



# MOVIE

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A JOURNAL OF FILM CRITICISM

ISSUE 7

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MAY 2017

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A JOURNAL OF FILM CRITICISM

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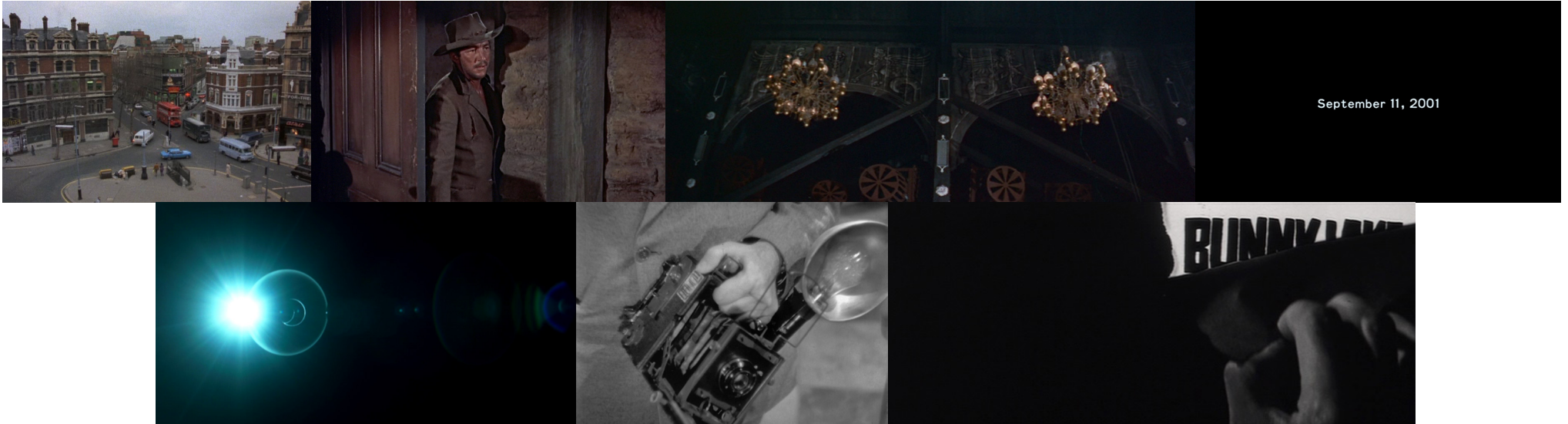
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## OPENING CHOICES

### Introduction

This dossier on Opening Choices brings together a group of studies which are heterogeneous but also akin to each other in significant ways. In terms of differences, there is a considerable spread of periods of filmmaking represented, ranging in date from *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946) to *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013), and a wide range of genres and types: thrillers of various kinds, a western, sci-fi, dramas revolving around single characters, intimate single settings and large scale historical, or quasi historical films, as well as different national cinemas. One takes videographic form, another addresses a television series.

What the essays have in common is the bias towards focusing on works which have been the subject of previous critical attention. That attention has looked at the whole, but such accounts have often skimmed over, or ignored the meanings and purposes of the opening moments. This is true of both the more heavily trodden ground of works by Hitchcock or Ophüls to the initial scholarly interest emerging with regard to the more recent films. In both cases, the weight of achievement, or the complexity of discussion which the works taken as wholes have received – or are beginning to receive – is taken to have deflected attention from their openings, and these pieces are addressing this imbalance. This seems to be

true where the openings are sharply distinguished in terms of qualities of style, setting, or mode from what follows, creating a division that explicitly announces them as prologues to the dramas that go on to be developed. But it is equally true where the distinction is much less sharp, where the openings would not immediately strike us as differentiating themselves in a clear way from the action that is to follow.

Again, what is largely the case is that the essays in the dossier are arguing for the overall coherence of the film and television texts they address. They claim that they can be better understood if we see exactly how these opening moments initiate and characterise some of the actions, interests or moods that will follow. Together they make a varied but strong case for the argument that works of substantial achievement know what they are doing in their opening moments, and that their openings invite particular ways of understanding what follows. With its wide range of source materials, what the dossier might be said to argue is that the opening choices of film makers will greatly benefit from critical analysis, when we pause to pay attention to them.

EDWARD GALLAFENT AND JOHN GIBBS



# OPENING CHOICES

## *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*: Significantly ordinary

Fade in on a towering, high-angle shot of London's Cambridge Circus at midday. As the camera stares down upon the streets below, we may note a number of pedestrians moving about – people walking along the pavement, cars and busses passing through the streets and around the junction's central concrete island. The sky overhead is grey and low, the trees bare, and the men and women all appear cloaked in heavy coats. It is winter, or perhaps late autumn. After lingering upon this scene for five seconds, a cut carries us inside a cramped, nondescript office, through the door of which a man enters, wearing a gaudy pin-striped suit that seems out of keeping with his drab surroundings.

So begins the 1979 BBC miniseries adaptation of John le Carré's 1974 novel *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, directed by John Irvin. In this essay, we will not be concerned with the man in the bespoke suit (a high-ranking Secret Intelligence Service official named Toby Esterhase, played by Bernard Hepton), nor with his three MI6 colleagues who soon follow him into the room, nor with the protagonist George Smiley's (Alec Guinness) quest to uncover which of those four men is a mole sent by the Soviet Union to sabotage Britain's intelligence gathering apparatus. We will not, that is, be concerned with any of the narrative intricacies or political intrigues of

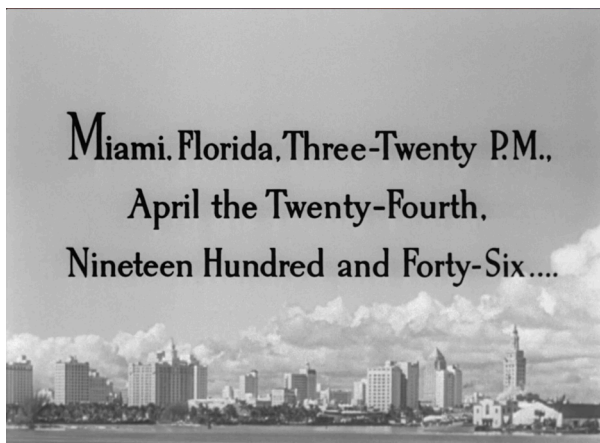


le Carré's spy story. My focus, will be on the opening shot, those first five seconds, that image of Cambridge Circus presented to us before the players take the stage and the wheels of plot begin to turn in earnest.

What are we to make of this shot? We might begin to answer that question by analyzing its basic formal function. It is, first and foremost, an establishing shot, meant to orient the spectator with regard to the film's fictional world and to indicate the story's location in time and space. Such opening shots, of course, have long been commonplace in narrative cinema. Classical Hollywood, for instance, abounded with opening shots of cityscapes and skylines. Films set in New York with

**ABOVE** *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (BBC, 1979):  
Opening shot of Cambridge Circus, London





the Empire State Building or Rockefeller Center (*Nothing Sacred* [William Wellman, 1937]), those in San Francisco with the Golden Gate Bridge (*The Maltese Falcon* [John Huston, 1941]). More often than not, a printed title would accompany these images as a kind of confirmation. Films set in cities with less identifiable landmarks, such as *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946), would rely almost entirely on these textual accompaniments to convey the intended information.

Writing about such shots, Robert B. Ray argues that they may be taken as exemplary of commercial filmmaking's tendency to rely, in Roland Barthes's words, on 'a certain redundancy, a kind of semantic prattle.' 'Studio Hollywood,' Ray writes, 'will always assume the viewer's ignorance of even unmistakable landmarks. The Eiffel Tower must come equipped with an explicit marker, "PARIS"' (2008: 189). David Bordwell observes something similar about Hollywood's typical approach to openings in The Classical Hollywood Cinema. These moments, Bordwell suggests, often mark the point at which a film's narration is at its most overtly declarative and self-conscious (1985: 26). The key information is presented directly rather than through expository dialogue or some other more oblique device. To put it more succinctly, these moments tell rather than show.

Made for British television nearly twenty years after the final collapse of the Hollywood studio system, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* grows out of a very different aesthetic tradition than the Hollywood films mentioned above, but a comparison between its opening and theirs might still prove productive for teaching us about how the shot works, and about opening shots more generally. The shot of Cambridge Circus is neither boldly assertive in its iconography (as a shot of Big Ben would be), nor accompanied by a printed title to confirm the identity of the city we're looking at. To be sure, the series' original audience, watching on the BBC in 1979, might

recognise the setting as Cambridge Circus (though the shot significantly omits the Palace Theatre, the intersection's most famous landmark). For non-British viewers (such as the author) encountering the series in syndication or on home video, however, that moment of instant recognition is much less likely to dawn, and in the absence of a captioning title a certain fog of indeterminacy will hang over the image. Even younger British audiences might have difficulty immediately recognising the exact location, as in the years since the series' initial airing the Circus's roundabout has been replaced with a crossroads. We might surmise from prior knowledge of le Carré's novel or of the series' basic premise (or by the presence of a red, double-decker Routemaster bus) that we are looking at a shot of London, but the image itself does not overtly assert this fact. Such inferences, that is, would be purely extra-textual.

What might we make of this decision? At one level, we might simply see it as an instance of what Mark Fisher has identified as the series' propensity to throw 'us directly into [its] world' with little explanation. 'Guinness's Smiley,' he writes, 'incarnated a model of BBC paternalism: he guided us through his world, but he had very high expectations of us' (2011: 41). The opening shot might thus be seen as an initial example of this explanatory reticence. Such reticence itself, furthermore, might be thought of as demonstrating a commitment to an aesthetic and narrative program that embraces what Ernest Callenbach once praised, in a letter to Seymour Chatman, as the cinema's 'inherent capacity for discretion and indirection' (Chatman 1990: 44).

Indeed, the shot of Cambridge Circus seems as good an illustration as any of Chatman's own contention that filmed images 'show only features; it is up to the audience to interpret them.' As an example of this phenomenon, Chatman points to a published transcription of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) that describes its opening shot as depicting 'a 25 year old brunette [walking] through the courtyard in front of a stately villa.' Unlike this prose description, Chatman argues, the film 'cannot guarantee [...] that everyone in the audience understands the character to be exactly 25 and the villa to be stately' (1990: 43). Similarly, the makers of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* cannot guarantee that the

**TOP** *Nothing Sacred* (William Wellman, 1937):  
Opening shot of New York's Rockefeller Plaza  
accompanied by written narration

**MIDDLE** *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941):  
The Golden Gate Bridge and identifying text

**BOTTOM** *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946):  
Miami's skyline with identifying text

audience will immediately recognise Cambridge Circus. Classical Hollywood's tendency to affix printed titles to even the most iconographically 'obvious' establishing shots might be understood as an anxious attempt to overcome precisely this inherent ambiguity.

But even printed titles and famous landmarks cannot fully guarantee that 'everyone in the audience' will grasp the information being conveyed. For a viewer who had never heard of San Francisco, *The Maltese Falcon's* opening would seem as opaque as our shot of Cambridge Circus. In fact, in some senses, it might register as more opaque. Because its purpose is purely informational, and because the information it seeks to convey is so simple and direct ('this film is set in San Francisco, CA'), even a small failure of comprehension will render the shot uncommunicative. On the other hand, because it is less overtly informational and more open in design, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy's* opening shot can still function even for an audience wholly unfamiliar with the locale it depicts. The question, then, is what does it function as? What information does it offer?

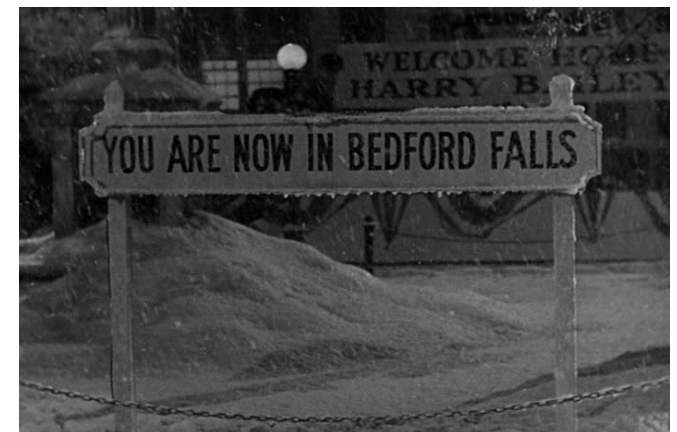
We might begin to answer this by thinking about the image, and its classical Hollywood cousins, by following Ray's invocation of Barthes and employing the tripartite semiotic schema proposed in his canonical essay 'The Rhetoric of the Image'. Any given photograph, Barthes posits, contains three distinct levels of meaning, 'a linguistic message, a coded iconic message, and a non-coded iconic message' (1977: 36). The first of these is more or less self-explanatory, comprising any and all printed or spoken language that accompanies a given image – captions on newspaper photographs or advertisements, dialogue or voiceover in films or TV programs, and so on. Its function, more often than not, is to 'anchor' our reading of the image, clarifying the image's contents and directing our interpretation. The second two, Barthes notes, are slightly more difficult to define and disentangle, as they 'share the same (iconic) substance' (1977: 36). Roughly, though, the 'coded' iconic message works through visual elements that derive from, and refer to, 'a general cultural knowledge' (35) and its meanings are largely "symbolic" [...] or connoted' (46). A photograph of the Eiffel Tower, for instance, may be used

to convey notions of class and sophistication stereotypically associated with a particular kind of 'Parisian' culture.

In contrast with the connotative and coded second message, the third is both more obvious and elusive. This 'denoted message' is what remains, or what would remain, if 'the signs of connotation [were] mentally deleted' (42). That is, the third message is simply the 'real objects' present before the camera. Unlike the first two messages, Barthes suggests, 'reading' this message requires no linguistic or cultural foreknowledge, but only basic perceptual faculties. Beyond connoting class and sophistication, a photograph of the Eiffel Tower also presents a large metallic structure towering over a cityscape whose existence, as an object, precedes and exceeds the cultural connotations we might attach to it.

With this in mind, we can begin to make a finer distinction between the typical Classic Hollywood establishing shot and the one we encounter at the start of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. The examples from Hollywood operate almost exclusively at the linguistic and iconic levels, offering heavily coded images that both clearly indicate a locale and draw upon stores of cultural connotations to prepare us for the film that follows. As Ray puts it, Hollywood filmmaking 'practices a certain laconic economy, dependent on the audience's knowledge of stereotypes' (2008: 189). To continue with our previous example, we might reasonably expect a Hollywood film that opens with a shot of the Eiffel Tower to be a light, 'sophisticated' comedy. Similarly, the opening of a film like *To Have and Have Not* (Howard Hawks, 1944) immediately suggests exotic, high seas adventurism, while *It's a Wonderful Life's* (Frank Capra, 1946) conjures the image of 'small town America' and its attendant virtues.

In contrast, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy's* first shot initially appears to be more purely denotative, presenting us a scene without apparent significance, an image without clear reference to any well-defined cultural code – a simple slice of city life caught unawares, an unstaged depiction of 'aleatory' action. And yet, as Barthes is quick to point out, no photograph can be wholly without connotation: 'Even if a totally "naïve" image were to be achieved, it would immediately join the sign of naivety and be completed by a third – symbolic – message [...]. It is an absence of meaning full of all



**TOP** *To Have and Have Not* (Howard Hawks, 1944):  
An opening image evoking high seas adventure and foreign intrigue

**BOTTOM** *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946):  
An opening image evoking small town America



the meanings' (1977: 42). Something of this nature is at work in the shot of Cambridge Circus. The signifiers here, though not so obviously coded as the Eiffel Tower or the Golden Gate Bridge, still signify. The sights and muffled, distantly recorded sounds of the city, of a commercial district in daylight, evoke the hustle and bustle of ordinary life, calling to mind the shared cultural experiences of workaday drudgery. The circular motion of vehicles moving around the intersection's central island conveys this more forcefully, standing as a kind of symbolic representation of, or objective correlative for, the repetitive, diurnal cycle of the typical weekday. Indeed, years later, Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant would include in the opening credits of *The Office* (BBC, 2001-2003) a shot that (unconsciously?) echoes *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*'s opening image. Moreover, the shot itself seems to recall, if unintentionally, the opening sequence of the long-running ITV soap opera *Coronation Street*, whose static shots of a practically anonymous Northern English town quickly establishes the series' working class milieu.

**BELOW** *The Office* (BBC, 2001-2003):  
An image from the opening credits reminiscent of  
*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*'s opening



Both *Coronation Street* and *The Office* were series manifestly about the ordinary, with the latter, in particular, concerning itself with depicting the crushing dullness of everyday life in a corporate, bureaucratic society. In its own way, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* shares this concern. In his novels, le Carré has always taken pains to stress the wretched and unglamorous aspects of spycraft and espionage. His first novels, appearing in the early 1960s, are easily read as implicit rebukes to the adolescent fantasies of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels and their popular film adaptations. If those films made the spy's life out to be a never-ending parade of car chases, gunfights, and amorous conquests set in exotic locations all over the globe, le Carré responded by depicting the business of intelligence gathering as, well, a business. Sure, spies may travel to Budapest or Lisbon (as characters in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* do), but most of the important action is carried out by stern looking men in cramped London offices. As the protagonist of le Carré's breakout novel, 1963's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, puts it, '[Spies are] just a bunch of squalid, seedy bastards like me: little men, drunkards, queers, hen-pecked husbands, civil servants playing cowboys and Indians.'

Despite le Carré's authorial insistence, however, we as readers might still be tempted to 'dress up' the mental images we generate while reading his books. Fired by their exposure to the Bond films and other popular spy fictions, our imaginations might unconsciously impute some romance and adventure into the novels' cold, starkly bureaucratic world, or make their characters slightly more attractive and glamorous than le Carré's prose descriptions might suggest them to be. Words on a page are, after all, merely words on a page, and even the most precise collection of adjectives remains open to a degree of imaginative interpretation.

The results of succumbing to such temptations are fruitfully demonstrated in the 2011 feature film adaptation of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* directed by Tomas Alfredson. Though Alfredson and his collaborators admirably condense le Carré's labyrinthine plot into a two-hour runtime, they fatally miss the mark when it comes to capturing the book's mood and spirit. Fisher, in his discussion of the film, evocatively highlights several of its failings on this front in the areas of casting and mise-en-scène, noting that 'too many' of the

film's 'preposterously fresh faced' actors 'too often [...] seem like twenty-first century moisturized metrosexuals in 1970s drag – and bad drag at that [...]. The skin, the hair, are too good. The faces are without the sallow, harried look [...] their voices unable to convey any sense of the bitter, brutalizing effects of the spy's life' (2011: 41). Fisher also notes a shift from the series' 'unprepossessing, functional, dreary' interiors to the more lavishly appointed sets of the film, whose version of the MI6 office resembles, to his eyes, 'something from a nightclub' (2011: 42).

In keeping with our present focus, we might also profitably compare the film's opening to that of the series. After a brief prologue depicting a meeting between Control (John Hurt), the former head of MI6, and Jim Prideaux (Mark Strong), one of his agents, in which the basic elements of the mole plotline are established, the film immediately transports us to Budapest, where Prideaux has been sent to gather information on the mole. The sequence is larded with sweeping vistas and swooping tracking shots and accompanied by a dramatic, orchestral score. This ostentatious camera style, which Alfredson continues to employ through the remainder of the film, is in stark contrast to the spartan restraint of the BBC series, but well in accord with the cinematographic norms of the contemporary spy thriller. We can thus see here where the film version goes awry. It sees le Carré's novel as merely another spy story, and consequently adorns it with all of that genre's standard signifiers and stylistic effects. One of the great virtues of Irvin's version is that it recognises that le Carré was doing something other than just writing spy stories, and in adapting the novel for the (small) screen it effectively concretises his vision of espionage as primarily a dreary and quotidian affair. Unlike with the novel, where our imaginations remain free to run (somewhat) wild, the BBC series insists on these elements.

Chatman, in a different exploration of the difference between narrational processes in cinema and literature, argues that the key distinction between the 'ways that visual details are presented in novels and films' is their relative level of assertiveness. As he puts it,

an 'assertion' is a statement, usually an independent sentence or clause, that something is in fact the case, that it is a



**ABOVE** *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (Tomas Alfredson, 2011):  
A sweeping vista of Budapest

certain sort of thing, that it does in fact have certain properties or enter into certain relations, namely, those listed.

Opposed to asserting there is mere naming. (1980: 128)

He illustrates this by comparing two statements: 'The cart was tiny; it came onto the bridge' and 'The green cart came onto the bridge.' The first of these, he argues, 'asserts that certain property of the cart being small in size and that certain relation of arriving on the bridge' while the second 'assert[s] nothing more than [the cart's] arrival at the bridge; the greenness of the cart is not asserted but slipped in without syntactic fuss. It is only named.' Film, he goes on to suggest, is mostly 'of the latter textual order: it requires special effort for films to assert a property or relation. The dominant mode is presentation, not assertive' (1980: 128). Earlier, we looked at *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*'s opening shot as an example of exactly this phenomenon, of film's apparent capacity to present without asserting, to depict without editorialising.

Looked at in comparison with the 2011 film version, and with mainstream spy films more generally, however, the shot suddenly seems to take on a slightly different character, and its very reticence and discretion come to appear as its most assertive aspects. What they assert, though, has nothing to



do with the internal properties and relations of the scene depicted, but rather with the series' own aesthetic strategies and their relation to the other members of its genre. If we take the series as a whole to be at least in part a rebuke to Bond films and other mainstream spy fictions, then we might see its pedestrian and ordinary opening shot as offering something like a statement of purpose. What is more, our ability to 'read' this aspect of the shot depends just as much on a pre-established knowledge of cultural codes as does our ability to 'know' what images of the Eiffel Tower or Golden Gate Bridge signify. We must have some familiarity with the conventions of the spy genre in order to recognise *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*'s divergence from them. Here, though, the codes communicate not by being present in the image, but by being absent from it. Their silence speaks volumes.

At the same time, as VF Perkins and Gilberto Perez have pointed out, no shot can ever be a 'simple' depiction completely devoid of commentary or expressivity. The nature of the medium itself requires that the camera be placed in a particular position so as to record a particular aspect of the world from a particular angle and distance. Such placement involves a deliberate choice of perspective, and no perspective can ever be completely neutral or free of implication. In attending to these matters, we might note Irvin's choice to film *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*'s opening shot of Cambridge Circus from an abnormally distant and severe high-angle perspective. In the context of a story about spying and espionage, and about ordinary-looking men who engage in such activities, and who might be hiding dark and terrible secrets, such a perspective cannot help but take on a lightly sinister aspect, carrying with it a whispered suggestion of mass surveillance networks operating just out of view. Such an association, of course, may strike a contemporary audience more forcefully than it might have the series' original audience in 1979, over a decade before CCTV and other surveillance systems became ubiquitous in London and other major global cities. But such an association is still there in the shot's framing, waiting to be read – another reminder of both the imbrication of everyday life and geopolitical power that is one of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*'s chief concerns, and of the dense significance present in this apparently ordinary opening image.

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# OPENING CHOICES

## *Rio Bravo:* Dude walks into a saloon

In the first shot of *Rio Bravo* (Howard Hawks, 1959) – the first, that is, after the opening credits sequence – Dude (Dean Martin) enters a saloon by a side door. This is not an obviously distinctive opening shot, nor is it among the most immediately memorable moments in the movie. Nonetheless, close attention to the shot reveals considerable complexity and economy of expression. Robin Wood, who describes *Rio Bravo* as the film he would choose to ‘justify the existence of Hollywood’, observes that ‘Hawks is at his most completely personal and individual when his work is most firmly traditional’ (1968: 35). All artworks have to negotiate their own relationship between the generic and the particular, the familiar and the idiosyncratic, but, as Wood suggests, the balance achieved between these dimensions in *Rio Bravo* is particularly rich and productive. A complex relationship between convention and specificity emerges across the movie as a whole, but it is striking how much of that relationship, and the basis for its subsequent development, can already be discerned in its opening shot.

The shot is not ostentatious. The action it depicts is slow and tentative, and its style of presentation does not draw attention to itself. Dude is shown in a medium shot, the camera reframing gently to keep him central as he enters and

moves into the saloon. In these respects, the shot offers us a functional, unremarkable depiction of a character entering through a door and fits Richard Schickel’s description of Hawks’ characteristic approach: ‘He will not sue for attention or favour’ (1977: 97).

At the same time, what we see is still presented to us as an entrance. One of the main characters, played by a recognisable star, is introduced. The opening of the door and Dude’s movement out of the shadows in the doorway promote a momentary sense of anticipation. The effect is fleeting, but enough to add a subtle emphasis to the entrance, beyond that which it already carries simply by being the first shot of the movie and the introduction of the first identifiable character.

The music also emphasises Dude’s entrance. As Dude opens and moves through the door, we hear a succession of slow three-note phrases on a Spanish guitar. After Dude shuts the door and stands by the wall, this slow melody is followed by a strummed chord and a contrasting fast, descending, flamenco-like figure. The music brackets Dude’s entrance, presenting it as a self-contained action, of interest in its own right. The emphasis provided by the music is identifiable but, again, light. The guitar is quiet – it can be heard over the background noise of the saloon but not fully separated from it.

The opening shot is brief (lasting only 12 seconds) and understated, but also dense in terms of the detail that it starts to make available to us. The particularities of the shot begin to suggest and refine some of what will be important in the film to come, in the specific dimensions of its story and world and in the ways in which our attention will be directed.

Among the most pertinent details in the shot are those relating to character and performance. Dude pushes the door open very gently, but this is not a controlled, deliberate movement, as we might expect from a character who was, say, peeking through an opening in a door and trying to avoid detection. Rather, Dude opens the door in a series of small, fitful movements. His entrance seems nervous, perhaps uncertain or embarrassed. The specific circumstances that produce such an entrance – Dude’s alcoholism, the humiliation he experiences frequenting saloons and begging for drinks – will be clarified as the film proceeds. It is already apparent, though, that this is not an assertive or confident





entrance. Rather than opening the door fully, Dude makes a relatively narrow gap in the doorway and edges through it. Neither does he move far forward once he is inside, instead staying close to the wall and starting to sidle along it. Dude's movements in the opening shot start to draw our attention to the importance within the movie of the degree of assurance or conviction with which characters act in particular situations. The central theme of the film has been repeatedly characterised in terms of 'self-respect' (Wood 1968: 48; Pye 1975: 41) and the sureness or otherwise of physical action and bearing is established as a key measure of this more abstract quality.

We are introduced to Dude in the opening shot through his movements and his appearance. He is noticeably dishevelled: he is unshaven, his jacket has a large tear on the breast, his collar is half turned-out and his hat is worn and starting to lose its shape. There is a suggestion of an undershirt underneath Dude's jacket, but it is unbuttoned, exposing his upper chest. Dude appears partially or carelessly dressed in a western, a genre in which the costuming of heroes, although not necessarily pristine, often emphasises elements of precision and control. We do not yet know Dude's name (or preferred nickname) but we will learn it shortly after the opening series of scenes. Among its other associations, the word 'dude' can refer to a dandy, and the extent of Dude's degradation at the start of the movie is retrospectively emphasised as he gets cleaned up and his costume acquires a more ordered and deliberate (if still casual) quality.

Comic drunkenness was, of course, a conventional feature of Dean Martin's persona as an actor and singer, but the state in which we first see Dude is not presented in comic terms. This is apparent in Martin's performance in the opening shot. There is a quality of intentness in Dude's eyes, which seem to be drawn to something in the saloon. However, he does not seem to be happy or excited – this seems to be a case more of compulsion than of any more positive motivation. There is a tension between the yearning in his facial expression, particularly in his eyes, and the tentative character of his movements. Martin's performance in the shot suggests that, while Dude may be in the grip of some sort of compulsion, he also feels conflicted or ambivalent about it, perhaps not as far as being able to resist, but far enough that his movements do not

match the intensity and desire in his eyes. While we anticipate that the tension we see in the opening shot will be developed and clarified for us in what will follow, a complex portrayal is already emerging.

As well as opening the door in a tentative, even embarrassed fashion, Dude also closes it gently, keeping his hand on it as if to stop it from making a noise. While he is clearly not hiding, it is obvious that he is not trying to draw attention to himself either. It is also significant that when he closes the door, he is looking elsewhere – his eyes are focused on the interior of the saloon, which we have yet to see. This not only accentuates a sense of distraction, an impression that Dude's attention is pulled in a certain direction at the expense of other concerns, but also suggests his familiarity with the place he is entering. He knows exactly where the door is and how to close it quietly without devoting any more than the slightest of conscious attention to it. Later in the movie, Dude will describe himself as 'an expert on saloons'. This is already hinted at in the opening shot, where the environment suggests a potential context for the qualities emerging in Martin's performance. Although it is not definitively confirmed that Dude is in a saloon until the second shot, which follows his eyeline and shows us the bar area, this is a reasonable inference to draw even before the film cuts away from Dude. The cowboy-hatted shadows on the door and wall and the background chatter we can hear suggest that this is a space of social gathering, and in a western this often means a saloon.

As my last point suggests, the details made available to us in the opening shot of *Rio Bravo* also help to shape our initial impressions of the environment that Dude is entering. We see the door before we see Dude come in, and have a brief opportunity to register its texture and that of the surrounding walls. The door is worn and marked, especially along the near edge. The rough walls, made from an adobe-like material, combine with the style of the guitar music to suggest a Mexican or Southwestern milieu (already implicit in the film's title). This tentative impression is supported by another prominent feature of Dude's appearance: the sweat visible on his face and chest. The film seems to be playing on conventional, even stereotypical associations of Mexican cantina-type locations as places of heat and excess, of illicit and destructive pleasures.



It is also significant for our impressions of both the milieu and the manner of Dude's introduction that he enters through a standard panel door rather than a pair of batwing doors. The door we see is a mundane, everyday fixture, its colour a drab brown. It is not the type of door conventionally associated with the main entrances of western saloons, and Dude does not enter in a way associated with that type of door. His entrance is not emphatic or frontal – he seems instead to be creeping in through a side door. Again, this distinction gets addressed more explicitly later in the movie, when Dude and Chance (John Wayne) chase a murderer into another of the film's multiple saloons. Dude requests that he should enter this saloon by the front door, because during the worst of his drunken destitution he was only allowed in via rear or side doors. Although it is much less explicit in the opening shot, an initial basis for the distinction is already in place, with the type of door combining with Martin's performance to suggest a furtive, even shameful dimension to Dude's entrance.

The illustration of Dude's typical way of entering a saloon in the opening shot and the subsequent clarification of its significance exemplify a central aspect of the approach to storytelling in *Rio Bravo*. Details are introduced subtly and unobtrusively, with their significance often emerging several scenes later. Other examples of this include the flowerpot used by Feathers (Angie Dickinson) and Colorado (Ricky Nelson) when they intervene to save Chance from the villain's henchmen, and the handbill containing information about Feathers and her late husband. The flowerpot is visible by the front door of the Hotel Alamo in a number of scenes as we see characters entering and leaving. By the time it plays a significant role in the action, we have had the chance to become accustomed to its ambient presence. Similarly, we see Chance open and read a letter, later revealed to contain Feathers' handbill, during an early scene with Dude and Stumpy (Walter Brennan) at the jail. Chance puts the handbill in his jacket pocket and takes Dude out on night patrol to distract him from his alcohol withdrawal. At this point, the handbill is little more than an incidental detail – the emphasis is on Dude's suffering and Chance's concern. A couple of scenes later, Chance brings the handbill out when he is mistakenly accusing Feathers of cheating at cards. Only then does it become a more prominent



element. The variety of emphasis within these examples also highlights the richness and range possible within the film's characteristic style of narration: the flowerpot and the handbill are introduced so gently that they are easy to miss, while the details of the opening shot are quietly suggestive from the outset.

