head on her paws, in the corner.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps because of feminist intervention, out of the dark corners and shadows of discourse, against the enshrined terms of the fathers, this illicit pastime of the movies has accumulated significant works and a healthy body of theory. The work, the project of this theory in films and writing, documents cinema and film's place within a history that elucidates the mechanisms of subjectivity: cinema as one possibility of analyzing the subject in the political, the social, the sexual.

To return to Barthes' exception, his "otherway" going to movies as his solution: "as if I had two bodies at once: a narcissistic body which is looking, lost in gazing into the nearby mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image but precisely that which exceeds it... in order to 'take-off'."<sup>36</sup> His narcissistic/distanced disavowal is precisely the point of a politics of subjectivity: the necessity of producing contradictions, "to foreground them, to push against the limits;" a strategy of negation "which holds all the terms of the argument in play;"<sup>37</sup> an effort and a commitment "to answer deviously," "to displace oneself."<sup>38</sup> Then, perhaps, pleasures can produce contradictions. Luxuriating can be a source of confrontation.

## Footnotes

- 1 The Shot-by-shot analysis of **Sherlock Junior** was part of the work of a 1975 film theory class, I particularly acknowledge the meticulous work of Thomas Stroschein. I importantly want to pay tribute to Andrew Lovinescu, the photographer in the Department of Art History, for laboriously and beautifully taking the photographs included in this essay (as well of countless others).
- 2 Theresa de Lauretis, "Imaging," **Cine-tracts**.
- 3 Michel Foucault, **The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction**, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978) p. 99.
- 4 De Lauretis, (1st issue).
- 5 Roland Barthes, **The Pleasure of the Text**, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975); the majority of quotations from Barthes are taken from "Upon Leaving the Movie Theater," in **University Publishing** (Winter, 1979), p. 3; the essay was reprinted from **Communications**, No. 23(1975).
- 6 Foucault, p. 45.
- 7 Barthes, p. 3.
- 8 Christian Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study," **New Literary History**: first published in **Communications** (1975).
- 9 Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," **Screen**, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer, 1975), p. 60.
- 10 Ibid., p.
- 11 Roland Barthes, **Roland Barthes**, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 84.
- 12 In an unpublished paper, delivered at the 1976 Purdue Film Conference, I developed this notion in relation to avant-garde cinema, particularly a film by George Landow.
- 13 Foucault, p. 35.
- 14 Ibid., p. 195.
- 15 Ibid., p. 124.
- 16 Ibid., p. 86.
- 17 Ibid., p. 153.
- 18 The general idea of imaged sex as framed overlaps with a paper delivered by Stephen Heath at the Center for **Twentieth Century Studies**, UW-Milwaukee, in Winter, 1980, as yet unpublished.
- 19 Angela Carter, **The Sadeian Woman And the Ideology of Pornography** (New York, Cambridge, etc.: Harper and Row, 1978).
- 20 Barthes, "Upon Leaving the Movie Theater," p. 3.
- 21 Carter, p. 60.
- 22 Foucault, p. 155.
- 23 Roland Barthes, **S/Z**, trans. Richard Miller (New York, Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 188.
- 24 Thomas Hess, "Pinup and Icon," in **Women as Sex Object**, edited by Thomas Hess and Linda Nochlin, **Art News Annual XXXVII**, p. 227.
- 25 Andre Bazin, "Entomology of the Pin-Up Girl," **What is Cinema? Volume II**, trans. by Hugh Gray (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press), p. 158.
- 26 Hess, p. 227.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Carter, p. 67.
- 29 My formulation of musical comedy as a genre, its operations and conventions, "Spectacle and Spectator" is in **Cine-tracts**, No. 2.
- 30 Foucault, p. 156.
- 31 Carter, p. 58.
- 32 From October, 1918 to October, 1923, the mark inflated from 4.20 to 242,000,000.00; the upward spiral continued to amazing degrees.
- 33 Foucault, p. 88.
- 34 Barthes, **The Pleasure of the Text**, p. 47.
- 35 Adrienne Rich, **The Dream of a Common Language, Poems 1974-1977** (New York and London: W.W. Norton). p. 52, p. 9.
- 36 Barthes, "Upon Leaving the Movie Theater," p. 3.
- 37 Pam Cook, "Star Signs," **Screen**, Vol. 20, No. 3/4 (Winter 1979-80). p. 83.
- 38 De Lauretis, (1st issue).

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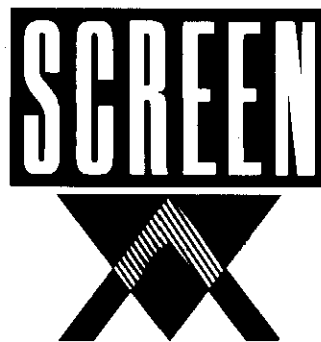
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# FILM BODY

## AN IMPLANTATION

## OF PERVERSIONS

Linda Williams

In the first volume of **The History of Sexuality**, Michel Foucault writes that ever since the seventeenth century there has been in the West an increasing intensification of the body both as object of knowledge and element in the relations of power.<sup>1</sup> This intensification has emerged in a proliferation of discourses of sexuality which have produced a whole range of sexual behavior now categorized as perverse. For Foucault this "implantation of perversions" is the result of the encroachment of power on bodies and their pleasures.

The implantation of perversions is an instrument-effect: it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct. And accompanying this encroachment of powers, scattered sexualities rigidified, became stuck to an age, a place, a type of practice. A proliferation of sexualities through the extension of power; an optimization of the power to which each of these local sexualities gave a surface of intervention: this concatenation, particularly since the nineteenth century, has been ensured and relayed by the countless economic interests which, with the help of medicine, psychiatry, prostitution, and pornography, have tapped into both this analytical multiplication of pleasure and this optimization of the power that controls it. Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement.<sup>2</sup>

Foucault's argument offers a significant challenge to the commonly held notion that sex exists autonomously in nature, independent of any discourse on it and as a natural challenge to a power which either pretends it does not exist or prohibits it. He argues instead that sex is a fictitious causal principle that allows us to evade the true relation of power to sexuality. Thus we do not escape social determination when we have recourse to the supposedly natural pleasures of the body since the particular forms these pleasures take are themselves produced by the needs of power.

Psychoanalysis has been a major force in the deployment of a sexuality that has intensified the body as a site of knowledge and power, making this body the major arena for the discovery of the non-existent "truth" of sex. But nowhere has the deployment of sexuality, and its attendant implantation of perversions, been more evident than in the visible intensification of the body that came about with the invention of cinema. This invention itself grew out of a scientific discourse on the body in the work of Muybridge and Marey whose "chronophotography" attempted to document the previously unobserved facts of its movements. And yet, this very machinery of observation and measurement turns out to be, even at this early stage, less an impartial instrument than a crucial mechanism in the power established over that body, constituting it as an object or subject of desire, offering up an image of the body **as mechanism** that is in many ways a reflection of the mechanical nature of the medium itself.

### **The Film Body and the Body of the Spectator**

In this essay on "The Apparatus" Jean Louis Baudry argues that the cinematic apparatus — considered not just as the film itself but the technical specificity of the entire cinematic process and its ideological effects — brings about a state of regression and narcissism in the spectator. Baudry suggests that his regression imitates an original condition of unity with the body of the mother. In this original state of plenitude, before the separation of the subject's body from everything else in the world, the images produced by dreams and hallucinations are taken as real perceptions. Baudry suggests that the cinematic apparatus imitates aspects of this original condition of unity by placing the film spectator before "representations experienced as perceptions" similar to those of dreams and hallucinations. Thus the cinema re-creates a form of lost satisfaction from a time when desire could be immediately satisfied through the transfer of the memory of a perception to the form of hallucination.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, according to Baudry, the very formation of the cinematic apparatus responds to a desire to figure a unity and coherence in the spectator that has long since been lost in the spectator-subject's entrance into the symbolic of difference. But if the "invention" of the cinema corresponds to a desire to figure a lost unity in the body of the spectator-subject, what is the effect of this invention on the primary object of this spectator-subject's vision: the human body figured in the film?

To a certain extent we know what the status of this body becomes as a relay to the body of the spectator within the already formulated institution of classical narrative films and their system of "suture."<sup>4</sup> To a certain extent also we already know how these films constitute the male body within the film as surrogate for the look of the male spectator and the female body as site of the spectacle.<sup>5</sup> But we know much less about the position of these male and female bodies in the "pre-historic" and "primitive" stages of the evolution of the cinema, before codes of narrative, editing and mise-en-scène were fully established. I hope to show that this "film body," like the apparatus itself, operates to restore a lost unity in the spectator-subject, but that this unity is a more specific and perverse response to the threat of disunity posed by the visible "presence" of the body on the screen — that in fact, there exists, at the very moment of the emergence of a "simulation machine"<sup>6</sup> capable of figuring the human body in a dream-like "representation mistaken for a perception," a dramatic re-staging within this representation of the male child's traumatic discovery of, and subsequent mastery over, sexual difference.

Both Eadweard Muybridge and Georges Méliès, two child-men whose work, in different ways and at different times, was formative of the institution and apparatus of cinema, privilege the body as pure object of truth in their work. For Muybridge this truth is scientific — a matter of isolating the essential. He strips the body of clothes to better reveal its musculature and movement. He isolates it against a bare background or grid to measure it, and he tailors his frame to accommodate the body's full extension in size. For Méliès, on the other hand, the truth of the body is both magical and mysterious. He complicates and clutters his bodies with a vast array of

costumes, mechanized scenery and gadgets of all sorts, and he situates all of this within a rudimentary diegesis. But for both men the naked body of the woman, whether boldly and repeatedly figured by Muybridge as in the plate from **The Human Figure in Motion**<sup>7</sup> (fig. 1), or briefly and coyly glimpsed as in this still from one of Méliès' rare "stag" films entitled **After the Ball**<sup>8</sup> (fig. 2), poses a problem of sexual difference which it then becomes the work of the incipient forms of narrative and mise-en-scene to overcome.

Figure 1

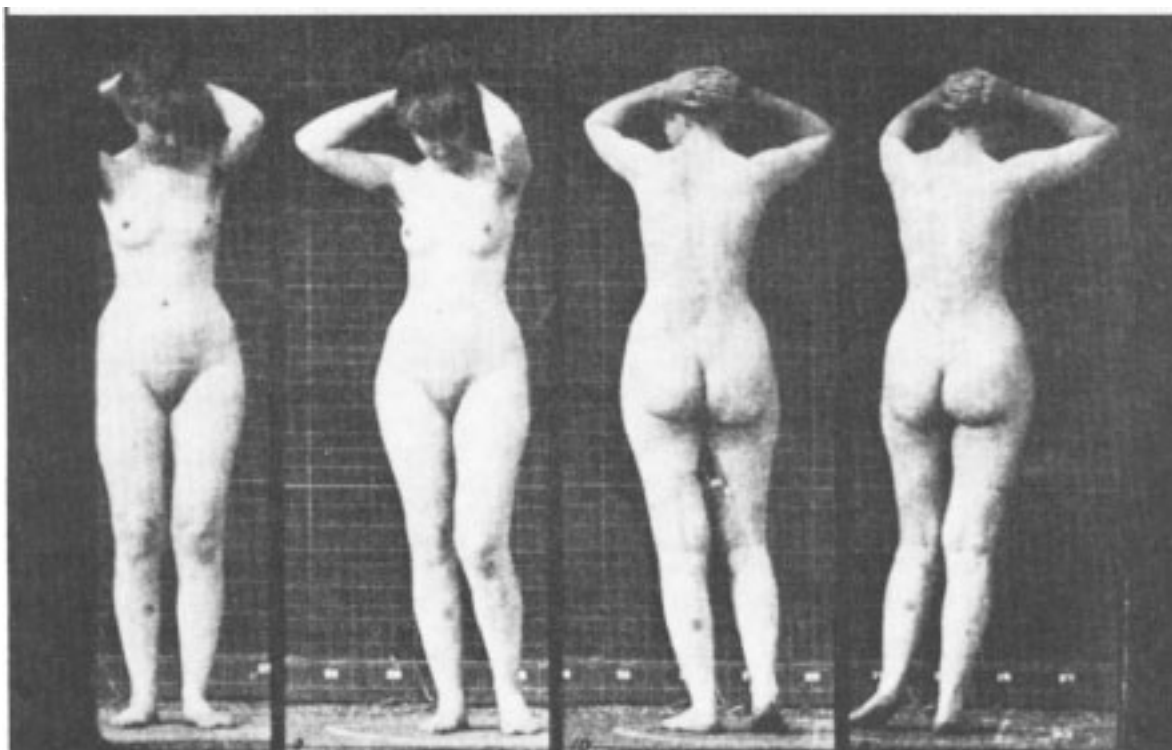


Figure 2



## Eadweard Muybridge

As early as 1880 Muybridge had illustrated his lectures on animal locomotion with the aid of his own "zoopraxiscope"—a circular glass plate that could mount up to 200 transparencies which, when revolved, could project a short sequence of movement. These projections of movement sequences, like the printed plates of **Animal Locomotion**—his vast study of both human and animal movement published in 1887—repeated very short portions of motions from side, front and rear points of view. Both the published photo-sequences and the projected movements of these sequences mounted in the "zoopraxiscope" portray an image of the body as a repeatable mechanism. This body mechanism is controlled in the published work by a whole battery of machines (Muybridge employed 48 cameras in a normal set up) capable of arresting movement for further scrutiny; and it is controlled in the zoopraxiscope by a mechanism capable of reconstructing this movement as illusion. Thus with Muybridge we encounter the very moment at which the representation of the discontinuous fragments of the still photograph begins to be reconstituted as a perception (Baudry's "representation mistaken for a perception") of continuous motion.

What is striking, however, is that with this mastery of the illusion of motion, with this near restoration of the whole body in its full perceptual force, come, in Muybridge's studies of the human body, gratuitous fantasization and iconization of the bodies of women that have no parallel in the representation of the male. And this is so in spite of the enormously simplified decor and relative absence of clothing of all his subjects.

In **The Human Figure in Motion** Muybridge divides his subjects into three categories: men, women and children. In each category, sequences of movements are arranged to reveal a progression from simple to more complex motions. The male figures progress, for example, through various forms of walking (fig.3), running and jumping to more complex tasks such as throwing and catching, kicking, boxing and wrestling, and finally to the performance of "Various Trades" such as carpentry (fig. 4) and hod carrying.

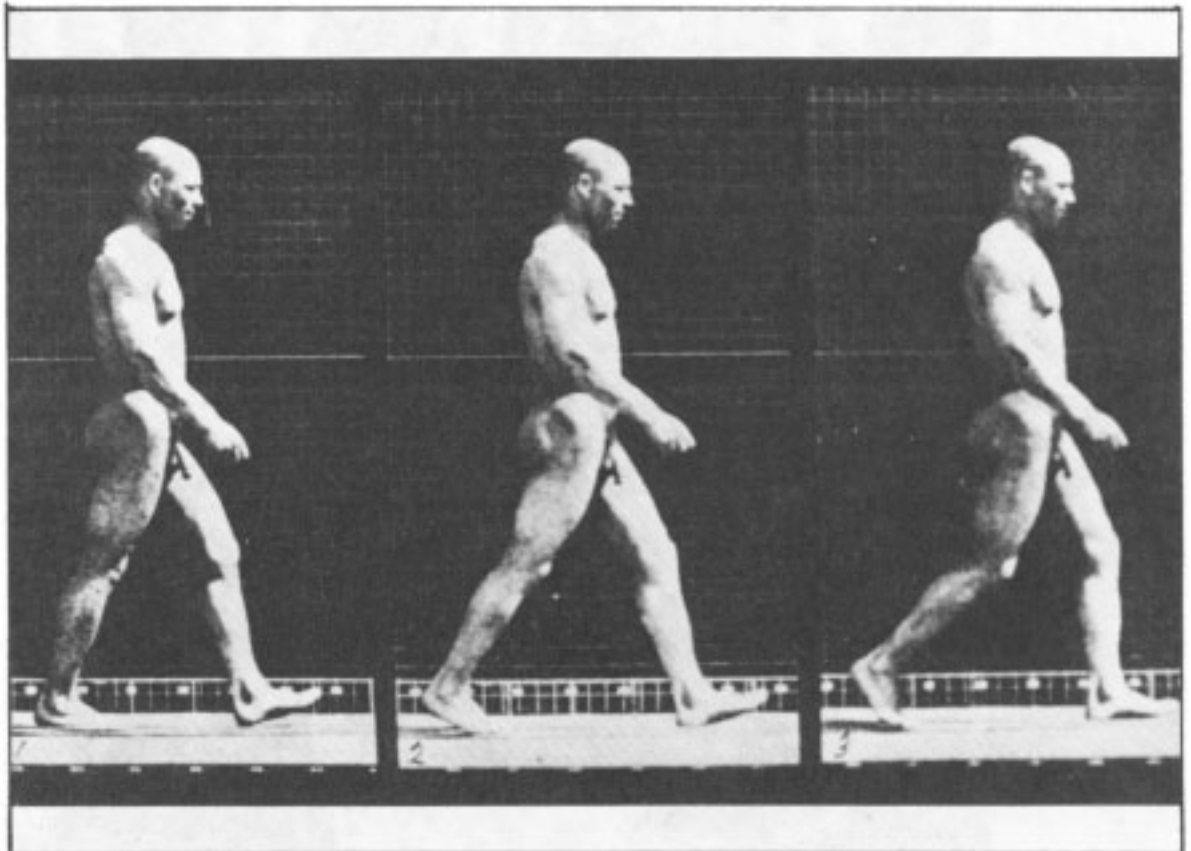


Figure 3

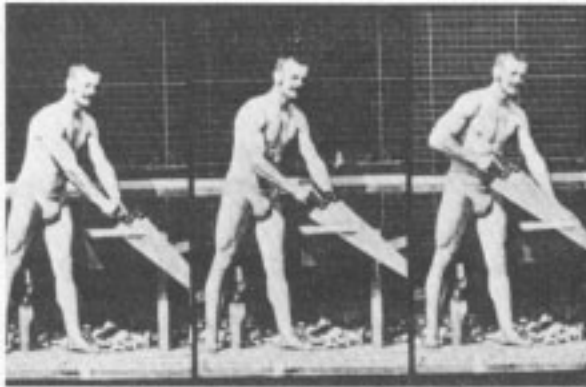


Figure 4

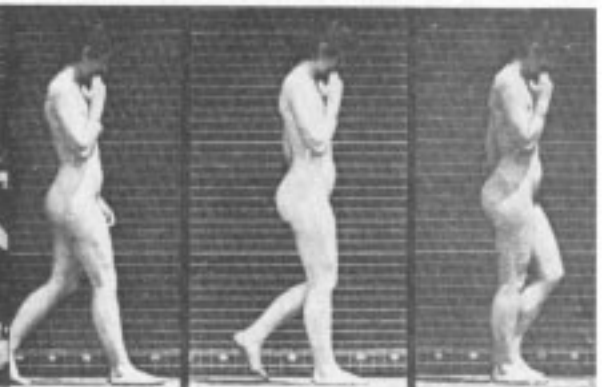


Figure 5



Figure 6

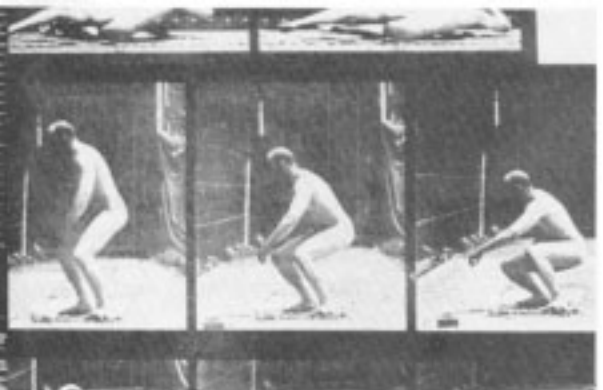


Figure 7

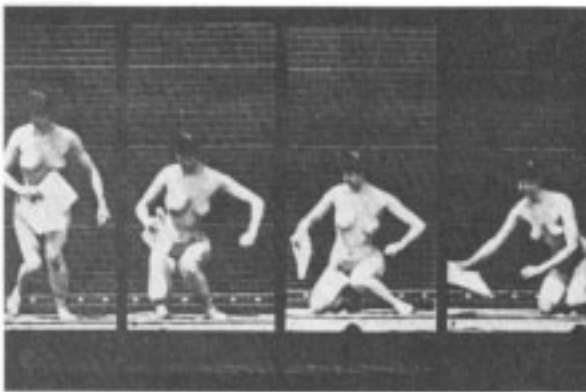


Figure 8



Figure 9

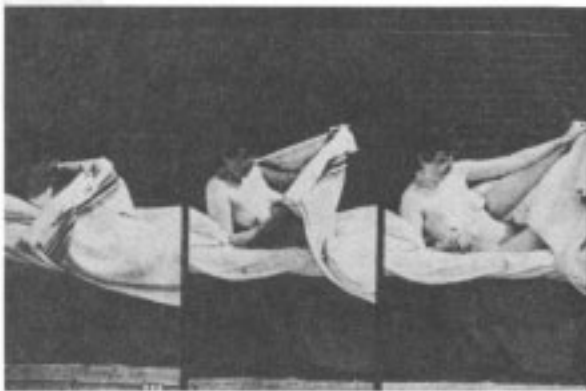


Figure 10

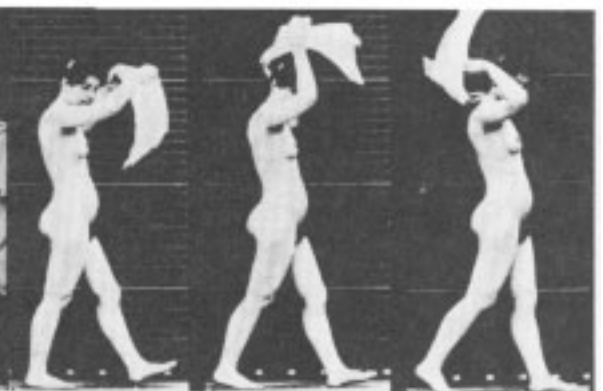


Figure 11

Women's bodies are put through a similar progression of activities designed to reveal movement in more typically "feminine" contexts. For example, we see many sequences of women walking but only one that shows a woman running. In place of the "Throwing and Catching" activities for men, we have women more sedately "Picking Up and Putting Down" to which a very brief section on throwing has been added. On the other hand, there are many variations on the comparatively passive postures of standing, sitting and kneeling.