Returning briefly to the matter of doors, a pair of batwing doors would also show us more of the space outside the saloon than we see when Dude enters. We get a glimpse of a blurred strip of wall through the door that Dude opens, but nothing more. At this stage in the movie, we are not given any clear sense of the environment beyond the saloon. We have, however, already seen something of the outside world in the opening credits sequence. In this sequence, we see an unidentified party of riders and wagons, later revealed to be Pat Wheeler (Ward Bond) and his employees, coming down a track towards the camera. One effect of this sequence is to





establish a milieu that is generically western but otherwise largely non-specific. We see western iconography – horses, wagons, western clothes, a mountain and a dirt track – but we are given little indication of who the characters are, where they are going or what might be important or distinctive about what we are seeing. Indeed, there would be little point in doing so, since we only see Wheeler and his party under and between the opening credits and are not in the position to give them our full attention.

Later, it becomes apparent that Wheeler and his wagons arrive in the film's town (which may be called Rio Bravo, although this is not explicitly confirmed) the day after the night depicted in the opening scene. Assuming that the credits sequence does show Wheeler's party about to arrive in town (rather than simply making their way down a slope at some earlier stage in their journey) the sequence is temporally

un-anchored, detached from the circumstances of the beginning of the story. Just as the credits sequence provides a general indication of the western genre, it also creates a general sense of arrival or beginning, rather than establishing a more specific relation to the events that will unfold.

The music in the credits sequence contributes to a related effect. The credits are accompanied by an instrumental arrangement of the song 'Rio Bravo' (of which we hear two lines sung by Dean Martin at the end of the movie) with the melody played on harmonica, accompanied by guitar and percussion. The instrumentation and folksy ballad style again form part of the film's general introduction of itself as a western. The acoustic character of the music, however, is more distinctive. The harmonica reverberates, as if it were playing in a large, resonant space. This gives the music a hazy, distant quality, reinforcing the impression that our initial access to the world of the film remains vague and unformed. We are waiting, at this point, for something more concrete to emerge.

This is an important context for the opening shot. Dude's entrance starts to extend and refine the general impressions made in the credits sequence. It has been established as pertinent that *Rio Bravo* is a western, that its story will take place in a conventional western milieu, with western-type characters and so on, and the opening shot continues to draw on generic associations. Dude's costume and behaviour evoke a number of possible western types: he may be a bandit or some other type of itinerant character, one forced to live in difficult material circumstances. Or perhaps Dude is a different type of bedraggled westerner: the town drunk, which of course he is quickly revealed to be. The generic associations of saloons are immediately in play and, as I have mentioned, the shot also hints at some of the stereotypical connotations of a Mexican or border town milieu.

As well as developing these broad, generic meanings, however, the first shot also constitutes a decisive shift in specificity and focus. We move from a general sense of western-ness in a vaguely defined exterior setting to a depiction of a particular character, looking and behaving in a particular way, entering a particular interior space and relating to that space in a particular and complex fashion. The change in register is reflected in the style, in the closeness and controlled scope of

the shot and the opportunities it gives us to register the details of mise-en-scène. We have been taken, as it were, from 'Rio Bravo is a western' to 'Rio Bravo is this western' and the movie starts to offer us ways to refine our understanding of what this particular western will be like.

The details that emerge in the opening shot are presented to us quickly, but, as I have argued, subtly. Their significance is not emphatically declared, and no single detail is isolated or amplified. The discernible shift in register after the credits sequence draws our attention to the details that we are starting to encounter, but the subtlety of presentation suggests that our attention itself is also important. David Thomson notes that a 'principle' in Hawks' movies is 'that men are more expressive rolling a cigarette than saving the world' (2003: 380). Although referring to Hawks more generally, Thomson is alluding specifically to *Rio Bravo*, in which the repeated action of Chance rolling a cigarette for Dude acquires considerable significance. The rich but unassuming character of the opening shot suggests that attention to small, specific details of this kind will continue to be rewarded in the movie to come.

The emphasis on the accumulation of significant details is maintained over the next few shots as Dude moves further into the saloon and we see more of it. It becomes apparent that Dude is our conduit into the specific world of the film and our connection to him continues to develop. However, we soon encounter another substantial shift in register when we move into the more extensively-discussed portion of the first scene, described by Douglas Pye as the film's 'famous "silent" opening' (1975: 39). In this part of the scene, the absence of dialogue becomes more noticeable and the performances become more stylised and gestural, often emphasised by overt musical flourishes and 'stingers'. The shift occurs when Joe Burdette (Claude Akins) throws a silver dollar into a spittoon for Dude to retrieve and the music suddenly becomes louder, more fully orchestrated and more obviously matched to the shot-by-shot action. At this point, the background sounds of the saloon also recede. An obvious explanation for this would seem to be that everyone in the saloon stops what they are doing to watch the ensuing confrontation in tense silence. However, the chatter fades away before it is apparent that

there is a confrontation, or that it has attracted much attention from those nearby. The barber behind Dude, for example, continues shaving his customer after Joe throws the coin, and it is only apparent that the saloon's patrons are watching after Chance gets involved. The change occurs in the soundtrack before it can be discerned in the action. The throwing of the dollar is significant in itself as a bullying gesture intended to humiliate Dude, but it also functions as a way of heralding the temporary shift in style and tone.

In the 'silent' sequence, several key aspects of the narrative, including Dude's alcoholism, Chance's role as sheriff and the central conflict involving Joe are introduced or confirmed in stark, readily-understandable terms. It is significant that Chance himself is introduced in this way, looming over the abject Dude in an exaggeratedly low-angled shot. As well as setting up the contrast between Dude and Chance, not just in their characterisation but in the very mode of their introduction, this also establishes the film's self-conscious play with the sense of stature associated with John Wayne, which we will see both reaffirmed and undercut in a range of ways throughout.

The 'silent' sequence acknowledges the strongly generic dimension to the film and its narrative, its reliance on conventional types (like Chance's upright sheriff) and actions (like Joe demonstrating his dishonourable villainy by shooting the unarmed man who intervenes when he is punching Dude). The generic elements are presented with an overtness that borders on parody – for example, the abrupt cut to a close shot of Joe's holster as he draws his gun and shoots the unarmed man – and stands in strong contrast to the gentler, less emphatic style of the first few shots. One effect of this is that we are alerted to the presence of very different types and levels of expression in the movie. Alongside its emphasis on subtle and specific details, the film also relies on broader and more explicit elements. For example, while Stumpy is a central character and the complexities of his relationships with other characters (particularly Chance) are developed across the movie, his presentation remains firmly within the conventional terms of the comic old-timer. In the climactic shoot-out, he greets the news that he has been standing next to a wagon full of dynamite by exclaiming 'Jumpin' Jehoshaphat!'





The shifts between registers in the opening sequence help to emphasise the importance of our attention across different levels of overtness and subtlety and prepare us for the various ways in which these levels will be combined in the movie. In the opening moments of the movie we are presented with contrasting levels of expression first sequentially, then in combination. After the 'silent' sequence, Dude helps Chance to arrest Joe and we return to a less obviously heightened style where individual details are no longer given the same emphasis through music and editing. However, some broader flourishes still remain, like Chance's 360-degree spin when he hits Joe with his rifle. Over the course of the first few minutes, then, it is demonstrated to us that a large range of types and levels of detail matter in this movie, from the subtleties of facial expressions and background design to much more overt and stylised elements.

By the time that Joe is arrested, our progress into the world of the movie is more or less complete. The shifts in register in the opening scenes make clear the extent to which this progress is gradual. Part of what is exemplified in the opening shot is the wider pattern of the crossing of thresholds. This is anticipated in broader terms in the credits sequence, with its general sense of arrival, but is made more concrete by Dude's entrance. One effect of the 'silent' sequence is to remind us that our entry into the film is not yet complete and that there are still thresholds to be crossed. As Pye observes, 'the emblematic compression of intense action' in the sequence 'borders on the unacceptably schematic' (1975: 40) and we might suspect that such a style would be difficult to sustain. Certainly, we would be unlikely to expect the absence of speech to continue indefinitely in a Hollywood western from the 1950s. The subsequent introduction of dialogue and shift away from the stylistic extremes of the 'silent' sequence make it evident, if it were not already, that we are being introduced to the film in stages. The early scenes of *Rio Bravo* work in a piecemeal fashion, developing the film's complex perspective through repetition, variation and accumulation of detail. This also functions as an introduction to the film's easy and deliberate pacing, which can accommodate both concentrated bursts of exposition (like the 'silent' sequence) and extended passages focused more on relationships and interactions than

on anything more directly related to the main plot (like the song sequence later in the movie).

Dude's entrance is significant in the context of the multiple thresholds that are crossed in the process of establishing the film's characteristic manner and approach, but also in relation to its treatment of convention. A character entering through a doorway is a common trope, widely used for beginnings and introductions (although not necessarily the first thing we see in a movie or a scene). The film noir *The Glass Key* (Stuart Heisler, 1942) opens with an establishing shot of the interior of a political campaign headquarters. The second shot, however, depicts corrupt political operator Paul Madvig (Brian Donlevy) entering through a revolving door with his entourage, and the story develops from there. The first thing we see in *C'era una volta il West / Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone, 1968) is a rickety wooden door creaking open. Shortly afterwards, the looming figure of Stony (Woody Strode) appears in the doorway. Doorway entrances are also sometimes used to introduce major characters, and the stars who play them, further into a movie (I will return to the matter of star entrances below). Amanda Bonner (Katharine Hepburn) in *Adam's Rib* (George Cukor, 1949) is first seen opening her bedroom door to collect the breakfast tray and newspaper, while Tracy Lord (Grace Kelly) in *High Society* (Charles Walters, 1956) is introduced backing through a door with an armful of wedding presents. Hawks himself used the device repeatedly, including in the opening moments of a number of movies. Comparing some of these examples to the first shot in *Rio Bravo* brings us back to some of the distinctive qualities of Dude's entrance while also highlighting the deliberateness with which it is employed as a convention.

If we compare Dude's entrance into the saloon with the arrival of Phillip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) at the Sternwood mansion in *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946) it is evident that the fleeting effect of anticipation created as Dude is revealed in *Rio Bravo* is given a more emphatic and extended treatment in the earlier movie. The anticipation created in *The Big Sleep* is more obviously that of the star entrance, which, as Valerie Orpen notes, is conventionally 'delayed and fragmented' (2003: 88). We see Marlowe's hand as he rings the doorbell and hear Bogart's distinctive voice as





Marlowe introduces himself to the butler before we finally see Marlowe as he enters through the door. In this instance, the doorway entrance is combined with the conventions for introducing a star performer in a way that suggests a character of greater and more immediate stature. The longer shot and the grander doorway also reinforce this contrasting sense of scale. Set against the opening of *The Big Sleep*, we are immediately aware of the humbler and more intimate qualities to Dude's entry in *Rio Bravo*.

Another possible comparison might be to the opening of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953), where Dorothy Shaw (Jane Russell) and Lorelei Lee (Marilyn Monroe) enter through a doorway on a stage and begin the song 'Two Little Girls from Little Rock'. The stage makes us immediately aware of their entrance as part of a performance, deliberately put on for an audience within the film. As with *The Big Sleep*, the use of a long shot rather than a medium shot adds a dimension of grandeur to the entrance. Combined with the set design, the scale of the shot also draws our attention to different possibilities of closeness and distance between performers and their audiences. Dude is not adopting a public persona in the same way – he is neither a performer like Dorothy and Lorelei (consider the contrastingly casual, relaxed position in which he sings later in *Rio Bravo*, reclined on the couch in Chance's office, his hat tilted forward over his eyes) nor a professional meeting with a client like Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*. The contrast here further highlights the more personal, unguarded qualities in Dude's entrance (and Martin's performance) and also the sense of Dude's isolation and estrangement – compared to either the detective or the two singers, he is not playing an obvious role or occupying an identifiable place within a defined relationship.

The self-consciousness with which Hawks treats this type of conventional entrance, though suggested in *The Big Sleep* and especially in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, is perhaps most evident in *Monkey Business* (1952). Here, the opening credits sequence makes an extended gag out of Cary Grant (initially called by the star's name rather than that of his character, Dr. Barnaby Fulton) repeatedly attempting to make his entrance through a doorway, only to be sent back by the director's off-screen voice. His anticipated entrance into the movie



is in fact an exit – we will shortly learn that Barnaby is trying to leave his house and go to a party with his wife, Edwina (Ginger Rogers). After the credits, the initial joke is extended as Barnaby, distracted by thoughts of his scientific research, never actually gets beyond his front door. The conventional entrance that we are primed to anticipate never materialises, and this provides us with a suitably perverse and back-handed introduction to both the character of Barnaby and the film's wider comic world.

In its self-conscious presentation, the doorway entrance in *Monkey Business* is acknowledged as a convention, involving particular expectations surrounding the introduction of



characters and performers, the thwarting or delaying of which forms the basis for the gag. In this way, it is also made explicit that such conventions can be subject to manipulation and inflection, that certain dimensions or details can be varied to create different (in this case, comic) effects. The overtness of the manipulation in this instance can, among its other effects, remind us of the deliberateness with which conventional elements are deployed in Hawks' movies. In this context, it is clear that Dude's entrance in *Rio Bravo*, though treated less emphatically, is an equally deliberate deployment of the convention. Unlike Barnaby, Dude is not impeded by escalating comic complications. What impediments there may be are internal and personal, and this difference is reflected in the more intimate and restrained style with which his entrance is depicted. Nonetheless, we are still being introduced to Dude through an obviously conventional device, highlighted by its placement at the beginning of the movie. Pye argues that 'The compression of *Rio Bravo* is the result of a self-discipline based on understanding the possibilities inherent in the generic material' (1975: 41). The treatment of Dude's entrance, acknowledged as a familiar trope but situated in its own precise and distinctive context, suggests that the controlled and expressive handling of conventions in the movie extends beyond those specifically associated with the western.

Different types of convention are centrally important in *Rio Bravo*, not just as sources of meaning, but as part of the way in which the movie makes its complex perspective available to us. Every stage in the articulation of this perspective is built on and situated within commonplace elements. Hawks' movies, which often work distinctive variations on established and familiar material, present a particular kind of critical challenge: to characterise the complex interactions between generic and idiosyncratic features without artificially separating the conventions from their treatment or assuming the greater value of more obvious deviations. This challenge is intensified when writing about moments like the opening shot of *Rio Bravo*, which could seem to be merely functional. The shot is functional, of course, but, as I hope I have shown, its precise and subtle realisation rewards further attention. At the same time, we must also avoid inflating the significance of such moments in isolation. The value of the shot is best

appreciated in the contexts of the film to which it contributes and of the conventions to which it relates.

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## OPENING CHOICES

### Similar means to different ends: *Lola Montès* as a punch in the gut

*I admire Max Ophuls for knowing how and for daring to make, on the most conventional subject and under conditions that ordinarily produce the worst kind of academic filmmaking, an avant-garde film.*  
(André Bazin, quoted in Müller, [1956] 2004: 41)

To understand the kind of film *Lola Montès* (Max Ophuls, 1955) was originally intended to be, one need only look to the pre-production decision-making of its producers at Gamma Films. They had chosen for their subject a biography both salacious and epic: the dramatic rise and fall of a woman famous for the passions she could incite. They hired Cécil Saint-Laurent to pen the script on the basis of his recent success with the risqué *Caroline Chérie* (Richard Pottier, 1951) and, shortly afterwards, they signed Martine Carol, star of *Caroline*, whose sex-symbol status helped to secure international investment. For director, they had originally sought Michael Powell on the strength of his work on *The Red Shoes* (1948), and they planned in advance to shoot in color and CinemaScope. In short, the film's producers had made every effort to ensure their film would be a spectacular international sensation.

As the case of *Lola Montès* makes clear, however, beginnings do not always lead in the direction one may expect. In the event, Gamma Films surely had cause to be disappointed with the work of their director, Max Ophuls. Indeed, *Lola Montès* performed poorly on initial release, and Ophuls was asked to re-edit and redub scenes for international distribution. Unhappy with his work, the producers edited the film again, converting the flashback structure into a more linear narrative, but ticket sales remained poor. What the producers could not have anticipated was that faced with – and perhaps inspired by – the challenge of directing a super-production, Ophuls would instead direct one of cinema's most lavish self-critiques. As Ophuls' himself wrote in his notebooks, 'The audience is expecting a cream cake but instead it gets a punch in the stomach!' (qtd in Müller 2004: 34).

In its opening moments, *Lola* encourages the false sense of cream-cake comfort to which Ophuls referred. An orchestra plays the overture, and, as the stringed instruments swell, the details of cast and crew appear in ornate gold script across the wide, royal-blue frame. At this point the film is interchangeable with any number of other period dramas, and an audience unfamiliar with Ophuls' work could be forgiven for expecting a routine romance to follow. Such expectations are quickly dashed, however, as a sharp whistle from the Ringmaster (Peter Ustinov) brings a sudden end to the titles and marks the beginning of Ophuls' strongest critique of stardom and spectatorship.

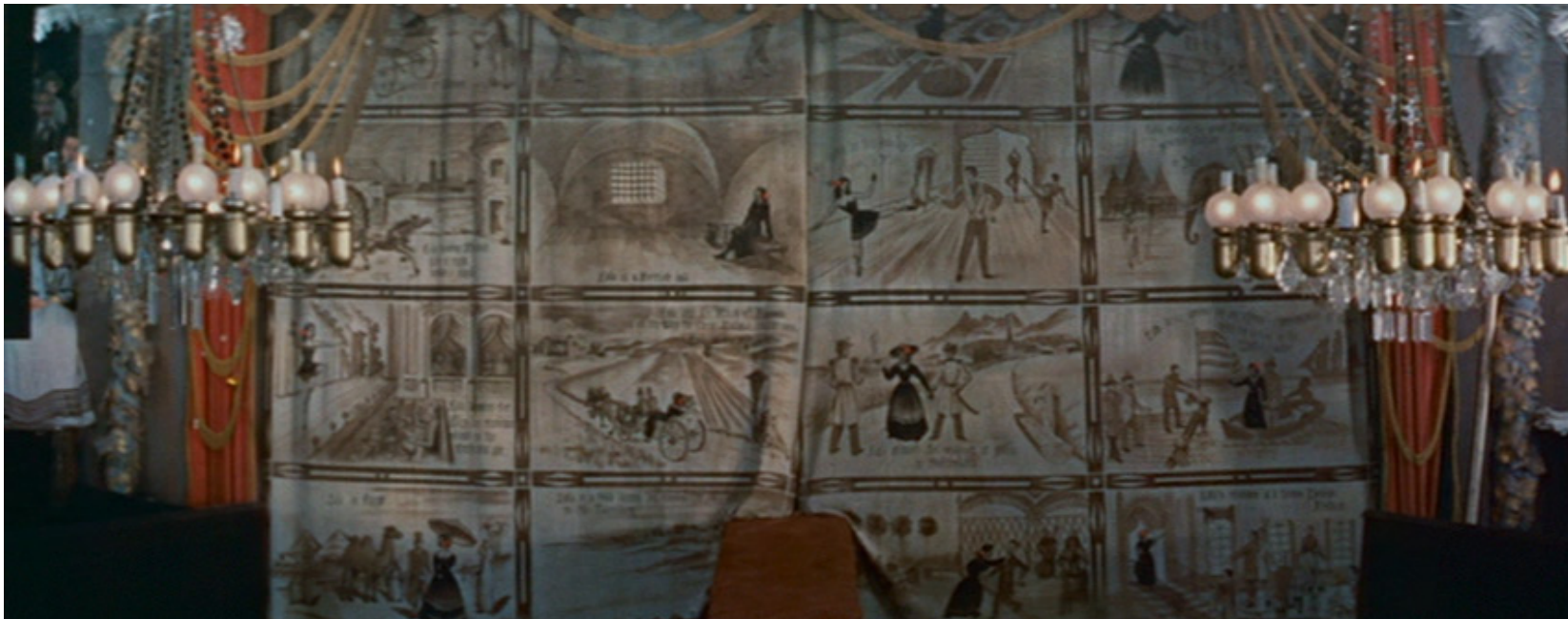
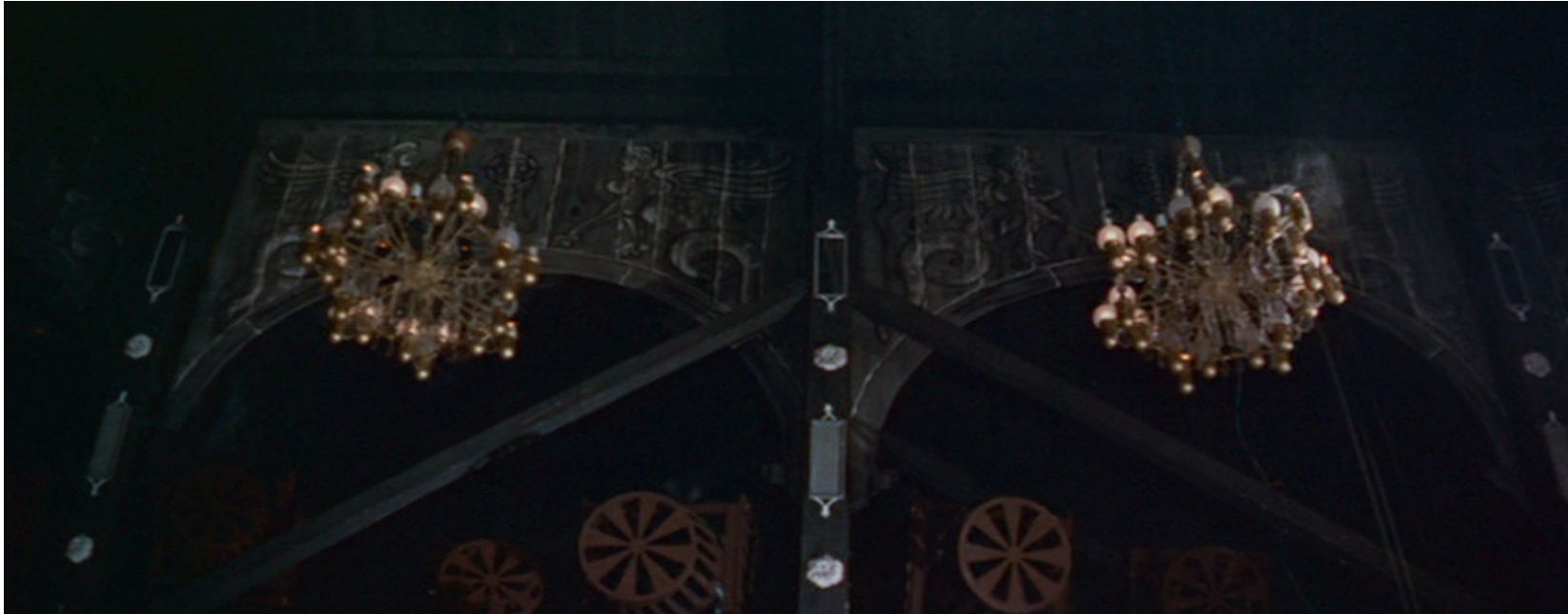
The opening sequence plays as a challenge to the viewer rather than as the fulfillment of the implied promise of the title cards. Indeed, the film as a whole turns the spectacle of CinemaScope against itself in an indictment of the kinds of lavish spectatorial pleasures most often associated with the format: the image of a woman reclining across the full width of the frame, the wide open vistas of the American west, the proscenium staging of a tap routine, crowds filling an enormous square. François Truffaut praised *Lola Montès* as being the first film to use the CinemaScope process 'to the maximum of its potential', but the film itself suggests this potential is rather different from Darryl Zanuck's marketing claims that CinemaScope would give audiences a thrilling sense of immersion in the picture ([1955] 1994: 225). Indeed,

the first shot of the film demonstrates Ophuls' intent to use CinemaScope in a way that makes both the device itself and our position as spectators frustratingly apparent. Or, in V.F. Perkins' words, these opening moments, and indeed the whole of *Lola Montès*, '[seem] to formulate a wonderfully productive new direction' (Britton et al. 1982: 109).

The first shot of the film opens on two chandeliers hanging symmetrically to the left and right of center frame [see overleaf]. The chandeliers are lowered, and, as the camera follows their descent with a tilt down, the complementary movements split our focus, causing the initial objects of our gaze to escape from us as they move further and further to the extreme edges of the shot. Even when viewing at home, on a screen immensely scaled down from CinemaScope theatrical projections, tracking the chandeliers requires glancing back and forth across the frame [see overleaf]. Ophuls' use of the wide frame here is reflexive; it first directs our attention towards objects moving within the shot and then frustrates our ability to follow them. In this opening shot, therefore, Ophuls derives from the ostensibly immersive CinemaScope format an alienating effect that underscores both the garish qualities of the circus and the inaccessibility of its ostensible subject.

While Ophuls' technique often calls attention to itself, in *Lola Montès* his self-conscious style serves a decidedly different purpose than it had in his previous films. In the 'Le Masque' segment of *Le Plaisir* (1952), for example, the tipsy canted angles, shimmering frames-within-frames, and swirling camera movements all give a breathless energy to the story-within-the-story. Similarly, a lengthy tracking shot early in *La Ronde* (1950) teases with only brief glimpses of Franz (Serge Regianni) and Marie (Simone Simon) as it follows them away from their party, imbuing our view of their dialogue with a flirtatious pleasure. In contrast, Ophuls chooses to open *Lola Montès* with a viewing challenge: two effectively identical objects moving further apart from one another as they fall. The effect is disorienting in part because of the impossibility of holding both chandeliers together in our gaze, but also because, compelled as we are by their displacement to search the frame for significance, we find only the blank space between them.





**TOP** The establishing shot of the circus rafters.

**BOTTOM** The final position of the chandeliers in the frame.



**ABOVE** The Ringmaster (Peter Ustinov) emerges, allowing a glimpse backstage.

Not truly blank, of course, as we see between the chandeliers the infrastructure of the circus: rafters, ropes, and pulleys; a lanky Uncle Sam conducting a blackface band; a make-shift proscenium arch with the Passion of *Lola Montès* drawn in caricature on a canvas curtain. When the Ringmaster emerges from behind this curtain, we glimpse various figures bustling about in front of a bare wall and scaffolding. As the remarkably fluid long take progresses, we see the film's construction, too. Cameraman Alain Douarino recalls that he had warned Ophüls about the plan to follow the Ringmaster's movements in a long take because he knew the camera's tracks would be visible in the shot. In his own words, 'Ophüls simply said, "I don't care"'.<sup>1</sup> In the film we can plainly see the results of a compromise: the tracks covered with rugs.

For Truffaut, these gestures towards the film's production direct it towards 'a more authentic truth' ([1955] 1994: 228), but if the film's truth is authentic, it is also pessimistic. In a CinemaScope super-production ostensibly about a fallen woman reduced to re-enacting her love affairs for a circus audience, Ophüls fills the wide frame with everything, and everything turns out to be a lot more than the magic of the circus. That magic is present, of course. The orchestration of so many jugglers and acrobats, so many props – hearts and

crowns – rising and falling, is a testament to not only the excitement of the circus, but also of the spectacular potential of cinema and of Ophüls' directorial prowess. But Ophüls deliberately refuses to efface the labor of production. We begin in the rafters; we see the ropes from which the props dangle; we see the camera's tracks. If the CinemaScope framing allows us the freedom to hunt for significance, Ophüls' mise-en-scène makes significant the circus' – and even the film's – construction.

Once again, this familiar element of Ophüls' films, the admission of the film as construct, is in *Lola* played to unique effect. Here, it goes further than an interrogation of narrational authority in the abstract, underscoring instead Ophüls' own culpability as the film's director. Douglas Pye has shown how, in his late films, Ophüls establishes a dissonance between the authority of his narrators and the diegetic worlds his viewers encounter. For example, Pye observes that the narrator of *Le Plaisir*, our 'Maupassant' (Jean Servais), is increasingly compromised in the course of the film's three stories, progressing from a disembodied voice to an on-screen narrator, himself 'an obvious part of the film's subject matter and subject to its critical view' (2002: 25). Importantly, however, *Lola* bypasses this progression. Whereas in *Le Plaisir* Maupassant's voice opens the film with teasing whispers from the dark about the stories he has to share with us, the Ringmaster begins *Lola* by barking for our attention. Whereas Anton Walbrook's narrator in *La Ronde* introduces the film's 19th century setting from a soundstage, Peter Ustinov's Ringmaster is unaware of himself as a player in the film. Unlike Walbrook's narrator, who, self-aware, dresses before us, donning a top hat, jacket, and cane while extolling the pleasures of the past ('It's so much more peaceful than the present, and so much more certain than the future'), the Ringmaster emerges from behind the curtain fully dressed in a pompous approximation of a general's uniform, cracking his whip to punctuate his pronouncements. Unlike any of his counterparts in Ophüls' other films, the Ringmaster is boorish (he is here to sell, not to seduce), and his agency is limited from the outset. That he is a disparaging analogue for a film director is made further clear by the casting: Ustinov, a director himself, had at the time of the film's release been recently lauded for his performance of another



despicable character, the Emperor Nero, in *Quo Vadis?* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1951).

Not only is our Ringmaster off-putting in this opening shot, as he snakes his way between performers, making salacious promises to expose Lola's most intimate secrets, the film further makes clear that this show is but one iteration of an inherently exploitive system. In addition to the promised 'beasts of the menagerie,' the circus demeans its performers, especially the little people whose stature is played for comic effect, at times abusively, as well as the acrobats whose stunts are only as valuable as they are dangerous. Lola, of course, is one of the exploited. She takes more risks than just her final death-defying leap, however. Her nightly jump is only one element of her sacrifice to the show, which is at its heart a crass commodification of her life, packaged as a spectacle to meet the demands of an insatiable audience.

Ian Cameron rightly observed that, early in the film, 'the [circus audience's] question asking sets up the idea that the narrative is the product of public demand' (Britton et al. 1982: 109). As the Ringmaster is an analogue for the film director, in *Lola* the circus audience's demands are presented as analogous to our own as movie viewers. Martina Müller quotes Ophüls as telling his costume designer, 'I love the mass of humanity as spectacle, but not as spectators' (2004: 34). If the audience of the circus is any indication, then part of Ophüls' critique is that the audiences' demands are both invasive and inexhaustible. Although the film covers only one performance, it makes clear that Lola must constantly perform her role. Even when the repetitive labor causes her to fall ill, as we soon learn it has, she must perform the kind of sex appeal for which Martine Carol was famous. We see Lola performing this sexuality under duress, not, as we may have expected to see, a sexualised Lola performed by Carol. Truffaut wrote that Ophüls had confided to him 'that he had systematically put into the plot of *Lola Montès* everything that had troubled or disturbed him in the newspapers for the preceding three months: Hollywood divorces, Judy Garland's suicide attempt, Rita Hayworth's adventure, American three-ring circuses, the advent of CinemaScope and Cinerama, the overemphasis on publicity, the exaggerations of modern life' ([1957] 1994: 234). Key here is that Ophüls connects the spectacle of new

film technology to the same audience demands that exact a physical and psychological toll on film actresses who rise to stardom. Rather than make a film about a promiscuous woman, Ophüls takes as his subject the collapse of a woman's life into spectacle.

What better vehicle for a critique of spectacle than a spectacular international super-production? These opening moments are spectacular, if also challenging. The grace of the camera's movement as it tracks is remarkable, as is the variety of performances it observes. When, halfway through the opening shot, with the Ringmaster in the middle distance, a prop crown is suddenly lowered into the extreme foreground, the result is genuine surprise and delight. When, moments later, the camera pauses briefly, looking straight down a line of paired jugglers, the depth of the image is incredible, and it gives the falling crown a 3D effect, perhaps the closest the CinemaScope process ever came to emulating its rival sensation. This sequence, and indeed the film as a whole, has no shortage of cream-cake, but the cream-cake is the vehicle for the film's heaviest blows. The 'honest' display of its own artifice (Truffaut goes so far as to say 'neorealist' ([1955] 1994: 233)) in the wide CinemaScope frame, the pomposity of the ringmaster / director, the pathetic insatiability of the circus-goers'

**BELOW** The pleasures of the circus and of the CinemaScope process on full display.





demands and their relation to our own viewing position, the damage the circus inflicts on its star: these are the punches, and Ophüls refuses to pull them. When the Ringmaster promises us a ‘revolution authentique,’ the rehearsed echo of the chorus girls’ reply undermines his boast by demonstrating the show’s scripted inauthenticity. Similarly, Ophüls delivers a cinematic spectacle complicated by the displeasures of its spectacular opening sequence.

In the round table discussion in the special issue of *Movie* dedicated to Ophüls, Andrew Britton argued that *Lola Montès* fails to effectively critique its subject because it ‘eternalises what the film is analyzing and locates it in “life itself”’ (1982: 117). In other words, the film treats the collapse of life into spectacle as a given for actresses rather than a historically situated tendency. Elsewhere, Truffaut argues the opposite case. For him, Ophüls’ method of delivering the punch of his critique through the cream cake he was hired to direct makes *Lola Montès* arguably ‘the greatest satirical film ever made’ ([1957] 1994: 234). He clarifies by adding that rather than ‘coming out like a laboratory test case [...] it is a superproduction within everyone’s grasp’ ([1957] 1994: 234). Considering the opening sequence of the film, we can contribute to this debate the observation that, in addition to avoiding an academic treatise, Ophüls’ decision to work through conventional arrangements does in fact situate his film historically: in testing the limits of the CinemaScope format, in his deliberate equating of circus to cinema, in his evocation of the recent plight of famous actresses, and in his presentation of stardom as a damaging submission to an audience’s most base desires, the film does offer a located critique.

Regardless of the degree to which one is swayed by these arguments, we must acknowledge that they are each made from a privileged position, looking back on the film with the benefit of hindsight. In the interim, however, we have evidence that another critic may have held Britton’s view of *Lola Montès*. In his second Franscope film, *Le Mépris* / *Contempt* (1963), Jean-Luc Godard puts the widescreen anamorphic format through another test of its possibilities. As in *Lola*, this test is a self-reflexive component of a film about stardom and filmmaking. With Brigitte Bardot in Martine Carol’s place as object of desire, with extensive use of red and blue filters, and

with a similarly disparaging view of the director’s economic imperative, it is easy to read *Contempt* as a response to *Lola Montès* that anticipated Britton’s concerns. Godard, of course, takes Ophüls’ model a step further. Richard Brody notes that ‘instead of imagining the film on the sole basis of Moravia’s novel, [Godard] wrote his script in specific relation to the actors who would play the main roles,’ injecting the source material with his own subjective reading of the story and biographical details of his life with *Anna Karina* (2008: 158). If we are to consider Godard’s film as similar in tone but more overt about its subject, we have another revelatory opening to consider. *Contempt*, too, opens with a lengthy tracking shot, but here Godard makes no effort to cover the tracks, choosing instead to display them plainly, eventually bringing the viewer face to face with the camera’s lens. Perhaps we can best understand these decisions as further steps in the wonderful new direction Ophüls had begun to explore in *Lola Montès*.

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<sup>1</sup> Douarino shares this recollection in an interview for ‘Max Ophüls ou le plaisir de tourner,’ a televised documentary on the making of the film. The program originally aired as an episode of *Cinéastes de notre temps* (ORTF, 1964–72) on French television in 1965, and it is included as a special feature on the *Lola Montès* Criterion DVD.

# OPENING CHOICES

## Intimacy, 'truth' and the gaze: The double opening of *Zero Dark Thirty*

The opening scene of *Zero Dark Thirty* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2013) is, strictly speaking, not a 'scene' at all since it offers no images, only a black screen, some text and a soundscape created from real recordings of phone-calls made on 11th September 2001. In this article I want to discuss the operation of intimacy, cultural memory and audience address in these ninety seconds, the way in which these same ideas are reworked in the scene that immediately follows, and the way the film's investment in 'the spectacle of authenticity' and its complex treatment of the gaze is established within both these opening sequences.

Structurally, the film can be conceived as having two beginnings, balanced by two endings, to create a double frame. The main narrative, depicting the CIA's ten-year hunt for Bin Laden through the personal quest of Maya (Jessica Chastain), begins with the heroine's first involvement in the torture of a prisoner thought to have information that may lead to Bin Laden's whereabouts; it ends with her identification of Bin Laden's body. Sitting outside this narrative are a prologue and epilogue. The prologue sets up the attacks of 9/11 as the context for Maya's quest – both at a national and a personal level, for to Maya the hunt is always personal. The epilogue, in which Maya finds herself the sole passenger on a

troop carrier with no clear sense of destination, speaks again as much to a national as a personal loss of purpose, after the quest is over.

The film's epilogue has received considerable critical attention<sup>1</sup>; the prologue less so. And where critics do mention it, details are often misremembered. In an interview with Kyle Buchanan, screenwriter Mark Boal reflects on the difficulties of writing the 'opening scene' of *Zero Dark Thirty* (2013). The scene he is referring to in this discussion, however, is the infamous torture scene that begins the narrative proper (to which I will return). It is as if he has momentarily forgotten the scene that precedes it in the original shooting script as well as the film. Given this oversight by the writer himself, it is understandable that many critics, fixating on the dramatic and / or ideological impact of the images of torture, make the same error. The preceding frames, after all, offer no images at all, and even the choice of audio is remarkably low-key given the events involved. Yet the prologue is critical, both dramatically and ideologically, to the reception of all that follows, and sets a striking tone both in terms of aesthetics and point-of-view.

### The reality affect


*Zero Dark Thirty* deliberately, even self-consciously, embraces a documentary aesthetic designed to support the film's status as a 'true story'. The film's visual pleasures are best described in terms of what Geoff King calls 'the spectacle of authenticity', which is often employed by the 'respectable' war film to distance itself from 'more "lowly" works of action-exploitation' (2000: 188). While the latter encourage us to 'wallow in the glorious sensual experience' afforded by special effects, the former seek to integrate our perspective with that of the participants, allowing us a 'sense of what the real event must have been like' (2000: 119). Thus, compared with the action-adventure film, such a war film often offers an experience that is uncomfortable, with periods of waiting and of prolonged bombardment; claustrophobic framing offering little respite in terms of long or establishing shots; and uneven, hand-held camerawork that often privileges camera movement over frequent cuts. A limited colour palette, naturalistic lighting and

understated performances further serve to create what might be described as a reality affect.

The 9/11 sequence offers an extreme version of the realist aesthetic and the rejection of spectacle. From the second plane hitting the tower, to the falling man, to the rubble of ground zero, there are any number of iconic images the filmmakers might have selected to represent the destruction wrought by the attacks. However, what such images have in common, what potentially makes them effective as a form of cultural shorthand, also renders them problematic in terms of eliciting a fresh response – and certainly in terms of the slow-burn, reality affect. Their very familiarity can render such images hackneyed and over-determined. Ironically, their spectacularity can detract from their felt impact – not least because (as many observers commented at the time) they seem more like scenes from a movie than images of reality.<sup>2</sup> Instead of including such images, then, the scene offers only voices over a black screen: the voices of victims, emergency operators and airline staff woven together into what William Goldenberg, the film's editor, calls an 'audio collage' (Hogg, 2013). Goldenberg's description of the intention behind the scene is quite revealing:

It's devastating to hear the voices of these people and they're real and not here now. [...] [W]hat it does is [it] sets up the rest of the movie and creates the mindset that the country was in after that happened. Everything that happened through the 10 years is set up by that one event. [...] It was important to Mark and Kathryn to get the audience in that mindset. (2013)

The sequence begins with the on-screen text: 'The following motion picture is based on firsthand accounts of actual events'. Then the collage of recorded voices fades in over a blank, black screen. As they gradually become intelligible the date momentarily appears on-screen, and the voices can be identified as those of the 9/11 victims, members of the emergency services and reporters, woven together with a certain amount of static. Individual phrases are emphasised within the mix: 'United 93' [...] 'we can't breathe' [...] 'real world or exercise?' [...] 'A plane's crashed' [...] 'a plane crashed into World Trade Centre One' [...] 'killed' [...] 'I love you' [...] A muffled cry and the sound of the second plane, followed by a



September 11, 2001

scream, takes us into the final part of the sequence: an edited version of the 911 call made by Melissa Doi, trapped on the 83rd floor. Doi repeatedly describes the heat and the smoke while the operator asks her to stay calm and reassures her that 'they're gonna come get you', until it becomes clear that there is no longer anyone on the other end. The sequence ends with the operator's quiet 'Oh my God,' as she realises this.

The voices are, of course, those of real people,<sup>3</sup> although creatively re-mixed and enhanced with Foley. The scratchy, degraded nature of the recordings only serves to emphasise their status as what documentary makers would designate 'actuality', as opposed to reconstruction. Their use thus blurs the boundaries between documentary material and documentary aesthetic, creating a degree of slippage which the filmmakers continue to exploit throughout the film – for instance, by introducing actual television broadcasts (most notably, news footage of the London bombings and of Obama announcing a change in policy) alongside fictionalised coverage (such as the surveillance footage of the hotel shooting or the radio announcement of the Balawi bombing). At this early point in the narrative, however, such a complex web has yet to be woven and the simplicity of the 'scene' is powerfully evocative.

### Intimacy and address

The voices have a further quality which the brash, visual products of long-range photography might lack. Whereas collapsing towers and falling bodies could invite us to take an outsider's view of disaster-as-spectacle, these voices take us inside the experience, aligning us with the participants and inviting us to imagine the view from within. It is a commonplace of radio studies that audio, devoid of visual material, brings a particular intimacy as we actively re-create a world inside our head.<sup>4</sup> It is something of this quality that the recorded voices of 9/11 bring to the film. And indeed, this is a quality that sound designer Paul Ottosson seems to be describing as he discusses the use of sound elsewhere in *Zero Dark Thirty* to draw audiences in and 'make it closer [so that] you feel what the character is feeling in the movie' (2013). King describes how 'a deliberate "handicapping" of

the means of representation' (for example the rejection of Steadicam technology or the introduction of motion blur) can contribute to the 'spectacle of authenticity' (2000: 121); here the poor quality recordings of the emergency services operate in a similar way. Not only does the scratchy quality function as a 'guarantor' of authenticity, it draws the audience in as we struggle to make out and make sense of the distorted dialogue.

The extent to which the viewer, given such a stimulus, will re-create the scene in her own head is illustrated by Ottosson's interviewer who, in summing up, refers to the 'cacophony of horrifying screams during the bombing of the World Trade Center' (2013). The soundtrack features no such 'cacophony', although this commentator is unlikely to be alone in his creative re-imagining of the scene. In fact the voices selected are comparatively calm and measured (the screams that occurred at the end of the original Melissa Doi recording, for example, are omitted); yet they are all the more poignant for that, and carefully orchestrated across locations and timeframes to build an impression less of a single incident than of a nation under attack. Ottosson describes how, in the almost complete absence of music, he built a complex 'score' for the film of layered ambient sound, augmented with an imperceptible element of heightened reality either from conventional Foley or the whine of a spike fiddle (2013). The opening sequence establishes this augmented 'natural' sound both as a constituent of the realist aesthetic of the film, and as a key storytelling tool.

The stories told – and the stories untold – in this short sequence are highly significant in terms of the audience that is variously assumed, constructed and addressed. The collage of voices is briefly accompanied by text informing us of the date (as on four successive occasions when historical atrocities serve to fuel the fervor of the avenging agents) but in the absence of imagery there is nothing to explain the nature of events of 9/11. It is assumed the date alone will be sufficient. There is certainly nothing to hint at the event's background or its geo-political context – the world events leading up to the attack, or indeed the wider repercussions that were to follow (what Nick Rombes refers to as 'deep history' [2013]). The stories that are told, fleetingly, yet effectively, are those



of ordinary American citizens caught up in these traumatic events, either as victims or as electronic 'bystanders' (switchboard operators etc.) powerless to help. The audience is invited into an intimacy of communion with these bewildered and frightened victims, and to revisit their own (in most cases already mediated) memories of that day. Thus the film both draws upon cultural memory as a sense-making paradigm, and helps refresh, reinforce and reinvent that memory. Just as many observers on 9/11 couldn't help but see the attacks through the prism of a Hollywood disaster movie, many subsequently struggled to distinguish their own memories from the various vivid re-presentations with which they were bombarded.<sup>5</sup>

Critically, the low-key, personal representation of this shared national tragedy is the closest we are offered to a backstory for Maya, the heroine of *Zero Dark Thirty*. It sets up what will be revealed as a very personal mission: her contribution to the hunt for Bin Laden. The invitation of the prologue is to derive her backstory from our own, rather than having to engage us in hers as would be usual in a conventional revenge narrative. For what we are recruited into here is not so much a mission to save the world, as one woman's uncompromising quest for revenge.<sup>6</sup>

### The spectacle of authenticity

If the prologue works through a kind of cinematic sensory deprivation, privileging suggestion over explicit depiction, the scene that follows provides a startling contrast, forcing the audience to witness, in uncomfortable detail, the 'enhanced interrogation' of a prisoner by CIA operatives. The almost elegiac tone of the prologue is replaced by a pervading atmosphere of violence, made all the more disturbing by its banal, routine nature. Nevertheless, there is an underlying continuity in terms of the aesthetics of intimacy and investment in what I have described as the reality affect.

This second opening is announced with on-screen text over black: '2 years later'. The succeeding moments constitute an assault on the senses, following the dark, muted prologue: a hand-held shot of bright sunlight streaming through a hole in the corrugated iron roof, illuminating dancing particles of

dust, is accompanied by the grating noise of a heavy metal door being opened. On-screen text announces 'The Saudi Group' as footsteps approach loudly. The next shot reveals a guard in a ski-mask, viewed over the left shoulder of his prisoner who is silhouetted in the foreground. A pan right repositions our view so that we look over the out-of-focus right shoulder of the foregrounded prisoner as CIA agent Dan (Jason Clarke) enters the space. Dan is momentarily framed in the bright sunlight of the open doorway, then the door swings firmly shut as he bears down on the prisoner, revealing another masked figure following behind him. A long shot shows the prisoner, Ammar (Reda Kateb), bloodied and bruised in filthy clothes, standing on a gym mat against a backdrop of plastic sheeting, surrounded by three large masked guards. The room is a concrete and metal shell, with high windows, ropes hanging from the ceiling and large wooden box to the side. A sharply focused close-up of the anonymous observer reveals



bright, unblinking eyes watching from behind the ski-mask, before the interrogation begins.

Shot largely in close-up, the brief exchange between the CIA agent and his prisoner is disturbingly intimate. Dan is again framed in close-up, over the shoulder of the indistinct figure in the foreground, as he moves very close to Ammar and speaks very quietly: 'I own you, Ammar. You belong to me.' As he says this the scene cuts to a close-up of Ammar, who looks resolutely down and away from Dan, avoiding his gaze. Again we see Dan in close up as he insists: 'Look at me'; again Ammar is seen in over-the-shoulder close-up, as he raises his head slightly but continues to avert his eyes. This exchange is framed to create an unequal dynamic in terms of power and perspective that reflects the dramatic context. In Dan's close-ups, his figure dominates the frame, shot slightly from below so that in the background we see the ceiling and the spots of blinding sunlight that shine through the holes. In the foreground we see just a little of the back of Ammar's head in the lower corner of the frame, his position emphasised by Dan's downward gaze on him. Ammar's close-ups, by contrast, are shot from slightly above, while Dan's shoulder and neck in the foreground occupy about a third of the frame, crowding the shot and dominating the slumped figure of Ammar.

The next shot positions the antagonists in profile, but favoring Dan, who is in the centre of the frame, while Ammar remains in the foreground, slightly out of focus. Suddenly Dan is shouting: 'You don't look at me when I talk to you, I hurt you!' A medium close-up reveals that Ammar is still refusing to meet Dan's gaze while the guards, barely visible at the edges of the frame, begin to shove Ammar back and forth with increasing violence. Another close-up of Dan is momentarily obscured by the movement of the prisoner in the foreground of the shot; then, as Ammar is pushed to the left of frame, the watching figure of the masked observer is briefly seen in the background. The close camera work and rapid editing makes it difficult to follow the action, with Dan's persistent gaze providing the clearest sense of the prisoner's movements. As the pace of the scene continues to increase, the use of the hand-held camera gives the impression of an observer barely keeping up with developments as a whip-pan to Dan, now shouting in the prisoner's face, is replaced





with another indistinct shot of the guards manhandling the prisoner, followed by one more close-up of Dan wherein the camera jerks as though its operator had stumbled, before, with a final 'Look at me, Ammar!'; Dan turns on his heel to walk away. A second close-up of the masked observer serves to frame this grubby 'spectacle', her steady gaze broken only by Dan's body passing through the foreground of the shot, as he mutters 'Come on' and a wide shot shows them both heading for the door. Meanwhile the three guards string their struggling prisoner up, a succession of jerky hand-held close-ups showing his feet dragging across the floor and the guard's gloved hands tying his with the hanging ropes. We see the agent and observer exit into the sunlight, through a door that seems improbably distant, as the prisoner and guards are framed in the foreground.

The next shot shows the same scene, but now viewed on a surveillance monitor outside the building, over the shoulder of a uniformed watcher. The tiny figure of the prisoner is distanced and depersonalised, while we are invited to engage with his erstwhile tormentors and explicitly with the difficulty of their 'work'. In particular we are introduced to our protagonist, for the anonymous observer peels off the ski mask to reveal the incongruously beautiful face of Maya. This revelation is in its own way almost as shocking as the scene we have just witnessed. As she takes off her bulky coat, Dan teases the newcomer about walking straight off the plane from Washington into her first interrogation 'rocking [her] best suit', and reassures her that 'they're not always this intense'. With a brief glance down, she murmurs 'I'm fine'. The tension is lifted by a series of wider, longer shots as Maya moves to watch the image on the monitor. She refuses Dan's offer of coffee, insisting that 'we should go back in'. The ski mask appears to have been replaced with another, almost as inscrutable, as she narrows her eyes against the bright sunlight. It is clear that Dan does not know what to make of her. He suggests that 'there's no shame if you want to watch from the monitor', but Maya shakes her head, almost imperceptibly, maintaining her unnervingly steady gaze. She shakes her head again when he offers her a ski-mask to wear as they make to re-enter: 'You're not wearing one. Is he ever getting out?' 'Never', he confirms, and they go back in.

The jarring effect of this scene, following on from the prologue, results not only from the shocking nature of the torture in itself but from the scene's stylistic intensity and shifting perspectives as well as its troubling juxtaposition within the narrative. It might be possible to see the opening events as motivation, justification even, for the torture. At the same time the scene opens up the possibility of a critique of 'enhanced interrogation', in keeping with the objective, journalistic approach to which the filmmakers have laid claim.

The dynamics of point-of-view within the scene also provoke an uneasy response. The opening images, and the early stages of the interrogation, are seen primarily from the perspective of the prisoner who, as a frightened victim, offers certain parallels with the 'prisoners' in the twin towers. Sounds of the heavy door scraping open and banging shut serves to highlight his predicament, as do the anonymous, masked guards and spots of sunlight intruding through holes in the ceiling and the frame of the door – glimpses of an exterior world Ammar will never see again. However, we find ourselves increasingly aligned with his torturers as the scene develops. Ammar's sullen, averted gaze offers us limited access and his out-of-focus silhouette in both the reverse shots and those in which he is manhandled by the guards, still less. Meanwhile the asymmetrical framing of their exchanges favors Dan, who presents a powerful figure framed in more traditional close-ups.

The film's investment in the 'spectacle of authenticity' is apparent in its treatment of torture: rather than offering the distancing, if exciting, spectacle of violence-as-entertainment it presents us with a perverse intimacy, drawing us into the very personal relationship between the torturer and his victim. This is achieved in part through the language and manner of the former, who speaks quietly at first, calling his victim by his first name, and in part through the use of intense close-ups and the hand-held camera work which places us in the midst of the action, altogether too close for comfort and indeed too close for a clear perspective – another instance of King's "handicapping" of the medium (2000: 121). The 'reality affect' makes this a disturbing scene to watch, more so due to our increasing complicity with the torturer rather than his helpless victim.



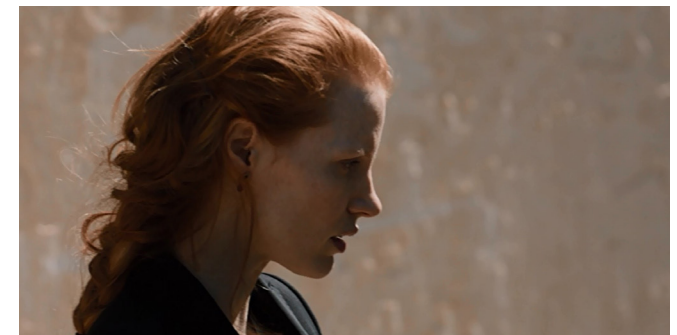
This complicity is reinforced by the presence of Maya, her role emphasised by the focus on her bright eyes and steely gaze. Maya's gaze, whether intense, detached or an unsettling combination of the two, can be said to be her defining characteristic as the film's protagonist. Her gaze structures the narrative; it also provides the audience with our main point of access, as we will spend two and a half hours figuratively and often literally looking over her shoulder. In this scene, her position is parallel to our own: we, like her, are observing torture for the first time, and like her we are implicated, not watching from afar but very much 'in the room'. Yet she is masked, offering us a limited point of identification. This is emblematic of our problematic relationship with Maya throughout the film: on the one hand, we watch with her and find ourselves closely aligned with her in terms of the unfolding investigation; on the other, we watch her watch – often inscrutable or apparently unmoved – her gaze as likely to present a barrier as a window to her inner life.

### Watching the watchers

It is not by chance that one of the first lines of dialogue in the film, 'Look at me!', foregrounds the power dynamics associated with the gaze. For the relationship between spectator and spectacle is a theme that runs through much of director Kathryn Bigelow's work and informs *Zero Dark Thirty* on a number of levels. In the course of her career, Bigelow has experimented with a range of (mostly action-orientated) genres. Particular themes and stylistic tropes, however, have marked her work throughout. Visually, she has consistently approached Hollywood staples with an art house sensibility (what has been called a 'painterly' aesthetic, reflecting her fine art background). Spectacle has been privileged over narrative, or constituted a key component of narrative, in many of her films (as for example in *Point Break* [1991]), while the gaze – particularly the male gaze that renders woman as spectacle – has been an explicit theme (*Blue Steel* [1989], *Strange Days* [1995]<sup>7</sup> and, in a self-conscious reversal, *The Weight of Water* [2000]). Meanwhile the technology of surveillance, implicitly suggestive of the film director's role, has been explored at levels ranging from the photographer heroine of *The Weight*

*of Water* to the futuristic SQUID in *Strange Days*. *The Hurt Locker* (2008), Bigelow's first foray into the contemporary war film, is marked by a poetic, almost 'other worldly' rendition of the physical detail of each heightened moment of combat, combined with a constant sense of watching and being watched. *Zero Dark Thirty*, while still characterised by close attention to detail (both visual and aural), seems to represent something of a departure aesthetically, embodying a willful refusal of visual spectacle – particularly in terms of its representations of violence and women, representations which were often combined to sensational effect in previous work. Nevertheless, the film continues a representational dialectic that self-consciously explores the nature of both the cinematic spectacle and the cinematic gaze.

Maya's unmasking is a significant moment in this respect. Fleetingly, she is positioned as Mulvey's 'woman as spectacle' (1975), creating a hiatus in the narrative flow. She looks down, away from the camera, watched by Dan. When he speaks to her, however, she meets his comments with her challenging, intense gaze, narrowing her eyes against the sunlight – once more a watcher. From this moment on Maya will own the gaze – explicitly represented as its subject, rather than its object – and with it a clear sense of purpose (in terms of character) and agency (in terms of character function). Bigelow's direction painstakingly avoids objectifying Maya: her beauty is, as it were, incidental. Yet her face also provides little in the way of clues to her inner life, always referring us back, with her intense mask of concentration, to the object of her gaze, and the exertion of her will through her gaze. Neither sexualised nor victimised, Maya is diegetically positioned as always the watcher, almost never the watched. At the same time, of course, we as the audience watch her repeatedly in the act of watching – partly drawn into and partly repelled by her cool, detached gaze. Only when her mission is complete, in the film's epilogue, will she become briefly again woman-to-be-looked-at, the film's famous final shot lingering in a medium close-up on her distraught face. Two moments of narrative-stopping 'spectacle' thus frame the narrative of Maya's quest. These coincide with the two moments when she experiences a comparative lack of agency: a moment before



she has taken full control of her quest, and the moment when, quest completed, she finds herself drained of purpose.

Having gained possession of the gaze, Maya directs it primarily toward the monitor, on which the prisoner can be seen. From an investigation which consists primarily of watching and analyzing hours of video footage to the climactic assault on Bin Laden's compound, experienced as a feed from the soldiers' night-vision helmet cameras, Maya's gaze will be mediated, like that of the audience, for much of the film. The monitor repeatedly draws her eye in this short sequence: the image, however ugly, fascinates with its promise of knowledge. Robert Burgoyne has described Maya's experience in terms of 'a direct, intimate witnessing, a witnessing that sutures her to the larger social and historical world the film portrays' (2013). As an audience we share in the alternating experiences of power and impotence that characterise the position of the unseen watcher. As we watch, with Maya, the surveillance feed from the torture chamber, the prisoner may come to seem less a sympathetic victim of violence than a potential source of useful information: the first of many such 'sources' we – and Maya – will encounter over the course of the film.

Maya's focus on the monitor, rather than on her colleague's attempts at small talk, also speaks to her single-minded, driven character. A typical Bigelow protagonist, she has, as Dan remarks, stepped straight off the plane and got down to work. Her refusal of a friendly coffee also sets a tone and a precedent: there will be no romantic sub-plot; her relationship with Dan will remain amiably professional. There is room in Maya's life for only one man – Usama bin Laden. Over the course of the film, despite never meeting him, she will develop an intimate relationship with her enemy: an intimacy presaged by Dan's relationship with his prisoner. In this respect Maya challenges another surprisingly persistent cinematic stereotype: that of woman who fears to look at the monster, or who in looking is destroyed. Instead Maya's steady, forensic gaze drives a quest which ends with her coolly identifying her enemy's body in the final scene of the main narrative. That moment is mirrored in these opening moments of that narrative, with their subtle but persistent emphasis on Maya's gaze: through the ski-mask, through the monitor, and directly



challenging Dan with an intensity that effectively deflects his scrutiny. Knowledge and the enquiring gaze are not dangerous for Maya: they are empowering. But they are also costly. Dan, apparently inured to his role, can joke, smoke and appear relatively relaxed outside the torture chamber.<sup>8</sup> Maya's impenetrable exterior speaks to the conscious effort involved in preserving her steely composure as she insists that they 'go back in'.

### Conclusion

The opening sequence of a film can function as a 'meta-text', introducing its representational system and, as Thomas Elsaesser has it, 'how it wants to be read and how it needs to be understood' (2012: 115). The foregoing discussion shows that the two openings of *Zero Dark Thirty* operate very much in this way. As well as establishing an intimate, 'documentary' aesthetic, and setting up a complex set of dynamics around the surveillance and the gaze, the two openings introduce



tonal and evaluative tensions in our relationship to the protagonist, whose work we will follow so closely.

At the same time the two openings provide the structural 'questions' which are to find their 'answers' in the two final scenes, framing the narrative with a rhetorical symmetry that organises our reading of the film. On one level this rhetoric is simple: the story 'proper' begins with an interrogation designed to find Bin Laden and ends with the identification of his body. In its prologue and epilogue, however, the film seems to acknowledge that such simple narratives do little to make sense of the post-9/11 world. Discussing the ambivalent epilogue in which Maya finds herself unable to say where she wants to go, Bigelow elaborates: 'Maya cries because Bin Laden's death is not an uncomplicated victory, since it leaves us with the national and global question of "Now what?"' (Rothman 2013). For 'Where is Bin Laden?' is not, in fact, the defining question of the preceding decade. The more important questions have to do with the wider consequences of the 9/11 attack and America's response to it – both for America and the rest of the world. These are the questions posed by the prologue and they inform the uneasy tone of the film, complicating our relationship with its protagonist.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Brockes 2013, Burgoyne 2013, Westwell 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Terence McSweeney has noted that the reason the images of the destruction of the twin towers struck people as being like a movie was because similar scenes 'had been a staple of American popular cinema for decades', citing *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998) as one such film (2014: 7).

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as though the film didn't already have enough problems with regard to debates around depictions of torture and the relationship of it makers with the CIA, relatives of some of the victims expressed distress that the audio had been used without their permission – gaining considerable media coverage and an apology, although legally there was no case to answer since the material was in the public domain.

<sup>4</sup> For example: Shingler and Wieringa describe 'the unusual intimacy between radio and its audience' (1998: 114).

<sup>5</sup> Alison Landsberg has discussed the power of such texts to function as 'prosthetic memories' (1995: 180).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed at one juncture her boss tells her she is 'chasing a ghost' and that Bin Laden is no longer relevant given the rise in internet-inspired 'free lancers', yet Maya continues to insist he is a priority.

<sup>7</sup> Bigelow's comment in an interview about this film, that 'we're a watched society and a society of watchers' (Smith 2003: 30) makes clear her very deliberate exploration of these themes.

<sup>8</sup> Although it is he who will subsequently leave for an office job back at Langley, having had his fill of torture chambers and needing to do 'something normal for a while' and, it is implied, unwilling to be 'the last one holding a dog collar when the oversight committee comes'.



# OPENING CHOICES

## *Under the Skin:* Cosmology and individuation

This paper will analyse the opening of *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2014) beginning at the end of the credits (45 seconds) and ending with the film's title (4 minutes 16 seconds). The opening sequence addressed here can be found on the film's blu-ray release, which is closer to the original cinema release than the DVD edition. The brief credits at the beginning of *Under the Skin* take the form of white lettering on a black background, culminating with the name of the star, Scarlett Johansson. For the following 22 seconds the screen remains black and the audio track silent until the appearance of a dot of white light centre screen. The dot becomes the central point of an emerging circle whose edges are partially delineated by two symmetrical curving lines of light. The image is suggestive of an emerging planet, an allusion, perhaps, to the spectacle of perfect, geometric planetary alignment presented in the first scene of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), which has since become a staple of the science fiction genre. The score by composer Mica Levi commences with the appearance of the dot of light, its lack of recognisable melody and use of rapid tremolos of synthesised strings creating a prickling play of discordant sounds that emphasise the alien, unknown quality of the emerging form.