Some of the movements and gestures in the women's section — walking, running, jumping — parallel those of the men. Yet even here there is a tendency to add a superfluous detail to the women's movements — details which tend to mark her as more embedded within a socially prescribed system of objects and gestures than her male counterparts. For example, the sequence of a women walking (fig. 5) adds the inexplicable, and rather coy, detail of having her walk with her hand to her mouth, thus lending an air of mystery, an extra mark of difference which far exceeds the obvious anatomical difference between the male and female. Or, in the single instance in which a woman runs (fig. 6), her run is again differentiated from the male's by the gesture of grasping her left breast with her right hand. Although one could presume that this is to keep her breast from bouncing, the narcissism of the gesture is unmistakable, especially since it has no parallel among the similarly bouncing male genitals.

A frequent feature of the various male activities is some kind of simple prop that is either carried or manipulated to facilitate different muscular and kinetic activities: dumbbells, boulders, baseballs; the equipment of various combat sports such as swords for fencing; and the tools of the "Various Trades" such as spades, saws and hammers. (Many male activities show men lifting, throwing, balancing and carrying a simple round boulder which functions in a variety of situations to demonstrate the movements which manipulate it.) But when the women's gestures include props, these props are always very specific objects, never a simple weight that can be re-used in many different situations. Lifting or carrying activities for women never use an abstract, non-specific object but instead, two types of baskets for her head, a jug of water, a bucket of water and a basin of water — all of which engage her in specific activities of washing, watering or giving to drink.

Although these props serve the ostensible purpose of eliciting certain kinds of motor activities, and although we do encounter **some** equally specific props for men as well, the props associated with women's bodies are never just devices to elicit movement; they are always something more, investing her body with an iconographic or even diegetic surplus of meaning. For example, when a women lies down on a blanket placed on the ground in an activity that is identical to the series entitled "Man Lying Down" (fig. 7), she does not only lie down. She is provided with a narrative reason for lying down and the extra prop that goes with it: she lies down in order to read a newspaper (fig. 8). In other variations of lying down that have no male equivalent, the woman lies down in a hammock and, finally, in a bed complete with sheets and pillows (fig. 9). The latter offers the bizarre sight of covering up the woman's nudity. It is complemented, in the final plate of the women's section, by the reverse spectacle of uncovering her nudity as the woman gets out of this same bed (fig. 10).



Figure 12

Figure 13

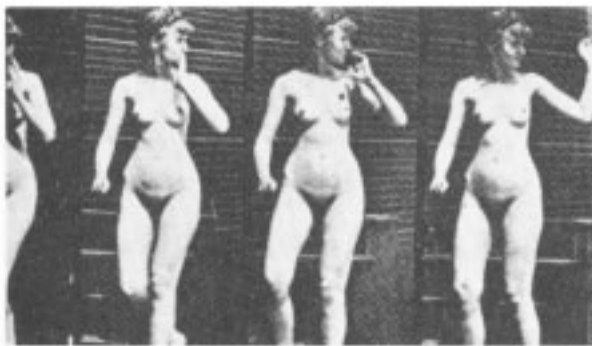


Figure 14

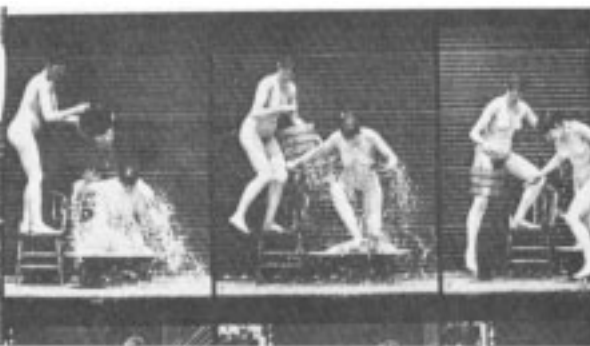


Figure 15

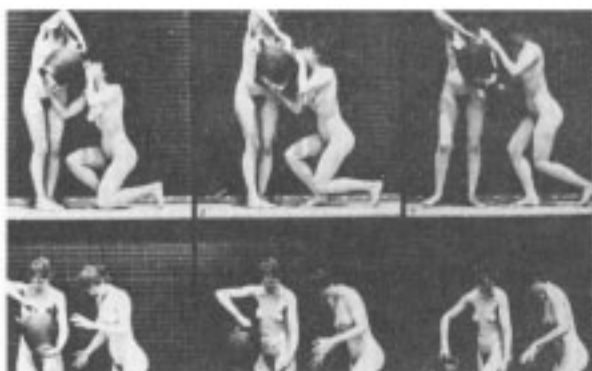


Figure 16

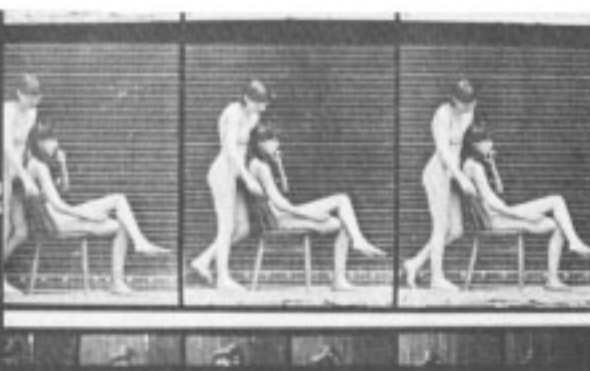


Figure 17

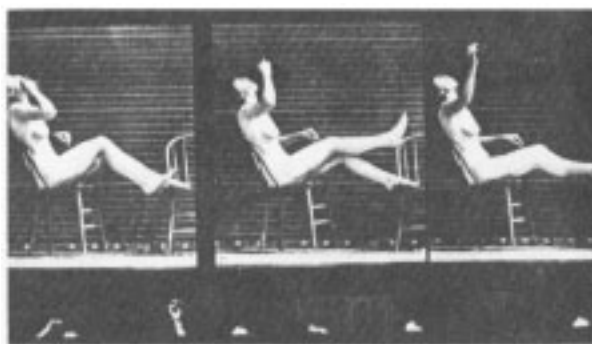


Figure 18

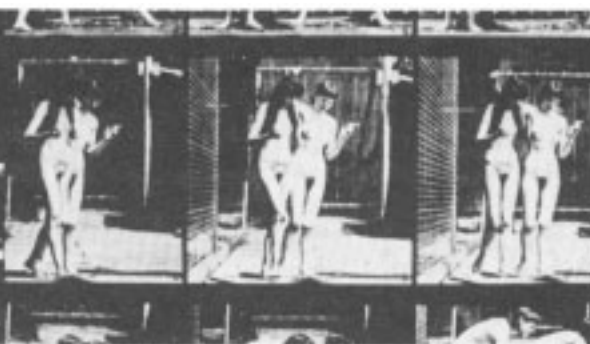


Figure 19



Figure 20

It does not seem entirely accidental that Muybridge chooses to conclude his section on women with this particular prop which in addition to its obvious sexual use, entirely covers and then uncovers the very body which the motion study seeks to reveal.<sup>9</sup> A similar game of peek-a-boo is played with a variety of materials or garments which partially cover — and in that covering seem to reveal all the more — the woman's body. We see this in the sequence entitled "Woman Walking Downstairs Throwing Scarf over Shoulders," (fig. 12). which covers only to uncover again (fig. 13). Thus the women are consistently provided with an extra prop which overdetermines their difference from the male. This overdetermination of difference also extends to such propless activities as walking and running or, strikingly, in a sequence in which the gratuitous gesture of difference, blowing a kiss, entirely defines her as a flirtatious object of desire (fig. 14).

An even greater surplus of erotic meaning runs through the group of photos which show two women in the same frame. These sequences are paralleled in the male section by such two-persons activities as boxing, fencing and wrestling which show the men performing a limited repertoire of combat sports. It would be absurd to expect women of the period to engage in similar sports. But it is interesting that even though Muybridge makes no attempt to imitate with women the motor activities of these male combat sports, he nevertheless does attempt to create activities that women can perform together. Since he must literally invent these activities, it is not surprising that we find in them extreme instances of what can already be termed a cinematic *mise-en-scène*.

In one almost comically incongruous "scene," an ambulant naked woman serves a cup of coffee to another seated woman who drinks it and hands it back. In another, (fig. 15) a woman stands on a chair and pours a bucket of water over another woman seated in a large basin. This second woman reacts, as if surprised by the coldness of the water, by jumping out of the basin and running away. In both examples Muybridge has directed his female figures in what are very nearly dramatic scenes of domestic interaction taking place in a minimally defined dining room and bathroom. These scenes have a much greater degree of diegetic illusion than the less spatially situated, more purely motor activities of the men.

But even the more erotically charged are the scenes in which two women perform an atypical series of movements, as when two women dance together, or the sequence entitled "Women Turning and Holding Water Jug for Kneeling Companion" (fig. 16). This sequence depicts the unlikely situation of a woman pouring water into the mouth of another from a large and unwieldy jug, with the added detail that she appears to spill a little water. Here, the unconventionality of the activity invests the scene with an enigmatic eroticism: why are these women playing with this large jug (no less!), and what is the nature of their relationship? The two women are defined as "companions;" none of the two-person male activities offers a similar description of the nature of the relationship between them. Another enigmatic scene, entitled "Women Sitting Down in Chair Held by Companion, Smoking Cigarette" (fig. 17) — the very length of these titles indicates their increased narrativity — shows a standing woman leaning against the back of the chair of her "seated companion" gazing down on her almost longingly.

The cigarette in this last sequence offers a powerful connotation of both loose morals and, for the period, masculinity, both of which lend lesbian overtones to the scene which are completely unequaled in the comparable male activities of boxing or wrestling. For even though these male activities involve body contact, their purposeful and conventional nature does not allow the same erotic investment. The cigarette is yet another of the many gratuitous details which perversely fetishize the woman's body. But it does so with some insistence, as in an equally unmotivated, extravagantly lascivious "pose" of a single woman (fig. 18). or in a twosome in which both women smoke while walking arm in arm (fig. 19).

Of course, one could try to explain all these props and poses by the fact that most of the women Muybridge used for his photos were professional artist's models, while the male "performers" were everyday people whose movements were linked to their activities in real life, e.g., the University of Pennsylvania's "professor of physical culture," two "instructors at the Fencing and Sparing Club," etcetera. But all this really explains is the significant fact that even in the pre-history of cinema, at a time when the cinema was much more a document of reality than a narrative art, women were already fictionalized, already playing assumed roles, already **not there** as themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Robert Taft, who wrote the introduction to the current edition of *The Human Figure in Motion*, tries to explain the need for professional female models by the fact that many of the women were required to appear nude.<sup>12</sup> But even allowing for the fact that it was more risqué for a Victorian woman to pose nude than for a Victorian male and thus the need for professional models, we cannot use this same reasoning to account for the fact that the women are both categorically and numerically **more** nude than the men. Of the fourteen classes of human and animal subjects photographed by Muybridge during his stay at the University of Pennsylvania, the first three are of men in three stages of undress listed as 1) "draped," 2) "pelvis cloth" — a kind of jock strap, and 3) "nude." Thus the women's intermediate level of undress, transparent drapery and semi-nude, does not perform the same function of covering the genitals as the male "pelvis cloth." In fact, it does quite the reverse, draping the female body with a transparent veil (fig. 20) or partial garment which, like the bedcovers, scarf or dress, only call attention to her nudity all the more. These transparent and partial clothes offer a variation on what Roland Barthes has described as the erotic function of all revealing clothes: the "staging of an appearance-as-disappearance."<sup>13</sup>

The contradictory nature of the gesture which discloses the "truth" of the woman's body at the same time that it attempts to hide it is common to almost all the surplus props and gestures throughout these photo-sequences, revealing the unmistakable structure of the fetish. In its classic Freudian definition, the fetish is any object which acts as a substitute for the penis, allowing the male to continue to believe in the myth of the female phallus so as not to have to confront the threat of castration which underlies the fact of sexual difference.<sup>14</sup> These erotically charged substitutes often cover or connect with the part of the female body thought to have undergone castration to preserve the illusion — the perverse male fantasy — of a female phallus. Freud calls these substitutes a "disavowal" but he also notes that it is in the very nature of this disavowal<sup>15</sup> to perpetuate belief that have been abandoned, thus paradoxically reasserting the very same fears it is intended to allay.

If Muybridge's photos of naked women insist on their nakedness at the same time that they also attempt to disavow it, if, in a sense, he always gives us more to see — more of her body, more of her gestures and more objects which decorate or situate her in a prototypical narrative — this could be because of the male fear that this "more" is really less, that women pose the terrifying threat of "lack." The obsessive gaze at the naked female body attempts to reassure itself in the very sight (and site) of this "lack" by the fetish-substitutes which endow her with a surplus of male-generated erotic meaning. By denying the woman any existence apart from the marks of difference, Muybridge exerts a form of mastery over that difference. But the very nature of the fetish disavowal also assures that the woman is defined entirely in terms that will perpetuate the nagging fear of the lack she represents. Her body can never by anything more than the two poles of this contradiction.

In this Freudian reading, the woman's body is reduced to the pure expression of desires produced in the male unconscious. But as Foucault notes, since it is law that constructs both desire and the lack upon which it is based, "where there is desire, the power relation is already present."<sup>16</sup> In other words, we find in the work of Muybridge, long before the evolution of the cores of either the primitive or the classical illusionist cinemas, at the very inception of the basic apparatus itself, a patriarchal power which places the woman's body within a perversely fetishized structure. The cinematic apparatus thus becomes, even at this early stage, an instrument in the "implantation of perversion" whose first effect is to deny the very existence of women.

We have seen that the "presence" of the woman's body on the screen generates a fetish response on the part of the male image-producer to restore the unity which this body appears to lack. This fetishization operates on the level of the cinematic signified. But as Christian Metz has shown, another form of fetishization exists on the level of the cinematic signifier. This, too, is structured upon a similar process of disavowal. However, this disavowal is of the illusory nature of the signifier itself. In other words, part of our pleasure in cinema derives from the contradiction between our belief in the perceptual truth of the image and our simultaneous knowledge that it is only imaginary — the discrepancy between the perceived illusion of presence created by the image and the actual absence of the object replaced by the image. As Metz writes:

The cinema fetishist is the person who is enchanted by what the machine is capable of, at the **theatre of shadows** as such. For the establishment of his full potency for cinematic enjoyment

(**jouissance**) he must think at every moment (and above all simultaneously) of the force of presence the film has and of the absence on which this force is constructed...his pleasure lodges in the gap between the two.<sup>17</sup>

The fetishist's pleasure in the holding of two contradictory beliefs is doubly inscribed in the early invention of the cinematic apparatus: 1) on the level of its signified when it first comes to represent women's bodies, forever arresting the look at this body with a look at the fetish which disavows the very perception of which the machine is capable, and 2) on the level of the signifier. Here it is significant that the fetish pleasure is strongest at the moment the "theatre of shadows" first emerges, when audiences — like the audiences who first viewed the projection of moving bodies by Muybridge's "zoopraxiscope" — are still capable of amazement at the magical abilities of the machine itself. Muybridge's apparatus, present and visible in the space of projection, hand operated by its own inventor, thus revealed more acutely than the later invention of the projector the magical power to create an illusion of motion from a succession of stills. Even though this illusion would be perfected in Lumière and Edison's later invention of celluloid film and the resulting ability to film and project much longer sequences of motion, at no time would the fetish pleasure of the signifier alone be so pronounced, until, that is, Georges Méliès — that other original fetishist of the early cinema — found new ways to amaze his audiences at the capabilities of the machine.

### Georges Méliès

For Muybridge the pleasure in the cinematic signifier lodged in the ability of the projection machine to produce an illusion of movement. He himself stood outside this machine as its operator. Méliès, however, redoubles and refines this pleasure in the cinematic signifier by placing his body within the machine, casting himself in the role of the magician-scientist jester-Mephisto who manipulates its magic. Thus he makes a spectacle of his own perverse pleasure in the tricks of which his personal "theatre of shadows" is capable. In film after film Méliès obsessively repeats the same game, playing, like the fetishist, upon the contradictory knowledge of presence and absence, making the game of presence and absence the very source of his own and the spectator's pleasure, while privileging his pleasure over that of the spectator insofar as he alone, as filmmaker **behind** the scene and as magician **on** the scene, penetrates more deeply the contradictory nature of presence and absence. As typified by a frame from the 1902 film, **The Devil and the Statue**, (fig. 21), his mugging delight in the game of illusion is clearly visible in each role he assumes.

But if Méliès refines and increases the fetishistic pleasure in the cinematic signifier, he also refines and increases a similar pleasure in the primary cinematic signified of the human body. As with Muybridge, the primary impetus behind Méliès' manipulation of the body is, once again, the need to master the threat of difference posed by the naked female form. And if for Muybridge this fetishization of the women's body begins to produce a level of diegetic illusion and mise-en-scène that far exceeds the levels called for in his motion studies, then a similar fetishization, running rampant in Méliès, produces even more elaborate forms of diegesis and mise-en-scène.

Long before Méliès had discovered the illusory powers of cinema, he was already engaged in an obsessive pursuit of mastery over the human body. From 1885 to 1888, before purchasing the theatre of the magician Robert-Houdin, Méliès constructed a number of robots in imitation of Robert-Houdin's own work.<sup>18</sup> These mechanical simulations of the human body allowed their inventor-operator complete control over their appearance and movements.

(There is a fascinating similarity here, not only between the mechanical simulation of the human body constructed in the robot and the later simulation of that body afforded by the cinema, but also between the manner of Méliès' mastery of both. According to Méliès' own account, he had seen robots on the stage of the Robert-Houdin theater and had proceeded to imitate them without any prior understanding of their mechanism.<sup>19</sup> Thus he re-invented an invention whose trick was the Simulation of the human body. This simulation of a simulation was then repeated ten years later in 1895 when, after failing to purchase the new invention of the cinématographe from Auguste Lumière after an evening showing at the Grand Café, Méliès proceeded to re-invent it as well. Thus Méliès seems to have been fated to repeat the invention-construction of machines capable of ever more perfect and life-like Simulations of the human body, **and** to repeat this

construction through a process that was itself a simulation of an already existing mechanism.)

From the first trick of assembling a simulation of the whole body out of mechanical parts to the further trick of making the imaginary bodies projected on a screen appear and disappear, Méliès perfects his mastery over the threatening presence of the actual body, investing his pleasure in an infinitely repeatable **trucage**. This trucage offers two related forms of mastery over the threat of castration posed by the illusory presence of the woman's body made possible by the cinema: on the one hand, the drama of dismemberment<sup>20</sup> and re-integration performed on all bodies, and on the other hand the celebration of the fetish function of the apparatus itself, particularly in its ability to reproduce an image of the woman's body.

A 1903 film entitled **Extraordinary Illusions (Illusions funambulesques)**<sup>21</sup> is a typical example of mastery over dismemberment and of particular interest because it combines cinematic **trucage** with Méliès' original obsession with the mechanized limbs of a robot. The film shows Méliès as conjurer removing from a shallow box, obviously incapable of holding what emerges



Figure 21



Figure 22

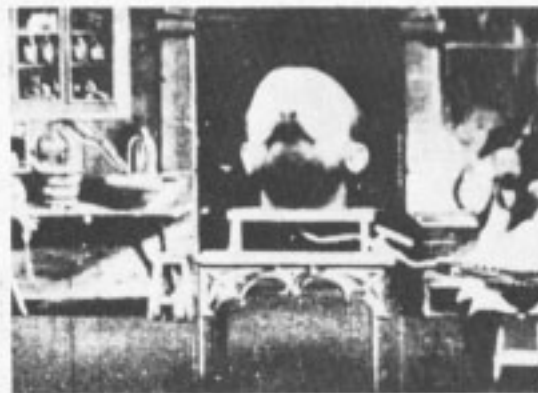


Figure 23

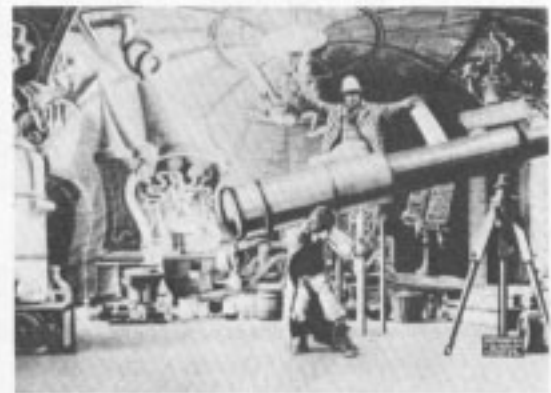


Figure 24

from it, a pair of legs, dummy's torso and finally a head. He assembles these pieces into the body of a mechanical woman who becomes animated enough to turn her head to give the conjurer a kiss. He then tosses this mannequin into the air. Upon landing on the other side of the screen, she is transformed into a flesh-and-blood woman. The rest of the film shows the conjurer trying with some difficulty to maintain this apparition — the woman has a disturbing tendency to change into a chef with a saucepan — but not without a further variation on the theme of dismemberment and re-integration in which the woman is tied up in a large cloth which explodes into fragments of paper whose pieces again re-form the woman. Finally, when the woman turns into a chef once again, the conjurer rips the chef to pieces and gradually vanishes himself.