The emergence of material form and light from darkness can be interpreted in the light of stories of cosmological creation from Greek mythology, which are most fully set out in Hesiod's *Theogony*. In the beginning, Chaos, 'a featureless void', is joined by Gaia, 'the Earth', and Eros, 'the universal principle of generation' (Clay 2003: 15-16). Emerging spontaneously from Chaos, Erebus (Darkness) and Night are the first to be influenced by Eros, their sexual coupling begetting their opposites: Aither (Brightness) and Day (2003: 16).<sup>1</sup> The differential creation of darkness and light marks a transition from parthenogenesis to sexual reproduction. Jenny Clay notes that across the *Theogony* 'negation – absence of qualities – precedes the positive [...] and in some sense receives its definition from its opposite number'; the utter void of Chaos thus precedes and is defined by the emerging forms of Gaia (2003: 15). While *Under the Skin* visually conforms to the classical tradition by presenting a transition from darkness to light, the film's shift from silence to sound also marks the musical score as a vivid presence, forming a contrast with the previous silence, which is retroactively marked as absence and linked to darkness. The music thus becomes a vital part of the diegetic world, the third differential element alongside light and form, joining darkness in a new cosmology.

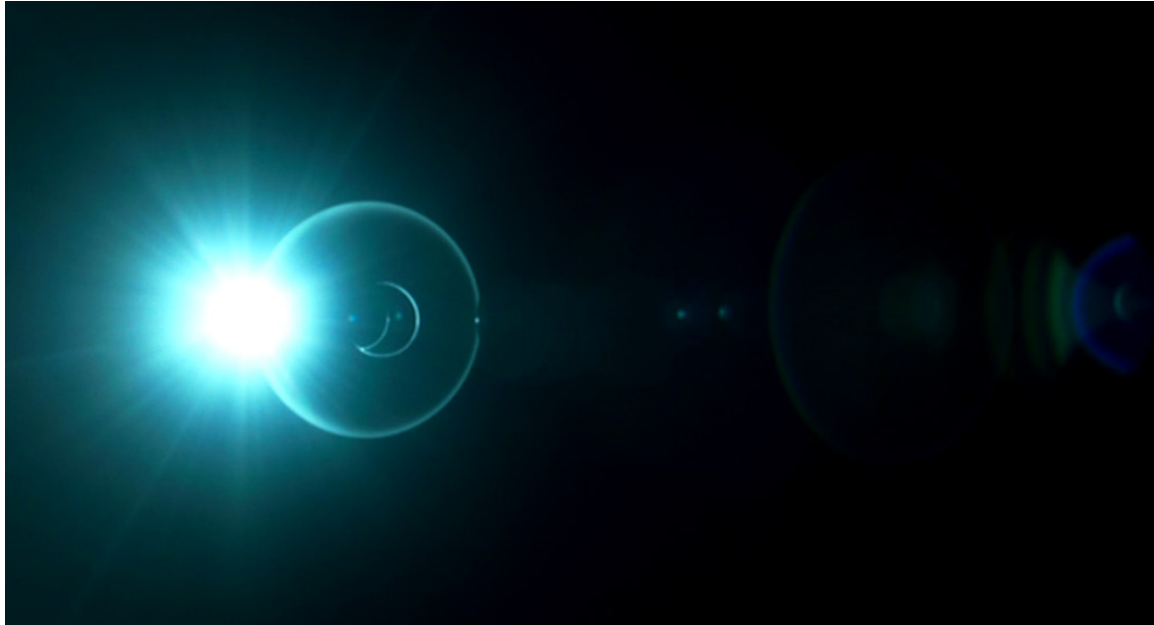
Comparison with the beginning of Kubrick's *2001* is instructive, particularly the version which commences with an entirely black screen for 3 minutes and 15 seconds while the sound of Gyorgy Ligeti's *Atmosphères* acts as an overture. Irena Paulus analyses the sound clusters that create the 'micropolyphony' of Ligeti's music, chords with 'a maximally dense arrangement of tones', which shift the listener's perception of register to a general sense of low, middle and high (2011: 105 fn 24). Michel Chion argues that *Atmosphères* plummets from high to low, offering an evolving single sound from which, 'sometimes individualised sounds emerge', including the trumpet and flute (2001: 96). The music is said to be 'on the threshold of formlessness, so close to what could be imagined as the sound of matter in continual transformation' (2001: 96). While both films commence in darkness, the absence of sound in *Under the Skin* can be said to evoke the nothingness of the void of Greek Chaos, while Ligeti's *Atmosphères* creates

a sense of chaotic materiality within which moments of order can be briefly discerned.

In *2001*, *Atmosphères* is followed by 'Sunrise' from Richard Strauss' *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which accompanies / orchestrates the spectacle of planetary alignment. Chion notes the 'vertical and triumphant quality of this theme': '[t]he opening musical phrase [...] begins with a long, low, "primitive" sound, and then turns into an ascending theme of extreme simplicity [...] the most basic intervals in music: perfect fifth, perfect fourth, octave.' (91). Kubrick's use of two very different classical pieces creates a shift from dense tones with occasional recognisable instrumental sounds to the separate intervals of an ascending melody. The separation of the notes of the melody and the geometrical revelation of each aligned planet creates a strong sense of a process of ordering, which is being carried out by a non-human / divine consciousness. The ascending, triumphant grandeur of Strauss' theme links the cosmological and the transcendent.

In contrast, Mica Levi's score for *Under the Skin* renders the emerging symmetrical structures of light profoundly unfamiliar and disturbing. The jagged sound of the rapid tremolos, both ascending and descending, works against the geometry of the image. The fluttering, multiple, pulse-like rhythms suggest a random, generative principle rather than the triumphant emergence of a single order. There is a cut to a closer shot of the light source its star-shaped form projecting multiple lines of white light, a pattern resembling a pupil surrounded by the lines of an iris, while concentric circles of brighter light emanate from its centre. The absence of scale means that the first two images of *Under the Skin* conjoin the cosmological – a new planet – with the individual – the emerging eye / I. At this point, the sustained crescendo of the music and the rapidity of the tremolos suggest a quickening that is forming a particular new life. The combination of music and image thus conveys the contingent emergence of new life from a chance combination of primal elements: light, form, darkness and sound, rather than charting the unfolding of a transcendent order.

This sense of a desacralised cosmology is emphasised in the third image. It resembles a scientific diagram and offers a side-on view of the structures featured in the previous image.



On the left, the star-shaped light source projects linear rays of light that illuminate the curves of a sphere, revealing a central hole. While on the right, a conically shaped source emits curved linear forms resembling sound waves, which change colour from blue to green. The sexual combination of the two elements, light and sound, creates a third manifest form. This initially appears as an insubstantial shadow of the sound waves, gaining dimension and dark solidity as it moves across the illuminated surface of the sphere, blocking the light, while the source of the sound waves gradually disappears.

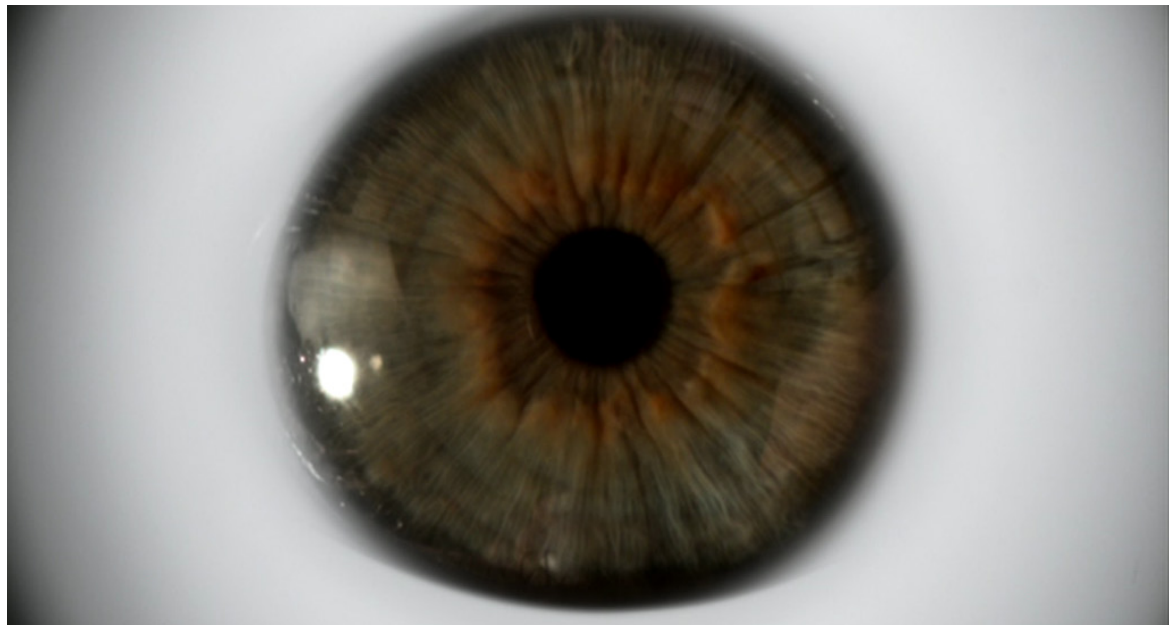
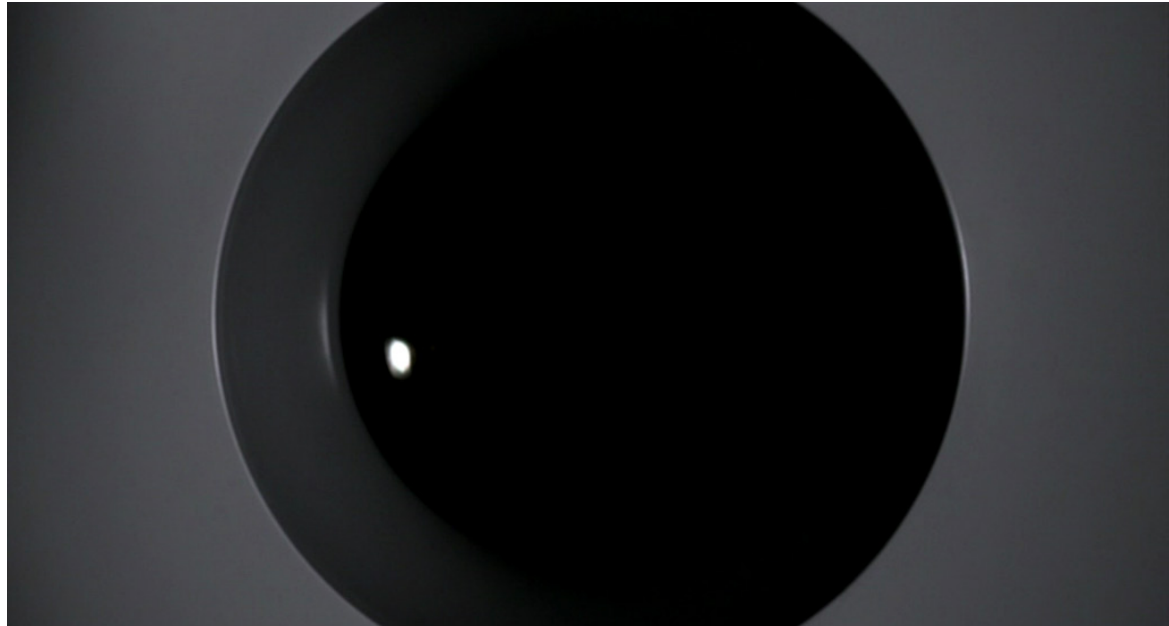
As the third form is made manifest the soundtrack changes, the music held in balance with a human female voice reiterating the sounds of consonants from the English alphabet including 's' and 't'. The film parallels the increasing materiality of the central form with the acquisition of the phonemes that constitute the basic building blocks of language. Sculpted from sound, this form of life is intimately and materially related to the sounds it emits. Interestingly, this differs profoundly from structuralist and post-structuralist accounts of language acquisition in which the structures of language are imposed upon a prior materiality. For example, Lacanian accounts construct immersion into the Symbolic order (the order of language and culture) as a rupturing of an initial harmonious materiality (Grosz 1989: 22-23). In contrast, the film's first presentation of sound as an intangible yet visible form creates a continuum between the primal element and language, which expresses the process of becoming material.

The movement of the third form across the surface of the sphere gives it solidity and density and it takes on a cylindrical shape as it gradually approaches the sphere's central hole. There is a cut to a closer, side-on view of the moving cylinder, its approach to the sphere resembling a space ship docking onto the mother ship. In line with familiar tropes of these scenarios in science fiction, the abstract circular and phallic shapes suggest a heteronormative sexual conjunction. As the cylinder penetrates the sphere the reflected light draws different patterns, taking the momentary form of a crescent moon before being eclipsed. The tropes of space exploration and planetary movement act as a continual reminder of the alien, non-human life form that is coming into being. At the same time, the soundtrack balances Levi's music with the female

voice, which is now emitting increasing quantities of phonemes in the form of hard consonants, 'd', 'z', 't', as well as the first discernable word: 'help'. The violin tremolos coupled with the word are suggestive of vulnerability, however, the repetition of the phonemes also indicates that the word may arise through random conjunctions of sound.

The next shot is a frontal presentation of the sphere, the cylindrical rod now creating a dark central circle, a point of light revealing its smooth, convex surface. The edges of the lighter sphere appear to contract as though the structure were turning and receding from view. The overall patterning of the shot remains symmetrical, a dark circle within a lighter circle. The female voice utters a plethora of words beginning with 'f': 'feel, film, films, foil, fail', before repeating the second and third. The sound acts reflexively, drawing attention to the film as a film and indicating the presence of its star, Johansson. However, her voice is rendered unfamiliar by the newly acquired English accent, noticeable in the repeated 'i' sounds of the word 'film'. This play on the familiar and the unfamiliar is a precursor to Johansson's appearance in the film, the brown wig replacing the star's bloneness in an endeavour to convey the unknown qualities of the alien protagonist. This strategy is only partially successful. While interviews with Glazer in the DVD extras attest to his desire to construct the alien protagonist as gender neutral by using the term 'it', the housing of alien sensibilities within the form of a star who is culturally constructed as a hugely desirable female body is problematic. Once embodied, the measure of what constitutes the alien is set by how far the protagonist fails to conform to gendered social expectations. This is particularly noticeable in scenes that draw attention to the discrepancy between the protagonist's lack of reaction and the viewer's reaction, such as the drowning at sea and the attack on the van by a group of youths.

There is a cut from the black and white image of the perfectly geometrical doubled circular structure to another black and white image featuring a jagged-edged inner circle, the abrupt transition giving the impression that the first has suddenly collapsed under pressure. This is followed by a colour shot of an extreme close-up of a human eye.





The close-up of the eye forms graphic matches with the two preceding shots. The dark edge of the collapsed inner circle matches the imperfect circularity of the edge of the iris. The shining point of light that previously illuminated the dark, convex surface of the inner circle is doubly reflected in the eye's surfaces, drawing attention to the convexity of the cornea and the bulging, transparent, moist layer of the conjunctiva. The graphic matches emphasise the imperfect symmetry of the human eye, drawing attention to its texture. The transition from black and white to colour brings out the variant shades of the iris, comprising autumnal browns from russet to conker and tinges of green. The colour palette is used again at the end of the film, forming a link between the physical, human form taken by the alien and the natural setting of the pine forest where she is murdered.

The contrast between the perfect symmetry of the conjunction of the sphere and cylinder that produces the doubled circle form, and the palpable, imperfect materiality of the human eye that pressurises and finally covers over this structure suggests a major disjunction between the emerging consciousness of the 'I' and the material 'eye'. The graphic matches coupled with the representation of the forming of new life set up a series of familiar oppositions, pitting the perfect, geometric, intangible (light and sound) and scientific against the geometrically imperfect, palpable, and viscerally material. The oppositions between the alien and the human are extended along familiar lines as the film progresses: logical versus illogical, reason versus emotion. This is illustrated in the scene on the beach in which the alien protagonist's reaction to the family drama is contrasted with that of a human stranger, a Czech tourist. She watches intrigued but unmoved, while he is impelled to attempt to rescue the parents from death by drowning.

The soundtrack accompanying the eye balances the music with new words: 'form, forms, cell / sell'. It is impossible to distinguish which of the final two is spoken, the soft 'ce / se' sound is repeated as though on the verge of saying 'self' but this moment of completed formation does not come and there is a cut to a white background featuring the film's title: Under the Skin in black lettering. The title draws attention to the disjunction between the inner formation of the alien and

its human exterior. The close-up of the eye acts has a significant precedent in *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) whose opening sequence charting the cityscape of a futuristic Los Angeles also cuts to a close-up of a human eye reflecting the flares from an industrial chimney. In Scott's film, close monitoring of the contractions and dilations of the pupil of the eye during the Voight-Kampff test provides the means of distinguishing the replicants' responses from the humans they so closely resemble. Under the Skin draws on this presentation of the eye as the privileged physical site of both empathetic response and emerging consciousness, unsettling the former and exploring the latter.

In *Blade Runner*, the replicant Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) endeavours to prolong his life beyond its 4-year term by confronting his makers, from the technician who designed his eyes to the owner of the Tyrell Corporation, before killing them. He comments to the former: 'If you could only see what I've seen with your eyes.' *Under the Skin* may be said to explore this possibility, seeing what the alien protagonist sees through our human eyes. At the same time, physical human embodiment, which is presented as pressurising the alien's perfect geometrical structures from the first sequence, profoundly shapes the non-human life form. The deadly sexuate encounters with male victims link back to the film's first presentation of cosmology. The men are gradually submerged in an unbounded liquid darkness – a volume without contours. Becoming a human, female body involves the imposition of bodily boundaries, specifically as a receptacle of a male body in penetrative sex. As the boundaries are imposed, so the predatory alien learns emotion – becoming fearful, becoming prey. The reversal from predator to prey is reflected by her loss of language – a marked loss given the formative role of sound in the alien's generation. Becoming a human female body is thus presented as a process of becoming receptive, silent, and, finally subjugated to deadly physical violence. Whether the film is offering a critique of the human when seen through our own eyes remains a key question.

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** I would like to thank Adam Gallimore for all his help with image capture.

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<sup>1</sup> I have used the term 'sexuate' to indicate couplings of two differential elements that diverge from the binary sex roles of normative heterosexuality.

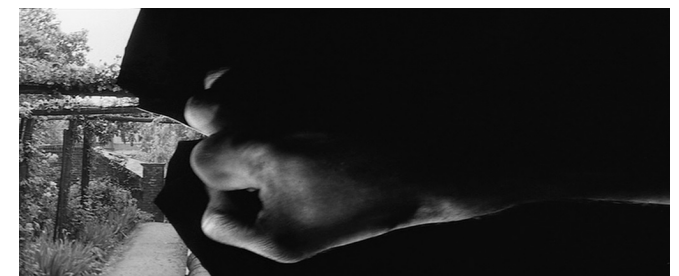
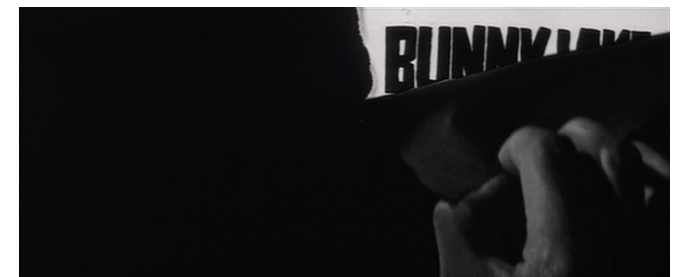
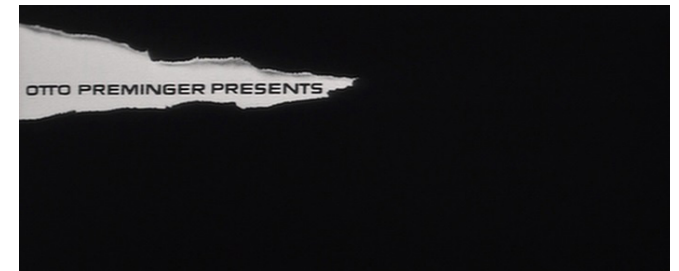
# OPENING CHOICES

## Otto Preminger's hand in the initial moments of *Bunny Lake is Missing*

*Bunny Lake is Missing* (Otto Preminger, 1965) opens with a black screen. Out of the darkness, a hand enters the frame from the right side and rips a section off the black screen, now revealed to be paper, exposing the words 'Otto Preminger presents' [Figures 1 and 2]. The loud sound of the paper tearing coincides with the start of the title song, a theme which opens with a melody evocative of the tunes which often accompany popular nursery rhymes. This shot cuts to another black screen, and again, the hand enters the frame, this time from the bottom right side, and removes a different section now revealing the title of the film [Figure 3]. The theme shifts from the simplicity and innocence of the recorder, which can be heard at the beginning, to more developed orchestral arrangements, which fit well with the epic proportions of the anamorphic screen. The whole title sequence is executed in this fashion, and ends with the hand scrunching the entire piece of paper up and removing it, unveiling the first shot of the film. This transition is the culmination of the formal play with textures, resulting from contrasting the flatness of the dark screen to the depth of the hand and the spaces left by the discarded pieces of paper. In this case, instead of a white section with credits, we can see a live action image, which further enhances the sense of depth [Figure 4].

It is tempting to see the hand which invades the frame and reveals the credits as a statement of authorship, inviting us to question aspects of intention. There are two people which we, as spectators, might immediately associate with the hand: the author of the credits and the author of the film. Someone already familiar with graphic designer Saul Bass, will be impressed by this new creation. Those new to his art may wonder who is behind such design and might even look out for his name in the credits. The identity which is revealed to us right at the start is Otto Preminger's. It is hard to miss his name as it is the first element which the hand reveals, so his 'appearance' benefits from the initial impact of the unique design.

The credits are announcing a rhetoric of effort. Usually the work which goes into creating elaborate titles is concealed from the audience. Here not only is it displayed to us, but the effort has been stylised and incorporated to the aesthetic of the sequence. The juxtaposition of the elements which are obscured and those which are revealed mirrors the process of discovery which we will go through in the film. The tearing of the paper, and the subsequent revelation of the credits which are concealed underneath, is asking us to think in terms of negative spaces, in a way which prioritises them over the positive, but in a way which also challenges such denominations. 'For both painters and architects, "negative space" refers to the opposite of solid objects. It describes spaces left open around the objects and the empty hollows within them' (Arnheim 1992: 92). 'Negative space acknowledges the active function of what can no longer be regarded as the empty in-between. At the same time, the term limits what is called "negative" to the subordinate role of the openings around and in the interior of solids' (ibid: 96). The black sections represent the positive and the white sections, resulting from subtracting the paper, account for the negative. However, the fact that the credits are waiting to be revealed (they are not added after the space is created), defies the simplistic dichotomy, as it could be argued that, since the credits are already there, they, as well as the space they inhabit, are the positive space, which is not so much created by the subtraction of paper as discovered or unveiled. In any case, every time a section of paper is removed, our attention focuses on the space which has been created



**FIGURE 1** The hand enters the frame through the right.

**FIGURE 2** The hand reveals the words "Otto Preminger Presents".

**FIGURE 3** The hand reveals the film's title.

**FIGURE 4** The hand unveils the first shot of the film.

and the information which it contains. This foregrounding of absence and presence seems carefully designed to preface the film which follows. The action concerns distraught mother Ann Lake (Carol Lynley) in her quest to find her four year old daughter Bunny (Suky Appleby), who disappeared from the nursery school where she had left her in the morning. As the story unfolds, the very existence of the child is put into question as nobody (including the audience) seems to have seen her. The removal of the child will prompt the exploration of what we are initially encouraged to believe to be an ordinary family, exposing a series of peculiarities which we could not have anticipated. In other words, the absence of the child reveals more than her presence would have ever been able to.

The design of the titles emphasises the withholding – and the revealing of information. The fact that every time a section of paper is removed, information is revealed, cautions us, in a way, to approach the following shots with the same expectant attitude, for they are also discovered by the hand and offered to us for scrutiny. In these shots, the withholding of information is a key element. The first shot of the film gives us a partial view of what appears to be a spacious garden on a clear day. In the background we can see a smartly dressed young man walking hurriedly towards the garden, beginning to cross it, with the camera tracking right to follow him. He is about to walk past a swing, which is moving, when something off-screen catches his attention. With his eyes aimed at ground, he walks towards the camera, which tilts down as he picks up a little teddy bear, which he quickly inspects, takes with him, and he then resumes walking towards a big red brick house. The next shot is from inside the house, with the camera located right by the door through which he enters. As he collects his belongings, we can see that the house is in a transitional state. White sheets cover the furniture, as well as the carpet on the staircase. As he stuffs the teddy into a bag, we can now see two men, dressed in what appears to be some sort of working attire, carrying suitcases out of the house. No words are uttered between them. They walk towards the main door. The young man closes it behind him and as he is about to close the next one, we match cut to a shot of the front of the house, taken from a crane at a high angle. The crane lowers as the three men walk towards the front gate of the house,

allowing us to see them exit through it from the outside. The young man grabs a key from a place which is concealed to our view, closes the gate and locks it, and putting his arm through the wrought iron returns the key to its enclosure. The camera follows him as he goes towards a van, where the two men are loading some heavy boxes. He puts the bag he is carrying inside the back of the van and advises the two men that 'She may be a few minutes late' – going on to ask – 'Will you please wait for her?'. The two men agree and he thanks them. The camera follows him as he walks towards a small sports car, and the camera goes back to a high angle as he drives away.

Compared to the highly self-reflexive title sequence, these introductory shots are rather self-effacing. The opening is designed to encourage us to make a series of assumptions. The man's demeanor as he walks with determination through the garden implies that he is the owner of the property, and the moving swing and the abandoned teddy suggest the presence (or absence) of a child. One thing which is safe to assume is that it is moving day; maybe he isn't the one moving – he could be a real estate agent overseeing the operation – but somebody certainly is. The sign denoting the NW3 postal district which we see on the wall next to the name of the street on the last shot, tells us that the property is located in the affluent London suburb of Hampstead. Until he speaks we may well assume the man to be British, since nothing learned from the shots we have previously seen indicates that he is American.

Viewers familiar with the film will also be surprised to learn that this opening conceals a highly consequential act of withholding – between completion of the final shooting script by John and Penelope Mortimer, dated April 1, and this sequence being filmed, sometime after principal photography began on April 21, a decision was made to drop the first ten shots of the movie.<sup>1</sup> The scripted sequence opens with the camera aimed at the sky, with a child's voice off-screen shouting 'Higher! Make me go higher!'. The child's face is revealed as she 'sails into view riding on a swing' (Mortimer & Mortimer 1965: 1). She is Bunny Lake, 'an American girl of three or so [...] elaborately dressed, wearing patent-leather Mary Janes, a dress, and a navy blue coat with brass buttons' (1). A cut to the vantage point allows us to see the whole garden where the scene is taking place; described as a large one, 'even for the well-to-do

London area where it is located' (1), from this perspective, we can now see the man pushing the child on the swing. Steven Lake, 'a tall, obviously American man in his late twenties' (1). A voice off-screen calls for him, and a cut to a close-up of the source reveals Ann Lake, 'a beautiful American girl of 22' (2), who informs him that he is wanted on the telephone. He starts towards the house, from where Ann is talking to him, and Bunny toddles after him. The camera follows them inside, allowing us some detailed access to the house's geography. The furniture shrouded in dust covers, the packed carton, the luggage and other impediments, are indicative of moving day. As Steven goes towards the telephone, Bunny, addressing Ann as 'mommy', complains that she needs someone to push her, to which Ann replies that 'it's time to get ready for school' (3). With the audience only able to see and hear his side of the conversation, Steven's answers reveal that the purpose of the call is to inform him that he has to be at the airport at ten-fifteen. From his reaction we gather that this is an unexpected appointment. After hanging up, Steven joins Ann and Bunny, and tells Ann she'll have to take care of the remainder of the moving. An off-screen voice coming from the radio informs that the time is nine o'clock, something which neither Steven nor Ann had realised. This triggers an argument between the two, as Ann complains that because of him, they'll be late for school. Bunny starts to cry as she doesn't want to be late. Ann decides to telephone the school to let them know they'll get there as soon as possible, and leaves with Bunny to get the bus to the school.

Compared to the released version, the ten shots dramatising this situation, give the impression that the child's presence is being insisted on. Her appearance is characterised by a succession of intrusions. She enters the frame of the first shot, and every time she speaks it is to interrupt the action or conversation taking place. Her interventions don't disrupt the sequence severely, but they require our attention, as well as Steven's and Ann's, to focus on Bunny for a moment. It seems like the child doesn't want to be ignored or forgotten, something common among children, but most importantly, it appears that the script doesn't want us to ignore her. These initial moments, and whether to show Bunny or not, seem to have been the object of much deliberation. A treatment



dated June 15 1964, also by the Mortimers, envisioned the sequence differently; 'at the beginning of the film, in scenes at Kensington Gardens, in their flat, and at the school, Blanche [in this version Ann is still named as in the novel] and Steven would be shown behaving as if Bunny was there, but the child would remain silent and the compositions would keep her offscreen' (Fujiwara 2008: 332). At some point between the date of this document and April 1 1965, when the final shooting script is dated, the decision was made to change this, unequivocally to show Bunny. Finally, between this date and April 21, when principal photography started, the decision was made to dispose of Bunny altogether.

Preminger's decision to not show the child at the beginning is key to understanding his approach to the film. By not showing us concrete evidence that Bunny exists, Preminger makes a mystery not only of the crime but also of the victim(s), and divides our attention between the questions 'who took Bunny?' and 'does Bunny Lake exist?'.<sup>2</sup> Had we seen Bunny, we would never question her existence, and by association, the mother's sanity, which is one of the concerns which several characters in the film share and becomes a major dynamic of the film. Had the film followed the script in its opening directions, it would also have revealed a lot more about the status of the three characters. Here Steven's nationality is made 'obvious', as Ann's is likely to be as they talk. In the film, Preminger introduces Steven (Keir Dullea) and Ann separately and we don't learn they are related until later. We are not made aware of Steven's identity until he telephones Ann, and his use of the word 'darling' in reference to her, makes us think that they are a couple. The two proceed with their daily activities and we don't think we are being shown anything other than two people conducting their lives (though it's no ordinary day with the family moving houses and Bunny starting school). The script, however, implies a relationship of a romantic nature between the characters quite early on. The script also gives us greater access to the house's layout. In the film, it is crucial that Preminger decides not to do so, since the climactic final sequence takes place in this location, and part of the chaotic and disorienting effect of the images here, comes from the fact that we have limited knowledge of the space.

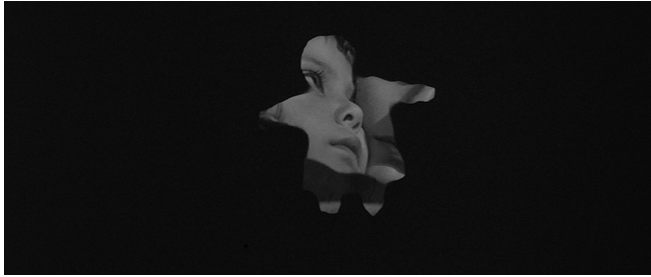
The degree to which Preminger is playing with the audience's assumptions becomes obvious after Bunny's disappearance, when it is revealed that Steven and Ann are actually siblings. It is at this point that the active withholding becomes apparent. By means of showing us these characters going about their day, and by looking at their behavior, we are led to assume they are married or, at the very least, engaged in a romantic relationship. As Chris Fujiwara points out, echoing a similar observation previously made by Jacques Lourcelles, we arrive at this conclusion 'not through any misdirection but simply through the absence of contrary indications' (339). After the revelation, Preminger's treatment of the characters remains essentially the same (he is not showing us any more than he had before), but our attitude regarding what we see, however, shifts considerably; something seems inappropriate in the way in which Steven strokes his sister's hair, or asks her to bring him a cigarette when he is in the bathtub. Their unusual personal situation could become a more interesting source of mystery than the kidnapping itself.

The first shots show us Steven exiting the Frogmore End house, for which he has to go through four different doors, two of which he locks. At a first viewing, we may take Steven's authoritative behavior, together with the fact that he seems to be in a hurry, simply as an ordinary character trait which isn't particularly telling. After watching the film and learning that it was Steven who took Bunny in order to kill her, and then returning to these initial shots, the way in which Steven is introduced to us is perhaps the most revealing thing in the sequence. The scene occurs minutes before he kidnaps Bunny, yet neither his behavior nor the film seem to advertise his intention. Almost every character we meet is first seen either walking in or out of a room through a door, or is found by other characters while they are entering a new room (also through a door). It is such a consistent pattern that it cannot be a coincidence.<sup>3</sup> While all the other characters are looking for something when they are walking through those doors, Steven is the only one who acts with determination and authority, knowing where he is headed to. After watching the film, we know that the determination and decisiveness we witnessed were directed towards the kidnapping of Bunny. If we contrast it to Ann's introduction, which comes immediately after

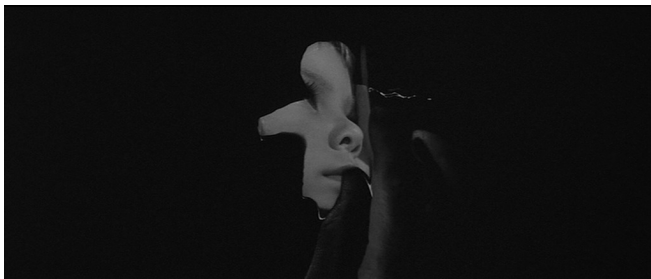
Steven's, the first shots acquire even greater meaning. The first time we see Ann, she is coming out of the 'First Day Room' at the school, where she has left Bunny. It's Ann's first time in the school and she seems lost as she looks for members of staff. Her lack of direction and the fact that she is looking for someone, but doesn't know where to find them, succinctly sums up her position throughout the film. Similarly, the way in which Steven is introduced, outlines his determination to do something which neither we, the audience, nor Ann are aware of. This positions him as the main narrative driving force (at least until Ann discovers it was Steven who kidnapped Bunny, at which point she becomes more active).

The fact that the swing is moving when we see it at the beginning doesn't make sense diegetically, as Ann and Bunny are already at the nursery at this point. In hindsight, it might be interpreted as related to the inescapable presence of Bunny in Steven's experience. The way in which he unceremoniously chucks the teddy into the bag can be read retrospectively as an indicator of his desire to suppress the child's existence. If the withholding of the relationship between Ann and Steven is one way which Preminger encourages us to reflect on Steven's inappropriate feelings for his sister when their kinship is later revealed, Steven's resentment of Bunny can be understood both in relation to his resentment at being displaced in Ann's feelings, and to Bunny's presence as evidence of Ann's relationship with another man. Steven's act of clearing away the teddy echoes his later attempt to remove all traces of Bunny, and what she represents to him.

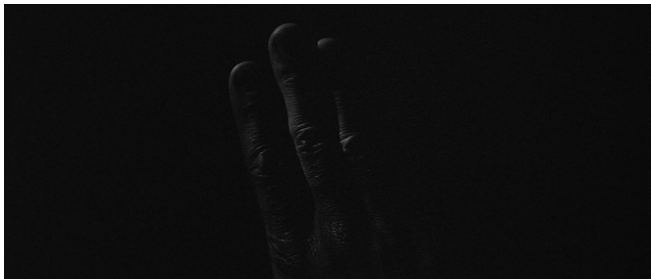
In the trailer for the film Preminger advises that no one will be admitted to the theatre after the film begins. While this most clearly follows the publicity strategy popularised by *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), a film which *Bunny Lake* resembles in a number of ways (the psychologically disturbed young protagonist, the incestuous implications, the gothic resonances), this personal insistence nevertheless indicates similar matters of importance. *Bunny Lake* is not quite a 'suppressive narrative' like *Psycho*, to use Douglas Pye's phrase (1992), but the instruction not to allow patrons into the cinema after the film's opening indicates the importance of the film's play with the cognitive dimension of point of view and the amount of detail which Preminger had packed into



**FIGURE 5** The superimposed piece of paper with the carved out doll reveals a partial view of Ann and Bunny.



**FIGURE 6** The hand restores the missing piece of paper.



**FIGURE 7** The hand closes the film.

in these few shots, making our perceptions of the character significant. Preminger had remarked that 'the ideal picture is a picture where you don't notice the director, where you are never aware that the director did anything deliberately', going on to add that 'naturally he has to do everything deliberately' (Shivas 1962: 20). The film's initial shots do not feel particularly revealing, especially when compared to the flamboyant title sequence which precedes it, but upon closer inspection Preminger's hand is clearly visible through his choices and their consequences.

Creative title sequences are a Preminger staple, particularly since the partnership between the director and Bass began in 1954. Bass would go on to design the titles for the majority of Preminger's productions until his final 1979 film, *The Human Factor*. The titles which he had designed for Preminger in the films prior to *Bunny Lake* tended to encapsulate the theme of the movie. Here they can also be said to reflect a method. In the 1960s, Preminger's films were celebrated by the critics from *Movie* for their 'objectivity', expressed through a 'detached', 'fluid' and an often 'unobtrusive' style.<sup>4</sup> The highly aestheticised *Bunny Lake* doesn't seem to conform to this model entirely. When asked by *Movie* if *Bunny Lake* would be a different kind of film from *In Harm's Way* (1964), and by extension to the epic subjects of the movies before it, he replied, '*Bunny Lake* is a suspense story. It's the first suspense story I've made in a long, long time, about 20 years.' (Cameron et al. 1965: 16). Until the final movement of the film, at least, it is more accurate to describe *Bunny Lake* as a 'mystery', a whodunit. This shift seems to account, partly, for the film's unique standing in the director's oeuvre at this point of his career. The film is indeed more closely related to the mystery film noirs he made at Fox in the 1940s, such as *Whirlpool* (1949), than to his widescreen productions of the 50s and 60s.

*Bunny Lake* finishes with the police arriving at Frogmore End to arrest Steven. Ann walks away with Bunny in her arms, and over this image another black piece of paper, with a carved out doll, is superimposed, which only allows us to see Ann's and Bunny's faces partially [Figure 5]. A hand restores the missing piece of paper (the doll-like shape) to its position, completing the sheet of paper which now looks like a dark screen, over which the final credits roll [Figures 6 and 7]. The

statement of authorship made at the start is reinforced by this concluding gesture, which adds to the sense of symmetry of ending the film in the same location in which it started. This film, (and the following film, *Hurry Sundown* [1967]), are considered by many to be the last works by the director over which he had a solid grasp of the production process. In the years which followed, the making of his films became more chaotic, and the results less effective. *Bunny Lake*, however, is a movie which certainly stands the test of close textual analysis, and the hand which so prominently opens and closes the film most definitely belongs to Otto Preminger.

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** I'd like to thank the members of the Sewing Circle (the University of Reading's close reading group) for their comments during the session on *Bunny Lake*, and my supervisors Alex Clayton and John Gibbs. I'm particularly grateful to John for going through numerous drafts, always providing insightful feedback and suggestions.

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<sup>1</sup> This and subsequent dates are taken from Preminger's biography by Chris Fujiwara.

<sup>2</sup> In the trailer for the film Otto Preminger says that perhaps he should have called the film 'Does Bunny Lake really exist?'

<sup>3</sup> In addition to Steven and Ann; the Lake's flamboyant landlord and neighbor Horatio Wilson (Noël Coward), walks into the apartment through the main door as Ann is unpacking the family's belongings; Laurence Olivier's Superintendent Newhouse is first seen observing the madness going on in the school's dancing room from the door, as the kids are doing 'exactly as they like' during their 'free play' time. We also meet other minor characters with key interventions such as the cook (Lucie Mannheim), Miss Ada Ford (Martita Hunt) and the doll maker (Finlay Curry), in a similar way. Even Bunny is first seen when Steven opens his car's boot (technically a door) to retrieve the child.

<sup>4</sup> These terms were spelled out for the first time in the 1962 *Movie* issue on the director, titled 'Why Preminger?'. At the time of its publication, the pertinence of the question had to do with *Movie*'s own endeavor to appreciate and celebrate the critically neglected Hollywood cinema, as well as to praise the work of a director whose films 'are so different from those of any other director that an investigation of Preminger's work tends to dwell as much on what it is not, as on what it is' (Editors of *Movie*, 11).



## Intoxicating stagecraft: Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend* and the mysteries of film in theatre

Siegfried Kracauer has famously argued, in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, that the theatrical story, whose prototype is the theatrical play, presents a continual threat to film's highest mandate: to let material reality enter the film frame in its own right, that is, open-endedly. Theatre's 'contrived intrigues' ([1960] 1997: 223), evident in even the most extraordinary dramas, represent a 'crude abbreviation' (219) of camera-life potential, proceeding conceptually by way of 'long shots' which align themselves automatically with the stage proscenium. 'The stage universe is a shadowy replica of the world we live in' (218), and thus exerts, when imitated, a 'restrictive effect on film'. Camera life, as opposed to theatre life, favors the wonderful indeterminacy of 'physical existence'. The types of narrative that cinema should develop are those that honor the camera's search for unresolved, contingent details from a reality that is not subjected to 'false theatrical unity'. Such narratives will deliberately leave 'gaps into which environmental life may stream' (255-56). The pre-determined design of theatre-based thinking and representation stand in the way of film's power to engage an unregulated sensory experience which productively blurs the boundaries of space and time. Kracauer would agree with Franz Kafka's disparagement of the film medium aping theatre's 'containment of

vision'. Kafka 'pulls away from cinema as surface continuity of images, urg[ing] an excess in seeing, a more-visual of vision' (Heath, 31. Citation in Trahair, 237).

Kracauer, as Miriam Hansen has stressed in her account of his obsession with film's 'photographic nature', conceived the ideal film spectator as one not constrained by narrative conventions or character behavior or story directives. The psychic disposition that the camera promotes is one which advances 'identification with all kinds of objects' ([1960] 1997: 17): 'it makes the individual lose himself in the incidental configurations of his environment, absorbing them with a disinterested intensity no longer determined by his previous preferences' (xxv). Kracauer advocates a spectator mind that meanders, plays with danger, makes its own arbitrary connections en route to revelation, rather than following theatre's pre-ordained narrative path.

Kracauer, like Rudolf Arnheim, perhaps never wholly recovered from cinema's too hasty abandonment of a silent film aesthetic. The difficult transition period from silent to 'early talkie' film could easily be read as a repudiation of the medium's birthright, and a regression to a slavish imitation of theatre practice. Screen time in movies was obliged for several years (1928-1931) to move much closer to stage time, with a resulting sacrifice of film rhythm and pace. And stagebound compositions seemed to paralyze the camera's quest for living fragments, what Béla Balázs once praised in an American silent film as 'a thin hail of small moments...of material life' which an environment releases to a genuinely exploratory camera eye (qtd in Kracauer, 225). Kracauer saw theatre space in film as a permanent barrier to a 'photographic approach' to the real. The cinematic spirit must defy the convention-bound ways of perceiving that theatre, with its mania for narrative order, cause-and-effect dynamics, and lucid character intention, has implanted in us. Theatre can creep into the filmmaking process anywhere – as Robert Bresson later contended, in his own Kracauer-like polemics against stage influence ([1975] 1997) – and its effect is usually a *contamination*, a thinning out of reality's mystery.

These old arguments seem to have lost much of their manifesto urgency and point in a world where theatre's status has so radically diminished. Whatever power theatre once

possessed to challenge film's new dispensation and different kinship with material phenomena has become invisible – and largely irrelevant – to contemporary filmgoers. Theatre's territory appears to have been completely assimilated by cinema and other media. It has no distinct domain – apart from the still valued possibilities of the live event – to declare as its inherent attribute and continuing advantage in the struggle for aesthetic sovereignty. Theatre has become, of course, an eager, creative host for elements from other art forms, including film and television, and it is worth noting that the version of theatre that film theorists and practitioners were most eager to discredit had to do with the proscenium arch tradition, with its elaborate sets, heavy dependence on speech, and dogmatic conception of realism.

I began with Kracauer's anxiety about theatre's insidious undermining of true film space (and time) to reanimate a once widespread debate about theatre's deficient attachment to the visible world, which it is film's mission to reveal and rescue. According to Kracauer, Bresson, Arnheim, and others, theatre is 'excessively' aligned, by its very nature, with artifice, with the imaginary, with the unnatural, with fixed categories, with seductive surfaces, with condensation, with appearances wedded to deception and displacement. It is, in short, a negative force, which is dangerous precisely because it can skillfully manipulate film reality for its own purposes. It can confuse the eye of the beholder, as well as the eye of the camera, so that they settle for less than the depth and weight of the real – that is to say, settling for facades and synthetic (as opposed to organic) arrangements.

I think there is a much more fruitful way to approach the problem of theatre space in film. I shall begin by discussing a number of attempts in the early sound era to fuse theatre and film technique so that what Kracauer terms authentic camera-life is discovered at the very heart of theatricality. I shall go on to provide a close reading of a relatively obscure theatrical set piece in Billy Wilder's purportedly realist film, *The Lost Weekend* (1945). This immensely popular and critically acclaimed movie appeared at the watershed moment when Hollywood began to question whether actual locations were aesthetically preferable to 'theatrical' studio settings, in keeping with a renewed post-war quest for the unadorned

documentation of ordinary lives. Wilder's narrative offers a remarkable example of how the presence of theatre lends a vital indeterminacy, flexibility of tone, and open-endedness to an otherwise too schematic and mechanised naturalism.

Let me begin my response to Kracauer's many-pronged attack on the theatrical by pointing out how invincibly metaphorical his employment of stage rhetoric is. 'Theatre space', as I understand the concept, becomes visible and viable as soon as it is named or pointed to or recognised as a frame that stands somewhat apart from the rest of a film's world. If, for example, characters encounter a theatre setting in the course of their narrative activities, and witness a performance there, we have an instant division of the film world into a stage realm and a realm outside it, whose reality (however stylised in its own right) asks to be thought about in somewhat different terms. Life as it unfolds cinematically on studio streets or 'real' urban neighborhoods, in an authentic barbershop or bar or constructed simulations of these settings, pose certain claims and demands for acceptance that a declared theatre episode is not obliged to take on. Theatre space may, of course, comment on the dramatic circumstances beyond its frame, and indeed, in countless ingenious ways, expose the seams and rifts in the outside narrative's hitherto taken for granted solidity. But theatre still is recognisably separate from the film reality beyond its borders.

In Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* (1939), to cite a very famous instance, we are allowed to watch Berthelin (Antoine Corteggiani), in a designated backstage area, as he dons a skeleton costume for an impromptu stage performance, set to the music of Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*. There is a full acknowledgment of artifice here. The participants in this piece seem to be self-conscious, at first, and to be hampered by a lack of rehearsal. Three figures in addition to Berthelin's skeleton arrive on a narrow, makeshift stage, costumed in white bed-sheets with crudely drawn eye sockets. They are meant to be ghosts, and initially carry skeletal umbrellas shorn of covering fabric. As a player piano performs the *Danse* in its own ghostly fashion, we observe as something close to a child's version of Grand Guignol acquires steadily more eeriness and disturbing power. As the skeleton continues to caper about onstage, presiding as a kind of diabolic ringmaster, his ghostly cohorts,

now holding paraffin lamps, move from the pasteboard stage graveyard out into the audience gathered to watch their antics. The seated chateau guests at first seem to react with mock consternation to the spectral invasion. But with no lessening of the sense of theatrical make-believe, something more than a stage boundary has been crossed. We suddenly feel the presence of death itself accosting the increasingly uncertain crowd of spectators. The ghosts swinging of the censer-like lamps, the shimmering white of the phantoms moving about in the half-light, strikingly alter our perception of the entertainment. In a trice, we are led to feel that the lives of this elegantly dressed group of watching guests are more fragile, and exposed. Their proximity to these silent attackers render them desolate, unaware of what transpires, momentarily bereft of social identity and purpose. The disguised actors shed their affiliations with an amusing spook show, and become harbingers of a destruction that they themselves are not cognisant of. The reality that erupts from their pantomime seems to release the horrors of the coming War into this drawing room. The theatre elements, in other words, achieve a camera-truth that vastly exceeds the collective social appearances and arrangements around them. Paradoxically, pure dramatic artifice releases 'the thin hail of moments...of material life' which Kracauer contends can be attained in film only when theatrical perception is overcome. In spite of our precise sense of the stage frame at all times, and our awareness of the player piano churning out the anxious rippling chords of the dance accompaniment, the sequence is imbued with one of Kracauer's most prized cinema goals: the loose, disorganised experiential flow that 'dissociates rather than integrates the spectatorial self' ([1960] 1997: xxviii).

Film representation generally aspires to make us forget that what is treated as real and natural in a screened world is in fact a waking dream. We give ourselves up for the time being to viewing conditions that seem 'more natural than reality'. Perhaps we don't completely lose sight of the fantasy dimension of a film, but it is not difficult to lighten our tenuous reality grounding, because so much of our perceptions and how we partake of them is, in Stanley Cavell's phrase, 'already drawn by fantasy' (1979: 102). A film fantasy can be a welcome relief from the burdens of those fantasies that so readily structure our lives outside the movie theatre. Film



fantasy is also a waking replenishment of the language of dreams, which nightly override the monitoring consciousness. Kracauer overestimates our hunger for a reality in film unhindered by fantasies of connection, or by the freedom of viewer invisibility, or by the pleasure of owning what we view, without the claims of other persons challenging our sense of sole and sovereign possession.

I would argue that theatre's interruption of a movie narrative's version of the real is a salutary reminder, to borrow Wendell Berry's frame of reference, that a film is 'an ecosystem full of dependencies, and nothing in it knows what it is dependent on' (qtd in Vaughan 2015). Theatre effects a temporary viewer estrangement from a movie's confidence in its own grounding. Theatre is an organised dream which suddenly faces off with the larger dream that encloses it, thereby calling film's own taken for granted phenomena (continuity, stable appearances, unmediated experience, angle of vision, etc.) into question. Theatre's often unanticipated division of film reality into two territories obliges the territory assigned to film to confront the assumptions that permit its representations to count more fully than theatre's as 'lived experience'. The result of such splitting is a bout of metaphysical viewer dizziness, in which the underpinnings of film reality loosen. It is akin to the interval of morning dream uncertainty (when we are still only half-awake), before we have quite restored our faith in the solidity of our everyday surroundings. Our conscious life is not instantly secure: we feel off-balance. Film's dependency on hidden theatrical components in its ecosystem is something that is frequently *suppressed*. When theatre declares its presence it is not imposing elements on film that are alien to it, or even separate from it. Theatre is inherently, inescapably part of cinema's identity.

The stage can, of course, easily be conceptualised as a distinct, confined domain, a set of attitudes and imaginary circumstances more static and posed than those of film, the entire entity lying in wait, as it were, behind a curtain. But such an idea is false. Suppose the curtain in question is on a stage containing a Busby Berkeley production number. At first we think we know where we are. The familiar stage-audience boundaries and orientation are firmly established. The number begins to unfold on what feels like an appropriate,

constructed setting, a place more stylised, diaphanous and hermetically sealed than the space the audience occupies. The spectators appear to have entered the auditorium from a world outside. But as the musical number proceeds, space continues to expand with a dreamlike largesse, and the perspectives we are granted on the ever-deepening spectacle seem more prodigiously mobile and untrammelled than anything presented in the film's grounded life-world. The stage picture in its exorbitant, near-limitless reach dwarfs the counter-claims of the film's prior, convention-suffused reality.

Kracauer's ideal of identification with all manner of unlikely objects, and the productive 'losing oneself' immersion in the 'incidental, contingent details of a physical environment' is achieved by Berkeley's flamboyant cinematising of stage illusion. Berkeley spectacles pass through a forcefully delineated theatrical mode of seeing to what I will term purely cinematic vision, without leaving the raw materials of staged artifice behind. Berkeley (a name he shares with a wonderfully compatible philosopher, Bishop Berkeley) conceives of a grand film synthesis. It is attained by a bold superimposition of two large interrelated planes: one, manifestly theatrical, and the other, from a higher angle, cinematic. Berkeley sees no point in denying film's intimate ties with theatre, ties which reach back to cinema's origins. As soon as the film frame was deemed suitable for storytelling of any sort, the theatrical tradition, vast and diverse in its relation to framing action for spectators, was naturally, inexorably brought into play. For Berkeley, cinema's most enticing route to expressive freedom lay in feats of transcendent theatricality.

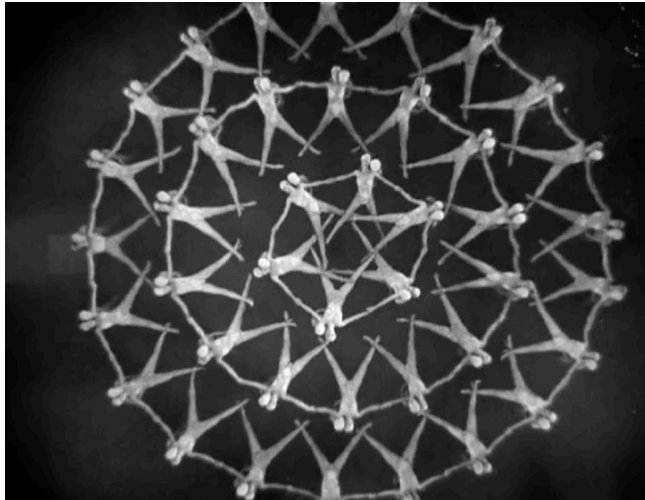
Theatre's restrictions can be most fully surmounted by a frank disclosure of film's elective affinities with stage territory. The camera eye merges with theatrical perception, then takes flight from this perch to something beyond the bounds of stage rhythm, stage distance, stage hearing and visual perspectives. Kracauer might offer some objection to the machine-like character of Berkeley spectacle – female bodies as the living cogs of mechanised stage confections – as well as his mania for order and rigorously deployed symmetry. But machine analogies hardly constitute a disavowal of cinema's foundational properties. Rather, Berkeley's heavenly human contraptions pointedly acknowledge the camera and





projector as mechanical instruments, which somehow engender séances, resurrecting dead time, with its glistening light and bustling spaces, for our delectation. The spectator is also reanimated in relation to these dream environments, as David Trotter phrases it, 'thanks to the surrogacy of a machine's eye view' (2015: 21) but Berkeley extravaganzas do not settle for mechanical perception as their end point. Machine energy and dynamism combine with an intimate camera address that wavers excitingly between fugitive personal glimpses and a nearly uniform sense of the mass. Interconnectedness as a necessary component of the (usually) blonde chorine ensemble leads both to a suppression of the individual, in favor of a Soviet-style glamour collective, and to vagrant, unforeseeable eruptions of startling human presence. (We move at a leisurely pace down a magical assembly line through a stream of images of greeting, each performer gazing into the camera and smiling as a close-up finds her. The effect of these volatile moments of release are not so different from Dziga Vertov's mad pursuit of contingency in *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), where a vast montage harmony is the putative goal.)

Berkeley treats us to a dizzying multiplication of vantage points on his unbounded stage pictures, breaking up our sense of the whole at unpredictable intervals, then reinstating it with an equally arbitrary montage rhythm. In the course of the number's layered unfolding, there is a slipping away of interpretive grids. The song lyric, which was our initial guide to understanding the number's theme and progression, seems to give way to increasingly unanchored dream embellishments. We are neither sure of what we are looking at nor how to process it correctly. This wandering away from a rational frame of reference is comparable to Kracauer's desire for a cinema perception that feels non-prescriptive and uncoded. Berkeley's transcendent theatre is a machinery of the irrational, whose orderly elements become agents of wildness, and a giddy chaos of vision. Because the meaning of this destabilising profusion eludes familiar categories, we are at liberty to read the extravagant details paraded before us playfully, salaciously, or – better still – with a mixture of awe and delirium. But theatre is the catalyst for all transformations. We pass through the theatrical medium in the way that Alice passes through the looking glass. Cinematic freedom depends



on the arrangement of objects set up on the other side of the mirror, in the adjoining room, as it were. On the cinema side of the mirror, we contemplate the overdetermined building blocks of each production number: a cascade of Ruby Keeler eyes; swirling white pianos or glowing, electric violins; waterfalls; human coins; a face transforming into a city skyline, which then opens up for us, yielding as we descend inward a multitude of city dwellers racing through their everyday work schedule so they can wind up at a massive nightclub, performing a frenzied dance of fate. It is as if we are dreaming our way back to a kindergarten of perception, where any image, devoutly attended to, can be a potential world unto itself.

The time inside a Berkeley number is visionary time, which seems unconcerned about endings. It does not feel accountable to the labored tick of a clock notching off the seconds. It is the time of rabbit holes and brief spells of nodding off to a surrealist elsewhere. When Berkeley has spent a sufficient amount of dream time synthesising order and chaos, the machine and the ecstatic garden of earthly delights, he invariably returns to theatre's normal scale and more home-made artifice. We recover the proscenium frame, a shallow stage, and a seated audience whose viewing, presumably, has been confined throughout to a single angle and distance. Whatever these spectators have witnessed, they have not been endowed with our heightened, intimate, and mobile form of imaginative perception. The return to the film's version of actuality feels like a sharp diminishing of sensory possibilities, a circumscribing of ordinary experience rather than a re-engagement with life on more refined terms. The camera seems abruptly shorn of its wings, and the politely clapping audience within the film manifests no further need for 'breaking bounds': propitious violations of common (perhaps too common) sense. These spectators have 'gotten their money's worth', and dutifully resume contact with normative reality conventions. The everyday comes back into focus as a realm untouched by the exotic abundance that has been poured out unstintingly on the magic cinema stage. The audience members are almost relieved to bid farewell to dreamy unsettledness – an instant unlearning – as though the wonders they beheld had not amplified or enriched them.

Instead of the uncontrolled life of the drives, with its murky, licentious ambiguity, the spectators seek surface coherence and the anchor of familiarity. They shrug off the luminous flow of transcendent theatre. Where do we, as spectators of the same-but-different events, position ourselves? We are not encouraged to attach ourselves to the mindset of the confined audience within the movie. Berkeley has untwisted the chains that tie us to a movie life where everything is 'at hand', subject to the control and calculation of our habitual designs. The gaps that the enigmatic spectacle has rashly opened up supply a critique of the rules of 'reality' participation on the other side of the footlights. The production numbers are almost invariably the climax of the often dime store narratives in which they have so disproportionately lodged themselves. Almost no narrative time is allocated to the final acknowledgment of the characters' situation within the offstage world. What has previously counted as the realm of the real, and the arena of human conflict, is swiftly vanquished by the 'anti-field' of make-believe, whose fullness, aliveness, and freedom from regulation grant it more truth-telling power. Cinema as a medium of untrammelled expression and disarray is unleashed in a Berkeley number only when the stage is set before us and the houselights begin to dim. For Berkeley, as I noted earlier, theatre is the necessary portal to film's visionary power.

In the early years of the sound era, when so many ideas about talking pictures and the qualities they should aspire to were drawn from the stage, the more gifted filmmakers regarded theatre's prior, and perhaps higher, cultural status as more of an albatross than a horn of plenty. The conversational rhythms suitable for theatrical productions and the weight of the static frame were a displacement not only of silent film's visual tempo, but of the fluidity of film environments, and the swift, easy, back and forth passage from one to another. Interior and exterior spaces, in silent films, were in constant, unstrained communion. The expectation of dynamic film terrain was natural among movie spectators, in whatever location the dramatic action was set. Any environment designed for film inspection contains a variety of expressive vantage points which allow social performance and private reaction to it to intermingle and separate, at the director's discretion.

The stage world and the camera frame had not seemed irreconcilable in the silent era, but the subtraction of audible speech from the visual scheme allowed for a marked disparity in the delineation of character action. Sound's arrival and rapid entrenchment intensified the border wars between cinematic and theatrical space. The new centrality of utterance seemed to call for overtly theatrical personages, who brought with them an elaborate repertoire of gestures, verbal styles, and physicalisation strategies that differed from silent film performance but retained (very often) their distance from what we might now term conventions of naturalness. Stage performers prided themselves on a combination of precision, subtlety, and a heroic scale of behavior, the latter demanding larger than life presence and vitality. Film took possession of what the studio heads regarded as efficacious theatrical staging techniques, with the accompanying conventions of dialogue exchange, stage business, and the 'unfolding' of character through revelations in speech. In spite of the rather quick recovery of silent cinema resourcefulness in camera movement, montage, lighting, and compositional variety (and the addition of experiments in scoring and sound editing), filmmakers and the public at large preserved a large respect, bordering on reverence, for theatrical tradition and the mystique of theatre.

It was by no means Berkeley alone, in the early sound era, who explored the possibilities of transcendent theatricality. The most talented directors of the 1930s nearly all found ways to use the theatrical milieu, theatre metaphors, and conspicuous stage devices as a means of extending film reality, as well as wittily interrogating its own procedures. Rouben Mamoulian's extraordinary *Love Me Tonight* (1932), for example, opens with four Atget-influenced compositions of an actual contemporary Paris in the light of dawn, each of them silent except for the intermittent sound of a tolling cathedral bell, rousing the dormant city to life. When the real Paris is seamlessly matched with a studio version of a Paris neighborhood (convincing enough to be employed as an authentic urban landscape in a studio drama), Mamoulian views from a height the operations of a solitary street-repair worker, trundling a wheelbarrow that holds his tools onto the avenue, and pausing to commence work. As the laborer begins to



empty his wheelbarrow, we hear the rattling sounds of items hitting the cobblestone pavement. We are then permitted to view the man at closer, ground level range as he wields his pickaxe. Mamoulian makes the sound of the axe striking against cobblestone the primary shot emphasis, which sets up a logic in which the diverse street sounds begin to disengage from their visual sources and create rhythmic, synchronised patterns. The sound of the pickaxe is answered in the very next shot by the sound of a snoring tramp, who is curled up beside two massive barrels. Pickaxe and snore become alternating instruments, joined in the next shot by the sound and sight of a woman plying her audibly whisking broom in front of her doorway.