Many of Méliès' early films (1898-1903) have similar rudimentary narratives based on variations of this drama of the dismemberment and re-integration of both male and female bodies. As early as 1898 **The Famous Box Trick (Illusions fantasmagoriques)** shows Méliès' again as conjurer, making another magic box appear from which emerges a little boy. The body of the boy is first conjured up, cut in two by the magician's wand, then restored to its original wholeness by the creation of two boys who begin to fight among themselves. Only after the drama of morcellation and restoration does final transformation causing the boys to vanish, bring an end to the conflict.

Frequently this drama of morcellation takes place on the body of the magician-conjurer himself. In **The Melomaniac (Le Mélomane, 1903)** Méliès plays a magical music teacher who gives a music lesson using a string of five telegraph wires as his staff. To obtain notes he tears off his own head and throws it up on the staff. Since his head always grows back he is able to musically notate a performance of "God Save the King" sung by the infinitely replenishable supply of heads (fig. 22).

**The Melomaniac** is in many ways a refinement of the earlier **The Four Troublesome Heads (L'homme de têtes, 1898)** in which the magician alternately removes and regrows his own head until the group of removed heads begin to annoy him with their singing. He then makes two of them disappear and tosses the third into the air to land on top of and merge with his current head. In both these films the magician stages the morcellation of his own body with the aid of a cinematic trick; he then restores his unity with another trick to become a kind of virtuoso performer of the drama of dismemberment and integration.<sup>22</sup>

In those films in which morcellation of the body is not followed by re-integration, we often find that the body undergoing morcellation can be regarded as a threat to another character who functions as a more sympathetic prototype of a hero. In these films two male protagonists engage in a crude oedipal drama ending in the dismemberment of one of them and the triumph of the other. Occasionally a woman figures as prize or cause of the conflict. In **The Man with the Rubber Head (L'homme à la tête de caoutchouc, 1902)** a conflict between a chemist and his assistant ends when the assistant inflates the head of the chemist to the point of explosion (fig. 23). In true oedipal fashion it is frequently the younger of the two men who succeeds in dismembering the older one, as also in **The Cook's Revenge (La Vengeance du gâte-sauce, 1900)**. In this film a kitchen boy steals a kiss from a chamber-maid, is caught by his boss, but then decapitates this boss in the ensuing chase. The film ends with the kitchen boy using the headless body of the boss as a broom to continue his work.

In all the above films we encounter a specific use of cinematic magic first to assert then to disavow an original "lack." Even when women's bodies do not appear at all (as in **The Four Troublesome Heads** and **The Famous Box Trick**), the threat of castration posed by their bodies seems to underlie the pattern of each scenario.

In a recent **Film Quarterly** article entitled "The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic and the Movies," Lucy Fischer argues that the primary function of women's bodies in Méliès' films — and in many other "trick" films of the period — is to disappear.<sup>23</sup> Fischer takes Méliès' 1906 film, **The Vanishing Lady**, as a paradigm for the magical treatment of women throughout the period. In this first use of a cinematic "substitution trick," a magician, played as always by Méliès, covers the body of a seated woman with a piece of cloth. When he removes the cloth not only has the lady disappeared but in her place is a skeleton.

Fischer is quite right to stress the significance of a magic which exerts power over women's bodies, decorporealizing it and reducing it to the status of a decorative object. But it is simply not

accurate to privilege the disappearance of women in Méliès' films, any more than it would be accurate to privilege her magical appearance. In fact, there are probably an equal number of magical appearances and disappearances of men in these films, or of any object for that matter, since the staging of appearance and disappearance is the primary way Méliès exercises the illusory power of his simulation machine.

Fischer's ultimate point is not only that Méliès' magic makes women disappear, but that often in the process this magic acts out a drama of male envy of the female procreative power, "giving birth" to all manner of animals and objects. This latter idea is tempting in its opposition to the patriarchal notion of a female "lack,"<sup>24</sup> and the somewhat shaky Freudian construct of "penis envy" which sometimes accompanies it. Fischer actually reverses the process to suggest that a kind of "womb envy" is at work. But again I fear that there is not enough evidence from the films. More important than the vanishing act, more important than the imitation of procreative powers, is the construction of a scenario which gives the magician-filmmaker power over **all** the bodies in his domain, allowing him not simply to conjure away the woman but symbolically to re-enact, and thus master through obsessive repetition, the problem of difference, the threat of disunity and dismemberment posed by the woman's body. Like the child's symbolic re-staging of the problem of his mother's absence in the game of **fort!/da!**, making her disappear so that she may again, this time as a result of his **own** manipulation, re-appear,<sup>25</sup> Méliès' scenarios of fetishistic disavowal announce his own role as magician-author-metteur-en-scène with a great flourish.

Significantly, these flourishes radically exclude his own body from the voyeuristic regime that Méliès, more than any other early master of film, inaugurates. In all the early films over which Méliès presides as magician (or as some thinly disguised variant thereof), the magician usually enters the scene, bows directly to the audience, begins an act containing many hand flourishes which call attention to the magic performed, and finally bows again before exiting. No one else in the film is allowed this knowledge of the existence of the film audience. Although it is possible to attribute these flourishes to the conventions of stage magic reigning at the time, it seems significant that even after the magician disappears from his films, Méliès retains characters, like Mephistopheles in **The Damnation of Faust** or the witch in **The Kingdom of the Fairies**, who carry on the function of the magician. If Méliès persists in this acknowledgement of the distance separating audience and scene, even going against all the emerging codes of cinematic illusion to do so, and if, at the same time he animates this scene with a multitude of characters who do not seem to be aware that they are on a scene, he does so in order to share with the audience his perverse pleasure in a visible **mise-en-scène**. Like the proverbial dirty-old-man who delights in showing his obscene pictures to others, part of his pleasure is in watching us watch. But for Méliès this pleasure is further enhanced by the inclusion in his own pictures of the fetish-machine that tames the threat of the female body.

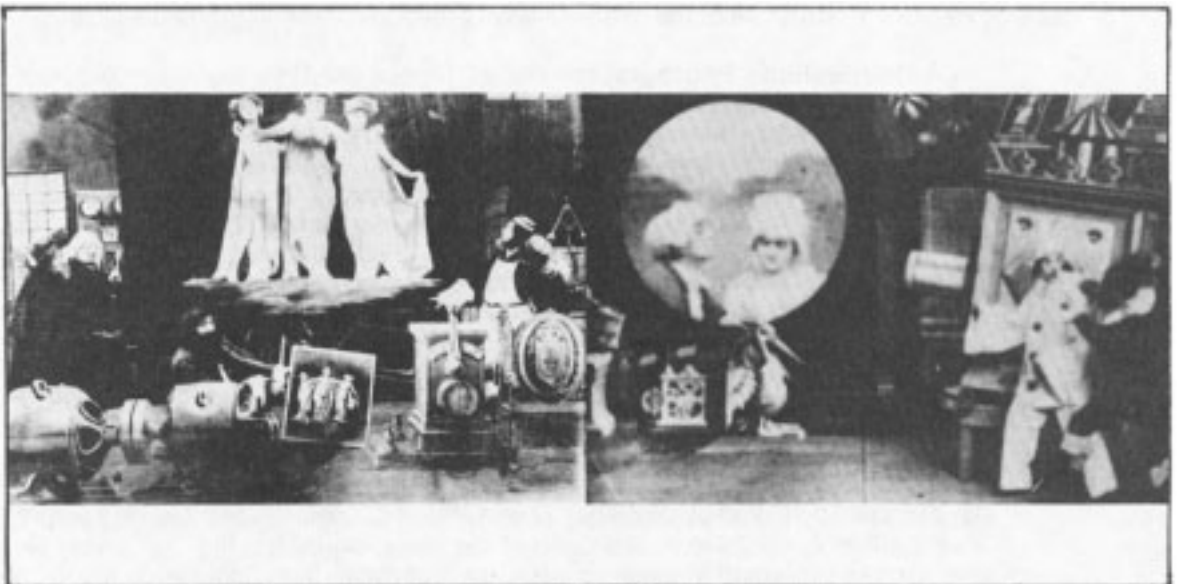


Figure 25

Figure 26

It is striking, for example, just how many of Méliès' films, especially his later ones, revolve around the functioning of an elaborate machine operated and manufactured by the fictional surrogate of the original magician. These machines, whether the clocks of the 1889 **Cinderella** or the rocket ship of **A Trip to the Moon** (1902) are often associated with or adorned by the multiplying bodies of beautiful women in scant attire. The proliferation of the machines themselves — the many fantastic vehicles, futuristic laboratories, even the mechanized monsters such as the giant in **The Conquest of the Pole** (1912)—are obvious ways in which Méliès celebrates and makes visible, the primary invisible machinery of the cinema itself. A great many of the machines featured in these films are, in fact, optical devices: telescopes in **A Trip to the Moon** and **The Merry Frolics of Satan** (1906) (fig. 24), a fantastic camera in *Long Distance Wireless Photography* (1908), a magic lantern that turns out to be a motion picture projector in **The Magic Lantern** (1903). These devices allow their operator and the film spectator a privileged view of women's bodies, variously producing, reproducing, or voyeuristically spying upon them.

In **Long Distance Wireless Photography** Méliès plays the Marconi-like inventor of a magical camera capable of projecting life-size moving images of whatever is placed before it. This fantasy on the potential of the recently invented telegraph is an uncanny anticipation of the not yet invented marvel of television. Méliès the inventor-operator shows off the capabilities of his machine to an elderly couple in his laboratory. He first reproduces a life-size image of three identically dressed women taken from a small photograph (fig. 25), then "televises" the movements of a live model.

In both cases Méliès celebrates the power of the apparatus to frame, tame and reduce the flesh and blood woman to the status of a two-dimensional image. In the first case it may even be significant that the live model is dispensed with entirely as Méliès creates a life size enlargement of what is already only a two-dimensional image of women's bodies. In the second case, a live model is present but a comic discrepancy between the seductive movements of the "televised" image and the less seductive behavior of the original model suggests a preference for the image over the less obliging reality of the original model.

Thus Méliès celebrates within the primary image machine of his own cinema a secondary image machine that is capable, like the first, of reproducing an image of women's bodies to the voyeuristic measure of male desire. The apparatus which makes possible "long distance wireless photography" packages the real-life bodies of women into safely proffered cheese-cake tableaux. Individual female bodies become the simple stereotypes of female-ness which uniformly differs from the male.<sup>26</sup> As figure 25 amply reveals, Méliès' own pleasure is that of the purveyor of images who delights in watching others watch. The "Others" who watch in this case are the elderly couple, the in-the-laboratory audience of the film's scientific demonstration. Like the doubling of the cinematic apparatus itself, this within-the-film audience duplicates the voyeuristic structure of the relationship of primary audience to filmed image.

In **A Spiritualistic Photographer** (1903), Méliès reverses the above process to bring the two dimensional photograph of a woman back to life. He performs a similar trick with the figure of the Queen on a life-size playing card in the 1905 film **The Living Playing Cards**. In all these films the device of the frame within the frame alerts us to the fact that everything we see, particularly the body of the woman, has been animated and produced by a voyeuristic, optical machine which safely situates the female object of desire both at a distance from and on a different plane from the male voyeur. Thus the image machine itself, through contiguous association with the woman's body and through its ability to reproduce that body as an image which disavows its inherent threat of lack, becomes the fetish-object **par excellence** of all Méliès films.

Perhaps the most complex illustration of the inscription of women's bodies within the voyeuristic and fetishistic regime of cinema occurs in Méliès' 1903 film **The Magic Lantern**. In a children's play room two clowns, a Pulcinella and a Pierrot, build a giant magic lantern to which they attach a lens. When they place a light (burning torch) in it, it projects a series of circularly framed moving images upon the wall of the playroom. The progression of these images is significant: a static landscape is followed by close-ups of a man and a woman in eighteenth century wigs flirting with one another against the background of the same landscape (fig. 26); finally we see the clowns themselves projected in close-up upon the wall. With this progression Méliès demonstrates the power of his toy which, like the machine in **Long Distance Wireless Photography**, is once again a metaphor for the cinematic apparatus. Thus we discover the ability of this apparatus to 1)

document external reality (the landscape), 2) represent a fictional world (the characters in 18th century dress), and 3) confuse the categories of real and imaginary in a gesture of reflexivity (the projection of the clowns from the "real" world into the fictional space on the wall).

After this brief anticipation of the entire history of film art, the two clowns become curious about the internal workings of the machine producing this magic (or perhaps they are like the naive spectator who suspects that the machine itself houses the people and objects it produces). They dismantle the box to discover that it contains a whole bevy of beauties attired in long dresses and hats who do a little dance in front of the dismantled machine. This process of dismantling is repeated several times to yield a pair of women in clown suits who do another dance, exit, and then perform two more choruses of dances, this time dressed in scanty **tutus**.

The two clowns interrupt the dancers to battle with one another center stage. Soldiers with drawn sabres arrive to restore order. They march around the two clowns and force them to climb into the magic lantern. When the soldiers re-open the box, the clowns have been transformed into a single giant jack-in-the-box. Pulcinella capable of extending itself to a height twice that of a normal human. As this jack-in-the-box moves up and down, the soldiers continue to brandish their sabres in a circle around it. Finally, the soldiers exit and all the women dancers do a circular dance around the alternating elongations and retractions of the jack-in-the-box.

Once again Méliès plays with the contrast between a two-dimensional, framed image and three-dimensional reality. And once again this contrast suggests a metaphor for the machine's ability to produce women's bodies. But while Lucy Fischer emphasizes the envious male's appropriation of female procreative powers in the construction of this machine that gives "birth" to women, I would stress instead that this spewing forth of identical female bodies only calls attention even more to the status of these bodies as totally mastered, infinitely re-producible **images** whose potential threat of castration has been disavowed by the fetish object of the machine with which they are associated. In other words, not only can this image machine be construed as a metaphor for the womb, but also and more powerfully, it can be construed as a metaphor for the penis — in particular since, as we have seen, the fetish object is always a stand-in for the fantasy of the maternal penis.<sup>27</sup> In the **Magic Lantern** this fantasy penis emerges first in the proliferating bodies of the women produced by the machine and second in the phallic protrusion of the jack-in-the-box. In fact, the shift from soldiers brandishing their sabres at this jack-in-the-box to the final dance of the women around it would seem to offer yet another variation of the drama of threatened dismemberment and integration. There is probably no greater illustration of the centrality of this fetish object in all of Méliès work than this dance of worship around the undulating phallus at the center of this giant magic lantern.

### **Conclusion: The Perverse Implantation**

In the pre-historic cinema of Muybridge and in the primitive cinema of Méliès, the unprecedented illusion of presence of the film body acutely posed the problem of sexual difference to the male image maker. Of course painting and photography had long since set precedents for the eroticization and objectification of women's bodies.<sup>28</sup> In many ways Muybridge simply follows these precedents. What is particularly striking in Muybridge, however, is the extent to which a supposedly **scientific** study of the human body elicits the surplus aesthetic qualities of incipient diegesis and mise-en-scène in the treatment of his women subjects alone. It is as if the unprecedented perceptual reality of the female body made possible by the emerging cinematic apparatus necessitated a counterbalancing fictionalization even more powerful than what could already be found in the arts of painting and still photography.

Thus what began as a scientific impulse to measure and record the "truth" of the human body, quickly became a powerful fantasization of the body of the woman aimed at mastering the threat posed by her body. This surplus of male generated erotic meaning denies the woman any meaning apart from her marks of difference from the male. As we have seen, Méliès complicates and refines this mastery over the threat of castration through the drama of dismemberment and re-integration performed on all bodies and through the celebration of the fetish function of the cinematic apparatus.

So if, as Baudry suggests, the cinematic apparatus in general affords the simulation of a lost unity with the body of the mother, then we find that some of the earliest representations of the female body within this apparatus aim at a more specific restoration of unity in the fetishistic disavowal

of castration. But if the woman's body generates a surplus aestheticism designed to disavow difference, this surplus also severely limits the meaning of this body to the two contradictory poles of the assertion and denial of sexual difference. Like the fetish which it in some ways becomes, the woman's body arrests the male's gaze just short of the site of difference. Caught between these two poles of the fetish structure of disavowal, the woman's body is perversely trapped within the contradictory assertion and denial of the fear of castration. Thus the cinema became, even before its full "invention," one more discourse of sexuality, one more form of the "implantation of perversions" extending power over the body.

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Richard Nixon was educated at Whittier College.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Michel Foucault, **The History of Sexuality**, translated by Robert Hurley, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) p. 107. Original French title: **La Volonté de savoir** (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).
2. Foucault, p. 48
3. **Camera Obscura**, 1 (Fall 1976) pp. 97-126, Translated into English by Jean Andrews and Bertrand Augst.
4. As applied to film the term suture implies the process by which the spectator as subject fills in the discontinuities and absences of a cinematic discourse which proceeds by cuts, framings and the fundamental absence of the signifier itself. The term derives from Jacques Alain Miller's discussion of Lacan's "logic of the signifier." In Miller's extension of Lacanian theory, suture describes the way the "I" created by language is both a division and a joining. Divisions of the "I" are overcome by the imaginary projections of a unitary ego to produce the fiction of the subject. In a similar way, the spectator-subject of the cinema overcomes the disunity of the cinematic discourse. See Miller, "Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier)," and Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," both in **Screen** 18 (Winter/Spring 1977-78), pp. 24-47.
5. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," **Screen** 16 (Autumn 1975), pp. 6-18.
6. See Baudry, p. 122.
7. (New York: Dover, 1955) This is the latter of the two abridgements Muybridge made of his vast and very expensive original 1887 work, **Animal Locomotion**. **Animal Locomotion** is an eleven folio volume of some 20,000 photos of animals and humans in movement. Muybridge later abridged this work into two smaller volumes: **Animals in Motion**, published in 1899 and **The Human Figure in Motion**, published in 1901. All the photosequences reproduced here are from this latter work.
8. **After the Ball** (1897) stars Méliès' mistress and future wife, Jehanne d'Alcy. The still from this film is taken from a reproduction in Paul Hammond's **Marvelous Méliès** (New York: St. Martins Press, 1975) p. 113. A more recent and thorough study of Méliès is John Frazer's **Artificially Arranged Scenes** (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1974). Frazer's book contains excellent synopses of all Méliès' extant films. Other studies include: Georges Sadoul, **Georges Méliès** (Paris: Seghers, 1961) and Maurice Bessy and Lo Duca, **Georges Méliès Mage** (Paris: Pauvert, 1961).
9. Nor does it seem entirely accidental that Muybridge concludes the male section with what could be taken as a complimentary metaphor of male ejaculation: a man with rifle falling prone on the ground and firing. The point, however, is that while the activity with the rifle reveals the male body in movement, the activity with the bed both conceals and reveals the female body in an erotically charged state of relative stasis.
10. See Lucy Fischer's analysis of a similarly masculine use of a cigarette in the Edison 1905 short **A Pipe Dream**. This film shows a woman who smokes playing with a miniature man in her hand. "The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic and the Movies," **Film Quarterly** (Fall, 1979), pp. 32-33.
11. Claire Johnston, writing with reference to an earlier article by Laura Mulvey has proclaimed the basic feminist criticism of the representation of women in film: "woman as woman" is never present. She simply comes to represent the male phallus. "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema," **Notes on Women's Cinema**, edited by Claire Johnston. **Screen**, Pamphlet 2 (London: SEFT).
12. Robert Taft. "An Introduction: Eadweard Muybridge and His Work," in *The Human Figure in Motion*, p. x.
13. **The Pleasure of the Text**, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 10.
14. "Fetishism," **Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works**, Vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1968).
15. Octave Manoni, in his book, **Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou l'autre scène**, (Paris: Seuil, 1969) pp.9-34, has emphasized the contradictory nature of this form of belief that knows itself to be false, calling it the process of "je sais bien, mais quand même..." (I know very well, but all the same...).
16. Foucault, p. 81.
17. Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," Translated by Ben Brewster; **Screen** 16 (Summer 1975), p. 72.
18. According to a letter from Méliès published in Georges Sadoul's **Georges Méliès**, p. 127.
19. Sadoul, p. 127.
20. In his **Film Biographies**, (Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1977), Stan Brakhage has much to say about Méliès' trauma of dismemberment: "Young George... completely overwhelmed, torn to pieces before what-we-would-call his 'birth' — begins as a child to invent a spirit-of-himself which will revenge him...a hero who will FREE the wickedly enchanted — or otherwise destroyed — pieces of his actual being. cause the monsters to dis-gorge the parts of his actuality; and young George, perhaps later then, begins to imagine a heroine who will restore him, a woman who will sew together or otherwise re-member his actual being." p. 17. Although I cannot agree with this attribution of dismemberment to "young George's" fetus, or to the supposition that a woman would "re-member" his being — quite the reverse seems to be the case in both instances — Brakhage does correctly identify the primary concerns of much of Méliès' cinema.
21. Frazer lists this as the correct title of the film, p. 127. There are, however, some super 8 prints bearing the title **The Magic Box**.
22. An even more threatening version of this same drama occurs in the 1902 film, **Up-to-Date Surgery**, in which a Doctor diagnoses indigestion in a patient, performs an operation that cuts the patient up into many pieces, re-assembles these pieces in the wrong order, then finally in the right order.
23. Fisher. p. 30.
24. This apprehension of a female "lack" does not mean that such a lack really exists. It is a male fantasy which has been instrumental in the implantation of perversion within the cinema.
25. Sigmund Freud, **Beyond the Pleasure Principle** (New York: Bantam, 1959) pp. 32-35.
26. It is interesting to compare, in this connection, the enormous differentiation in the costumes of the male characters in all Méliès' films to the near uniformity of dress among the females e.g., the scant sailor suits of the women who help the scientists board the rocket ship in **A Trip to the Moon**, or the similar uniforms of the women in **The Kingdom of the Fairies**.
27. "Fetishism," **Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works**, p. 153.
28. See John Berger, **Ways of Seeing** (New York: Penguin Books and the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1973).
29. I would like to thank Patricia Mellencamp and Stephen Heath for suggesting the "Film Body" portion of this title and the general topic of the presence of the human figure in film. I am also indebted to Virgil Grillo and Betty Theotokatos of the University of Colorado for helping me to reproduce the Muybridge plates from **The Human Figure in Motion**, and to Andrew Lovinescu of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee for "transforming" the slides into photographs.