The camera then races upward to take notice of rooftop chimneys releasing early morning smoke rhythmically, accompanied by metal tapping, as other sounds find their place in the ever-complicating tempo. We shift with remarkable montage speed between high and low perspectives. Shutters open in upper stories; a baby's cry is heard; a knife-grinder audibly sharpens his blade on a frame in the courtyard; cobblers hammer nails in front of their business; the metal curtains covering the display window and door of a grocery are raised; a woman flaps towels near a wash line in an upper story; another woman in a separate window beats a rug; a cart is wheeled out of a doorway as a sudden stream of pedestrians add a volume of their own to the syncopated tumult of the district. The synchronised sound rhythms and their manner of sequential revelation lend a decisive theatrical overlay to all our visual impressions. The convincing urban setting is unmasked to exhibit a theatre setting sharing the same ground. The theatre elements emerge through the massive, artful integration of percussive effects. The uncanny reality of an inclusive, steadily enlarging stage works its way into every nook and cranny of a richly textured, atmospheric movie environment. Yet while there is no attempt to reduce the conspicuousness of theatrical devices once they have been brought into play, a stunning defamiliarisation effect that seems emphatically cinematic emerges in the midst of all the overt playful contrivance.

The sound display sharpens our sight, as it were, making us apprehend more fully the beauty of work gestures and

commonplace urban activities. Mamoulian reveals a festive dimension in the world of repetitive daily routines that outshines their drudgery dimension. Instead of monotony and confining tasks we observe a network of small, meaningful events that mysteriously compose a credible living environment. Material existence is redeemed, in Kracauer's sense of the word, by objects being lifted from the shadows to which distracted seeing and hearing have consigned them. In a manner not unlike that of De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* (1951), or even his *Bicycle Thieves* (1947), the bits and pieces of observed phenomena that the camera serendipitously fastens on are 'lit up from within,' to use a famous phrase of André Bazin's, by the rapt delicacy of the visual treatment and the love the director feels for them ([1971] 2005: 62). We are not obliged to 'escape theatre' to achieve the impact of the reality effect. Theatrical hearing and the 'musical' editing rhythm are precisely the catalyst by which our hunger for marginal details is activated. A theatrical perspective enables us to penetrate more deeply the 'overlooked' ephemera of the agreeably dense, tactile surroundings. The overwhelming excess of visual and auditory stimuli, akin to that confronting us in any real street environment becomes, in Mamoulian's visionary transcription, a fresh spur to imaginative engagement with the world beyond the frame.

So there is indeed no telling, no way of knowing in advance what becomes of theatre when it is inserted into film. Theatre can align itself with film's deepest efforts to mirror choice fragments of 'reality' and equally with its deepest doubts about any such enterprise. (One thinks of Bazin's suggestive formulation: 'realism is more a reaction than a truth' [[1971] 2005: 64].) Theatre can serve as a safe refuge from trying life circumstances outside its orbit, or a realm where experience and understanding become more perilous and painful. Theatre can enshrine artifice or be the most efficacious instrument for breaking it down. It can legitimate the kinds of role playing that transpire throughout a film narrative or expose their evasions and fraudulence. It can mingle happily with cinema's other modes of representation or be forcefully confined to one clearly demarcated domain. The boundaries, when insisted upon, may exist for the purpose of elevating or denigrating the stage's gifts of flight and transformation. A





film setting can be reclaimed at any point as a stage setting, a film character as one who is temporarily or permanently dwelling in theatrical space. Theatre can seek out the extravagant fullness of spectacle or divulge an extreme of bareness, a ground zero space where all material accoutrements and delusive appearances have been removed. One thinks of Beckett's stage or the 'empty stage' so brilliantly theorised by Peter Brook ([1968] 1996). Theatre can seek out the shimmering, but also diamond-hard opulence of an Ophüls' opera house, or the strangely poignant simple machinery scrolling drawn landscapes of foreign lands behind the windows of a fairground railway compartment in Ophüls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948). (The acknowledgement of the artifice in the latter scene offers no impediment to our belief in a romantic journey of large consequence.) Theatre can blossom in a cramped fortune teller's tent at a carnival or claim a vast outdoor vista, as when the circus wagons depart on a dusty dawn at the end of Chaplin's *The Circus* (1928). In the Chaplin scene, the tramp sits in a vanished big top ring, holding a torn paper decoration inscribed with a star. The star is associated both with his lost love and all the melted away illusion and pageantry of the circus life. Chaplin crumples the star wistfully and kicks it away behind him with a dancer's aplomb. He does not look back before wandering off across the wide, abandoned field. Is the tramp in search of another theatrical space to replace the circus ring, or does he seek a freedom beyond theatre's reach? The film leaves the question open, as does the mingled stage-film medium Chaplin self-consciously probes. His perspective is fittingly that of one always somewhat outside and at variance with whatever theatre-in-flected realm he stumbles into, yet whose dream, by turns fearful and yearning, is to be taken inside and made whole.

The rest of this essay will present an extensive analysis of the *La Traviata* theatre sequence in Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend*. I've selected this episode, in part, because it has received almost no critical attention as a theatre-in-film set piece. It is the only sustained section of the narrative in which Don Birnam's (Ray Milland) alcoholic predicament is viewed from a somewhat distanced comic perspective. This flashback interlude almost breaks the established form of the film in the course of altering its relentlessly somber tone. Don's brief

stay at the opera performance introduces a rush of surrealist mischief and libation-fuelled stage harmony in a stark, step-by-poisoned step chronicle of Don Birnam's disintegration during a five day bender. The theatre segment also coincides with Don's decision to tell the story of his unwritten novel to his bartender, Nat (Howard da Silva). Don uses his arrival at the opera house as his memory portal, which opens up an alternative beginning to his narrative, one that interrupts the determinist flow of his weekend, and gives him some room to maneuver as a fantasist, playing with serendipitous chances.

The *La Traviata* sequence and Don's follow-up enforced wait in the theatre lobby after he flees from the performance in progress, create an atmosphere of expectation which makes possible the magically theatrical first meeting of Don and Helen St. James (Jane Wyman). Helen materialises as a kind of apparition, a protective spirit drawn to the aspects of Don that are worth loving, and who believes he can be saved. We have already been introduced to Helen earlier in the film proper, as someone nervously appraising Don's performance of unperurbed self-possession, as she debates whether she can leave him for a short while on his own. Every move of his she has contemplated thus far – in *The Lost Weekend's* present tense – has been part of a complicated masquerade, Don's desperation transmuted by a feat of actor bravado into seeming ease.

By 1945, the meeting points between stage and film could be arranged in movie narratives without the same air of competitive challenge so pronounced in the early 1930s. As I've argued, in the beginning of the sound era, much experimentation was lavished on the ways in which theatre and film could be explosively fused. The sense of stage reality was often that of a testing or proving ground for a film reality claiming its own nature through the fantastic metamorphosis of theatrical elements. By the mid-1940s, the stage seldom provoked so intensively film's efforts to disclose its own ground of being, its visionary and materialist prerogatives. But by 1945, we find another significant threshold moment, as the hermetic studio worlds of Hollywood scenarios begin to mix more freely with actual locations. There was a new reality hunger at the end of the war, driven in part by the 'documentary feel' of the first Italian neo-realist films, which seemed like a natural continuation and extension of the documentary still

photograph tradition of the American Depression. The studio-built settings not only in run-of-the-mill features but in high-budgeted films revealed, unwittingly, a more troubling connection to fabrication, and the sequestered-from-life frivolity of mere playacting. Prior to the end-of-war enticements of more authentic-seeming urban images, the atmosphere of reality in film was achieved without a strong audience awareness of what was, by design, omitted. There was not a felt division for regular moviegoers between 'actuality' as a possible starting point for film storytelling and the cunningly engineered environments of the studio-made counterfeits. Perhaps the vast number of war films which attempted to create visually persuasive renderings of 'fresh from the headlines' American military campaigns in Europe and Asia generated a demand for greater external verisimilitude in other kinds of film drama. One must also factor in the collective civilian response in the United States to the spectacular range and depth of war carnage – cities turned to ruins from carpet bombing, concentration camps, inconceivable death tolls, the loss of any sense of civilised order and proportion. The world suddenly needed to be apprehended at closer range, with a kind of amazement at the sheer fact of surviving presence: the raw, intimate texture of a place's *thereness*, or more aptly, *still-thereness*. As found rather than built locales became a new Hollywood convention, previously 'good enough' representations of crowded thoroughfares and rented apartments, urban parks, offices and taverns became suspect, as though a recreation bore the stigma of fantasy. If real places were sought out rather than vaguely approximated through stage-like facsimiles, spectator belief and full emotional engagement with movie stories – maintaining at least intermittent contact with the real – would be enhanced. James Agee's film criticism of the period is filled with exhortations to filmmakers to locate shards of 'uninvented' or 'unaltered' reality in their work, and Agee was profusely grateful for every image in touch with 'the cruel radiance of what is' ([1941] 1974: 11). In summary, glossy representations of the pseudo-real became the new index of objectionable theatricality, a limiting connection with fanciful, too overt 'imitations' of life.

*The Lost Weekend*, as part of this new wave of gritty, urban investigations, promoted its unusually extensive employment

of New York locations to certify the seriousness of its attempt to move beyond Hollywood tricks and softening (Sikov 1998: 220–221). It would strive to depict an alcoholic's milieu without the stratagems so customary in *false* environments. The stage metaphor in 1945 might readily be invoked to explain a thinning out of perceptual challenge, a preference for selective, shallow focusing rather than the tumultuous brouhaha of the urban wilderness. 'Setting in depth', not merely a technique but an ideal, comprehensive vantage point, permits movies to uncover areas of their subject matter which backdrops, landscapes smelling of paint, and tidy arrangements of action on one or two planes would stylise or suppress. The look of film noir, as opposed to social problem realism, was, of course, theatrically stylised, but the Expressionist dimension seemed a fitting metaphysical wardrobe for the haunted, dislocated scavengers of lost memory moving through noir's dream-like, chiaroscuro mazes.

The *La Traviata* drinking scene in *The Lost Weekend* is not merely a stage interlude (opera no less) in an ambitious urban melodrama, but a distillation of everything that theatre signifies in 1945 as a sanctuary from the real, and a bulwark set against the search for a new vocabulary of photographic expression. The theatre is under pressure to reveal all the ways in which it is blind to (and utterly remote from) the perceptual exigencies and anxiety of Don Birnam's plight. Intriguingly, however, theatre also serves as a means of replenishment for a range of human attitudes and values that the doom-laden scenario that briefly intersects with it feels cut off from.

The sequence begins at Nat's Bar around noon, when Don, already inebriated, is flirting with Gloria, a call girl, and teasing her with the possibility of a theatre date that evening. He mentions a production of the uncut *Hamlet* that is currently running nearby (the five acts of the tragedy subtly linked to the five days of his epic debauch), and suggests that it might be a lark to see it together. He invites Gloria to speculate on Hamlet's character, perhaps mindful of the parallels with his own abiding weaknesses: a paralyzed will, and an incapacity to be forthright with the women who are drawn to him. When Gloria leaves the bar, elated that sophisticated Don has agreed to have a 'dress up' evening out with her, Nat – the bar's owner – reacts angrily, accusing Don of treating Gloria and his more





serious 'high class' love interest, Helen, with deceit and contempt. He toys with the possibility of expelling Don from the tavern. To reingratiate himself, Don decides to share with Nat some unsavory, self-flagellating highlights from his still unwritten autobiographical novel, *The Bottle*. Its plot will presumably supply answers to the questions Nat has raised. Why is Don's relationship with the admirable Helen so vexed and punishing, and why is he unable to stop drinking? He promises Nat that it will be a horror story, and, as if to make good on his claim, commences his flashback telling at a point three years ago, when his alcoholic identity is already well-established. He announces 'Chapter One', but it is not a hopeful narrative beginning, suggesting that he cannot retrieve a separate meaning or alternative path for his character from a time before the onset of his addiction.

The tale starts in medias res, with the fateful decisions already made, and Don's prospects already dim. We discover Don, in the visual staging of the transition to flashback time, as part of a crowd of theatregoers, perceived first in what seems the blurry mist of what Don recalls as a 'wet afternoon'. As the image gains sobriety focus, we are able to pick out Don sporting a derby, an anonymous member of the pressing throng in the lobby of the Met. He makes his first distinguishing gesture in the act of covertly transferring a pint of rye whiskey from his suit coat pocket to the pocket of his raincoat. Within moments, a young man has collected Don's raincoat and derby and given him a coat-check claim ticket. The sounds of *La Traviata* are already audible in the lobby. We hear the jaunty strain of the champagne song, 'Libiamo ne lieti calici' (Let's drink from the joyful chalices) as Don watches his coat and its precious contents being carried away. Wilder adroitly establishes the claim ticket as having an importance at least equivalent to the unseen opera ticket. Catching up with the opera in progress, we track forward in the next shot to locate Don's position in the theatre audience as the drinking song, still unseen, is getting underway. Don is still reading his program while everyone around him attends to Alfredo's onstage acceptance of the invitation to sing.

Alfredo is showing off his vocal prowess in an 18th century Parisian salon, a more refined version of what Nat in the tavern referred to as Don's 'making with the mouth' as he

holds court on his barstool, garrulously confiding to anyone willing to pay heed to his drunken rigmarole. The informal action of the barroom performance space has been cleverly transposed to the opera stage. Gloria, the good-hearted call girl enamoured of Don's air of worldly charm and breeding, is analogous to Violetta, la dame aux camellias, in *La Traviata*, a renowned courtesan whose tragedy will in part be caused by her being lured, despite her accumulated cynicism, into a serious love relationship with Alfredo. The shapelessness of Don's unwritten 'Gothic novel', which he says is 'all in his mind' and will, when he finds the resolve to commit it to paper, probe the unchangeable malady that consumes him, is in marked contrast with the perfect form of Violetta's descent to death. Her narrative is driven by the twin agents of love and an equally incurable illness.

The magic lightness, cordiality, and seeming harmony of the Act One champagne song is a powerful temporary structure of feeling which will, in the way of opera, be raised high as a musical act of faith only to be shattered into heaps by later eruptions of contingency and misunderstanding. This portion of the opera, in other words, brings a realm of perfect fellowship into being as a dazzling apparition, which the audience is encouraged to escape into, with no sense of burden. While the song lasts, we can luxuriate in forgetfulness. The future consequence of sportive revelry and tipsy elated pledges are well-hidden. What we behold onstage is a beautiful picture of order, where voices join as one, and every cup is refilled as soon as it is emptied. Violetta and the chorus enjoin us to become live-for-the-moment hedonists: 'Let's enjoy the wine and the singing, the beautiful night and the laughter. Let the new day find us in paradise.' The opera spectator takes his strongest cue from Alfredo, still blooming with youthful idealism, who finds his full, ardent voice as he urges everyone present to 'drink from the joyful chalices that beauty so truly enhances'. The spectator is allowed a prolonged view of an ambrosial heaven, which music lends solidity by transfiguring physical life.

It should be noted that the drinking song, while presenting plentiful impressions of gratifying concord, contains an undercurrent of disconnection. Alfredo and Violetta have different conceptions of pleasure and love at this point, which



do not come into open conflict, but are not reconciled either. They offer opposing assumptions in a festive mood that makes them sound the same, as though the gap is being overcome. Alfredo believes that the fleeting pleasures of the bacchanalia attain value when they serve as a prelude to enduring love. Violetta argues that carnal delights are like all other 'foolish pleasures'. Passion's quest is but one more frivolous pursuit, which quickly runs its course. To complicate matters further, Violetta's amused detachment masks an extraordinarily deep capacity for romantic subjection. Alfredo's faith in beauty and the truth of 'ecstatic feeling', in contrast, is pure, but untested. He has been in love with Violetta for months, a commitment she does not yet take seriously. Alfredo is also, however, very much ruled by social convention, and this is something that neither of them knows at this juncture. Violetta may well suspect that he is an 'excitable' youthful type that she has often encountered, but love, when it takes hold of her in a final fierce contest with the hold of her illness, will make her indifferent to all her sensible early intuitions. The push for a unified vision of celebration in the drinking song is, in part, designed to move Violetta's urbane perspective closer to Alfredo's fervid, trusting utopianism. The tilt toward persuasion and harmonious convergence ironically sets the tragedy of the opera in motion. Agreement about the value of love has a price. Violetta's enviable sense of freedom and self-possession will soon be gone.

What would audiences of *The Lost Weekend* in 1945 be likely to project onto the meticulously recreated stage world of *La Traviata*? Spectators could not easily forget the recent wholesale destruction of Italian cities and the disintegration of civilised values in Europe (order certainly among them). The Italy of Verdi must have seemed irretrievable. Paris, where *La Traviata* is set, had just been liberated from four years of Nazi occupation, with a shameful shadow history of collaboration. An exuberant Alfredo, in a light suit with a flowing cravat, stands on a stage filled with candle lit chandeliers, candles in sconces and on tables in candelabra – war's fires, moderated and contained. The banks of candle light create a protective circle of radiance for a serene assemblage of party guests to inhabit. Behind a row of tables, whose white coverings match the frilly gowns of the female salon guests,

is a massive Rococo painting in the style of Fragonard, and on either side of it high, double-sided windows, a lustrous fragility backed by darkness. The scene has a quality of spectral emanation from an era doubly extinguished, first by time's ordinary passage, second by the just completed catastrophe, which mocks and mourns such oblivious gaiety. By now the skeleton and ghosts from the theatricals in *La Règle du jeu* have become massive and inescapable, and are putting the finishing touches on their dreadful, long harvest. The crowd in this ancient drawing room cannot reckon with the darkness behind their glass-paned sanctuary. They seem bewitched, held in an amnesia spell which will be kept alive by their solidarity, and the bravura force of their choral singing. Their island is safe from the future's invasion, but the ground of *La Traviata* is less firm than it used to be. The entire apparatus is kept alive by a war-weary opera audience's willingness to animate the spectacle with an act of self-conscious, perhaps excessively taxing belief. The Verdi fantasy requires mental reinforcement and a selective blotting out of 'too immediate' woes. This forgetting intriguingly mirrors that of the onstage choristers, in their elaborate wigs, frock coats, and gowns.

Don Birnam's spectator challenge is, from the outset, notably at odds with that of the audience surrounding him. In a sense, his involuntary level of assent to the 'truth' being represented exceeds everyone else's. He is completely caught up in the action onstage. His connection with the stage illusion grows steadily more binding as the song proceeds. Yet he is rewriting the narrative as he watches, pointing it in a viscerally more desperate direction. Don bypasses the genial argument of the singing lovers-to-be, and in fact can scarcely attend to their central position onstage. He decomposes the official proscenium picture designed by the opera's director, and in its place conducts a private visual pursuit of overdetermined objects – champagne bottles and brimming, stemware glasses transported on trays. The stage is entirely commandeered, Hitchcock-style, by point-of-view shots from Don's (implied) perspective. His single-minded concern with drinking leads us from one upraised glass to another across the entire playing area. The singers are reduced to chalice bearers. The silent, bewigged servants in tailcoats, on the other hand, who carry the champagne in bottles or on drink-laden trays

become the dominant personages, transforming inconspicuous background action into arrestingly dramatic foreground. Their back and forth movements are closely monitored because they are in control of the treasured alcohol, and determine its trajectory. Don watches Alfredo and Violetta drink (in close-up) from their glasses as they pause from singing, as though the music were a mere tease leading to the suspenseful culmination of ecstatic tasting. Behind this couple, other drinkers begin to sway in a trance-like manner, their glasses functioning like a hypnotist's twirling watch, inducing a spell in Don. As these men and women move off to the left, they create a human curtain, which parts to disclose a large ornate champagne bucket against the rear wall of the set, stocked with seven bottles thrusting outward from a bed of ice. Two more servants stand motionless on either side of the bucket, like an honor guard, holding open champagne bottles in their hands with a reverence befitting spiritual artifacts.

Alfred Hitchcock no doubt drew upon this episode for the famous Sebastian party sequence in *Notorious* (1946) the following year. Concurrent with spying activity centered on keys and a dangerous planned visit to a wine cellar, the viewer of *Notorious* is made to feel uneasy about the dwindling stock of champagne at the party itself. Hitchcock highlights trays of champagne glasses, party guests' hands eagerly taking them, and bottles on ice being opened by a servant behind a lengthy impromptu bar, as the available stock rapidly thins out. A comparison of the overt stage activity in *The Lost Weekend* with the party events in *Notorious* makes it clear that Hitchcock conceived of his charged social gathering as clandestine theatre. The stage is fully operational, but not explicitly declared. The point of view of the hostess, Alicia (Ingrid Bergman) – herself a reformed drunkard – who fears the guests will consume the champagne too plentifully, thus causing her husband to need the wine cellar key she has stolen from his keyring, transforms the entire meaning of the party into one woman's mounting anxiety: a private stage performance choreographed entirely by her fearful, roving gaze.

In Wilder's *La Traviata* sequence, the vision of liquid abundance is not (as in Hitchcock) about a hidden agenda. For the characters onstage, everything having to do with drink is out in the open, frankly declared and tenaciously indulged.



The open stage world powerfully contrasts with Don's shameful alcoholic secrecy. Drinking and more drinking is the only activity that links all the choristers together. A perfect drinkers' temple temporarily comes into being before Don's swimming senses that has but one purpose: merry, harmless, in fact irreproachable, intoxication. Don is emotionally united with the staged tipsy assemblage. He is at one, he imagines, with the values being celebrated. But his intense involvement with onstage gestures and signifiers missed by the audience at large – indeed, the force of his imaginative collaboration – ironically reactivates the sense of exclusion that he experiences in all the socially normative spaces of his own life. The logic of social integration presented in the *La Traviata* scene implies that to *belong*, one must have a literal drink in one's hand. The possession of one's own filled glass is what permits you to be inside rather than outside the spectacle.

The comedy of the sequence is built on the tension between an invitation to pleasure and excess, offered at increasingly close range by a subjective camera fused with Don's desired objects, and the stubborn fact of spectator distance. The feeling of 'film vision' proximity is continually enhanced, in tandem with the *gap* of theatrical separation. Film seeing is so often predicated on our being so 'incorporated' in what we are looking at that we forget that we don't actually possess it. Seeing and hearing can often weave us into a fantasy space that abolishes alienation. What we behold – once we have entered the mindset of the film's world – appears to be ours for the taking. Don's theatre perception, for that reason, is sharply at variance with normal film perception. The rules of theatre spectatorship within film is that theatre viewers generally know their place, which is to say their bodily placement, more clearly. They retain the awareness of the stage as a material medium, located at a fixed distance from their seat.

The movie spectator's sense of distance from the cinema screen is one that film is at great pains to dissolve. The stream of film images, as many theorists have noted, has much in common with the language of dream and daydream, both of which have an immense ongoing role to play in our inner life. If the boundary between screen and inner life is blurred, the spectator will receive cinematic experience in a less consciously mediated fashion, as though it were transpiring not

externally but within the spectator, in a manner analogous to dream, memory, fantasy. The seat one occupies at a movie theatre is no barrier to a more intricate sustained placement within the film frame. Theatre, though associated with 'live experience' rather than manufactured simulation, maintains the consciousness of physical separation from the stage as part of its reality effect. One can become deeply involved in theatre performance without losing the awareness of viewing and hearing from a certain remove. The audience space divides us from the performed action. Cinema preserves this condition of intervening space and spectator distance when depicting stage events on film. The audience space is always dramatically in play, communing in its own theatrical manner with the events onstage.

Movie characters watching a stage are rendered more dynamic if the emotional impact and challenge of distance – a systole-diastole of distance dwindling, then being reasserted – are made an integral part of the presentation. The auditorium is a second stage space, as it were. Billy Wilder's *Love in the Afternoon* (1957) provides a brilliant demonstration of the audience as a distinct performance domain, where the fact of distance is the substance of the drama. While the Prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is playing in a sumptuous opera house, Ariane Chavasse (Audrey Hepburn) is seated in high balcony, distracted and daydreaming, while her date listens enraptured to every phrase, conducting with his hands as he follows along in his own copy of the score. All at once, Ariane's attention is caught by the arrival, far below her, of Frank Flannagan (Gary Cooper), the millionaire playboy with whom she is romantically obsessed. Frank's seat is in the front row, at ground level, very close to the orchestra. Ariane seizes her date's opera glasses and tries to bring Frank into sharper focus, and nearer to her. He is seated next to his own date, with his back turned. Equally unmindful of Wagner's seductive musical force, Frank flips through his program, then rolls it up and converts it into a makeshift telescope. He randomly directs his spyglass to other sections of the audience. A visual comic love duet is superimposed on Wagner's majestically yearning, doleful overture as Ariane – in close-up – remains riveted on Flannagan's activities in the theatre's cavernous





depths, while his blithe, womaniser's scan of the crowd for more engaging prospects fails to locate her.

I have stressed this issue of the spectator 'playing area' and the awareness of distance from the actual stage because they figure decisively in the last phase of Don's viewing of the drinking song. As I previously observed, Don's cheated point-of-view shots move us extremely close to the opera action, though his seat is separated by many rows from the stage. His perception has the camera's freedom to magnify and hyperbolise whatever drink-related details intrigue him. The framing and cutting align with (and give full license to) Don's revision of the dramatic meaning and flow of Violetta and Alfredo's musical exchange. However, the freedom to reconstitute the operatic performance, according to his private needs, coexists with the necessity of banishment from the festivities. He is trapped in a seat at the remote outskirts of the bacchanal, where deprivation is absolute. He suffers (comically) for being utterly cut off from the filmic line of action he discerns and orchestrates. Don is, in one sense, integrated into the drinking scene in precisely the same fashion that the film viewer is. This level one union is in sync with the effortless sharing and fellowship of pleasure that is everywhere ratified onstage. But Don's literal spectator detachment from the very spectacle his imagination narrates, ironically turns all the signs of onstage togetherness into repudiation. It is as though the smiling choristers with their lifted champagne glasses are conspiring to ignore him, to deny him the hospitality available to all the other guests, to render him invisible. No servant will catch his eye and either acknowledge him or carry the drink tray in his direction. So, from the position of theater viewer disenfranchisement, Don feels compelled to launch an even more subjective assault on the staged proceedings.

In a comic prefiguring of *The Lost Weekend's* climactic, harrowing delirium tremens episode, Don suddenly converts (by hallucination) the actual swaying dancers onstage into a row of disembodied cloakroom raincoats. A chorus line of mackintoshes, extending from stage foreground to background, gently swings in time with the song's rhythm. The rhythm itself, though not audibly distorted, comes to seem more plaintively clock-bound, as though passing moments were insistently marked, signaling the loss or draining away

of our too brief time on earth. Don is extending the prerogatives of point-of-view camera authorship here still further, bringing the stage picture into fuller harmony with himself. He translates, by hallucinatory fiat, whatever is alien and separate in the celebration into images of belonging. One of the swaying coats teasingly discloses a bulging pocket, which Don is able to see through, as though a final manifestation of theatrical illusion were being offered for his gratification. Inside the pocket a whiskey pint materialises. The bottle, in effect, breaks the fourth wall, casting an anthropomorphic glance outward into the audience and finding Don, meeting his gaze, as the joyfully inebriated salon guests declined to do. Don's self-made cinematic environment onstage becomes a prison-house of subjectivity. He dispatches, first, the logic of the opera, then its material conditions in exchange for the dream of a coat (a means of covering up). The bottle within the coat seems to take possession of Don in the act of unveiling and sighting him. It defines him unnervingly as an appendage of itself. The bottle is hidden in this fantasy projection to every spectator but Don. Hiddenness in relation to alcohol (covering up) displaces a ghostly social world in which drinking is hyper-visible, the lynchpin of all positive human connection.

Another surprising metamorphosis, which is crucial to our understanding of the *La Traviata* scene, takes place in Ray Milland, the actor. He briefly sheds his affiliation with Don's desolate estrangement, and reconnects with the romantic comedy persona familiar to film audiences from his previous ten years as both contract player and star at Paramount. The beginning of the 'going to the theatre' flashback interrupts the steady downward movement of *The Lost Weekend* narrative and implies – in spite of Don's preliminary insistence that he was already a drunk *then* – that we will be granted a reprieve, as Don recalls the initial phase of his relationship with Helen. Milland's series of reaction shots to the *La Traviata* libation orgy are all keyed in to the comic notion that he has made a disastrous choice of escapist fare. The internal burden appears to lighten for Milland's character even as his desire to obtain a drink escalates. Milland does not overplay his responses, but we are meant to recognise a kinship at this point between the face of discomfiture Don displays and the faces of the many hapless characters Milland has previously played who all at



once find themselves, like Don Birnam at the 'wrong' opera, in an amusing fix.

The proximity of an artificial stage milieu, in combination with the memory of Don (just before) initiating a tavern yarn which he hopes will garner some sympathy from his bartender audience, create a protective aura around the figure at the center of the story 're-enactment'. This nattier dressed and less hardened Don is no longer adrift in an oppressively real urban environment. He has stepped – like a fictive personage – into a stylised sanctuary where the drinks are 'pretend' champagne and the performers follow a pattern of merrymaking that is securely choreographed and without any hint of strain. Milland's demeanour is free to shift over to a mode of response that invites pleasurable viewer complicity. Confronted with overtly theatrical difficulties, Milland is temporarily released from the duties of full-scale anxiety. Wilder uses Milland's *other* face strategically in this interlude. It provides the viewer with sudden reassuring access to the dominant convention of lighthearted intoxication scenes in Hollywood film.

The vast majority of scenes portraying drunkenness in American movies made prior to 1945 are playful and mischievous. They promote a much-valued loosening of constraint – a welcome surrender to giddiness and irresponsibility. Nick Charles, of *The Thin Man* series, was the representative alcoholic of 1930s Hollywood cinema – usually soused, but never to the point where his wit and charm founder, and whose only drink-related problem was a bad hangover. One-night benders were sometimes viewed in a melancholy light, but the excess was seldom linked to addiction. *The Lost Weekend's* pointed determination to oppose this convention – to overthrow the regime of droll inebriation – naturally creates a countervailing pressure to return to familiar territory. The suppression of comedy in the rendering of Don's binge heightens the desire for an acknowledgment of laughter's cleansing force. Comic freedom is a sphere of knowledge (and expectation) that lies adjacent to the newly cold and dreary nightspots of the *authentic* 'naked city'. Wilder employs theatre then as a cunning passageway back to the traditional wisdom of what spirited revelry can accomplish. Milland's mask of sodden cynicism – within the confines of the 'horror story' he claims

to be telling – briefly comes loose, and Milland the genial comic actor is permitted to stare hungrily at a staged version of the lost frivolous pleasures that his current role, and the imprisoning world that go with it, have cut him off from. It is not merely a drink that Milland craves, but the cost-free brio that is one of its reliable cinematic privileges.

As the drinking song concludes and the audience within the film greets it with enthusiastic applause, Milland feels obliged to abandon his theatre seat and turn his back on the stage spectacle. Though his squirming overinvestment in the champagne utopia (a utopia itself cut off from the Violetta tragedy that has not yet found its footing) unleashes laughter of the old-fashioned, gladdening sort, the flashback episode's linkage with Milland's star persona remains precarious. The fact of Milland's lack of fit in *this* story with the maze of artifice set before him, causes the actor to flee, perhaps reluctantly, back to the weightier reality Don Birnam's desperate condition has called into being. But in fact Milland cannot shake off his old persona just yet, nor can Don Birnam achieve an easy escape from the space of theatre.