# THE ECONOMICS OF U.S. FILM EXHIBITION POLICY AND PRACTICE

Douglas Gomery

Film exhibition is the least examined and understood aspect of the political economy of the Hollywood system. Neo-classical economists assume neutrality for this segment of the production process; Marxists traditionally have analyzed exhibition as only an extension of Hollywood's monopoly practice. However, I argue that US film exhibition has never been neutral or a simple extension of Hollywood, but a changing, complex cluster of pleasure production, at the core of the formation of the motion picture industry's profits and power. This article will posit an intervention in the history of film exhibition, providing a re-examination of the material conditions of the reception of motion pictures and the construction of their meaning.

Economic analysis of any industry rests on certain basic assumptions concerning what goods and services are produced within a given economic system. In the United States economists define an industry as a collection of firms, a set of for-profit institutions creating one or more products. Thus, one fundamental task for economists studying US industry has concerned how best to classify profit-seeking enterprises. For the US today, for example, should one speak of a film industry on one hand, and a separate television industry on the other, given that since 1950 Hollywood giants like Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner Bros. and Columbia have produced and distributed motion pictures and video for both media? Or would it be better to lump those four firms into the leisure-time industry? In addition, the actions of such firms further complicate the problem. All modern corporations employ advertising campaigns to persuade potential customers that there are significant differences among various brands of a single good or service ("product differentiation"). Since knowledge of commodity taxonomy is fundamental to the economic analysis of industry, it becomes necessary for film scholars to understand precisely what goods and services were produced by what has been traditionally labeled the US film industry. Has the industry proffered only one commodity, or some set of goods and services? Has this offering varied over time?<sup>1</sup> Specifically, most theorists assume that the US film industry tendered some form of pleasure, but for the economic historian what cluster of goods and services produced that pleasure?<sup>2</sup> Film historians and theorists alike have long focused upon narrative motion pictures as the **single** source of consumption. In the rest of this article I shall examine other material factors concerned with "going to the movies," and analyze the changing form of the commodity presented as "movie theatre" entertainment.<sup>3</sup>

Recently, for many reasons, film scholars have expended a disproportionate amount of energy analyzing US films from the classic 1930s period. Certainly, one reads over and over again, that during that epoch the US film industry produced a single commodity, narrative motion pictures, and exhibited them in theatres. My analysis of commodity exchange begins with that generalization, and challenges it on two grounds: (1) US exhibitors, since 1915, always offered a **cluster** of goods and services, far more than simply narrative entertainment of film, and (2) this pleasure production fundamentally changed between 1930 and 1938, precisely the area historians have traditionally considered the most stable. Obviously motion pictures always comprised part of the cluster of goods and services offered by exhibitors, but never one hundred percent, and always in a changing relationship to other factors of production. The whole of the bundle functioned as the exhibitor's commodity, and thus it is important to understand how, when and why it changed in terms of the economics of the industry.

From the end of the nickelodeon era (1907-1914) to the 1930s, the dominant form of exhibition in the United States was the "presentation cinema." By 1923 such cinemas accounted for three-quarters of US box-office revenue, and an even greater proportion of profits. All such theatres offered shows of equal portions of live performance [the presentation] and motion pictures (features, shorts, and newsreels). Picture palaces housed these spectacles; lighting displays and performers turned each show into a unique theatrical event.<sup>4</sup> Revenues accrued only from admission fees.

Presentation-cinema entertainment opened with a musical overture from a house orchestra of twenty-five to one hundred members. Next came the presentation (a stage show), a newsreel, short subjects, and the feature film. Exhibitors tried to limit a complete show to two hours, sometimes even cutting the feature by several minutes rather than lose possible crowd turn-over. Sid Grauman in Los Angeles, Sam Katz in Chicago, and Roxy in New York are usually credited with initiating extensive presentations circa 1915. By 1923 the presentation-cinema had become the industry standard, with three predominant strategies for organization: the "pure" presentation, the "variety" show, and the "headliner" attraction. The "pure" presentation offered a revue constructed around a single theme, for example, a holiday motif, a current fad, or a local celebration. Radio City Music Hall in New York City continues in this tradition. A subset of the "pure" presentation, the "prologue," tied this theme to one found in the feature film. Sid Grauman championed the "prologue," but outside the far West few copied his style. Much more popular was the "pure" presentation, pioneered so successfully in Chicago by Balaban & Katz. By 1926 "pure" presentations were utilized in all Paramount/Publix theatres, the industry's largest chain. Roxy proposed an alternative, the "variety" show, by copying forms popular in the vaudeville theatre. This strategy soon grew to be very expensive as Roxy and others began to raid the Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit for talent. New York's Loew's chain, the parent company for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, pioneered the "headliner" form. One singer like Gilda Gray or All Jolson, or bands like those of Paul Whiteman or Vincent Lopez, would fill thirty minutes. The "headliner" approach, with the exception of Radio City Music Hall, would be the sole strategy to survive into the 1930s.<sup>5</sup>

Regional chains like Balaban & Katz in the Midwest or Stanley in Philadelphia mounted the most expensive presentations.<sup>6</sup> Smaller independently owned houses imitated as cost schedules permitted. With the coming of sound, exhibitors immediately eliminated live entertainment and added filmed stage shows — vaudeville shorts. Only a handful of the largest US theatres, 4,000 seat houses in America's ten largest cities, retained live performers. The presentation-cinema became all-movies by 1931.<sup>7</sup> But as this transformation was taking place, the Great Depression began — with a sharp decrease in attendance and revenues, and a significant change in relative prices for all factors of production. In response, exhibitors sought to lower costs, locate fresh sources of revenue dollars, and differentiate their product. Moving toward the latter goal during 1930 and 1931, theatre owners began to offer more feature films (double, even triple bills) and fewer vaudeville shorts. Double features, a two-for-one policy, had begun in 1915, but throughout the 1920s few exhibitors practiced such a strategy. Alternatively, other theatre owners initiated give-aways (pillows, chinaware, bicycles, silk stockings, lamps, and watches) and/or games: normal bingo (with free tickets as prizes), bingo presented from a short film ('screeno'), or horse races shown on film, for which patrons who held the winning number received prizes or free tickets.

However in 1933, the US federal government National Recovery Administration, the NRA,

prohibited all give-aways and games as "unfair competition." Consequently more and more theatre owners turned to double bills. The US Supreme Court did declare the NRA unconstitutional in May, 1935, and quickly some exhibitors reinstituted give-aways and/or games. But by then the double feature strategy had become institutionalized, and would function as the dominant US exhibition strategy well into the 1950s. And even more importantly Hollywood producers had taken over all the important regional chains of the 1920s. The first-run houses of the major chains tendered double bills, but not in the numbers of their independent competitors. The mix varied. Some exhibitors presented two or more A films, others an A and B, still others three B's. Theatre owners constantly varied combinations in order to gain an edge on nearby competitors.<sup>8</sup>

Exhibitors sought other non-filmic methods by which to attract more customers. One innovation was air-conditioning. First presented in Balaban & Katz houses in Chicago in 1917, during the 1920s only the most profitable, large downtown houses could afford this sizable investment. By 1930 only 400 (of approximately 20,000) US motion picture theatres offered "climate control." During the 1930s, with Carrier's development of a compact, relatively inexpensive apparatus, many exhibitors installed a system for air-cooling and/or humidity control, usually just the former. Extensive use of Carrier's new inventions at the Chicago World's Fair during the summers of 1933 and 1934 generated familiarity and favorable publicity. US movie houses functioned as the sole institution offering such service at prices affordable to middle and lower income US citizens. Generally throughout the 1930s and 1940s air-conditioned spaces remained the purview of the rich in their homes, expensive restaurants, Pullman cars, executive offices, or grand hotels. Indeed for this period the number of **fully** air-cooled and dehumidified movie theatres did not exceed 3,000 (before the institution of construction restrictions for World War II). Many smaller theatres only **cooled** the air — sometimes with indifferent results. All-in-all many, if not a majority of US citizens, had their first taste of the pleasure of cool, dehumidified air during hot periods of weather in motion picture theatre.<sup>9</sup>

But exhibitors also desired new sources of revenue, and so began to sell a complementary good, food, rather than continue to let customers buy from nearby confectionary stores or popcorn wagons. During the 1920s exhibitors sold only candy. Because at that time theatre owners kept their auditoriums very dark, and had ushers lead patrons to their seats, pre-packaged candy could be most easily handled. It required little investment, special knowledge, or expertise on the exhibitor's part. Still, a majority of theatre owners in the twenties did not sell candy; few presentation houses did. Sales of food did not fit the "high class" image such deluxe operations sought. With the coming of the Great Depression, theatre owners fired their ushers, turned up the auditorium lights, and let patrons find their own seats. More over, all immediately added candy sales, and began to experiment by marketing other foods. Popcorn soon emerged as the cornerstone of refreshment operations. Unlike candy, it possessed a seemingly addictive aroma which filled lobbies before the movies began and during intermissions. Popcorn was easy to acquire and manufacture, and seemed to appeal to movie goers of all ages. Moreover popcorn functioned as what economists label an "inferior" good. Like other cheap starches, or poor cuts of meat, as incomes go down, people consume more, not less. To complement the salty popcorn, exhibitors introduced an array of cold, soft drinks. Soon suppliers developed beverage dispensing equipment to solve the problem of individual glass bottles rolling and breaking in the auditorium.

Native Americans had developed popcorn. Immigrants to the US, using horse-drawn wagons, popularized it as a snack food. By 1900 popcorn wagons had become commonplace in urban shopping districts, fairs, outdoor concerts, circuses, political rallies, parades, and other popular culture attractions, and with the coming of the nickelodeons, soon were a familiar sight outside such enterprises. Still theatre owners refused to market any food inside their lobbies because they deemed such behavior "vulgar," not in keeping with the dignified image they wished to project. Popcorn was considered messy, foul smelling, and too noisy to make — all traits associated with lower class entertainment. During the Great Depression theatre owners ignored these past associations. Sales skyrocketed. Chains, utilizing their considerable resources, drove "mom-and-pop" popcorn wagons out of business by purchasing the corn in rail-car lots and reaping huge discounts. A 15 cent box of popcorn cost only 3 cents for raw materials — container, oil, and corn. Even counting wage, overhead, and depreciation of equipment, the profit rate usually exceeded 100 percent. Thus it was not surprising that by 1947, nearly 90 percent of US movie houses sold popcorn. The lone holdout was the Loew's chain, owner of MGM. Often sales of refreshments matched or exceeded box-office revenues. An exhibitor's maxim became "find a good popcorn location, and build a theatre around it." Not too sur-

prisingly, popcorn became a major US crop. In 1900 there were 20,000 US acres devoted to popcorn; by 1920 the figure reached 60,000; and in 1948 over 300,000 US acres were planted with this movie-house favorite. Sales of soft drinks (Coca Cola dominated here), and later, buttered popcorn, pushed revenues and profits even higher.<sup>10</sup>

As part of this double-feature strategy (multiple features, air-conditioning and refreshments), exhibitors ritualized the intermission. The first feature would end, the house lights would go up, and the patrons would rush to the lobby to purchase popcorn, candy, and colas. Trailers would signal a return to movie entertainment. The form became narrative, food, narrative in a discrete but continuous pattern. Other services, standard during the presentation era, were eliminated. Theatre lobbies and auditoria (as well as exteriors) were left to rundown. Less was spent on upkeep, most potential light sources for the stage and auditorium were covered over or left unlit. and fewer and fewer ushers were hired. New "deco" or "international-style" there (about five percent of any city's total) were downright barren compared to their pre-Depression counterparts. The decorative displays of the Oriental, Tivoli, or Egyptian became icons symbolizing another era. During the 1950s a third alternative — the feature-film strategy — would emerge, and is still with us. But we should not assume, as many seem to do, that this feature-film strategy even approximates a typical theatre's offerings prior to or after the Great Depression.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, during the Great Depression exhibitors replaced the presentation-cinema with the double-feature cinema. Theatre owners eliminated, with rare exceptions, all live performance, and added more feature length films. The double feature, even the triple feature, became the industry norm. Out went lighting shows, and architectural splendor. More importantly, exhibitors modified their offerings by adding air-conditioning, and selling food for the first time. Movie theatres tendered unique climate control; no other leisure-time industry offered relief from heat and humidity. For revenue formation, sales of popcorn at times overtook box-office revenues. Consequently, precisely at the time that Hollywood's giant corporations vertically integrated and solidified their monopoly position, they significantly altered the product their chain theatres supplied, and then reaped the profits of the "double-feature" cinema. Many scholars have examined the effects of the Great Depression on the US film industry. Overlooked have been the important changes which were taking place in film exhibition during this period.

This short intervention suggests at least three ramifications for how we understand film exhibition. Most narrowly, with the creation of the double-feature cinema, there were changes in production (for example, the rise of the "B" film, the development of new genres), and distribution (the rigidification of the run-zone-clearance system for monopolizing box-office revenues).<sup>12</sup> The Hollywood majors (Fox, RKO, Warners, MGM, and Paramount) even permitted companies which only produced "B" films — Monogram and Republic. Second, my analysis challenges traditional economic measures of a Hollywood film's significance: box-office revenues, distributors' revenues, or even the seldom seen world-wide film grosses. Indeed most scholars provide only estimates for box-office receipts for major US cities — the information found in weekly **Variety** and other trade papers. Since 1930 any profit figures must include refreshment receipts and costs. Before that economic historians and others must account for the effect of presentations. The data historians and critics have traditionally utilized seems very biased. Finally, this paper proposes that film scholars re-examine the material conditions of the experience of "going to the movies." For the double-feature cinema, consumers purchased a cluster of goods and services: pleasure from motion pictures, food and climate control, a complex semiotic system critical to audience's constructions of meaning. Semiotic and psychanalytic theory would seem to argue that such considerations must be important for the reception of films.<sup>13</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1. Such questions provide the basis for how Marxist economists understand capitalism. Marx began **Das Capital** with a chapter on commodity definition. See Karl Marx, **Capital**, Volume I (New York: International Publishers, 1976), pp. 35-40.
2. For a discussion of the concept of pleasure in relation to the cinema industry, see Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," **Screen** 16, No. 2 (Summer, 1975), pp. 18-20. In a recent interview Metz notes the difficulty and importance of "doing the economic history of the development of the industry with the metapsychology of the spectator." See Sandy Flitterman et al. "The Cinematic Apparatus as Social institution — An Interview with Christian Metz," **Discourse I**, No. 1 (Fall, 1979), pp. 9-10.
3. For neo-classical views on the importance of commodity definition see Paul Samuelson, **Economics**, 10th edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), pp. 432-433, 487-491, 536-537, and Richard Bilas, **Microeconomic Theory** (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp. 96-98, 173-175. A summary from a leading Marxist economist can be found in Paul M. Sweezy, **The Theory of Capitalist Development** (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp. 23-24, 56-59.
4. For an analysis of the economics of motion picture exhibition in relationship to picture palaces, see Douglas Gomery, "The Picture Palace: Economic Sense or Hollywood Nonsense," **The Quarterly Review of Film Studies** III, No. 1, (Winter, 1978), pp. 23-36. Most writers wax nostalgically about these theatres of pleasure and ignore their important economic functions as part of a systems of monopoly.
5. **Variety**, April 1, 1926, p. 36; **Variety**, March 10, 1926, p. 35; Eric T. Clarke, "An Exhibitor's Problems in 1925," **Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers**, January, 1926, p. 49; Eric T. Clarke, "An Exhibitor's Problems in 1927," **Society of Motion Picture Engineers Transactions**, IX (1927), p. 453; Ben M. Hall, **The Best Remaining Seats** (New York: C.N. Potter, 1961), p. 208; Lewis W. Townsend and William W. Hennessy, "Some Novel Motion Picture Presentations," **Society of Motion Picture Engineer's Transactions**, XII (1928), p. 349.
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8. Robert W. Chambers, "The Double Feature as a Sales Problem," **Harvard Business Review**, 16, No. 2 (Winter, 1938), pp. 231-232; Edward R. Beach, "Double Features in Motion Picture Exhibition," **Harvard Business Review**, 19, No. 4 (July, 1932), p. 506; Douglas Gomery, "Hollywood, the National Recovery Administration, and the Question of Monopoly Power," **Journal of the University Film Association**, XXXI, No. 2 (Spring, 1979), pp. 50-52.
9. Jack Alicoate (ed.), **The Film Daily Yearbook - 1931** (New York: Film Daily, 1931), pp. 920, 927-28; R.E. Cherne, "Developments in Refrigeration as Applied to Air Conditioning," **Ice and Refrigeration**, CI (1941), p. 30; Oscar E. Anderson, **Refrigeration in America** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 310-313. "Here's Where Air Conditioning Is Used," **Heating, Piping and Ventilating** XII (September, 1940), 547.
10. Perry Lowe, "NAC President Sees the Beginning of the End," **Boxoffice** 115, No. 34 (November 19, 1979), pp. M1-M8; Douglas Gomery, "The Growth of Movie Monopolies: The Case of Balaban & Katz," **Wide Angle** 3, No. 1, pp. 54-63; John F. Barry and Epes W. Sargent, **Building Theatre Patronage** (New York: Chalmers, 1927); Harold B. Franklin, **Motion Picture Management** (New York: George H. Doran, 1927); Jack Alicoate (ed.), **The Film Daily Yearbook - 1952** (New York: Film Daily, 1952), p. 630; Mabel Guinan, "The History of Popcorn," **Boxoffice**, 113, No. 6 (May 15, 1978), pp. 22-26; "Cash in the Lobby," **Business Week**, March 15, 1947, p. 22 and various information sheets from the Popcorn institute, a trade association, Chicago, Illinois, 1979.
11. Ben Schlanger, "Motion Picture Theatres," in Talbot Hamlin (ed.), **Forms and Functions of Twentieth Century Architecture**, Volume III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 453-477; Dennis Sharp, **The Picture Palace** (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 151-160; Douglas Gomery, "Movie Exhibition in Milwaukee, 1906-1947: A Short History," **Milwaukee History**, 2, No. 1 (Spring, 1979), pp. 8-17.
12. As Hollywood corporations vertically integrated, their chains set up a pattern of release to generate the most possible revenue for any film ("admission price discrimination"). Then these firms could extract the maximum surplus profits in a system of exhibition with no presentations. See Michael Canant, **Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), pp. 58-82.
13. Perry Lowe, "How to Double Your Refreshment Sales and Profits," **Boxoffice** 115, No. 37 (December 10, 1979), p. M1. This paper is a fragment from the author's Gomery's larger study of the economic history and significance of motion picture exhibition in the United States.

# THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI

## CONDITIONS OF RECEPTION

Michael Budd

This paper examines **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** as a way of studying, within a particular historical juncture, two interrelated problems: first, the relation between a particular text and its audiences, that relation seen as a complex matrix of interdeterminations, of pressures and constraints; and second, the relation between mass culture and modernism, an opposition cutting across both the specific signifying practices of the film and its multiple receptions.

If, as Theodore Adorno has suggested, "mediation is in the object itself, not something between the object and that to which it is brought,"<sup>1</sup> then specific relations and conditions of reception will mark a film as strongly as those of production: certain readings potential to the work are activated, others ignored, and it ought to be possible to identify through examination of extra-textual determinants and indicators of meaning, the particular textual strategies and characteristics which have been made salient by the historical context in which real subjects view the film. Readings are determined not only by the structuration of the text, but by the subjective and social situation into which that text is inserted. Clearly, the case for specifying an audience's reading of a film is an inescapably incomplete and speculative one. All that can reasonably be argued are limits and pressures, the terms and conditions of possibility. But such an argument is crucial if we are to avoid the limitations of the concept of the ideal reader, either as determined in ideology by texts, or as always already free and fully conscious. Stephen Heath has argued that

signifying practices are subject productions...: productions of the subject, productions by the subject;... subject production as a give-and-take of precise constituted materiality and particular work of signification...<sup>2</sup>

Both subject and text are part of an historical context which will mediate and be mediated by their relation.

**The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** is a particularly apt film for examining the relation between a text and its reception, because the text itself is so contradictory, so riven with internal tensions and gaps, while its reception history includes not only mass culture with its pressures toward commodification, but also the avant-garde and its modernist practices. Contemporary audiences were deeply divided, but these audiences probably did not see "different" films in any simple way; more likely, they used the film for different purposes by reading its salient features in opposing ways<sup>3</sup> Across the film's textual split, specific conditions of reception helped to determine the readings of the film by two very different contemporary audiences.<sup>4</sup>

**Caligari** was distributed in the United States by Sam Goldwyn: it opened at the Capitol Theatre, one of New York's largest and most prestigious houses, on April 3, 1921.<sup>5</sup> After breaking house records there for a week, it played at the Ziegfield in Chicago for three weeks, and an undetermined number of other theaters across the country during May and June.<sup>6</sup> Thus the film became a crucial point in the transformation of Expressionism from an avant-garde into a mass cultural phenomenon. In Germany, Erich Pommer, the film's producer, was popularizing a minority taste. In the United States, Expressionism was virtually unknown: reviewers, commentators, and advertisers showed no knowledge of the movement or the style, and frequently labelled the film impressionistic, cubistic, or futuristic.<sup>7</sup> Outside the subculture of Expressionism in particular and modernism in general, **Caligari** could be commodified, its context for signification dispersed and reorganized. A specialized art style was brought out of the cafés, art galleries, and other esoteric haunts of Berlin and other large European cities, and into the machinery of the culture industry. In the United States, three interlocking discourses both indicate and help determine the reading intended, if not necessarily fully realized, by that culture industry: reviews, advertising (the discourses of publicity), and the exhibition situation, which can actually change the text. All three discourses attempted to naturalize, to a greater or lesser degree, the transgressive settings, as well as other incompletely consumable aspects of the film.

Reviews are notoriously unreliable sources of information about audience responses, but it seems to me possible to suggest their status as indicators as well as determinants of meaning in a symptomatic reading. The major problem of **Caligari**, the relation of settings to narrative, was addressed by three reviews in remarkably similar ways. Even assuming that reviewers copy one another, the similarity reveals an interesting pattern.

...the settings are the background, or rather an inseparable part, of a fantastic story of murder and madness such as Edgar Allan Poe might have written. This story is coherent, logical, a genuine legitimate thriller, and after one has followed it through several scenes the weird settings seem to be of its substance and no longer call disturbing attention to themselves.

**New YorkTimes**, April 4, 1921

The impressionistic treatment of the backgrounds fits the picture perfectly and you forget their bizarre and contrasting appearance as the story unfolds. The top-heavy houses, crooked streets, odd ground clothes reflect the mood of the characters appearing in them.

**Exhibitor's Herald**, April 23, 1921

The first hundred shocks are the hardest. After that, the eternal zig-zag, the leaning walls, the demoniacal eccentricity of the lines become accepted things. After all, they form a background only; the story is strong enough in mystery and suspense to keep front stage. The two main elements — story and setting — are completely attuned in mood...

**New York Evening Post**, April 4, 1921

A unity and harmony of elements presumably characterizes "art," but the conventions of Hollywood realism subordinate style to narrative. The contradiction between the idealist aesthetic and these conventions threatens to become visible only when a film like **Caligari** proposes, implicitly, a new norm for the unification of elements, at a new level of stylization. The insistent foregrounding of mise-en-scène threatens to make "inseparable but unequal" into

"inseparable but equal," disturbing the regulation of attention of classical narrative cinema. But during viewing, old habits are able to reassert themselves after a brief struggle, with the help of the film's tight, efficient narrative action, which puts the settings back in their place.<sup>8</sup> With less knowledge of aesthetics, the experience of paying customers might nevertheless be similar. If so, viewing the film would reproduce a significant cultural tension in the temporary dysfunction of reading as consumption. Across a single viewing would be staged, in miniature, the accommodation of the more radical, modernist elements of Expressionist style into the homogeneity and closure of classical narrative. I suspect that the process is never completed, though: curiosity and mystification probably brings people into the theaters initially, but too many disturbances remain for the film to become a fully efficient part of the commodity culture.

Like reviews, advertising seeks to adapt the subject to the text. But ads are much more aggressive in their naturalizing: whereas the **New York Times** will reassure its readers that the story, foundation and teleology, is "coherent, logical, a genuine and legitimate thriller,"<sup>9</sup> ads will attempt to foreground characters and stars, make Expressionism into a novelty, multiply images of women as attractions, and keep the whole thing dignified, as befits a European art film. To assimilate the film into the discourse of publicity, advertising must address the problem presented, symptomatically, in reviews — the relation between story and setting.

Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 are of the four full-page ads in the April 23, 1921 issues of **Moving Picture World** and **Motion Picture News**, trade publications read by theater managers. As advertising for advertisers, in a period when many theaters had to provide all their own publicity, they are perhaps both determinative and indicative of the kind of appeal subsequently made to the public. At this relatively early stage in the history of movie marketing, a systematic and ingenious strategy (the "marketing concept") is already evident. Saliency is given to novelty, box-office success, and the suspenseful story, while the film's German origins become "European" (much anti-Germah prejudice existed during this period). In figure 2 the authority of New York reviews is invoked. Novelty and uniqueness predominate in Figure 3. For Americans, the film did indeed as the copy says, "drop like a lightning bolt into the amusement world." Out of context, its origins both cultural and national deliberately obscured, it's not surprising that some Americans might find the film unhealthy or "degenerate" when they found out it was German. The liberal, cosmopolitan image that Goldwyn cultivated with importations like **Caligari** is contradicted by the accompanying mystifications, which could easily generate prejudice from ignorance. (See figure 4.) And the obscuring of artistic context is equally relevant: Expressionism's extreme subjectivism, its attribution of representational "distortion," abstraction, and fragmentation to the pure emotional expression of a transcendent artist, made it, of all styles in the modernist pantheon, perhaps the most vulnerable to a naturalization in which the transcendent artist becomes a character, whose pure expression becomes, in turn, madness.<sup>10</sup> Mystification of the film's origins makes possible its insertion into mass culture; the naturalization of Expressionism helps make possible the attribution of madness to a whole nation.

As Figure 5 illustrates, that naturalization, though, is never complete, the excess never wholly contained. These are black and white reproductions of the color one, three, and six sheet posters distributed by Goldwyn. Roland Barthes, John Berger, and others direct us to the importance of captions. There, the posters "will attract attention no matter what the observer may think of their art qualifications." A modernist art is problematic for advertising; its purpose must be redirected; it must, above everything attract attention. The accompanying story, top right, ends by arguing that the posters "fairly shriek from their stands." If that sounds like a paraphrase of an art historian's description of an Expressionist painting, it's because the scream of protest of early Expressionism against the material world in the name of spirit contains the dialectical kernel of the advertising hype. Adorno's critique is instructive here: "The more the I of Expressionism is thrown back upon itself, the more like the excluded world of things it becomes."<sup>11</sup> The Expressionist's desperate cry lends itself to inflection across the cash nexus.

The large middle poster is also interesting visually. Typically, the threat to the woman has been selected for emphasis; Jane's function in the narrative as spectacle and token of exchange is commodified even further, her costume emphasized in an attempt to accommodate Expressionist style to the world of fashion. The poster might almost be recaptioned, "New fashion sensation from Europe draws male glances at the fair." Woman attracts the look, but cannot return it, and Cesare's glance resembles that of the male spectator's, who nevertheless does not have to confront the resemblance.



Figure 1



Figure 3



Figure 5



Figure 7



Figure 2



Figure 4



Figure 6



If the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation's theater poster attempts to interest the female spectator in Jane's costume as a possible way of selling dresses as well as movies, the publicity stills in Figure 6 go considerably further in extracting Expressionist elements from the film and transforming them beyond recognition into the consumable. Here is marketing with a vengeance: shorn of any meaningful context, misnamed, nothing is left of Expressionism except the graphic style itself, and here that style itself virtually disappears. What viewer would know, or care, that this is neither Expressionism nor Impressionism? An avant garde art style is here nothing but a vague patina, a component in the manufacture of glamour. If Expressionism can be made into a fashion, its cultural prestige will circulate through the Goldwyn image and its stars. But alas, the attempt is unsuccessful. Perhaps the publicists' imaginations are inadequate, or the recalcitrant public has discovered some unexpunged Germanic element...

The American Legion of Los Angeles detected a Germanic element, and organized a major demonstration against it. "Out with him!" The film opened at Miller's Theater, one of Los Angeles' largest, on Saturday, May 7, 1921, and ex-soldiers were there to picket all afternoon.

By night the demonstration had assumed monster proportions. The streets in the neighborhood of the theatre were packed for blocks and street car and automobile traffic was interfered with. Long lines of protestants armed with banners bearing patriotic legends marched up and down in front of the theatre. At 8:30 o'clock, Fred Miller, manager of the theatre, announced that the film would be taken off and "The Money Changers" substituted.<sup>12</sup>

The next morning, Fred Miller put this ad (Figure 7) in the Los Angeles papers, and **Moving Picture World** later featured the ad in its "Selling the Picture to the Public" section as an exemplary way to cut losses through clever advertising.<sup>13</sup> "Out with him!" Even in its failures to enter American mass culture, **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** is revealing. With Goldwyn's help, exhibitors like Miller had attempted to hide the film's German origins; when discovered and punished, they flaunted it, even exploiting anti-German sentiment to put distance between themselves and the film. As Goldwyn's posters and publicity stills helped to put the disturbing settings back in their place, the film is here equated with one of its characters. Representing the now unnameable film is a German abductor of women. (Perhaps there is a lesson here regarding the relation of bigotry to the aims of corporate capitalism and its servant, publicity.) When the story broke, Goldwyn Pictures was in trouble, because its exchange managers were then holding their annual convention in Los Angeles. The chairman of the board, F.J. Godsol, assured them that **Caligari**

was the only German picture that Goldwyn was interested in and that this film was merely distributed by and not owned by Goldwyn. Godsol said further that Goldwyn had no intention of releasing any other German pictures.<sup>14</sup>

Goldwyn could benefit from prejudice as well as what was only apparently opposite, the internationalism of glamorous foreign imports; both were useful in the maximization of profit.

In Germany, meanwhile, the advertising slogan suggested a psychologizing reading: "You must become Caligari."<sup>15</sup> The viewer/customer's subjectivity was placed in the same mode as a character's, the imperative voice linked Caligari's demonic compulsion with the prospective ticket-buyer's compulsion to experience the film, and in line with the film's own strategies, attention was diverted from the mediating figure of Frances, whom the viewer does become in a more problematic and potentially disturbing sense.

And yet... how effective was all this advertising? The evidence I've been able to locate suggests that the film was, at best, a moderate success in the United States, doing well in a few large cities, but dying in the summer heat.<sup>16</sup> How vertiginous, how unconsumable the film must have been in 1921! It was not enough for publicity to prepare subjects for the difficulties of the text. The text itself had to be changed to produce less noticeable shifts in subject-positioning.

This was the purpose for the addition of a stage prologue and epilogue, written for the film's

opening at the Capitol in New York and, according to the **Motion Picture News** of June 18, 1921, "used by practically every exhibitor who has shown the picture."<sup>17</sup> In an unusual move, the **News** printed the prologue and epilogue in full, with lines and business, so that its readers might stage it themselves as part of the whole presentation of which feature films were only a part during that period. Prologues and epilogues were not uncommon then, especially in bigger theaters, but they were not ordinarily narratives; instead, they established a mood with songs and dances appropriate to the film they framed, often shifting into and out of the film as smoothly as possible with matching movements and lighting. Here are the prologue and epilogue to **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari**; remember that the film ends with the doctor examining Francis, with the title, "I think I know how to cure him now."

### Prologue

(Curtains part to disclose a spacious room, with the glow from a lighted fireplace at left, while through a large library window at the rear streams soft moonlight. At a table between the window and the fireplace the figures of two men are outlined but not fully disclosed. The dialogue begins as soon as the curtain has risen.)  
Cranford — (Seated and speaking to his companion.)

"I believe you know that I am not given to imagining things — I deal in fact and ignore fancies — and yet I cannot express to you in words the intense distaste that grew on me the nearer I drew to my goal. There was something positively malignant and unnatural in the density of the twisted creepers and shrubbery. That I continued to force my way through the dark, green foliage was due entirely to my pride and not to any liking of my adventure. As I struggled on in the tangled thicket suddenly the green wall in front of me parted easily to my touch and I plunged breathless, confused and shivering with a nameless dread, out of that unhealthy green welter onto a gravelled path which wound away toward the house. Facing me on a marble seat green with mold sat a young man who appeared in no wise surprised at my advent, but more as if he had been expecting me. He was tall and slender, with haunted eyes set in a sad and sensitive face. As I went toward him, he arose and greeted me simply. Being somewhat of a recluse, he said, it was rarely visitors came his way, but they were none the less welcome. He seemed like a man sleepwalking in a horrid nightmare, and his need to talk was so apparent that despite the warning of danger that prickled my skin I sat down beside him on the ancient seat. "Did you ever hear of 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari?'" he asked me abruptly. As I shook my head and started to reply, he laid an admonitory hand on my arm and looked toward the house. Along the pathway came a maiden moving as if in a dream"

(Curtains close, lights out, fade into first scene of picture, showing two characters in garden, with girl in white coming slowly down path.)

### Epilogue

(Same scene as in prologue. Fire has banked down to glowing embers. On the table the great candles are low in their sockets. A blue haze of cigar smoke rests lightly on the atmosphere. As the scene is disclosed, Cranford rises to his feet, stretches his arms high above his head, then turns quickly to Janes as the latter, who has been comfortably sprawled out in his chair presumably throughout the narrative, struggles up alertly into a sitting posture. Janes' whole attitude expresses intense questioning, but before he can speak, Cranford raises an emphatic finger.)

Cranford —

"And he did! Francis Purnay is today a prosperous jeweler in Edenwald, happily married, with a couple of healthy, normal children. And the strangest thing about his recovery is the lapse of memory that accompanies it. He is like a man suddenly awakened from a bad dream and unable to remember any detail of its horror. The name 'Dr. Caligari,' today means no more to him than Smith or Jones. He has completely forgotten his hallucination!"<sup>18</sup>

The film participates to some degree in the Expressionist convention of universalized character names by leaving off most last names. Of course Erich Pommer intended the film for international release, and so first names and locations are generally non-Germanic; again, Expressionist style lends itself to commodification. The process begun in production is completed in consumption: the new frame added to the film fills in last names that are vaguely English or American (Cranford, Purnay, Janes, Smith and Jones).

The character who listens to Francis' story in the film is a potentially problematic one, since he seems to be an inmate of the asylum, but must also serve as stand-in for the viewer at the crucial moment of the revelation of Francis' madness, when he recoils at the protagonist's ravings as a cue for our own response. The new, second frame attempts to contain the sliding of this function, probably invisible to most viewers, by making the listener a sane "anchor," an authoritative reference point outside the original text. The men's faces are not seen, so the listener can become Cranford. Setting and first words ("fact" over "fancy") sketch in the appropriate subjectivity for the narrator. Elaborate description establishes that the listener comes from **outside** the asylum, explaining how he could be neither doctor nor inmate. Doubt is immediately cast on Francis' sanity, something most viewers of the original film probably perceive only retrospectively. The enunciation of the film is attributed to a responsible source: that the listener is not present for Francis' incarceration only helps confuse his narration with omniscience. It is Cranford who produces space and time for narrative, as he tells a beginning of the garden scene which the film now only completes. Through these strategies, almost ruthlessly functional and efficient as narrative, the prologue/epilogue acts as script doctor, naturalizer. Questions are answered, homogeneity reinforced, the film adjusted for mass consumption. It's now easier, more obvious (though still difficult) to attribute the Expressionist settings to Francis' madness, since sanity is now more clearly delineated as an area of closure. That closure is not only narrative but stylistic: the prologue and epilogue help solve the problem implicitly acknowledged by the reviewers, by helping the audience to read pictorial deviations through, behind the recuperating categories of character and narrative; two-dimensional pictorial space becomes subordinate to three-dimensional diegetic space.

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In contrast to the milieu of publicity within which most people saw **Caligari**, there was the institutional context of European modernism, centering in Paris, in the little cine-clubs and journals, the intellectual and artistic ferment of the twenties there. As one of the first films to incorporate modern painting (even in a narrative context), **Caligari** was frequently shown and discussed in these avant-garde contexts, faking an early place in the development of theory and polemic about film within the modernist currents that produced the impressionist, dadaist, cubist, and surrealist experiments. **Caligari** was useful in the general argument that film was an art (for Pommer and Goldwyn as well as for the Parisian avant-garde), and in the specific contention that its essential nature, what distinguished it from all other arts, was visual. So the avant garde probably **reversed** the priorities of the mass audience's reading, since it emphasized, at least in its published commentaries, the significance of the mise-en-scène and generally ignored narrative structure. This is true even of polemics against the film, including those by Ezra Pound and Blaise Cendrars. Anxious to promote the visual, but not connecting setting with narrative, Pound accurately attacked **Caligari** as pictorially derivative. Cendrars went further, arguing that the film was uncinematic because it did not employ techniques distinctive to film alone: "The distortions are not optical and they do not depend upon the unique angle of the camera, nor on the lens, the aperture, or focus."<sup>19</sup> The point is that the avant-garde's reading is a function of its self-conscious status as opposition to the commercial cinema. That opposition, in the twenties, centered around what Cendrars called "purification of the art,"<sup>20</sup> isolation and emphasis of a cinematic essence

against all theatrical, commercial, or other regressions. Thus **Caligari** was an important early milestone for the Parisian avant garde, but necessarily remained marginal to the movement, its transgressions against convention seen as anachronistic.

Hermann Warm, one of the set designers for **Caligari**, provided a modernist "slogan" for the film which is a perfect counterpart to Pommer's Berlin advertisement: "Films must be drawings brought to life."<sup>21</sup> The imperative voice here draws attention to the two-dimensional surface of the image rather than the interiority of a character, as part of an aesthetic polemic against, implicitly, the diegetic space of classical narrative. And yet the command also articulates the ultimate Expressionist psychologization of painting: a visual style caught between representation and abstraction, between continuity and montage, is narrativized, inflected toward conventional representation by the movement of human figures "brought to life" within it. The very aspect by which modernism lays claim to the film, and to cinema with it, is the same aspect which enables the film to take its place, however uneasily, in the commodity culture. The film's debt to Expressionism is partial and carefully limited: it grafts a visual style from painting and theatrical set design onto a conventional narrative form, ignoring the modernist experiments in Expressionist literature, poetry, and drama. **Caligari** is a transitional, excessive film in relation to the institutions of filmic modernism as well as to those of classical narrative: the profound contradiction in its form could be read in opposing ways by two opposing but interdependent audiences, its determinate cultural contexts eliciting a complex play of exchange and use values.<sup>22</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1. Theodore W. Adorno, "Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie," **Kolner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie**, XIX, 1 (March, 1967); quoted in Raymond Williams, **Keywords** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 172
2. Stephen Heath, "The Turn of the Subject," **Cine-Tracts**, Vol. 2, No. 3 & 4 (Summer and Fall 1979), p. 43.
3. Michael Budd, "Retrospective Narration in Film: Rereading **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari**," **Film Criticism**. Vol. IV, No. 1 (Fall 1979), p. 35-43; Siegfried Kracauer, **From Caligari to Hitler** (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 61-76; Noel Burch and Jorge Dana, "Propositions," **Afterimage**, No. 5 (Spring 1975), p. 44. In previous work on the film, I have attempted to delineate the internal tensions and contradictions which make possible various readings, including Kracauer's argument about conformism and Burch and Dana's modernist reading.
4. The obvious transgression of **Caligari** is its Expressionist settings; much more than its tricks with the frame story, this is the inescapable, everpresent difficulty, central to every commentary, every reading I have found of solicited. The transgression is produced by a split between (1) a classical narrative decoupage, with style a function of narrative, and (2) settings which 1) emphatically deny the reality effect, 2) foreground, contradictorily, both two and three-dimensional space, and 3) generally do not match the stylization of the narrative action which takes place within them.
5. "**The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** Premiere at Capitol During Week of April 3," **Moving Picture World**, Vol. 49, No. 5 (April 2, 1921), p. 481.
6. "**The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari** Released; Broke Records at the Capitol Theatre," **Moving Picture World**, Vol. 49, No. 8 (April 23, 1921), p. 852; "Booked for an Indefinite Run," **Moving Picture World**, Vol. 50, No. 3 (May 5, 1921), p. 501; "**Caligari** film in Big Booking Demand," **Moving Picture World**, Vol. 50, No. 6 (June 11, 1921), p. 629.
7. See, for example, P.F. Reniers, "The Screen," **New York Evening Post**, April 4, 1921; "**Caligari** Film at Capitol," **Motion Picture News**, Vol. 23, No. 16 (April 9, 1921), p. 2470; or virtually any other contemporary account.
8. Indeed, it can be argued that the film, far from being crude and theatrically primitive, is actually a relatively advanced development of the realist narrative ("invisible" editing, a complex, deceptive temporal structure, etc.), perhaps as a kind of dialectical compensation for the destabilizing influence of the Settings (Carl Mayer's influence would be crucial here). In the uneven development of classical narrative, **Caligari** is made in a period when that mode of discourse is consolidating its hegemony.
9. "**The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari**," **New York Times**, April 4, 1921
10. For most viewers, I suspect that **Caligari** paradoxically makes recuperation possible at the moment of greatest narrative transgression — the revelation of Francis' madness — by keeping the motivation for the Expressionist settings within the film itself. Though the film helped establish the tradition of art cinema, it blocks a reading as authorial vision so characteristic of that tradition.
11. Theodore Adorno, **Prisms**, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London 1967), p. 262. Quoted in Martin Jay, **The Dialectical Imagination** (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973), p. 177.
12. "Monster Demonstration Staged by Ex-Soldiers Drives **Caligari** Off Screen in Los Angeles," **Moving Picture World**, Vol. 49, No. 12 (May 21, 1921), p. 269; Figure 5 in Vol. 50, No. 4 (May 28, 1921), p. 388; Figure 6 in Vol. 50, No. 5 (June 4, 1921), p. 526.
13. "Found a Victory While Facing Supposed Defeat," **Moving Picture World**, Vol. 50, No. 4 (May 28, 1921), p. 396.
14. "Monster Demonstration," op. cit.
15. Kracauer, op. cit., p. 71.
16. I found no references to the film in either **Moving Picture World**, **Motion Picture News**, **Variety** or **Exhibitors Herald** after mid-June, 1921.
17. "Rothafel Prologue with Lines and Business," **Motion Picture News**, Vol. 23, No. 26 (June 18, 1921), p. 3693.
18. Ibid.
19. **Cinéa-Ciné**, No. 56, June 2, 1922; quoted in Standish D. Lawder, **The Cubist Cinema** (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 96-97.
20. Ibid., p. 96.
21. Kracauer, op. cit., p. 68.
22. Thanks to David Bordwell, Douglas Gomery, Clay Steinman and Phil Rosen, who helped me greatly at various stages in the preparation of this article.