With the music of Verdi still audible on the soundtrack, we watch Don move briskly down a hallway leading to the cloak room. Don presents the attendant (Frank Orth) stationed there with a second ticket of admission – his claim check ticket – which promises to afford him more reliable, tangible entertainment than *La Traviata*. The cloak room, however, does not stand separate from the theatre he has just vacated. It is rather a continuation of the stage realm, part of the building devoted to theatrical exhibitions. The desk where the attendant is roused by Don's early 'exit' and demand for his coat forms a smaller version of the opera stage, with an equally untraversable barrier. The attendant is, in effect, a comic surrogate for the bartenders such as Nat whom Don regularly confronts, with a similar power to bestow or withhold the 'relief' that Don longs for. Don's departure from the theatre is significantly delayed by a confusion over ticket and coat match-up. Instead of his own raincoat (with its secret stash of rye) Don's ticket obtains – through a mistaken identity imbroglio – a woman's leopard skin jacket. Don's coat is hidden away somewhere in the mass of other opera patrons' apparel, over which the attendant stands watch. The attendant

refuses Don's demand to enter this second stage area and conduct a search for his missing coat.

As with his viewing of the opening aria of Verdi, Don's spectator position is rife with vexation and a sense of exclusion. The opera stage and cloak room both initially promise an easy route to felicity, in one case, a musical respite from pressing worries, in the second, the retrieval of his property through a reliable social form of exchange. The opera stage presentation, after bombarding Don with taunting images of 'not having', is overthrown by Don's fantasy of bobbing raincoats, one of which contains a reminder that real (not make-believe) liquid salvation lies within his reach. When Don arrives at the second, cloak room proscenium, where the 'real thing' presumably awaits him, he is presented with an exotic, faintly absurd 'female' substitute for the coat he naturally expects – a theatrical prop coat, as it were.

The comic tone established in Don's emotional ambush by the Verdi drinking song is strategically extended by Wilder in the cloak room dispute. The attendant regards himself as a theatrical personage – the Guardian of Order – and fends off Don's surly, loud protests with the sturdy aplomb of a man who has served a long apprenticeship in farce. Ray Milland's full return to the identity of 'Don Birnam' is delayed by this somewhat stylised, histrionic encounter. Don's agitation is dramatically softened by a deliberately highlighted plot contrivance. The world where dispiriting accidents occur is the real world, but accidents of *this* sort (the timely arrival of a mysterious coat belonging, we have no doubt, to a beautiful woman and a prospective partner in love) are bright confectations, infused with the airy determinism of romantic comedy. The coat offers a secure basis for 'meeting cute'. The more galling determinism of Don Birnam's falling again and again into the throes of his addiction is temporarily offset by the lighter fatedness of fairy tale romance. Perhaps we recall Don, at this point, in his role of barstool raconteur, concocting a fable for Nat that will make him a sympathetic ally. Moviegoers of 1945 might well be reminded of Ray Milland's first romantic comedy hit, *Easy Living* (1937), whose plot is set in motion by a costly woman's fur coat being tossed out of a penthouse window, and landing – oh propitious accident – on Jean Arthur

(Milland's soon-to-be love interest) as she rides atop an open air double decker bus.

While Don is forced to sit disconsolately on the opera house stairway – awaiting the end of *La Traviata* and the sorting out of the coat muddle – he settles still further into the recognisable manner of Milland's star persona. He stylishly renders his impatience. Within the context of *The Lost Weekend*, this former, less shackled version of the actor [the star the audience knows] is strongly associated with the values of theatricality and its gallant propensities, rather than the stern strictures of film realism. We hear snatches of the opera as Milland sits, bemused and frustrated, on the carpeted lower steps. The music behind the wall marches Violetta inexorably toward her doom, but on our side of the theatrical partition, comedy has bought itself some time to play out a less drastic scenario. The neighbouring orchestral sounds emphasise Don's separation from grandiose moods: a reprieve from the grip of compulsion. Compulsion, of course, frequently unfolds in the language of melodrama. Don / Milland is, after all, merely waiting, resignedly wagging the umbrella (which came with the leopard jacket at the coat check counter) as though it were a conductor's baton, rather than frantically seeking a drink. Wilder creates an emotional polarisation between vying forms of theatrical activity. The storm and stress of not to be deterred opera misfortune contrasts with a man holding himself in readiness for a possible shift in circumstance, a meeting that is likely to supply a different kind of rescue than he anticipates. As Milland submits to the changing demands of his theatre environment, it seems as though the film narrative itself is opening up to a new tone and fresh possibilities of development. The theatre space becomes a useful arena of indecision and tantalising wavering for Wilder the director.

Films with a too controlling thesis, and accompanying pedagogic baggage, often face the problem of appearing too intent and clear about what needs to be communicated. A film, especially one with polemical urges, can know too well what it's about, and make that very fullness of purpose a route to falsehood. Theatre offers a space that registers doubt about the necessity of a fixed tone, and of a too narrative conception of the reality principle. In Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), one

of Barton Keyes's (Edward G. Robinson) most important narrative responsibilities is to be comic playwright-in-residence in the Insurance Company claims office. He keeps *Double Indemnity* from getting locked in a somber melodramatic mode by reimagining one crime after another in exuberantly comic terms. He uses the various spaces of the insurance company that he pops up in as ready-to-hand stages for his impromptu performances. He enthralls his listeners by exposing the 'bad plotting' of his greedy criminal adversaries. He offers bravura reconstructions of their sordid schemes once he has seen through their defective story construction. By conceiving, with Olympian detachment, all crimes as failed theatrical ventures, Keyes creates vital counterpoint for the increasingly grim writhings of Neff and Dietrichson in their loveless entanglement. They achieve a greater measure of realism in their sustained conflict and double-cross because of Keyes' antic effrontery, his ceaseless theatrical testing of every character's angle. Keyes's dramatist presence gives the world of *Double Indemnity* a plurality of available tones, and its reality principle a renewable comic dynamism.

The trip to the theatre in *The Lost Weekend* does not, of course, remove or even reduce Don's resolve to obtain alcohol, but it provides a different lens for contemplating it. His drive is relaxed through a disproportionate fantasy interruption. He is stymied, here as elsewhere, by conditions blocking his gratification, but in the little drama with the amusingly stubborn master of cloak room protocol, he is assigned a task to perform that involves another person's well-being. In place of his own pint to hold, he is given a coat, and the mere act of holding it for a length of time, however grudgingly, establishes a connection with its undisclosed owner. When Don finally discovers her – they are the last two occupants of a hallway that moments before had been teeming with patrons eager to reclaim their coats and depart – they are alone together, on a markedly silent stage. In addition to the folded coats they carry, Helen raises a comically forlorn derby as 'identifier' and Don still clutches a woman's umbrella. In the foreground is a pillared, sand-filled, standing ashtray, in which Don has wittily stubbed out his rolled up opera program.

Once the coats have been traded and Don has made sure that that his bottle remains safely stowed in the pocket, he





reveals that he has had 'three long acts to work you out from that coat of yours'. He has built up a picture of Helen's likely name and type from the owner's initials on a sewn tag and the Toledo location of the furrier. Prior to the commencement of articulate flirtation banter, Don roughly responds to her request for her umbrella. After snarling 'Catch', he tosses it haphazardly in her direction. Her retrieving gesture is mistimed, and the umbrella makes a jarring noise resembling a gunshot as it strikes the bare floor. This graceless toss and drop literally restore gravity to the proceedings. The unexpected violation of a smooth, precise stage rhythm in their opening exchange throws us back, sharply, to the dominant *Lost Weekend* tone of despondent harshness. Wilder choreographs this crucial 'break' as though it were an onstage blunder during a performance. An intended action is spoiled by a performer fumbling or mistiming her response. Reality suddenly seeps into dramatic artifice through the gap created by an accident. Milland promptly recovers his grace and self-possession after Helen describes him as 'the rudest person I've ever met', which is equivalent to an actor cleverly repairing the breach. The umbrella 'detonation' as it hits the floor inside the opera house serves an even more important function by preparing us for a rhyming action that will come soon afterward. As Don and Helen leave the theatre and encounter a still-in-progress rainstorm, Don's whiskey bottle slips from his pocket and shatters on the sidewalk, in full view of Helen. The humiliating exposure of Don's hidden object / vice, conjoined with the bottle smashing and thus emptying its precious contents, breaks the spell of the comedy and romance interlude that the theatre sanctuary had made possible. It's noteworthy that Don and Helen's delight in sparkling give-and-take precisely coincides with their lengthy traversal of corridors and stairways as they slowly depart the theatre building. Once they arrive outside – a threshold crossing forcefully marked by the appearance of gusting rain and early evening darkness – the weight of the conversation grows notably heavier. Don reverts to calculation and subterfuge, and Helen's impulsive invitation to join her at a New York party is seized upon by Don because it affords a solution to the problem of the lost pint of rye. Alcohol counts for

more than Helen's own presence in his swift decision to accept her offer.

Almost immediately Don's flashback story is replaced by an image of Don still glibly holding forth in Nat's bar as Nat cleans up. The chance of an auspicious start to a meaningful love story must be evaluated entirely by reference to the theatrical frame within which all the events we have witnessed transpired. We are led from a positive to a negative reading of theatre's implications by the jolting reminder of Don as self-pitying tale spinner. Don misrepresenting himself to Helen out in the rain, followed by his failure to make good on the initial favorable impression he has made, decisively undermines Milland's fleeting retrieval of his insouciant star persona. The theatre excursion now may strike us as a retreat from self-awareness, a journey into illusion akin to Don's bouts of drunkenness.

Surprisingly, however, as *The Lost Weekend* nears its ending and the narrative attempts to give Don a credible hope of self-reclamation, theatre is once again called upon to provide 'reality' with an adjoining space of possibility. The coat mix-up so central to the theatre episode is recapitulated after Don touches bottom. That nadir point arrives with his DTs hallucination of a bat fiercely attacking a mouse that peeps out of a hole in the wall of his room. The mouse's lifeblood streaming down the wall subtly resembles the spreading stain of whiskey, and the mingled association conveys the draining away of Don's will to survive. It is intriguing that as we arrive at the culmination of the film's realist excavation of alcoholic experience, we shift to mental theatre, a fantasy of horror played out on Don's mindscreen. The problem Wilder faces in his closing scenes is how to introduce the rhetoric of redemption in such a way that it does not betray the film's reality effect – its essential grounding in a starkly authentic, inhospitable urban milieu.

His Lubitsch-inspired tactic is to make the crucial moments in Don's metamorphosis play out through our engagement with objects. Wilder selects Helen's and Don's coats for further dramatic attention precisely because they are imbued with a kind of magic and power, derived from our first encounter with them in the cloak room playlet. Don and Helen both make reference to the coats as linked



to the beginning of their *story*, a narrative they believe is, to some degree, distinguishable from the counter-story of Don's addiction. Don and Helen's fairy tale challenge is to interpret accurately the concealed meaning of the other's 'performative utterance' with Helen's coat, which, in effect, turns into Don's coat once it is stolen and pawned for a hidden object. Helen is reunited with Don in a nursing capacity at the end of his 'lost weekend', though his mood remains hopeless. When she falls asleep at his place, Don steals her leopard skin jacket and takes it to a pawnbroker. Initially misconstruing his gesture as a total repudiation of their relationship, and a callous betrayal, Helen locates the pawnshop and arrives there without any coat in spite of a rainstorm, which echoes Don and Helen's first post-theatre contact with the world outside as a newly formed romantic pair.

She discovers at the pawnshop that Don has not pawned the jacket for drink money, as she feared, but has swapped it for a gun, with which he intends to kill himself. The decision to trade the coat for a gun reconstitutes the jacket as an emblem of value. Don is not contemptuous or unmindful of the coat's prior significance. Rather, because he can no longer conceive of himself as a person worthy of it, believing he can do nothing for its owner but further augment her pain, he severs their tie by choosing to give up booze and life with one stroke. He imagines that his theft of the coat will prove to Helen that he cares nothing for her, and thus set her free, when in fact it convinces her that she is the only living figure who has not emotionally dissolved for him. Helen fathoms the mystery of the theft correctly, and leaves the coat with the pawnbroker, running back to Don's apartment while getting soaked to the skin (in a manner that anticipates Shirley MacLaine's New Year's Eve run at the end of Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960), also linked to a pending threat of suicide). Helen's abandonment of any thought of protective covering for herself gives the viewer a visceral sense that she is attuned to Don's degree of 'exposure', and is prepared to meet him in that spiritual place. Back at Don's apartment, his willingness to open the door and let her in, which pulls him away from his inspection of himself in the bathroom mirror, on the verge of his contemplated shooting, suggests that he has been drawn, at least for the moment, out of his trance of utter estrangement.

His ability to respond to her restores a sense of otherness to his shrunken world. As he urges her to leave, he is conscious of her sopping wet state and offers her his raincoat so that her return to the streets will be less punishing.

As she stands near the doorway, Helen is granted a propitious, almost supernatural view of Don's revolver in the bathroom, through an oval mirror reflection. This sighting is meant as a corrective to the language of hallucination earlier in the narrative, including both the DTs segment and Don's opera fantasy of the dancing raincoat, when the pint of rye materialises, through a blend of stage and cinema sorcery, within the coat pocket. After spotting the gun's reflection, Helen retrieves a half empty liquor bottle that she has concealed in an umbrella stand (and in so doing, harkens back to the umbrella from the theatre scene, in another instance of sleight-of-hand transformation). She urges Don to choose the glass of whiskey she pours for him over the gun, and offers to drink with him.

Helen's last theatrical action is to take over Don's previous role of barroom storyteller, pleading with him to conceive a new life narrative in which his drinker and writer selves are no longer regarded as separate beings, but aspects of a single person. Don gradually enters into the spirit of her reworking of his story, and demonstrates his resolve to start afresh as writer by dropping a lit cigarette into his beckoning whiskey glass, thus converting the Traviata 'chalice of joy' into an ashtray. This action is linked to a recurring Milland gag – highlighting his comedy persona – of him turning his cigarette around in his mouth so he doesn't try to light the filter. Usually this action is performed in Wyman's presence, and is another Lubitsch-inflected idea for releasing wit from sodden helplessness. As Don begins to re-tell his story of the weekend, gaining some authority over it by taking on – as the film concludes – the responsibility of film narrator, we are led back to the film's opening theatrical image of a bottle suspended by a cord outside Don's apartment window, hidden from every perspective but the one we share with the camera. The privacy of this revelation is, in Kracauer's terms, theatrical. The sighting has a pre-ordained air, a quality of contrivance. The bottle looks back at the viewer, in much the same fashion that the fantasy pint flask on the opera stage seeks out Don and, in





effect, winks at him. We discover Don once again through his window, in the same position he occupied at the beginning of the film. He stands above his bottle, with his back turned to it, but in full knowledge of its whereabouts. The bottle still dangles as a prospective outcome within Don's accompanying narration. Don, as storyteller, 'writes' his ending in advance of living it, as a decisive turning away from his series of ruinous failures. But the air of the undisclosed secret knowledge, the lingering tie with his compulsion, visually persists.

The reality principle conspires with theatrical dream-work in the concluding phase of *The Lost Weekend* to create a delicate balance. Wilder stays in touch with the obdurate city chill, present not only in the sleeting rain but in the grungy rooms of Don's apartment. The rooms, with their unrelenting subdued light, a light of metaphysical grayness, are a strong indicator of how things presently stand for Don Birnam. The resigned helplessness that these spaces steadily project is not vanquished. Yet, as I have argued, the objects that are brought into play in this drab arena are steeped in theatrical color, possessing what one might call the power of theatrical suggestion, and destabilising the naturalist propensities of the plot. Theatre does not assume full control of the proceedings, but it manages to impart a certain elasticity to Don's character and predicament. The objects that he perceives, handles, comments on possess a transformative power of their own, established in the orbit of *La Traviata's* stage world, and Don borrows some of their 'converting' strength by association. Helen's continuing faith in Don – visualised through her coat-mediated recognition moments – depends for its persuasiveness on the mythic force of the theatrical gaze, which is anchored to her first appearance in the film. A woman appears on a bare stage, holding Don's coat and mournful, bereft derby, awaiting discovery and connection. Before Don can see himself in the finale, he must see her, shorn of more than her coat, as though for the first time, thereby closing a circle. The objects that carry forward from the fiercely festive and harmonious spectacle of *La Traviata*, bloom afresh in the sodden aftermath of Don Birnam's weekend, and provide viable experiential openings for him. Theatre is the spell-weaving, Ariel emissary from another world – undefeated even by the Second World War's banquet of horrors.

Ariel's world rests inside film's dream of the real, and is consecrated to shape-shifting, marvels, unlikely restitution, and a higher, more flexible causality.

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## *Daisy Kenyon:* Otto Preminger (1947)

Published in September 1962, *Movie 2* was a special Otto Preminger issue, with articles on his films by Ian Cameron, Paul Mayersberg, V.F. Perkins, Mark Shivas and Robin Wood from within the *Movie* group, and with additional contributions from Eugene Archer and Eric Rohmer. The articles stress key features of Preminger's work which are now taken for granted, such as his ambiguity and objectivity, his commitment to 'exact and lucid presentation' (11), the fluidity of his long takes, and his fondness for father / daughter and father figure / daughter figure relationships. In referring to such notions here, I would like to acknowledge these early *Movie* pieces: in a sense, they provide a critical background against which this essay is written. Although in the 1962 issue, *Daisy Kenyon* is not considered separately, it is referred to by Mayersberg in his article 'From *Laura* to *Angel Face*', and I shall indeed quote him.

*Movie* returned to Preminger in *Movie 4* (November 1962), which also includes an interview with the director. Then, over the years, there has been a smattering of Preminger articles inspired by these early *Movie* pieces: I am thinking of Walker (1970), Lippe (1988), Gallafent (1992), Gibbs and Pye (2005 & 2010) and Keathley (2012). Nevertheless, although these are by no means the only articles of interest on the director, in the

55 years since the two *Movie* issues, there has in fact been relatively little critical consideration of Preminger's films. There is no substantial critical account of his work overall; two fairly recent biographies – by Foster Hirsch (2007) and Chris Fujiwara (2008) – do not say much about the details of the films. In particular, I am unaware of any significant criticism of *Daisy Kenyon*.

By 1947, Preminger – who also produced *Daisy Kenyon* – was a highly-respected director at Twentieth Century-Fox, and Joan Crawford was a major star of the era. This was the only time in his career that Preminger worked with such a major female star, and one would therefore expect a degree of tension between Preminger as *auteur* and Crawford's star persona. In fact, Crawford got on well with Preminger – see Spoto (2011: 191) – and tensions emerge, rather, in the interaction of star and genre. And although Preminger would have been responsible for articulating the material in such a way as to bring out these tensions, part of my argument is that they were common to many if not most of Crawford's films.

I would like to look at the film from four perspectives. In the background throughout, there is the matter of genre: *Daisy Kenyon* is both a woman's film and a melodrama, and there is a play between these genres – which do of course overlap – which the film from time to time highlights. (The Region 1 DVD of the film markets it as 'Fox Film Noir'. This misidentification arises, I assume, because of the current popularity of 1940s film noir. *Daisy Kenyon* has nothing to do with film noir.) Within that overall frame, there are three main lines of analysis: the adaptation of the novel, which raises in particular the issue of ideology; the contribution of the director, which raises in particular the issue of style and tone; and the significance of the film as – to an extent – a vehicle for Joan Crawford, which raises in particular the issue of identification.

### The novel and its adaptation

The first edition of Elizabeth Janeway's 1945 novel has 'An historical novel of 1940-42' across the front cover, emphasising that the narrative covers the lead up to and entry of the US into World War 2. In the film, the time period is shifted

to the immediate post-war years. It would thus be useful to look first at the novel, and the way it inflects the story. In it, Daisy, a New York magazine illustrator, is 32, and she has been having an affair with Dan O'Mara, a high-powered lawyer, for eight years. In his early forties, Dan is unhappily married, but devoted to his two daughters, Rosamund (15) and Marie (13). His wife, Lucile, knows about the affair. A somewhat confused Pete Lapham then enters Daisy's life, and she responds to his evident need for her by having an affair with him. Their relationship is facilitated by Dan's absence in Washington, trying to get approval for a new type of plane engine – to help the British war effort. Pete tells Daisy about the death of his wife Susy, killed in a road accident (he masochistically blames himself: for marrying her; for letting her drive), but then proposes and, even though she still loves Dan, Daisy accepts. On the evening when Dan learns from Daisy about her impending marriage, he returns home to find – in a melodramatic twist – that Frank Millar, a friend of Lucile's to whom she had turned purely for comfort, has had a (non-fatal) heart attack in their apartment.

Married, Daisy and Pete move in the summer of 1941 to a cottage in Martha's Vineyard; Pete – who foresees the US entry into the war – joins the army and goes to boot camp. But on one of Daisy's trips to New York, Dan turns up, embittered at the failure of his plane engine deal. He takes it out on Daisy, and rapes her. Then, feeling guilty, he phones her from home to apologise. Lucile listens in, and bursts into the conversation, provoking Dan to threaten to kill her. To protect Daisy, he then threatens Lucile with divorce, saying he will name Frank Millar as co-respondent.

Dan rapes Daisy on 8th December 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor. It's as though the national trauma combined with the personal humiliation turn Dan, albeit briefly, into a monster. In the aftermath of the rape, the symbolism becomes even clearer. Daisy thinks she may be pregnant, but it turns out to be an ovarian cyst which has flared up – as though in response to the rape – and must now be removed. Symbolically, (1) the cyst signals a change in Daisy's body: Dan's seed is now actively harmful, (2) the operation hints at the taboo subject of abortion, and (3) the operation will get Dan out of her system. Moreover, it will enable her, in future,

to conceive. Meanwhile, Pete has been away at camp; all he learns is that Daisy needed an operation. Daisy and Dan have a final day together; imagining for themselves an alternative world in which they are married; Daisy then happily catches the train to visit Pete at camp.

Bought by Fox before publication, the novel was a best seller. The long process of turning it into a script is summarised in Fujiwara's biography (2008: 90-92). Satisfying the Production Code Administration was a major issue, but the film neatly solves the problem of Daisy's two sexual liaisons by (1) beginning at the point when Pete enters her life, which stops her sleeping with Dan, and (2) rushing her into marriage with Pete in order to legitimise the sex in that relationship. Joan Crawford seemingly sought the role of Daisy, and Fox studio head Darryl F. Zanuck obtained her on loan-out from Warner Bros. She in turn requested Dana Andrews and Henry Fonda, both under contract at Fox, as her co-stars. It seems likely that the final version of the script by David Hertz was written with these stars in mind.

Although the adaptation shifts the time of action to post-war, otherwise it keeps much of the novel's plot up to Dan's assault on Daisy and its immediate aftermath. The film's final act (of four) is quite different: one suspects that a resolution which was dependent on a suspicious-sounding operation and a rather whimsical final scene between Daisy and Dan was rejected at an early stage. Some of the differences in the first three acts derive from the date shift: thus Pete (Henry Fonda) comes out of the army rather than goes in, and his war-time experiences have compounded his emotional instability. But he is also given a more masculine job: in the novel he was art editor of *The Ladies Gazette*; here he designs boats. Others are auteurist: Frank Millar is dropped, but Lucile (Ruth Warrick) is given a father, Coverly (Nicholas Joy) – a typical Preminger detail – and he serves as her confidant. Dan (Dana Andrews) is now a partner in the law firm of Coverly, Coverly and O'Mara, but he is also the driving force within the firm. But Dan is also undermined: he is given the extremely irritating habit of calling almost everyone but Daisy and the members of his family 'Honeybunch', which makes him seem patronising and 'cocky'.

A major effect of the casting is a shift in the character of Pete. Perhaps the most striking feature of the novel is its emotional violence: Daisy rows constantly with both Dan and Pete. It's as though Janeway can only drive the narrative forward by conflict. The film is markedly less aggressive: Daisy and Dan do still argue, but Fonda's Pete is far calmer than his prototype. When Dan patronises Pete on Daisy's doorstep early in the novel, Pete is enraged and wishes afterwards he'd smashed Dan's face in. Fonda's Pete just takes it in his stride. However, this was Fonda's last film in his contract with Fox, and it seems likely, as Tony Thomas suggests (1983: 135) that the actor, third-billed, saw the role as little more than his ticket to 'freedom'. This would help account for Pete's placidity – which becomes something of a problem in the later scenes – and for the generally low-key level of Fonda's performance.

Otherwise, the four main characters are much the same as in the novel. But two narrative changes are more radical. The legal matter that takes Dan out of town is here the case of Suyu Naguchi, a Nisei who fought in the war and then came home to find that a smart operator had, seemingly legally, taken his farm from him during his absence. This is a very rare Hollywood reference to the appalling treatment, during WW2, of those of Japanese descent in the USA – even the Nisei, who were US citizens. Moreover, since the usurper acted legally, the law itself is implicitly indicted; in the perhaps better-known example of *Bad Day at Black Rock* (John Sturges, 1956), the villainy is confined to the locals.

The second change is foregrounded, and so has greater force. In the scene with Daisy after Dan has lost the Naguchi case, it *seems* as though he intends to rape her – he kisses her very aggressively – and although she fights him off, he still feels guilty, and later phones to apologise. Again Lucile interrupts, provoking Dan's violent outburst – and, in the film's most shocking moment, his threat to kill her is overheard by Marie (Connie Marshall), his eleven year-old daughter. But the film now takes a different direction from the novel. Here it is Lucile who wants a divorce. Moreover, if Dan won't grant her exclusive custody of the girls, she'll take him to court, naming Daisy as co-respondent. After consulting with Daisy and Pete, Dan refuses her terms, and the first part of the last act takes place in a divorce court.



**TOP** Marie overhears Dan threaten to kill Lucile.

**BOTTOM** Outside the courtroom, Marie and Rosamund come to see Dan.

Preminger studied the law, and there are court scenes throughout his films; this is the earliest. Nevertheless, to depict a divorce court in 1947 was unusual. The PCA was neurotic about divorce, which could only happen under highly specific circumstances, and a serious look at what happens in a divorce hearing was virtually a taboo subject. *Cass Timberlane* (George Sidney, 1947) summarises the ideologically approved stance to such matters. The film begins in a courtroom at the end of a divorce case; Cass Timberlane (Spencer Tracy) is the presiding judge. Summoning the two plaintiffs to the stand, he extols the institution of marriage and refuses the divorce. Otherwise, prior to *Daisy Kenyon*, I can only recall the divorce courts appearing in screwball comedies – e.g. *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937) and *Midnight* (Mitchell Leisen, 1939) – where they are used as the basis for comedy. *Daisy Kenyon* shows the painful side of a divorce hearing.

Lucile's attorney (Art Baker) considers that it is his responsibility not simply to establish Daisy's affair with Dan, but also to insinuate that this has damaged her marriage – she and Pete no longer live together. Eventually, his questions become so personal that Daisy protests, which annoys the judge (Charles Meredith). He now permits the attorney's line of questioning, and Daisy's obvious distress at talking about her marriage prompts Dan to give up the case.

The emotional distress in the courtroom is mirrored in physical pain outside. During the lunch recess, Dan's daughters come to see him. Marie is holding her ear and, although both she and Rosamund (Peggy Ann Garner) claim the pain is caused by the cold weather, Dan realises with a shock it is likely that Lucile has hit her, which happened earlier and which Dan attributes to Lucile's rage at his affair. Although the ambiguity of Preminger's presentation means that we cannot be sure of this reading, the film nevertheless shows the unpleasantness of divorce for all those affected: the co-respondent, the married couple, the children.

Superficially, this supports the PCA's position: divorce is supposed to be bad, and so anything that stresses its messiness is ideologically acceptable. But it is not just a divorce that is at stake here, but also the custody of the children, and Lucile is using the divorce court to separate father and daughters – something which makes both girls very unhappy. As so often

in melodrama and the woman's film, the law, working in the interests of the 'righteous', is repressive.

Unfortunately, after the intensity of these scenes, the film becomes more contrived – and 'melodramatic' in a negative sense. Dan now wants to marry Daisy; he and Pete travel to the coastal cottage (here in Cape Cod) to get her to decide between them. But Daisy becomes so panicked that she takes the car out, drives too fast on the icy roads, and crashes. Although a crude device, the crash nevertheless calms Daisy down. Returning to the cottage, she says she wants both men to return to New York. But Pete waits outside whilst she convinces Dan that it's over; he then despatches Dan, and re-enters the cottage. Daisy seems to be expecting him; they kiss.

Janeway's novel is essentially the story of a woman who, over a period of eighteen months or so, painfully extracts herself emotionally from her affair with a dynamic married man in order to commit herself in marriage to a more reliable, sensitive man. It is explicit that both relationships are sexual, which means that this particular 'change of partner' story is not really the same as the more familiar choice in the woman's film (and women's literature) between the husband figure and the lover figure, as in e.g. *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945).

The film tells much the same story, but by shifting the events to post-war becomes more incisive. Daisy is a working woman who has maintained her financial independence in the post-war years, which is progressive when set against the more common resolution, as in *Mildred Pierce*, in which the heroine is ultimately recuperated into the home. Dan did not fight in the war, and since we do not learn why (in the novel he's old enough to have fought in World War I), this subtly tells against him. His decision to take on a legal case which has arisen out of the war is presented as hubris: he does it to make Daisy love him. His failure may be seen in moral terms: he hasn't the skill to combat deep-seated racial prejudice because he hasn't the moral commitment. In the novel, the only excuse for Pete being what Daisy calls 'a little unstable' is his wife's death. In the film, he is also a veteran who has been emotionally damaged by the war (in one scene, we see him having nightmares), which strengthens his characterisation

and, indeed, poses him against Dan in a rather different way from in the novel.

A change from the novel that is more difficult to read is the relationship between the two men. In the novel, they only meet once, when their paths cross on Daisy's doorstep. But, in the film, Dan goes out of his way to be pleasant to Pete, beginning with a scene – after Dan has learnt that Daisy is married – when the men meet outside the house and discuss boats. In fact, this is a wonderful little scene at Daisy's expense: she watches them from the window, trying to hear what they're saying, baffled by their apparent friendliness towards each other. Later, Dan summons Pete from Cape Cod to consult with him and Daisy over the publicity that would arise if Lucile took matters to court. They meet Daisy in a cocktail bar, and their arrival together again perturbs her: she utters a suspicious, 'Do you two get together often?'. Her confused response to their relationship climaxes when she is so disturbed by the thought of both of them coming to see her that she takes the car out and crashes it.

In *Movies: a Psychological Study*, Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites use the friendship between the two men in *Daisy Kenyon* to illustrate their argument that 'Male friendship in American films is impervious to disruption by a woman' ([1950] 1971: 214), one of their many wild generalisations. But the point here is, rather, that the men become friends through dating the same woman, which is most certainly not the way things usually work in the woman's film. Ultimately, it would seem that the male friendship works to confuse and disorientate Daisy, but the purpose of this is difficult to fathom.

### Establishing the characters – Preminger's style

The film's first three scenes will serve to illustrate Preminger's skill. The movie begins with Dan visiting Daisy in her 12th Street apartment. She's at work, sketching her friend and model Mary Angelus (Martha Stewart). Dan sweeps into the apartment, the camera tracking behind him, changes the mood by immediately switching off David Raksin's romantic theme tune on the record player (an act he repeats on later entrances) and tries to communicate with a Daisy who –





**FIRST COLUMN**

**TOP** Daisy tries to hear the men's conversation.

**BOTTOM** The cocktail bar: Daisy is made uneasy by the men's friendliness to each other.

**SECOND COLUMN**

**TOP** Dan enters Daisy's apartment and switches off the record player.

**BOTTOM** Daisy 'tidies up' the room.



irritated by his coming round when she had told him she had a date – virtually ignores his presence by continuing to work. After Mary has left, Daisy expresses her resentment at being no more than Dan's mistress. As she goes around the room thumping the cushions and rearranging the ornaments, she pauses to tell him she's through, then makes a speech:

'I have to fight to stay happy; fight for everything. My life's all mixed up ... and what fun is it? ... You've got her and you've got the kids. You've got your work and being a big shot in Washington. I've just got my work. You've messed that up, too. When I'm mad I can't work, and I'm mad all the time. You're never going to marry me because you're never going to be divorced, for all you say...because you don't want to be.'