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# THEATER AND CINEMA

## THE SCOPIC DRIVE, THE DETESTABLE SCREEN, AND MORE OF THE SAME

Herbert Blau

"... For they are dead, and I... I... I..."

Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*<sup>1</sup>

Some years ago I made a series of films, with Ed Emshwiller, for a theater-work I was directing. The films were projected on a large planked wall, white-washed, and suspended by two ropes from the flies. It was the only scenery for a sort of Brechtian fairy-tale about a funny old lady who was really a murderous witch and who, at one point in the play, pursued her good daughter and her soldier-lover in a mad chase around the theater, going in and out of sight until, as she was about to catch them — a lethal butcher-knife raised in the air — they veered suddenly at the wall as if to smash themselves upon it in a suicidal marriage pact and, miracle of miracles, ran right through the wall and into one of the films. The mother flourished her butcher-knife and went high-tailing after but, as the scrambled tale was told, bounced back ignominiously to the floor. It was a crude but, if I must say, rather nifty piece of stage trickery. The wall was designed like a Chinese puzzle box, triggered like a pinball machine, with a number of swinging doors and windows which figured dazzlingly in the ensuing confusion, and confusion of realms: stage and screen images pursued and combined with each other, splitting and substituting, overlaid, in displacements more bewildering than the Czech Camera Obscura, or the **mise-en-scène** of the unconscious. In the supersaturation of appearance and disappearance, the scopic drive was driven to distraction. Meanwhile, back on the floor, the wicked mother was dazed and the lovers were escaping on the film, when she picked herself up and — as if to crack the barriers of all forms, a true apostle of Mixed Media, postmodern — went hellbent at the wall, bang, like the utmost subject of desire, the desublimated apotheosis of the Nietzschean Will to Power, pure manic aggression, after them into the film. And they all disappeared down a road into a perfectly regressive dissolve going backwards with Derrida down the Originary Trace.

It wasn't the first time — this rather total reinscription of the theatrical space in the cinematic image — that I'd been involved in a literal assault on, or ontological confrontation with, the limits of a form. Sometimes, it seemed, we wanted to do away with the space entirely. In the late fifties, for instance, I had directed the production of **Waiting for Godot** that, while it had other things to recommend it, first achieved notoriety when it played at San Quentin, the first theater performance at a maximum security prison since Sarah Bernhardt had been there, early in the century. It was the production which gave a groundbreaking anecdote to **The Theater of the Absurd**.<sup>2</sup> But the barrier-breaking that concerns me now has to do with a disjunct moment in the play when Gogo, with not the faintest idea of what he's doing there or where it all began or what happened yesterday or a minute before ("I'm not a historian," he says later<sup>3</sup>) — frightening himself to death for no reason at all, which is reason enough — suddenly turns from Didi's plot-making futilities and with the full force of his desire to leave the repetitive structure of this dreadfully self-reflexive play, strikes the proscenium arch a great blow, like Samson knocking down the pillars of the Philistines, crying out for all the estranging world to hear, "I'm hungry!"<sup>4</sup>

The hunger is visceral, psychic, formal, metaphysical, paracritical — the actor's desire meeting the character's desire meeting the theater's desire (my own desire at the time) for liberation from its own limits. The blow was not actually in Beckett's script, but the violence surely was — as it was in the actual rage of the actor (and my own rage) against the predicament of an estranging profession which kept him nearly starving (he is eating now, and in the movies), and our theater on the edge of bankruptcy. So there was also rolled up in the actor's fist — in the unappeasable successions of desire — the distressing memory of the old logic of continuity in the theater, of provenance and providence, the wish-fulfilling narrative placement of being, a more accommodating structure with a better story and — in this elegiac scene on the edge of nowhere, mere appearance (with a Cartesian frame around it) — more dependable conditions of presence.

Naturally, the proscenium didn't fall. Never mind the structure at San Quentin, in our theater it was over thirty feet high pure concrete block, the unbudgeable objective correlative of a certain ordinance of power with attendant modalities of being, and consequently **seeing**, that have persisted in consciousness even when appearance was being pushed, like the rocks on Cézanne's mountain, up to the picture plane by the Sisyphean effort of modern art. If there was any secret presence in those rocks, a mysterious power to behold, it was the heroic mission of Cézanne to hold it in place on the surface. But a surface is surreptitious, and our habits of perception are stubborn. Appearance equivocates even in the upfront facet-planes of that indomitable brush until, cracking like the ice floes of **Alexander Nevsky**, the surface disappears. Or so it seems. Especially that transformative surface which Meyerhold — the great Russian theater director, teacher of Eisenstein — called "that detestable rectangle, the screen. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Meyerhold detested it because, almost as if it **were** the proscenium, which he detested too, "it can't be thrust apart"; and he understood Eisenstein's art of montage not so much as a testable proposition in a space of thought, but as the means for obliterating the rectangle from the consciousness of the spectator.<sup>6</sup> But the power of the screen, that duplicitous surface, is more self-serving than he knew, insisting on having it both ways. Which is forever troubling to the demystifiers, and the pure in mind.

In the history of the cinema, there has been an equally heroic effort to overcome the duplicity, whose ideological reference is Renaissance perspective. Even before Cinerama — that naive filmic equivalent to the "all-over" expansionism of the Action painter's canvas, at the margins of peripheral vision — there was the wide-angle lens, or superimposition, or the empty frame, or the Vertovian anomalies of composition which unsex or depopulate the site of narrative so that it seems without perspective. The vanity of this filmic enterprise has, as I've suggested, its equivalent in the theater in the determination to break down the privilege of the proscenium arch with its recessively encoded, analogical space and its imperial heritage of the one best seat. Unfortunately, such determination rarely has the ideological purpose or aesthetic resourcefulness of Meyerhold or the critical self-consciousness of Gogo's blow, a sense of its vanity, and — so far as theater structures are concerned — its material cost. In recent years, we have had the supposedly liberating presence of the thrust stage, that phallic substitute which sustains the Name of the Father without bringing us one inch closer to the Sacred Grove.

That delusion was part of the folklore of the Cultural Revolution after World War II, made affordable by the blood money of a permanent war economy with its Edifice Complex — all those new theater buildings of the fifties with their adjustable platforms and multiple pre-set switchboards and pneumatic lifts and electronic turntables with their annular rings, returning us, through all the architectural fantasy, to the unregenerate Same. It's like thinking, when you're dealing with an irremediable condition, that a change of scenery will do the trick, "Actually there was a wall, across there. . . with a door," says Teddy in Pinter's **The Homecoming**, a threshold play of the period, inspiring to a new insurgency in the theater of the sixties. "We knocked it down. . . years ago. . . to make an open living area." But Pinter equivocates too, that's his method. "The structure wasn't affected, you see. My mother was dead." And Teddy was wrong, of course, he was an academic. The Great Mother was reborn in the Age of Aquarius, at the time of the Vietnam War. Yet, even with the participatory **anima** of the Counter-Culture, in what is still called Environmental Theater — where you might sit or squat or move all over a polysemous space in a converted garage, or even dance (then) with the actors who, after a symbolic birth-giving, might embrace you and feed you — the one undeniable presence was the continuity of our proscenium minds.

Which is not at all to say — to put this in perspective — Renaissance minds; if only that were true, in theater or in film, with any frequency. Nor am I convinced — though I have done much experimenting with the plenitude of empty spaces and other configurations — that we automatically have better minds when we abandon the conceptual space of the proscenium arch, or any other convention whose framing power was constructed out of history by great intellectual force over many generations. There **may** be, surely, a conception of sufficient force to warrant abandoning it, or trying to knock the bloody thing down, but we are often ingenuous or cavalier about abandoning even less sturdy conventions, like those of the dramatic fiction, which reappear, despite us, like the Allegorical Figures in Genet's **The Balcony** after the Revolution. In that scopic brothel like a movie palace — where mirror upon mirror mirrored is all the show — all the scenarios ending in death are rerun like a reel of film. Genet's homoerotic fantasies in the brothel, which are curiously chaste, like film, are surrounded by a production apparatus which is more like cinema than theater. Yet it **is** theater, at the teasing selvedge of the form, where we remember that there is no ontological coalescence of mirror and screen. In the theater, the not-quite-Lacanian mirror is traditionally curtained, as is sometimes incongruously true of the blank screen.

Like the screen, the curtain is a convention worth reflecting on. It is now, in the theater, an emblematic symptom of the concealment which, in theory and in politics, we distrust. We remember the archaic theater when it wasn't there, but we often forget that the intervention of the curtain in the open arch was an achievement of great psychic dimension, not only as a subliminal trace of the Ark of the Covenant (though it was presumably invented by the Romans) but to the degree that what we see there is, if you reflect upon it, **better not seen** — at least in life. To want to see it enacted is almost perverse (not to mention the desire to enact it). "Is this the promised end?" "Or image of that horror?" (**Lear**, V. viii. 264-65). Isn't that what tragedy is really about, despite the placebo of catharsis? and comedy, that cruel and skeptical form, even more culpably? a coverup, to keep you laughing, but maybe smarter for that, for to think you **can** see it may be even more perverse, as Plato thought. Draw the curtain. "Not yet!" Those are the opening words of **The Family Reunion**.<sup>8</sup> Among other things, a curtain takes pity — though we've been distrusting that emotion too, like the family, like the oedipal presences of the the originary narrative, in recent times. A convention, like an emotion, may seem exhausted, but it certainly begins to wither when we stop imagining what it was like **before** it was there.

Try that with the curtain, not yet conceived of as a theatrical gesture. Think: the first impulse of intervention, somewhere between revelation and duplicity: **now you see it now you don't**, the generic difference that becomes the living subject; and then the difference between the curtain rising and the curtain falling or the curtain split and parting, or drawn from one side of the full length of the stage, stage hand seen, or not, or the Kathakali half-curtain where the actor's legs and headdress are seen, but not the torso, that strange anticipatory presence, like the three knocks behind the curtain of Molière, or the rolled curtain of a play by Yeats, with an Image on it (borrowed through Ezra Pound from the Japanese screen); or a curtain such as we once constructed in San Francisco, which swaggered way above the audience, its underside satin and royal blue (for Brecht's play about Galileo, who had his troubles with perspective, as Brecht did with the shiftings of history around the Bomb), released into space like an unfurling sail and, when it closed the proscenium again, became a movie screen, framed **outside** the proscenium by discordant images of Vitruvian man, putting the perspective in perspective by somewhat cartographic versions, **on** the screen, of the accelerating half-lives of subatomic particles and the shrinking time of interplanetary space, where the nanoseconds beyond film seem as if they **were** filmed, by Paul Sharits, or as if a landscape by Michael Snow were being dissolved — out there, as we are told, where there are no curtains and space folds back upon itself as if Creation and not film were being reversed, and all matter is turned into **foam**; or, finally, the curtain we used for a second production of **Godot** in a smaller theater, a sort of tattered assemblage. de-eroticized and see-through, which rose halfheartedly and never made it, falling feebly to the ground — as if the phallocentric universe had given up.

"Let us pray," says Hamm in **Endgame**,<sup>9</sup> whom we first see curtained, black specs over blind eyes, as if **in** camera; who seems at times like a theory of film, which "is the first art form," as Walter Benjamin said, "capable of demonstrating how matter plays tricks on man."<sup>10</sup> Film is also the medium in which all the things of the world may be **appeared to**, without (as for Hamm) the residual certifying presence of living things. That, I take it, is one of the things that Michael Snow was attempting to demonstrate in **La région centrale**, that there would be something more than a qualitative vacuity in a universe without anything human or even animal, uninhabited, except for

the residual perceiving. If, as we're also being told, the human presence is a poverty in the space of life, film seems to have the capacity to impoverish it even more, to a thing among things that merely appear. In any case — and whatever the state of the human — film at last makes possible the accomplishment of the notion that a rose may appear red to a stone. The existence of a film helps to clarify Whitehead's notion of **prehensions**, according to which "all actual things are subjects, each prehending the universe from which it arises."<sup>11</sup> The darker side is that it sometimes feels like a dead universe, repeating the singular first person: I . . . I . . . I . . . . By contrast, phenomenologically, the theater is full of **apprehension**. The verb is voiced. The stage is filled so that it may be silenced. The curtain falls. Or, as in the **Kaspar** of Peter Handke, there is the definition of a precipitousness in the form: "What is/ worth striving for is a curtain that/ is just falling."<sup>12</sup>

Lévi-Strauss says of structure that it is a virtual object whose shadow alone is real. But what can be said of a structure which — the further it is traced through the corporate body of our cinematic apparatus (a body without organs) — seems like a shadow's shadow? It's a strange shadow, indeed, which has the look of something that is looked at, as the theater doesn't, and can't, no matter how many times it has seemingly been seen before, since it has never been seen like **that**. The theater's duplicity is of another nature, the bodily **presumption** of a presence that disappears. Meanwhile, let us realize — the curtain parted or fallen to the ground — that there are fecundating options on that ground where, as Derrida says in his essay on Artaud, "each agency is linked to all the others by representation, in which the representability of the living present is dissimulated or dissolved, suppressed or deported within the infinite chain of representations,"<sup>13</sup> as if, however, that were a scandal, and I suppose it is. It is also, and I suspect we must live with it, the most perversely obsessive subject in the theater, what makes it detestable (to Plato, to Tolstoy, to Augustine). the **subject of perversion**, what we want to see and shouldn't, in the theater or in the living present — what immemorial wall or membrane between? — to which the theater is always tempted but refuses, refusing to live on anything but its own terms.

Sometimes the theater refuses to live, even in the theater. It is a form which knows the presence of self-corruption only too well. It is a time-serving form, and I shall return to that. But its terms can be very powerful, seductive and seditious, and may impel other forms to the living present, as with painting in recent years (also in disrepute) after realizing that not even the purest abstraction could achieve relief from representation, which simply can't be painted out. After Pollock stretched the canvas into an action field like a stage, the canvas itself was assaulted, its shape and materiality, like the proscenium arch. Even in the barest minimalism the imperiousness of the paint was eventually scorned in favor of the carnal body or purer conception, as if acrylic were elitist, as film — which can do without the body and was always expensive — must inevitably be with the price of silver going up. In the confusion of realms, and economics, it remains ironic that cinema, so fabulously profligate, should retain its populist dimension, though even its revolutionaries should have known, in the days of its silence, that to the ordinary person in the chain of representation, money talks because, as Marx showed, it is almost wholly empty, like the filmic illusion, onto which can be projected the sum of all desire, its low degree of existence invested with dreams. Which is, as Metz and others have pointed out, what makes it "real."<sup>14</sup> (After the vitality of its infancy, cinema went through a period where old men, running the industry, were making the stars; now the baby moguls work upon our dreams with the inconceivable Force of galactic millions.) With money, as with cinema, it appears, subject and object are happily married: you can have anything I want. We shall come back to that lucrative subject in a while.

As for the activation, or appropriation, of the other arts by performance, certainly it was important for the pictorial enterprise, equivocating there or itching for action, to come off the wall, as in Happenings or Body Art or other hybrid events, as it was for the theater, feeling stifled behind the proscenium, to go into the streets. But mostly the exercise was rather like jogging, the returns not yet in, questionably beneficial, and in any case neither the picture frame nor the proscenium seems to have been really exhausted (no more than fiction, according to the recent recantation of John Barth, who had written a famous essay on "The Literature of Exhaustion"). Which may say something about the durability of the Oedipus complex against the depredations of deconstruction.

As for the detestable screen, it is still very much attached to its origins in perspective, and the generic narrativity that goes with it. So long as a projector is trained upon a screen — whether or not a curtain parts upon it — the Name of the Father will be there, like the stains upon Hamm's

stancher, that displaced tampons like a Veronica, despite the feminist agenda or **A Film About a Woman Who**, or whether or not it's a film made by a woman. When it's not there, there will be no more movies to go to, for the perceptual and the eidetic will have been joined, which is perhaps a consummation devoutly to be wished for, but I doubt it, and I'm not counting upon it in my time. I say this despite some admirable experiments to break with or away from the screen into the seemingly truer and more nurturing ambience of a participatory space, like Anthony McCall's environments around the projecting apparatus (before, with two women and another man, he became doctrinaire about Freud's Dora), or the video feedback performances of Joan Jonas mirroring her own body mirroring itself, or Stan VanDerBeek's unceasingly ingenuous search for a purely oneiric space, where self-actuated images are hypnopaedically projected on a geodesic dome, or the movies are shown on steam. If there is any resemblance, in the latter, to the film theorists who — like the Young Hegelians from whom Marx split with scorn — seem to be appropriating filmic experience entirely into consciousness, that is purely coincidental.

There are those in the theater who sometimes wish that the entire cinematic institution would vaporize like that, but there is nothing theoretical about the desire. They find the screen detestable for much simpler reasons than Meyerhold. The most basic reason, to be sure, is that the cinema has been taking audiences away from the theater since its inception — which is another (at least partial) illusion that needs to be put in perspective, taking us in other theoretical directions, but returning us to more of the Same.

If films appeal to larger audiences than theater, that is perfectly normal and terribly strange, and they do so for two apparently contradictory reasons: they are both more familiar and more fantastic. In this country especially we are still without a substantial theater tradition, and it's unlikely that we'll ever have one. Going to the theater is not part of the natural rhythm of things — belated because of the Puritans, outcast like the King and the Duke, derivative and mostly idiotic until the emergence of O'Neill, somewhat embarrassing, certainly ponderous, even then, and even now — only for the most limited segment of the population (high Wasp or Middle European), in large urban centers — considered anything like a necessity of life. It is unimaginable that if we were bombed out, as the Germans were, that the first buildings to go up after the blitz would be the post offices and theaters, as they did in German cities, although we would very well show movies in the shelters, as we do in submarines, or the "race-track" bunkers where — with the projectile intelligence of the Road-Runner — the MX missiles would be released.

As everybody knows, we grew up teething on film, and movies are second nature. Thus, no matter how bizarre or banal a film may be, it feels more credible than theater, not only because of its powerful impression of reality, the dominion of the immediate image, an absolutism of immediacy which is more than documentary, but in the sense that it has better credentials, **more credit** (on the money market and in the libidinal economy), and thus seems more authentic, if not — to use a weary old word of another era — **relevant**, even when it puts us to sleep. I am not being facetious about that, but specifically theoretical. "In all forms of society," writes Marx in the **Grundrisse**, "there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it."<sup>15</sup> The mode of production which Marx had in mind here is obviously bourgeois capitalism, but he might as well be describing the cinema, whose particular ethos, we know, is etherized upon that table — even when, in its earliest period, the audience was proletarian.

My own relationship with the movies started in a proletarian environment, where it never occurred to me that the signifier would be inaugurated by my presence, the production of which depended on the ubiquity of an ideological being which was not-there, transforming the world into discourse, the text of which was already written. It wasn't until I became acquainted with the philosophical groundwork of no-beginnings that I stopped walking into the middle and insisted upon seeing the movies from the start. But then I also recall the prototypical days — long before I saw any theater — when you went to the movies and wondered if there were live actors behind the screen (the enlargement of whom you never figured out), even when you took for granted that (feet sticking to the ammoniated floor) you could stay there all day and see the film over and over, the actors never getting tired. When I do think now about the evolution of this relationship with what became the cinema — particularly within the overlapping discourse of film theory, psychoanalytical theory and feminist theory — the equivocating nuances of my attitudes seem

rather accurately described (if I may refer to Beckett again) by the opening of **Molloy**: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance . . ." <sup>16</sup> — the ether being all-pervasive. The indeterminate voice of the narrator continues: "My mother never refused to see me. that is she never refused to receive me, for it was many a long day since she had seen anything at all. I shall try and speak calmly. We were so old, she and I, she had me so young, that we were like a couple of old cronies, sexless, unrelated, with the same memories, the same rancours, the same expectations. She never called me son, fortunately, I couldn't have borne it, but Dan, I don't know why, my name is not Dan. Dan was my father's name perhaps, yes, perhaps she took me for my father, I took her for my mother and she took me for my father." <sup>17</sup> In any event, it is the family resemblance which is critical, and the recidivist mirroring of the unconscious, that unconscionable phase, the Imaginary. One of the significant functions of the fantasizing power of film seems to be — like dream, like trance, like the ethereal and soporific mythopoesis of Mallarmé or Bergson — to keep us sleeping.

We're still amazed by the "vacuous actuality" of film — and in the worst of films still convinced by the actual vacuity. Theoretically, it seems not to make any difference. "Besides for me," as for Molloy, "the question did not arise, at the period I'm worming into now, I mean the question of whether to call her Ma, Mag or the Countess Caca, she having for countless years been deaf as a post." <sup>18</sup> And still is, of course, since you can't talk back to a screen, or touch what's on it, no more than you can bring up the vacuity in theory, which keeps deferring the subject because it's presumably nameless. Whatever was true then, the question does arise now. If something of our childhood does come back at the movies — and I suspect that has to do with **how** we allow ourselves to think about it in view of what it **is** — there is no guarantee of its being any the less difficult or confusing than it was before — and it may be all the worse for that, our having profited so little from experience. Either the theater or the cinema can be the ground of an activity which is thoroughly solipsistic (as I know very well from the limiting dangers of my own work in the theater). I see no real difference in that possibility by which the spectator might consider himself the passively organizing principle of the cinematic or the theatrical event. Depending on how you look at it, they are both apparitional and both aboriginal, but the identification with one's self that is the condition and outcome of a pure act of perception, making the viewer a tautological subject, is the result. too. of an attitude **toward** viewing in the spectator. The one who is there before anything appears to inaugurate the possibility of being thoroughly beguiled by the solicitations of the look's caress is already consciously soliciting the possibility. People less sophisticated are not likely to be looking anymore for the actors behind the screen (when we did, we were **critically** attentive to the apparatus, even if fooled), but they are also likely to be putting up a variable resistance to the discourse. This does not prevent anybody from conceding that the unhearing immateriality of film — deaf as a post but affirming the incestuous existence of untouchable objects, like the dubious tree falling in Bishop Berkeley's forest — seems more fully **there**, more overwhelming, than the palpable bodies in front of your eyes in the theater.

We hardly think of a suspension of disbelief at the movies, whereas there is always on stage a compromising incompatibility between the corporeal body and the **mise-en-scène**, which includes touchable objects that seem unreal until you've made some very peculiar mental adjustments to very dubious but insistent conventions. There is something refractory in the theater, which may be thought of — with its history of improbable possibilities and impossible probabilities — as the adversary proceedings of a real presence, which is neither so direct or **vérité** as a **mise en présence**. In the theater, credibility **is** the issue, as in foreign policy. "What, has this thing appeared again tonight?" (**Ham.** I. i. 21). As with the Ghost on the ramparts, so with the acting process; whatever the thing is, it is never certain, and if it doesn't appear you wouldn't believe it, and you're not sure you do when it does, the thing itself. As Coleridge realized, the word is perfect and indeterminable for whatever it is that comes and goes in a performance, without which there wouldn't be much of a performance, though we never trust it. The thing is that it comes and goes, and the environment of the theater is not conducive to making it seem real, in the more obvious sense of that word — though its entire history has been dedicated to that project. Against the artifice of the form, the thing doesn't stand a chance. You have to work to validate it every night. Think of the Ghost, that pitiable convention, and the now-classical conundrum of the stage, as contrived by Shakespeare: how to make it not only believable but real.

When we think of the real in the simplest sense, the movies seem to have the advantage. The documentary superiority is inarguable. There is the elephantiasis of reality in the closeup. And no theater event — no matter how excellent the staging — can approach the impression of an

eeriness being **realized** (what Malinowski, speaking of magic, somewhere calls "the coefficient of weirdness") that can be achieved by any third-rate horror movie or some aesthetic atrocity from outer space or the filmed drawings of **King Kong**, not to mention the coefficient of realness with weirdness in the seamlessly animated photographs of a movie I once saw (by Jules Engels) of the French town of Uzès, in comparison to which the mere reality of the town itself, were I to go there, might seem a hallucinatory fraud.

The real unreality of the cinema was, to begin with, the most startling attribute of the photograph before it ever became a moving picture. The great dramatists of the late nineteenth century saw what was coming, the revenge of reality on the photograph, what Eisenstein — who had worked in the theater — tried to impede, the tyranny of **motion**, which confirmed reality by obscuring it in a form which wouldn't exist without it. The coming "attractions" of Eisenstein were episodes in film like Meyerhold's ideographic acting style, the static "passes" or, later (also indebted to Meyerhold), Brecht's **gestus**, the bracketed action of Alienation, or "the lapidary style"<sup>19</sup> of Chaplin, all of which rein in pure motion for a moment, taking a breath for aim, before the whole thing runs away. The prose of Marx was also possessed of motion, but that same holding action which we see in the swollen laconicism of Eisenstein's montage is in the staccato rhythm of this marginal note from **The German Ideology**, denotatively filmic, like a shooting script: "**Hegel**. Geological, hydrographic, etc., conditions. Human bodies. Needs, labour."<sup>20</sup> Ibsen, however, sensed that such an impedance might never again be possible, that out of the fissures of reality, like the crack in the chimney of the Master Builder, came dispossessed motion, aflame with its own becoming, which "seethes and precipitates and changes color, inside. . . ." That is Rilke describing Ibsen, "among the alembics in the firelight."<sup>21</sup>

In Rilke's beautiful account of Ibsen's methodology as an alchemical quest, it's as if Ibsen were already making film, anticipating Bergman, Antonioni, Rohmer, and a hundred other filmmakers before and since, not to mention Artaud, who hated what he thought Ibsen represented. Rilke goes on to say, addressing Ibsen, "you took the enormous decision at once and single-handed to magnify these minutiae, which you yourself first became aware of only through glasses, that they should be seen of thousands, immense, before all eyes. Your theater came into being. You could not wait until this life almost without dimension, condensed into drops by the centuries, should be discovered by the other arts and gradually made visible for single individuals. . . . This you could not wait for, you were there, and that which is scarcely measurable — a feeling that mounted by half a degree; the angle of refraction, which you read off at close quarters, of a will burdened by almost nothing, the slight cloudiness of a drop of longing and that barely perceptible color-change in an atom of confidence — all this you had to determine and preserve; for in such processes life itself now was, our life, which had slipped into us, had withdrawn inward, so deeply that it was scarcely possible even to conjecture about it anymore."<sup>22</sup> In the desire to stop motion, to determine and preserve, it's as if Ibsen were the painter and the engraver that Hamm remembers, in the exactitude of his madness, replete with motion, fantasizing the end of the world, but dragged sadomasochistically to the window of the asylum (as to a movie screen) by Hamm to face the derisive fantasy of recurrence: "Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness!"<sup>23</sup> — turning through every overdetermined drop of apprehension, to ashes.

There were always psychological subtleties in the theater, even on cothurni and with megaphones in the mask, but it wasn't until the Jacobean period, and in Racine, that they acquired a specifically psychoanalytical magnification, the desire to **see** every microscopic inflexion of desire in a form where magnification, in the acting, takes certain subtleties away, and where the eye, watching, is unassisted by magnification and can be more or less acute depending on the distance from the performance. (In assessing conditions of presence, there is also what Stanislavski called the "given circumstances" — not, however, of plot, but the distancing of presence, an aspect of which he called stage charm, by the magnitude or voluminousness of the auditorium. There is surely something different about seeing a film in a vast space with a ton of velour and pendent crystal and floral scrolls and cupidons and Buddhas with jewels in their foreheads, and seeing it in a cinématèque or a classroom or Cinema 1 of 4 in a supermarket. I'm not sure how the fantasies change but I suppose they do. Yet it's nothing like the radical variations of presence with the diminishing or expanded dimensions of a theater, where the voice is heard differentially and appearance is altered at the most obvious physical level. Take makeup, for instance, part of which goes in the theater as compensation for the expansion. It may do wonders for the actor — as we've seen in the stupendous makeup jobs in the movies — but only

so much wonder, then, if you're close up on a hot night in an unairconditioned theater where you can see the actor sweat, and the director doesn't want that, as Grotowski **did** in his theater, where you were forced close to the playing area, or surrounded by it, yet formally separated by the Kierkegaardian intensity of the sweat. I have seen whole plays with the best of performances swallowed by the wrong stage as if there were nothing present, and I have seen actors dwarfed by sets or displaced by moving scenery or, for that matter, by the magnitude of an electronic score or by a careless sound operator who drowned them out or deprived them of some untellable decibels of presence by the wrong calibration of an amplifier. I have also directed in one of the world's more affluent theaters, vast but deceptively intimate, but with a seating arrangement so pitched that to this day — even after much investment in making the stage more accessible to the auditorium — much of it is off-limits and an actor tends to look not only smaller but younger, immature and a little callow, no matter how old he is. There is a whole theory of theater in such contingencies of performance, which are, in other alarming ways, indecipherably germane to its presence. That indecipherability leads us back to Ibsen: The violence in Ibsen's late drama came from attempting to do what seemed impossible on a stage and what film, later, could do without half trying — as it can achieve comic effects by incongruous splicing that would elude, in the theater, the most impeccable timing of the funniest actor. What Ibsen wanted to do — at the end as in the beginning — was to bring towers and whole mountain ranges into the "capillary action" that Rilke described,<sup>24</sup> and to sustain in a world which was increasingly imaged the image of a world which refused to be.

Sometimes he knew it was impossible. Thus, he located the domain of the wild duck **behind** the photographic studio, as if desire, fantasized by the living actor, could never compete with the actuality of its imagistic exposure within the dimensions of the real, which had to think of other dimensions. Ibsen was already imagining the tilting ice floes of Eisenstein when, after moving into the bourgeois parlor from the fjords and mountain tops, he moved out again and tried to bring an avalanche on stage in behalf of the invisible. Those unsurpassable late plays of Ibsen, such as **When We Dead Awaken**, are to this day dismissed or misunderstood by people in the theater, as they were by my teachers in drama school years ago, who called them psychotic and ignored them. And they nearly are psychotic, those premonitory visions of what we'd see later on film being realized or apprehended, then, at the excruciating outer limits of theater, as if the alchemical process of dematerialization — the apocalyptic desire of Artaud to burn away the execrable body of enacted desire — were brought to consummation in the alembic and suddenly reversed, or the specific gravity of the dream, its ether, were extruded back into flesh by sheer will.

When we used to think of life as a dream — as in much of Shakespeare or in the great play of that title by Caldéron — we were thinking of it as theatricalized; but now, as if the dream is dreaming the dream, as in "The Circular Ruins" of Borges, where the body of the dreamer is consumed in the concentric blaze of the fire-god's seeming, which magically gives life to a sleeping phantom or, when it appears that a phantom is awakened to flesh, caresses him and engulfs him "without heat or combustion"<sup>25</sup> — we think of it as cinematic. There is still, behaviorally, the mimetic presentation of the self in everyday life; and we have just been through a generation that tried with some (illusory) success to theatricalize our politics, which was already saturated by image and image-making. In the media, and especially video, where the stagings occur in a rabid consumption of image, the film is more than doubled over. "Any man today," as Walter Benjamin wrote in the thirties about mechanical reproduction in art, "can lay claim to being filmed."<sup>26</sup> Which is why, again — in the circular reality of the system of reproductions — we think of film as being realer.

As experienced, phenomenally, even a Chekhovian play, in every naturalistic nuance, seems more artificial and more **acted** than almost any film you can think of with maybe comparable characters but a less reliable psychology in a similar setting. The "realest" Chekhov I've ever seen was the film version of **The Lady with a Dog** which, as I remember, was performed mainly by superbly trained young actors of the Moscow Art Theater who, good as they were, could never seem as natural on a stage. When we reach back into the archives, we are likely to accept on film what would be forbidding in the theater, into whose archives we obviously can't reach — acting, for instance, as ideographically factitious as Donald Crisp's in **Broken Blossoms**, precisely because it is not being acted **right there**, where the archive doesn't yet exist. Crisp seems to be working in another order of reality — which we're tempted to call **theatrical** — than Lillian Gish who, despite the assumed mannerism of her crippled gait, seems a natural. The composite reality

is, however, more credible somehow, and certainly more unified — like the different styles of the film's two cinematographers — than a similar disjuncture of style would be on stage, unless the boxer-father's character were bracketed as fantastic; or even if we saw it in Brecht, where the disjuncture would be alienated **as** a sign. The almost gratuitous strength of Crisp's performance may be unassimilated even so, as if it were sticking out of the film, like a thrust of brutalizing fantasy into life.

In theater, there is an essential disjuncture in performance, the reality of a factitious presence; the form is actualized in proportion to the presence of **that** reality. In Chekhov, we are always surprised at how subtle and imperceptible that reality may be, how seemingly natural, though we are also somehow reminded — as at the end of the first act of **The Three Sisters** — that it can only be **as acted**. As the ineffectual festivities of the family romance are dispersed into the ensemble pathos of eroded presence, the nameday party is comically frozen and a photograph is taken, and the acting proceeds as if it were life, with our consciousness that life is acting and acting upon us, more of the Same, interminably, like the baby carriage encircling the stage at the apparent end, with all the repetitive fluency of film, which had to be invented for the repetitions. It's as if Chekhov had taken the successions of theater, and its realization, as far as it could go toward life, in the age of photography, before it became cinema.

The theater's actuality, is, however, in the fluent dimensions of the disjuncture between life and theater, in the **vulnerability** of the acting body, more specifically coterminous with life and more stubbornly resistant to the implication that they are, despite the theater's own propaganda, one and the same. Whatever the origins of theater, there is no memory trace in the form that does not testify to the disturbance caused by life's insistence upon being seen as theater. That is its subject, and the predicate of its presence, and the theater has been struggling with that paradox from the beginning — all the more so in that increasingly self-conscious theater, from Strindberg through Genet and, recently, Robert Wilson, which has also been acquiring the characteristics of film, as if that were the answer to the question: Is the whole world a stage or is it not? That's an almost impossible judgment to make, but the theater is addicted to judgment, about what we can never really be sure is a real question.

The **diegesis** so dear to film semiologists — the obligatory recital of facts in the judicial discourse, all that pertains to the narrative — is an almost obligatory concept in the theater, which has been judicial, so far as we can tell, through the living memory of the form. We have a record of it in the **Oresteia** — the only extant Greek trilogy — an etiological drama about the nature of justice and the emergence of the jury system from the preoedipal laws of repetitive vengeance. "The law **is** theatre," says Sartre, and the theatre **represents** the law, even in the utmost avoidance of the litigious, as in the theater forms of the East. If, as appears to be true there, life **is** a dream, what then is theater? It is the form which — with all the representational means at its disposal, including the power of illusion and the illusory power of its separate presence — resists the truth it is acknowledging in the appearance of what it **is**, which may be impossible to distinguish.

For the struggle in the theater has always been the struggle with illusion, that obligatory scene, the denial of representation by the representation of denial — a self-reflexive distrust of its own powers, the fantasy that cancels difference, whether between nature and culture, myth and history, memory and imagination, word and thing, god and man, father and mother, being and becoming, man and woman or — as we "read the meaning in that beacon light"<sup>28</sup> which seems to begin the history of theater by announcing the end of the war in Troy — reality and illusion, "the interchange of flame and flame":<sup>29</sup>

**Chorus**

Yet how can I be certain? is there some evidence?

**Clytemnestra**

There is, there must be: unless a god has lied to me.

**Chorus**

Is it dream visions, easy to believe, you credit?

**Clytemnestra**

I accept nothing from a brain that is dull with sleep.<sup>30</sup>

Whatever there is in Clytemnestra that causes us to rethink the claims of gender and is still genetically encoded in the theater, she was not meant to lose it at the movies. That it can be lost in the theater is apparent from the theoretical writings of Brecht. The Alienation-effect was developed in order to wake up the dozing spectators of the "culinary theater," where instead of eating popcorn you go to digest your dinner. Brecht, too, expected nothing from a brain that is dull with sleep, and that includes the actor as well as the spectator, from both of whom he wanted critical judgment as the precipitance of not-quite-action but the living capacity **to act**.

What is represented in the theater, by performance, is the opportunity for performance. So far as the spectator is concerned, it may be, as in the classical theater, performance in a mode of contemplation and figuration. It may appear passive, but there is work to be done, as Marx understood, in reminding us that "The **forming** of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present."<sup>31</sup> In the translating of analogical representation into **effects** of behavior, likeness, identity, and identification, the senses of social man, like those of the actor who is not sleepwalking, are **other** than those of non-social man, though it is this alienated figure who is often thought to be the ideological subject of the movies. When Jean-Louis Comolli wants to reverse that tendency, he speaks of a film of his own in which the theatrical space is reinserted into the cinematic field, so that the viewer and not just the technical apparatus is the operator of the analogical mechanism, desire for the Same reflected "as movement, as trace, mark on faces, gestures, words; in short, theater."<sup>32</sup> Which is critical of the perspective that it constructs. Before theater becomes theater, certain intellectual operations have to be performed — though we have seen attempts at forms of theater which have refused the analogical mechanisms in vain. What we often see in such refusals (as in the communitarian anarchy of *The Living Theater*) is the pathos of a failed analogy to freedom.

For it makes no difference if the performance leaves the stage. That is no less ideological than before, and naively ideological to boot, for what it amounts to is a self-deluding shift in the order of representation. What we encounter is the non-theatrical illusion, a theatricality exposed to the illusions of its own demystifications. As the duplications of realism destroy the appearance of a repetition of reality by the impurity of signaling differences, so any performance splits off from itself the analogizing propensity of the very idea of performance. As for realistic drama, there the most immaculate effects of representation, as we see in Chekhov, most fully belie the representation, certifying the image **as** image, with all the combinatorial play upon the illusion of reality and the reality of illusion that keeps the image in its place as image; that is, the thing by means of which we are deceived. One must be deceived by the image in order to **see** the image. Were we to see what it is representing we wouldn't believe it for an instant, I mean the image — for the other we never see, though the desire to do so never ceases. "You must pierce the wall," writes Kafka. "Piercing it is not difficult; it is made of paper. What is difficult is not to be deceived by the fact that there is already a painting on paper representing the way you pierce the wall, so exceedingly deceptive that you are tempted to say, 'Don't I pierce it continually?'"<sup>33</sup>

What the theater does, then, is to bring into presence what, without theater, cannot be present — not unlike, in the psychoanalytical process, the making-present-in-consciousness what seems past or out of memory, the presentness depending, however, on its becoming **consciously** past for the first time. So, this thing which appears, and appears **because** remembered, never was before the remembrance, which composes it, a real illusion, factitiously rehearsed, like the delusion formation of Freud's Schreber, which was an attempt at reconstitution or recovery of the past, something other than a delusion to the extent that, in its rehearsal, it was being-formed. The theater event, even when not realistic, is a testing of reality in a formative process, by making it up as it goes along, another thing. Neither the reality being tested nor the reality composed exist outside the activity of performance, which is not to deny that there is still another reality objectively there, external to the consciousness being performed. The re-sources of credibility are drawn both from the process and that to which, insensibly, the process is being referred through the senses, with their authorizing credentials. What is being rehearsed into performance is **a series of choices**. Which is why the issue of responsibility is there, in the play, as it can never be on film, where all the choices have been made and, re-viewed, are inevitably afterthought. That is why we can expect the cinema, with its impression of reality, to sustain what Metz calls its basic bond with the theater, where thought is basic because fleshed out. The theater is too corporeally real to be thought real, but it is **really thought**, the senses having become in practice, as Marx says in an early text, "direct theoreticians." So, too, the eye becomes a human eye, "when its object has become a social, human object produced by man and destined for him."<sup>34</sup> It can only

be destined for him if he's awake.

If the theater has a legacy of the judicial, it is generically theoretical. The word theater comes from the same Greek roots as theory, having to do with watching and the place of watching, the two meeting in **speculation** — an idea much explored in film theory, but without much emphasis on the corollary: that it implies a kind of **vigilance** as well, as with The Watchman who awakens from a fabulous preoedipal dark to open the **Oresteia**, as if what will be seen has already been seen, through the long duration of observant thought: "I speak to those who understand,/ but if they fail, I have forgotten everything."<sup>35</sup> The Watchman speaks, too, with the observed solitariness of occulted caution, as to the initiates of a Mystery, for it's a mystery that he wants us to understand. There's something about the occultation that makes us see it, something intrinsic to the nature of the theater, which is not merely play but catechistic play, the play of thought and the thought of play, mnemonic and demonic — a kind of animated brain fever with a metaphysical obsession, approaching panic, the god who may have lied. The theater has reason for being nervous, for sad mortality o'ersways its power. In the theater it is not only that the line between presence and absence is blurred, but the line between presence and panic — which is to say that the ontological condition of stage fright is borne into performance and, with no editing out, remains an active if subliminal component of what we see. Sometimes the actor is so anxious we can hardly see, as if the anxiety were the Mystery, and it possibly is.

Every now and then — through years of watching in the dark — you wonder what keeps a performance from breaking down. We tend to think of actors as exhibitionistic, but I've also found that the first thing an actor wants to do when he gets on stage is to get off as fast as he can. **What keeps him there?** The motives are figured in traditional drama by the interdependent tropes of Will, Necessity, and Chance — although the drama is always asking, as the actor does in his craft, where does one begin and the other end? And are those the right questions, like to be or not to be? Sometimes, whatever it is that we call presence seems — as Lévi-Strauss says of the enigma of the prohibition of incest — the answer to which there is no question.<sup>36</sup> Isn't that the significance of the second, more enigmatic appearance of the Ghost, in the Closet, where the previously **embodied** Ghost, visibly acted, is not-there; not as in the voided space of film, but literally so?

To the degree that film is a more direct representation of the unconscious than theater, it confirms what Freud wrote in his essay on "The Uncanny," that "our unconscious has as little use now as ever for the idea of its own mortality"<sup>37</sup> — which is not exactly true of the Ghost, with its almost unimaginable effort of rematerializing will and the poignant memory of its once-smooth body, scarred now like the walls of time, where all the moral imperatives are blurred. The most compelling presence in the theater is, any way you look at it, perishable goods, vulnerable, trying desperately not to believe it, nothing you can depend on, nothing will come of nothing, much ado about nothing, nothing to be done, never, never, never, never, never. Where, at the limits of theater, in the dialectics of negation — unduplicatable but driven to repetition — some self-cancelling avatar of desire, sonorous and immaterial, seems almost to pass onto film. "O, I am in a mist!"<sup>38</sup> There are exquisite moments of theater where this is especially so, where anyone who has ever directed has wished he could get it on camera, and then unwishes it if it is to remain wholly theater, realized in its vanishings, where the intimacy of absence is such it can hardly be looked at, but perhaps only seen with the unaided eye: "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young."<sup>39</sup> "Look on her! Look her lips,/ Look there, look there —" (**Lear**, V. iii. 311-12). On the other side of the avalanche, more of the Same.

It's at these vanishing moments that we feel most tellingly the temporal inflexion of the actor's vulnerability — the more so the more realized **by** the actor — and the particular vulnerability of the theater itself, possessed with disappearance, the differences that **must** be seen, like the differences between forms at their limits.

In cinema, the analogue of the actor's mortality is the deterioration of the film which starts at its inception, and therefore becomes the paradigm of a disappearing presence, despite the notion of a printed text, fixed by chemicals — these ideas becoming the coordinates by which we play the game of its absence. There is also the issue of how well the printing is done and how well the film is screened, the condition of the screen itself (I saw one recently with a stain through the projection like a glyph of Clifford Still) and the condition of that particular filmstrip, although practical reason tells us there is some sort of real difference between a person who **is** dying and

a film that can be replaced, another copy struck, perhaps not an exact clone, but better than we are likely to have with human beings for a while. So as regards the power of a disappearing presence, the theater would appear to have the advantage, its very corporeality being the basis of its most powerful illusion, that something is substantially there, the thing itself, even as it vanishes. There are many apparent causes of stage fright, but that may be the final ground. Presence in acting is something more than charisma or the energy that makes us say the actor is all there. (Sometimes he is, but he isn't very much.) What **is** there, however, is the dimensionality of time through the actor, ether of time. Of all the performing arts, the theater stinks most of mortality. If the theater is perverse corrupt, it is because it is also time-serving in this sense.

I'm not sure that we're conscious in the cinema as we are in the theater of the discrepancy between the interval of time as performed and the duration of life as lived. We speak of the two or three-hour traffic of the stage, but we're unlikely to think of film in such measure because of the versatile negotiability of cinematic time: arrest, reversal, speedup, and various kinds of optical exchange, the synthetic time-warp of montage, splicing, segmenting, so that we almost want to see the spaces between frames, a virtual suspension of time, in the intoxicating control of succession, the feeling that time, after all, is possessed by the cinematic machine, the primal illusion of the moving strip, the wished benediction of its beginnings. This is not the exactitude of dimensioned time of classical practice in the theater, where the compression of time, and the famous Unity, is a proposition about life, and the relationship of life and art in another order of reality. As experienced in the movies, time exists (as the theater has so well stated the other proposition:) between a sleep and a forgetting — either technically, producing an image in the frequency of frames, or reminding us that time is without dimension, the merest illusion of an extension, in the redolence of those absent objects of the patina of our gaze; in the stricture of speculation through our fictions of space.

In the theater, where space is **designated** (even if disrupted), we are much more conscious, I think, of the overlay of playing time upon lifetime, and the painful inadequacy to it, an epistemological foreshortening that is also, in tragedy, an admission of defeat. If there is the residue of old ritual it is in this compression of apparently discrete events which seem to remember in the play within the play an older infinity of play that existed before time. Even when it is performed in the open air, as in the infancy of the form, the theater always has a sense of belatedness, and not immediacy, to it — as if it were born with impacted memory. It is this born-again redundancy in the **momento mori**, not merely the circling of the immediate upon the real that can be incessantly projected, that accounts for the peculiar strangeness of the theater, which is not to any degree like film a product of the world's affluence and which doesn't seem to remember unless it **pretends** to forget, though it has forgotten nothing, or there would be no play.

There has been in recent experimental theater a lot of sentimental longing for myth and ritual, a romance with instant archetypes; but even when the theater was still closely affiliated with ritual, it knew that it was just pretending, and what we have in performance is not so much a ritual event as the ghost of a ritual pretense. The theater is a far more skeptical form than film, by nature, whatever else is imposed upon it — film having emerged in consonance with the novel out of the fictive aspirations of the legacy of romance. In theater, the body's specific gravity is always there, subject of time, astride of a grave. About the older infinity of play before time: that is almost congenitally distrusted in the form. The self-reflexive play within the play is an obsessive mechanism of theater, like the mechanisms of paranoia, but unlike the current discourse on film (with its admixture of literary and feminist theory), the theater is never content with the theoretical prospect of a field of endless play. Whatever it contributes, in theory, to the textual dispersal of all forms, the theater remembers the unstated undercurrent of play which inevitably makes the actor sweat. Play is dreadful. It is the mere passage of unthinking time, thinking making it so, as we saw in Gogo's fist which, for the moment, wanted to put an end to play. As for those minutiae that Ibsen wanted to preserve, sometimes so etiolated as to seem out of sight, there may be, as I said before, a momentary instinct for wanting them on film, but the persuasive intuition of their presence **is** their evanescence, a living indeterminacy that can never be studied again, **that way** — because, in a very strict sense, it is the actor's mortality which is the acted subject, for he is right there dying in front of your eyes. The critical thing, then, in the institution of theater is not much that an actor is there, but that an actor is so vulnerably there. Whatever he represents in the play, in the order of time he is representing nobody but himself. How could he? That's his body, doing time.

The cinematic institution, like the film festival which is a part of it, shifts the locus of vulnerability from the film, the art-object, or the actors in the film (if there are actors) — the image of human agency in the narrative — to its **representatives**. I won't use another term because, theoretically, the textualization of film, as with the book, has made the author-creator disappear as it has made the subject "problematical." This is all the more ironically so as the assault on **representation** continues. Thus, there may be a lot of badmouthing at a festival, or even a riot, but the film by then, unless scissored in projection or symbolically heisted, is safe in the can while certain people are being abused. The actors in the film may not even be present, or if the director is he is part of the discourse. As for the film, even if it is destroyed, there are other copies. In the theater, however, the question of the subject and the ambiguities of presence disappear — at least for the moment — when the actor is assaulted or arrested or, as I have seen it, the show is stopped by blacks, feminists, or — not to suggest parity of purpose — lunatics who are apolitical, but who (with a logic more or less justified by the schizoanalysis of the **Anti-Oedipus**) might, as has been done in the past, leap upon the stage and attack Iago for his dirty seeming.

When that happens, it's not the transcendental subject or the absent presence which is in danger, but the otherwise missing person, the one who breathes and eats and shits and fucks, **homo ludens** as **homo historia**, who may have to decide right there, diachronically, whether he means it or is merely pretending. I mean is he willing to stand by what he represents, like the "unperfect actor on the stage" in Shakespeare's sonnet, "Who with his fear is put beside his part" (**Son.** 23.11.1-2). A film doesn't blush when it has to go out and perform the night after bad reviews. Nor does it have to summon up — as actors in my own work have done — the will to play against severe hostility, that presence which enters an actor's performance in sometimes crushing, sometimes dialectical collaboration with the subliminal residues of stage fright. **Cruising** just played at our local cinema, and the gays protested. But Al Pacino, who suffered through his embarrassment in the film (the embarrassment registered as indelibly as his permanent wave) is no doubt involved by now in another project and can keep a secure distance from the filmic event — unless, like Vanessa Redgrave, he chooses to make of a given showing the semblance of a confrontational appearance which, if sufficiently publicized, will change the way we see the film, but not a mini-frame of her performance.

Theater is not an Action but a pretense of action, an adumbration or incipience, the annunciation of an infinitive which the cinema cuts off. So far as the problem of identity is concerned, the whole body vociferates. Even in the silence of mime, the theater is **giving voice**. It is not only that we suffer an anxious empathy when the actor forgets his lines, but when the actor gets really anxious, the first thing to go is the voice. In film, it can be doctored on the soundtrack or recorded another time. On stage, the loss of voice is the worst of all inflictions, the contingency that really hurts, bringing us painfully back to life, the watchers and the watched. Theater becomes more like film, in another sense, when the actor's vulnerability is at a minimum, when it virtually becomes, for all its dialogue, a silent partner to the absence, time-serving in the cruder sense (the dialogue being, in our conventional theater, a coverup for the silence), entering the structure of the discourse determined by the entropic agencies of power, the media, and most profoundly fantasized, and perpetuated, by the politics of discourse on film and, despite its demystification of the apparatus of cinematic power, the extension of that discourse in theory — what Metz calls the theodicy of indulgence.<sup>40</sup>

Before I conclude with more of that, let me observe that there are, in our established theaters, plays whose surface is very little different, whose articulation in performance is so mechanically perfect, and yet so vacuous, they might as well be film — which is not saying a film version of the same **is** the same, just more of it, the enervating libidinal tithe from the same psychic fount, the same repressive apparatus in the overall system of production and consumption, and counting on the same capacity (not necessity) for submissiveness in the viewer. There are more of them in the cinema but they come from the same ideological story board. When, in the theater, we wonder where the audiences have gone, they have gone where there's more of it, more of the Same, what we increasingly find coming on stage from the ideological dispensation of film, as if the two forms were a continuum, as I think they are, with a break in the bonding like one of those bone fractures in the Oedipal clubfoot that don't even show up in the x-ray.

Critical theory is presumably charged with making such distinctions, with seeing what cannot quite be seen, but one of the things I've meant by more of the Same is the presence of theory in the fantasies of power — though in the American theater we may have to talk of its absence,

because as compared to film there is next to no theory at all. This is especially true about the speculative presence of the audience, whose Authority is still cynically sanctified as the Last Judgment by those who would manipulate it as if it were brainless and had no judgment at all. Which is more often true than not, as it is more epidemically in the movies, where it is often given theoretical ground. Nothing I've ever written has aroused such animosity among the cynical as the statement (years ago) which seems an understatement now: Give an audience a chance, it will inevitably be wrong. But that assumes, through all the fantasies of replicating desire, in the infinite deferrability of meaning, that we still believe judgments can be made. Worse, that judgments need to be made. I say this in an atmosphere of harsh judgment by those who, in the new doxology of deconstruction, legislate the open-ended, the ceaselessly mutating eroticism of postponement, polymorphous and parodic, a "pure jubilatory discourse,"<sup>41</sup> coming attractions, in the siren voice of **jouissance**. If it were more like that, as it is in much of Barthes, I might continue to forgo judgment, but is it not true that one often hears the invocation of a receptive and feminine space in a voice which insists (through a formidable jargon) that the play of interpretation is absolutely privileged, and that's the only conclusion you can come to.

Sometimes the heavy arsenal of film theory reminds me of **The Great Dictator**, when Chaplin yanks a cord on Big Bertha and the shell pops out of the phallocentrism like a gum-drop orgasm, and the Barber, sent to defuse it, finds it alarmingly activated in his wary orbit, feeble as it is, real, and dangerous, and no kidding — parody never sufficient to power. Or the scene in which he and Reginald Gardiner are upside down in the byplane with the dispatch case, containing the hermeneutic cipher that will save the day; thinking they are right side up, the Barber also trying to keep time in place as his watch rises in space, by pushing down on its signifying chain, amnesia following the crash as the Barber emerges from a Black Hole or cloaca or the preoedipal maternal slime into the contingencies of the Reality Principle. Or the sequence in **Modern Times** where the head of the foreman is locked, as in a guillotine, upside down in the huge flywheels and gears of a sort of desiring machine, and Chaplin sticks a stalk of celery in his mouth so that the discourse is returned for a moment to the vegetal silence of plenitude, like the few leaves on the tree in the second act of **Godot**. Or — when I think of the political fantasies of the theoretical discourse — the dictator Hynkel doing his ballet with the balloon of world power, not only power punctured for the fools who have it, but the fantasies of non-aggressive power for the fools who don't. Or, at the end of **Modern Times**, the seductive exhortation of the final smile of Goddard by the Tramp, an artifice of radiance, a construction, summoning up its possibility by pure fiction, nothing to go on but a wish, dispelling what Derrida names "the **dead time** within the presence of the living present, within the general form of all presence"<sup>42</sup> — as they disappear up the road, shuffle and virginal buttocks, divided by the white line of impeding difference, as they return to mountains and horizon, also down the Originary Trace, putting the dead time to work when jobs remain scarce or have lost their savor. Or the writing flying off the Tramp's wrist before — in an aboriginal babble of polyglottal words — "shifting the signified a great distance," and "throwing, so to speak, the anonymous body of the actor into (the) ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes:"<sup>43</sup> — but then it goes, that bliss, because it never forgets, in the joyous presence of the disjunct soundtrack, that the shifted distance is only about as long as the watch's chain; and that if neutered pleasure, its "force of **suspension**" of a centered system or philosophy of meaning "can never be overstated," as Barthes says,<sup>44</sup> the force of that system can never be overstated either, like the strength of the proscenium when Gogo struck, the **jouissance** of power laughing up its absent sleeve.

What strikes me about these Chaplinesque reflections on the activity of theory is that, as theory, they are very discrete about the limiting condition of pure presence. When we feel, as Barthes did, "a certain need to **loosen** the theory a bit," lest the idelect repeat itself,<sup>45</sup> Chaplin reminds us that there is in every libidinal flow theoretical trace-lines circumscribing the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, but keeping, through the impeccable eloquence of seeming innocence, an unstinting eye on those other lines, prison lines, soup lines, goose-stepping lines of pure force, and other eternal lines to time which are, whatever the hidden agendas of the mirror phase, written clearly enough: "TEN DAYS LATER." The blank and darkened screen with those plain words in quotes tells more than a narrative story, and the duration of its projection is not only relatively. immeasurably, meant for reading or opened to desire, but — as in the interludic inscriptions of a Brecht play, as after the Great Capitulation of Mother Courage — also meant to return us, libido abated and in the simpler sense, to political and social reality, outside of the rectifying fantasies of metonymic and playful words, or the orthographic reifications of cinematic bliss.

## FOOTNOTES

1. (1941; rpt. Harvest-Harcourt, 1969), p. 85.
2. See Martin Esslin, **The Theater of the Absurd** (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1961), p. xv.
3. Samuel Beckett, **Waiting for Godot** (New York: Grove, 1954), p. 42 (a).
4. **Godot**, p. 13(b).
5. "Chaplin and Chaplinism," in **Meyerhold on Theater**, trans. Edward Braun (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), p. 320.
6. Meyerhold, p. 320.
7. (New York: Grove, 1965), p. 21
8. T.S. Eliot, **The Complete Poems and Plays** (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), p. 225.
9. Samuel Beckett, **Endgame** (New York: Grove, 1958), p. 54. Actually, "Let us pray to God"—but why rub it in.
10. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in **Illuminations**, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (Frankfurt, 1955; rpt. New York: Schocken, 1977), p. 247, n. 11.
11. A.N. Whitehead, **Process and Reality** (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 89.
12. **Kaspar and Other Plays** (New York: Noonday-Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p. 80.
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14. Christian Metz, **Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema**, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 10.
15. **The Marx-Engels Reader**, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 242.
16. **Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnameable** (New York: Grove, 1958), p. 7.
17. **Molloy**, p. 17.
18. **Molloy**, p. 17.
19. Meyerhold, p. 321
20. **Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 156, n. 2.
21. Rainer Maria Rilke, **The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge**, trans. M.D. Herter Norton (New York: Norton, 1964), p. 75.
22. Rilke, p. 75.
23. **Endgame**, p. 44.
24. Rilke, p. 76.
25. Jorge Luis Borges, **Labyrinths**, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), pp. 48, 50.
26. Benjamin, p. 231
27. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Interview with Kenneth Tynan (1961)," in **Sartre on Theater** (New York: Pantheon, 1976), p. 126.
28. **Agamemnon**, 1.8, in **Oresteia**, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 35.
29. **Agamemnon**, 1.490, p. 49.
30. **Agamemnon**, 11.272-75, p. 43
31. **Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 89.
32. Paper delivered at the conference on "The Cinematic Apparatus," at the Center for 20th Century Studies, University of Wisconsin — Milwaukee, 1978; from ms., p. 23.
33. Franz Kafka, recorded as from **The Castle**, but after careful search, not to be found, there, or elsewhere, but certainly from Kafka, appropriately, a missing source.
34. Quoted by David McLellan, **Karl Marx: His Life and Thought** (1973; rpt. Harper Colophon, 1977), p. 121
35. **Agamemnon**, 11, 37-38, p. 36.
36. Claude Lévi-Strauss, **The Scope of Anthropology**, trans. Sherry Ortner Paul and Robert A. Paul (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 37.
37. **Studies in Parapsychology**, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1977), p. 48.
38. John Webster, **The White Devil**, V. vi. in **John Webster and Cyril Tourneur** (New York, Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 117.
39. John Webster, **The Duchess of Malfi**, IV.ii. in **Webster and Tourneur**, p. 193
40. "The Imaginary Signifier," **Screen**, 16, No. 2 (1975), pp. 23-24.
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43. Barthes, **The Pleasure of the Text**, trans. Richard Howard (Paris, 1973; rpt. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 67.
44. **Pleasure of the Text**, p. 65.
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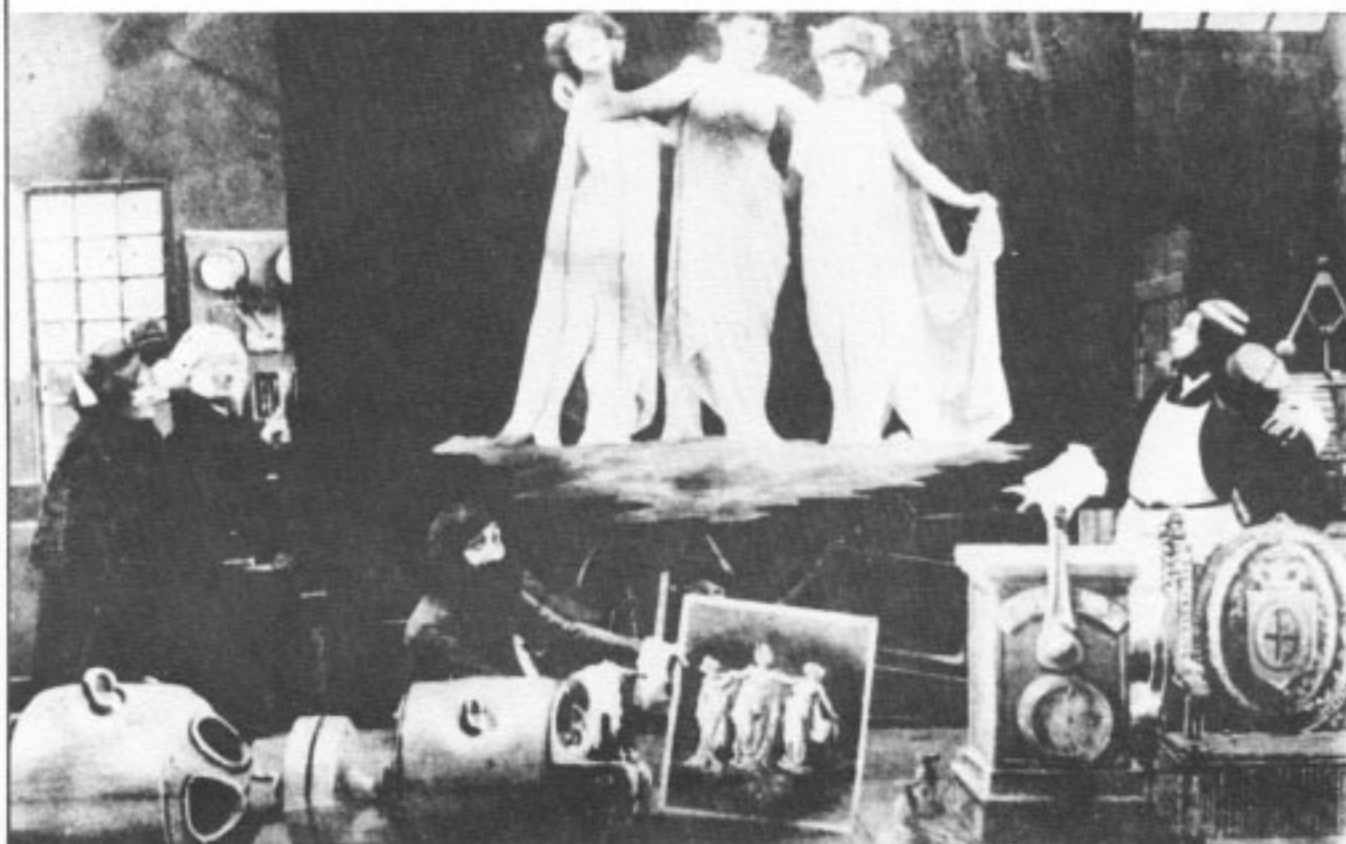
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