Of course, Dan denies this last accusation, and wins Daisy round by softening her: by turning serious, speaking quietly, and telling her how much she means to him. He also says he'll get out whenever she tells him to, which relieves him of the responsibility and gives her the semblance of control. He charms her, and of course he wins; the relationship will continue. At the moment Dan leaves, it starts to rain. In a shot which eloquently expresses Daisy's sudden sense of loneliness, Preminger tracks out on her, sitting alone in the darkened apartment, the rain falling outside the window.

It's a brilliant scene, establishing all the essentials of their relationship. Although quite close to the original scene in the novel, it's more condensed, emphatic, effective. First, Andrews' Dan is much more dynamic than the original figure, and what we see here establishes the pattern: Dan tends to enter a space and take over, so that everyone else is forced to react to what he does. Second, Dan in the film is more convincing romantically: he turns on the charm more smoothly and winningly. The mise-en-scène is also crucial. Just as Preminger's strategy with Dan is to emphasise his dynamism and decisiveness, the camera sweeping around with him, so

with Daisy he conveys her sense of being on the one hand trapped – her routine of going round 'tidying up' is through a very circumscribed space – and on the other 'enwombed' in the safety of the home: when Dan moves in to soften her, the connotations are of romantic togetherness. When Daisy's session with Mary finishes, the women alter the diegetic lighting in the apartment: the work lights are removed; Daisy puts on a table lamp. But the lighting is still relatively low key, even though it's daylight outside. The lighting thus collaborates in establishing the atmosphere, in suggesting Daisy's enclosure within the apartment. Daisy does, in fact, spend most of the film in one of her two homes: the apartment and the coastal cottage. That she works at home is part of this and, until the climactic car drive, she is rarely shown out of doors. The association of Daisy with enclosed spaces thus becomes a structural motif in the movie, and Preminger uses this to qualify her independence.

The film's second scene is between Daisy and Pete in the same apartment, and we see at once the contrast between the two men. Waiting for Daisy to dress, Pete moves in a restrained, contained manner, the opposite of Dan's sweeping around. Since he is in the apartment for the first time, we would expect a certain restraint, but Pete seems unsure of himself. But he's also gentle: he makes friends with Daisy's dog, which Dan had ignored. (In the novel, it's a cat, and – in keeping with the novel's generally more aggressive tone – it attacks Dan in his first scene and Pete later.) It is established that Pete and Daisy met at a party last night, and that he gave her his service ribbons. He jokes, 'I always give them away when I find someone who'll listen to me', but symbolically it is as though he had given himself into her safekeeping. For Pete, Daisy is a lifeline back to civilian life; the unseemly haste with which he declares his love and proposes (after a couple of dates) is a measure of his insecurity.

At the same time, Daisy is not as sensitive as she might be. Learning that Pete used to design boats, Daisy remembers his wife's photographs of them. Immediately, she type-casts him: 'What is it with you guys? Don't any of you go back to the wives you left when you went to war?'. The doorbell interrupts before Pete can respond: Dan has sent back the taxi he appropriated from Pete. From Daisy re-entering the apartment and



**TOP** Dan softens Daisy's hostility.

**MIDDLE** Track out on Daisy alone in the apartment as it starts to rain outside.

**BOTTOM** Pete makes friends with Daisy's dog.



reporting this to the two of them exiting is filmed in one of Preminger's characteristic long takes, which emphasises the fluidity of the shifting positions.

Walking back to pick up her fur and handbag, Daisy comments on Dan's high-jacking of Pete's taxi, suggesting he was probably rude. Helping her, Pete smiles: 'I didn't notice.' As they then walk towards the door, Daisy returns to the topic that interests her. Pausing with her hand on the light switch, she says, delivering the line with the suggestion of a challenge, 'We were talking about your wife.' Walking past her to open the door, Pete now responds: 'You were, yes. She's dead.' The camera has been tracking behind them; now quite close to Daisy, it captures her sudden confusion, and when she switches off the light, it's as though she is seeking to hide her embarrassment. It's a beautifully choreographed moment. Daisy is aware that she has made herself seem unfeeling, and she avoids looking at Pete as she walks past him through the door. But she does not apologise, a reflection of the 'hardness' of her character. There is a sense that her relationship with Dan has made her cynical about men, and it's difficult for her to adjust to someone like Pete. Equally, however, Pete's 'I didn't notice' could now perhaps also refer to Daisy's own faux pas, which might suggest delicacy but could equally imply a rather odd emotional detachment.

The third scene is Dan in his Park Avenue apartment with his wife and daughters. Again, the scene expertly summarises the essentials, here Dan's home life. Dan continues to sweep around, taking phone calls as well as dressing for dinner, and Lucile is so outpaced by all this activity that she admits, rather feebly, that nobody expects her to understand his business affairs. We note that they have separate bedrooms, and it's hinted that she probably knows about Daisy, but this is something they do not discuss. But the main point of contention between them is how to treat the girls. Thirteen year-old Rosamund is the first to appear: she enters the room in the background, symbolically between her parents in the foreground, and does a pirouette for her father to admire her in her new dress. Dan is most responsive, whistling and commenting, 'Fifty million dollars, honey'. Irritated, Lucile immediately censures her for wearing lipstick, and so Rosamund appeals to her father, calling him Dan: 'Do you



#### FIRST COLUMN

**TOP** A confused Daisy switches off the light as Pete opens the door.

**MIDDLE** Daisy does not look at Pete as she leaves the apartment.

**BOTTOM** Dan takes a phone call whilst dressing; Lucile in the foreground.

#### SECOND COLUMN

**TOP** Rosamund shows off her new dress – particularly to her father.

**BOTTOM** Dan comforts an upset Marie; Rosamund on the left; Lucile on the right.



think it's too much?' Dan's response – 'Of course it is, but it's very attractive' – technically supports Lucile, but at the same time flatters Rosamund, which further irritates Lucile and she leaves the room. As Dan gently chides Rosamund for the way she's just treated her mother, they hear the sound of a violent slap, followed by tears: Lucile has hit Marie, allegedly for insolence. Marie runs to her father for comfort, so that Dan is now called upon to mediate between mother and daughter over a much trickier issue. Eventually, he succeeds in comforting Marie and in getting her to apologise to Lucile, before telling Lucile, when the two of them are alone, never to hit the child again. Lucile, in turn, is angry at the way he is at home so infrequently that he can spoil the girls. Here the scene is much more developed than in the novel, not just in the (typically Premingerian) closeness of the father / daughter relationships (Marie, too, will call him Dan), but in the sense that Lucile takes her frustration out on the girls, which sets up the later moment during the divorce proceedings. It is clear that the relationship between husband and wife has broken down, but Dan stays married, we deduce, for the sake of the girls.

These first three scenes illustrate Preminger at his best: his lucidity, his objectivity, the fluidity of his camera movements, his staging, the choreography of his characters. His objectivity, in particular, obliges us to *read* the events; to deduce motivation from frequently ambiguous actions. The extent to which Dan is genuine in saying that Daisy is the most important person in his life, or how much he encourages his daughters in their preference for their father; the way Pete shifts from apparent neediness to apparent detachment – these are just some of the early ambiguities. Later scenes could likewise be discussed along similar lines, but the key role is Daisy's.

## Joan Crawford

As has on occasions been noted (e.g. by Andrew Britton [1984] 1995: 162), the dominant structure of Bette Davis' films is focused on her character's rivalry with another woman, frequently over a man, and almost always in a struggle for power. Joan Crawford's films have a completely different dominant structure: she rarely has a female rival; instead her

heroine typically has to choose the right partner from two or more men. However, in a surprising number of the films, she initially makes the wrong choice. Again and again, she thinks she is in love with, and may even marry, one man, only for her to realise that another is really a better choice. The difficulty for her heroine then lies in extracting herself from the first relationship. In *Sadie McKee* (Clarence Brown, 1934), there are in fact three prospective partners, and so Sadie moves through two unsatisfactory relationships before ending with the 'right' man. *Chained* (Clarence Brown, 1934), *Forsaking All Others* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1934), *Mannequin* (Frank Borzage, 1938), *A Woman's Face* (George Cukor, 1941) and *When Ladies Meet* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1941) all then have versions of this change of partner structure involving two men.

These films thus construct a whole range of different sorts of partner for the Crawford heroine, a range that ensures a constant play of male / female relationships in the films – something which I suspect helped the popularity of the films with contemporary female audiences. *Daisy Kenyon* fits readily into this series of films; indeed, as Stephen Harvey points out, in the nature of its change of partner structure, the film is similar to *Chained* (1974: 105).

Yet another factor with Crawford is her heroines' sexuality. Before the imposition of the Production Code in 1934, her films included quite a few extra-marital affairs; afterwards, this became difficult. But Crawford's sexuality is such an insistent force in the films that one is sometimes unsure just how far she has gone. Equally, from a certain point, Crawford's films were tailored to *allow* her to have sexual relationships. The pivotal film may well be *A Woman's Face*. In the original Swedish version, *En kvinnas ansikte* / *A Woman's Face* (Gustaf Molander, 1938), with Ingrid Bergman as Anna, Torsten Barring is simply a posturing villain. But, in the MGM remake, with the story restructured as a Crawford vehicle, Barring (Conrad Veidt) becomes a cultured and charismatic figure, who has no difficulty in seducing Crawford's Anna. And from 1941 on, it is rare for Crawford's heroines *not* to have a sexual relationship with one or more of the film's men.

Moreover, this continued for some time. Like Dietrich, Crawford took on roles in which she is sexually active well into middle age. In Crawford's case, this sets up tensions in

some of her 1950s films: since men can so readily seduce her, they may be out to exploit her, as in *Sudden Fear* (David Miller, 1952) and *Female on the Beach* (Joseph Pevney, 1955). Made when Crawford was 43, *Daisy Kenyon* is on the cusp of this transition, but its premise is nevertheless that Crawford is not simply sexual, but also romantic and desirable. To claim, as Foster Hirsch has done, that Crawford was 'too old' for the role of Daisy (2007: 146) seems to me churlish. Crawford is fine as Daisy, and it is clearly progressive that her age is not a handicap.

Daisy also fits the typical Crawford heroine in that she is a career woman who has succeeded in keeping her financial independence. The opening scene between Daisy and Dan establishes that it is her *work* that is suffering because she hasn't secured from him the commitment of marriage. The emotional difficulties of the change of partner structure dominate the film, but Daisy's need to work is never forgotten.

To accommodate the Crawford persona, Daisy in the film is made markedly less abrasive and aggressive than in the novel, but there are, nevertheless, criticisms of her as a woman's film heroine. An early example is her assumption that Pete must have left his wife. It is almost a given in the woman's film that, in personal matters, the heroine is more sensitive and understanding than the men. But Daisy seems to lack the emotional insights that her sister heroines almost invariably possess. There is a sense that she's too wrapped up in her own view of things to really understand. Moreover, this is, I believe, a significant feature of a number, perhaps most, of Crawford's films. As a consequence, unlike other woman's film heroines, Crawford is only occasionally called upon to sacrifice her own happiness for that of those she loves. The heroine needs to be able to understand and sympathise with the weakness or inadequacy of men – as Greta Garbo and Bette Davis of course do – in order to be in a position to make such a sacrifice. Compared to them, Crawford fails the test. One could argue that this is progressive: why should the heroine sacrifice her own needs? But it is, nevertheless, a difficult path for a heroine: she risks seeming selfish, and so losing audience sympathy. I suspect that, in negotiating this territory, most Crawford films reveal ideological tensions.

Despite careful scripting to satisfy the PCA, it is quite clear that Daisy's relationships with both men are sexual. Moreover, the film also skilfully implies sex. There are two key scenes. After he and Dan have discussed boats, Pete comes up the stairs (Daisy's is a second floor apartment), but then sits at the bottom of the next flight of stairs; Daisy joins him. Michel Cieutat mentions that couples sit on stairs in Hollywood films to discuss their problems (1991: 205); my reinfection of this is that the discussion is usually a prelude to the couple making up by going up to the bedroom and sleeping together (2005: 369). The latter is certainly implicit here. Pete declares his intention to kiss Daisy, 'like nobody was ever kissed – even before you wash your face'. He then lifts her in his arms: 'Were you ever carried over your own threshold before?' Daisy: 'Not sober, darling'. Pete carries her in and closes the door.

The implied sex here is also structurally significant, since Pete is celebrating the usurping of the previous lover. He will even have sex with Daisy in the bed she used to share with Dan. Although the PCA could not really object because the couple are now married, there is a sense that Preminger is pushing things a little far. Writing about a scene in *Fallen Angel* (Preminger, 1946) in which Dana Andrews and Alice Faye are shown in bed together, Bob Baker comments on 'Preminger's censor-baiting' (1992: 189). In this scene in *Daisy Kenyon*, Preminger has converted the familiar 'groom carries bride across threshold' moment into what seems like an anticipation of imminent sexual abandon. Such a notion would, I suspect, have been even clearer to readers of the novel, where there is indeed a scene in which an aroused Pete and Daisy rush into her apartment for extremely urgent sex: see Janeway (1973: 75).

In the next scene, Pete and Daisy have moved to Cape Cod; it's as though the New York apartment has, for the time being, served its purpose in Daisy's emotional journey from Dan to Pete. When Daisy returns to it, we have the attempted rape, which provokes a crisis in this journey. But the intermediate stage is in the Cape Cod cottage, where the focus is just as much on Pete getting over Susy (they also lived in the area) as it is on Daisy getting over Dan.

The second (implicit) sex scene occurs in the cottage, but, in the events leading up to it, there are further details which complicate our view of Daisy. First, as Daisy works in the living room, Pete tosses in bed with a nightmare. But her response is to close the bedroom door on him, as if cutting herself off from that problem. (Contrast the sympathy with which Peggy / Teresa Wright responds to Fred / Dana Andrews' equivalent nightmare in *The Best Years of Our Lives* [William Wyler, 1946].) Waking, Pete tries to describe the nightmare to Daisy, saying it involved both Susy and his war-time experiences. But Daisy interprets things in her own way – 'But mostly Susy' – even though Pete comments: 'If you say so, doctor – only I don't know how you know'. The implication is surely that Daisy doesn't really know, but she wants to take Pete in a certain direction. Not for the first time drawing a parallel between them, she says, 'I've had to work to get Dan out of my system. I've done it, too. Now you've got to work'. She produces a poem which Pete wrote when Susy was killed; it ends with the line, 'What happens to a hurricane, that hasn't any place to go?' Pete responds, 'It was self-pity. The whole nightmare was that', which shows that (a) he doesn't understand about nightmares and (b) he wants to change the subject. But he then raises a delicate matter, one which suggests that Daisy is being optimistic in saying she's got Dan out of her system: he points out that Daisy has never told him she loves him.

One issue being addressed here is Daisy's commitment to the marriage. In *Movie 2*, Paul Mayersberg suggests that Daisy marries Pete in 'a mood of despair' (1962: 15), and although this seems a little extreme, there is no doubt that she has not entered into the marriage with the sort of happiness and optimism one would expect. The sequence lays out some of the difficulties Daisy is having. First, she is awkward when it comes to comforting Pete: Crawford is not an actress who finds it easy to 'mother', and this extends to her relationships with men who are vulnerable in some way. Second, she simplifies



**TOP** Pete carries Daisy over the threshold.

**MIDDLE** Post-coital: Pete and Daisy through the bedroom window and the rain.

**BOTTOM** Pete and Daisy celebrate the success of their sex with a kiss.



Pete's emotional problems so she can offer forthright advice. Taken together with her reluctance to say she loves him, one could argue that these details are a sign, not often registered in films, of the difficulties of (early) married life. But there is also a sense in which they subtly undermine Daisy. For a wife to see her husband through a difficult period of readjustment after the war requires certain emotional resources: Daisy, it is implied, lacks these.

However, the sex scene follows this, and this does bring the two of them closer together. The post-nightmare scene is terminated with a fade to black, followed by Pete, in pyjamas, lifting the blind on the rain outside. Daisy joins him (in the sort of nightdress that could pass, under the Production Code, as day wear), and in a reverse angle shot, we see them from outside the window, the rain pouring down. The film cuts back inside, and Daisy tells Pete that she loves him. He goes to pour out drinks for a toast, after which she tells him, 'Now you know what happened to that hurricane that hadn't any place to go'. 'Now I know' responds Pete, and they kiss passionately.

Evidently, Daisy is talking about sex. The window is in the bedroom, so we deduce that they've just got out of bed, and that Daisy is complimenting Pete on his performance. Here the rain has different connotations from that in the opening scene; it suggests, rather, sexual togetherness. Rain is another motif discussed by Cieutat: he suggests that it frequently possesses sexual associations (1991: 304-308); this is an excellent example. Moreover, the cottage has now acquired the associations of togetherness and warmth identified by Jean-Loup Bourget in an article on Crawford in *Film Reader* 3 (1978). However, although Bourget notes what he calls 'the cottage-motif' (26) in Crawford's movies, he does not sort out the range of ways in which it functions. In melodrama generally, the cottage (cabin; beach house) is an escape from

the world, and the associations are usually romantic, but they may shift, as in film noir, towards adultery and murder. Crawford's films cover the full range: in *Mannequin*, the associations of the country cottage are romantic; in *Mildred Pierce*, those of the beach house are typically noir, and the cottage in *Daisy Kenyon* and the beach house in *Humoresque* (Jean Negulesco, 1946) fall somewhere in between. The associations of the *Daisy Kenyon* cottage are, ultimately, positive, but the moments of harmony there are relatively brief. In addition, there is the deeper problem of Daisy's unease outside the home: the car crash is almost a parody of her inability to function competently when outdoors. However, as Bourget notes, the fire in the hearth is a potent symbol in the final scene: when Daisy finally says goodbye to Dan, Preminger frames her so that she is against the fire, which emphasises the familiar association of the woman and the hearth in such a way as to stress his loss.

There is another 'sex scene': Dan's sexual assault. This is more problematic, since although it triggers the chain of events of the last act, it is weakly motivated. The scene begins with Dan pushing his way into the New York apartment uninvited. He and Daisy argue quite violently; in particular, she refuses to show sympathy for his having lost the Naguchi case: 'The one time in your life you thought about somebody else, you lost. Well, that's too bad. But if you're really trying to do something that will change things for people, you've got to be humble'. The problem with Dan's reaction – his aggressive sexual attack – is that it is out of character: unlike his prototype in the novel, Andrews' Dan lacks the viciousness that would motivate such an assault. Daisy fights him off, and sobs that she'll never forgive him; Mary returns to the apartment to prevent matters getting worse.

Despite what Daisy says, subsequently she does forgive – which is important for a woman's film heroine. After the violent row with Lucile, Dan returns to Daisy's. He waits outside her door; she, too, had been unable to sleep, and had gone, we assume, for a walk. He tells her, 'I'm humble now', and although he doesn't actually apologise, he makes it clear that he's here to make up: 'I couldn't go on thinking of you with that expression in your eyes'. She gently touches his face. After she's gone inside, Dan suddenly picks up a milk bottle

**TOP** Daisy with the fire in the background as Dan leaves.

**MIDDLE** Daisy reconciles with the now humble Dan, touching his face.

**BOTTOM** Dan thirstily drinks from the bottle of milk.



from the doorstep and gulps from it thirstily. It's a startlingly effective moment: Daisy's gesture shows she has forgiven him, and his drinking the milk suggests the resolution of a crisis.

Milk is yet another of Cieutat's motifs: 'In the cinema, [drinking] milk is a symbol of faith in the future, and therefore of optimism' (1991: 182). (I discuss Cieutat's thoughts on the motif in *Hitchcock's Motifs* [2005: 29-30].) Dan and Daisy's relationship had been poisoned by his violence; now they can move on. Mayersberg goes further, and takes the scene and its resolution in Dan's drinking the milk as characteristic of Preminger: 'The grotesque realism of the fight scene dissolves here into a mood of symbolic forgiveness. *Daisy Kenyon* is constructed, like all Preminger movies, on a dialectic of crisis and renewal, and Preminger moves from one to the other with Shakespearean fluidity' (1962: 16).

Temperamentally, Dan and Pete are in crucial respects like polar opposites: one an archetypal dominant male, forceful and successful; the other the sort of man who finds life rather threatening, and who needs a protective framework in order to be able to function properly. It is implied that the army has provided such a framework for Pete: in the novel, he becomes a lieutenant even before going on active duty, but in the film, he is a master sergeant, not an officer, a rank which would have required him to be more decisive and authoritative. In addition, he remains in the army until he marries Daisy, as if he anticipates that she, now, will provide him with a safe haven. Dan, by contrast, only realises that he can be vulnerable and need Daisy when, returning to New York after the failure of the Naguchi case, he gives the taxi driver Daisy's address in mistake for his own (a clear Freudian slip). The scene which crystallises Pete's 'problem' is the nightmare and its aftermath; the equivalent scene for Dan is the attempted rape and its aftermath. Accordingly, Daisy is called upon to act in opposite ways to these two crises: doing her best to comfort Pete; fighting off, but then forgiving, Dan. This is indeed standard Crawford material: that all her men 'need her', but in different ways, and she has to negotiate her way through the competing demands.

Despite certain limitations implicit in the Crawford persona, the film's handling of the emotional shifts in Daisy's relationships with the two men is fairly successful. Less

satisfactory is the treatment of the melodrama. Melodrama is actually foregrounded as an issue in the proposal scene: Daisy characterises the way Pete feels about his wife's death and his war-time experiences as melodrama: 'I believe the facts all right, but not the melodrama. If everything had gone dead for you, you wouldn't know it. You wouldn't be sitting here trying to sound like a case history.' This, too, is taken in part from the novel (Janeway 1973: 78), but it's re-scripted to make it less fraught – there Daisy is genuinely getting angry with Pete for his self-pity – and more reflective. But, as the film develops, we see that Daisy herself is prone to melodrama. This is most apparent in the scenes which lead up to her (highly melodramatic) car drive. Unable to cope with the pressure of deciding between the two men, Daisy becomes panic-stricken and reacts like a child – running away.

This is the film's most problematic sequence. When Dan first phones to tell Daisy that they want to see her, she is still in the New York apartment, frenziedly packing. Her response to his call is an incredulous, 'Peter's with you?', then 'Oh, no. No, I'm not up to that kind of civilized nonsense'. She flees to the cottage. But the men pursue her, and Dan phones from the local railroad station, telling her that they're coming to see her and it's no use running away. Daisy hangs up, but the phone immediately rings again. At this point, the sense of melodrama is heightened in a manner most untypical of Preminger, as close-ups of Daisy are intercut with a series of increasingly looming close-ups of the ringing phone. When Daisy then flees in the car, the shots of her driving are accompanied by the ringing, as if she is still being hounded by it. Only when she crashes the car does the ringing stop.

There is a structural reason for Daisy's wild drive: it re-creates Susy's drive of five years ago but gives it a happy ending. Although we know nothing of the circumstances of Susy's fatal car accident, it was on the same roads. Nevertheless, the sequence doesn't work. In *From Reverence to Rape*, Molly Haskell writes of Daisy 'driving eighty miles an hour through the woods, her chin jutting, her eyes glaring ahead not at the road but into the middle distance of her own self-absorption, in a narcissistic trance that can only be broken (since she can't change expression) by the crash when she drives off the road' (1974: 168). The notion of narcissistic self-absorption is telling.



ABOVE Daisy emerges from the crashed car.

This is not the frenzied, hysterical reaction of, say, Georgia (Lana Turner) in her equivalent car drive in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (Vincente Minnelli, 1952). Daisy has been impelled, like a melodramatic heroine, into an emotional, overwrought reaction, but she enacts this more like an 'emotional game' in the sense outlined by Eric Berne in *Games People Play*, a game along the lines of 'See What You made Me Do' ([1964] 1967: 76-79). The reckless car drive satisfies Daisy's image of herself as harassed by outside demands (from, of course, the men) into such a foolish reaction. When Dan first phones, she tells him that she's got to be alone to work, but rather than suggest a sensible solution (such as give me a week to think things over), Daisy rejects the men's 'civilized nonsense' and flees. She casts herself as irrational. Whereas Georgia's frenzied car drive brilliantly captures the sense of a woman driven to hysteria, there's something rather silly about Daisy's drive. Once more, one feels, the film is criticising its heroine.

Although when Daisy returns to the cottage, she says that she wants both men to leave, Pete stays. This raises the question of whether this is a false happy ending, and the film is implying that Daisy would be better off alone.

There is a nexus of competing factors here. First, the PCA would require a suitably moral ending, which means that Dan would have to be sent away – implicitly back to his family – and Pete would be expected to stay. Hence, in Daisy's final scene with Dan, she parrots the ideology: when Dan says that his marriage is over, she responds: 'It can't be over as long as the children are a part of it'. But the scripting is more subtle when a reference to Dan's family as his 'responsibility' is included. At the end of their scene, Daisy says to Dan: 'It would never have worked ... because what you called wanting me wasn't any more than wanting to run away from responsibility: the way you're doing now'. The phraseology enables the 'real' thoughts to be inferred: 'what you called wanting me wasn't any more than wanting sex'. This doesn't change the direction of the scene – she is still getting rid of him – but it does shift the focus towards what we feel were Dan's real motives in having the affair. Second, and in support of this ending, is the change of partner structure from the book: it seems important that this sort of story can be told without impugning the heroine's character. In other words, it should

be possible for a woman to extract herself from an unsatisfactory relationship, even if it is sexual, and move on to a better one without the PCA insisting that she be punished – the sort of punishment that is inflicted, for example, on Terry (Irene Dunne) in *Love Affair* (Leo McCarey, 1939) for her past affair with Ken (Lee Bowman).

But, third, and working against this, is the problem of Fonda's Pete. Beginning with the scene between the three of them in the cocktail bar, Pete plays it very cool, almost as if he doesn't really care about the outcome. He says it doesn't matter to him what happened between Daisy and Dan; he married Daisy because he needed her, but he is all right now, and if she wants to divorce him to marry Dan, he won't object. We might conclude that his behaviour here is masking his feelings: that his speech is an expression of his irritation at (or even his masochistic submission to) Daisy wanting to fight the divorce case on Dan's side, and that Dan's suggestion that he's 'hostile' is close to the mark. But the way Pete plays the scene leaves these questions unresolved. Daisy is shocked at his attitude, but he walks off before she can properly protest.

Equally, we do not know why Daisy and Pete stop living together. This is an odd omission, since it suggests that Pete really doesn't care any more. In the final scene in the cottage, Pete says very little to Daisy, and what he does say is ambiguous. He explains that Dan has asked him to give her a divorce, but when Daisy asks why he's come here, he replies, 'To have you ask me for it yourself'. He does not add, 'if you want to', so that he could mean 'I'm here because I want you to ask me for a divorce'. He then goes to wait outside, leaving the floor to Dan. But, after he has sent Dan off alone in the taxi, he re-enters the cottage and declares: 'When it comes to modern combat tactics, you're both babies compared to me'. In other words, this is really the outcome I was working towards, and the two of you didn't have a chance. Daisy pours each of them a drink, and they wordlessly repeat the toast and the kiss which followed the post-coital declaration of love.

Jean-Loup Bourget is upbeat about this ending: '[T]he cottage also becomes the symbol of Fonda's quiet confidence. He is sure of his love and of Crawford's reciprocatory feelings; knowing the decision she has already taken, he refuses to influence her. The accident and the cottage in the snow are the

tangible signs of the recognition of happiness' (1978: 26). The scene seems to me more problematic. At the very least, Pete must be testing Daisy; seeing whether she really has got Dan out of her system. But his own detachment, and especially his cryptic line about her asking him for a divorce, make things much more difficult for her. To withhold any intimation of his own feelings on the matter may be read as both sadistic and masochistic; as though, he, too, is indulging in emotional game playing. His final line reinforces the sense that, to him, it's all been rather like a game. For these reasons, despite the repetition of the toast and the kiss, there would seem to be something uneasy about the ending.

Ultimately, and typically of Preminger, *Daisy Kenyon* seems to be an enigmatic film, in which it would be difficult to reach firm conclusions about a number of key issues, including how we are to read the ending. Some of the ambiguities are bound up with the way Preminger articulates the Crawford persona. Although the stylistics of the star vehicle – punctuating close-ups of Crawford; a key light almost invariably on her face – are present, Preminger nevertheless views Daisy with more detachment than is the norm for a woman's film heroine. As a consequence, the rhetoric of Crawford's performance (the way she presents herself to her audience) tends to be more foregrounded than usual. Whereas, in a film like *Mildred Pierce*, we identify with Mildred's suffering, Preminger's inclination is to problematise Daisy's, most strikingly in the climactic sequences. However, this is not to maintain that Daisy is undermined at the expense of the men. All the characters, even the children, are viewed with a similar critical detachment. When the girls come to see Dan during the divorce proceedings, Marie holds her ear in such a way as to signal to him that her mother has hit her, which is her way of appealing to him: please don't leave me with her. But we don't know whether Lucile really has hit her, or whether Marie is simply using daughterly wiles to make such an appeal. In his slightly delayed response to this, Dan puts on an equivalent act – making a point of signalling his distress – for Daisy's benefit: taking out his handkerchief, holding it to his eyes, stopping dramatically on the stairs. Again and again, details in the film could be similarly cited for their insights

and complexities. The result is a rich, challenging movie, one which has been unjustly ignored in film history.

#### MICHAEL WALKER

Michael Walker has been on the editorial board of *Movie* and its on-line successor since 1969. His most recent publications are 'Steven Spielberg and the Rhetoric of an Ending' in *A Companion to Steven Spielberg*, ed Nigel Morris, Wiley Blackwell (2017) and *Modern Ghost Melodramas: What Lies Beneath* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

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**ABOVE** Nicholas Ray, Alan Bell, Victor Perkins  
Sylt, Germany, 1968

## V.F. PERKINS 1936–2016

### A tribute

As most readers are likely to be aware, V.F. Perkins, founder editor of *Movie* and of *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*, pioneer of film education and of serious film criticism in the UK, died last July.

Tributes to Victor have been extensive. A special [website](#) hosted by the Department of Film & Television at the University of Warwick brings together a bibliography with many personal recollections by former students and colleagues. *Sight and Sound* published a fine [obituary](#) by Alex Jacoby, and [Film Studies for Free](#) commissioned and published a series of videographic tributes, and collated those elements of Victor's work which are available online. These materials include an interview in which Victor reflects on his critical practice and imperatives, filmed at the Academy of Fine Arts Saar, at Saarbrücken; this in turn has been reworked by Ian Garwood to capture a series of '[choice moments](#)'. In this issue, we offer our own tribute: reprinting two of Victor's most important articles for *Movie* and publishing an obituary by Charles Barr, a long-standing member of *Movie's* editorial board.

In the early 1960s, Victor was central to the battle around the significance of film style which was to reshape English language approaches to writing and thinking about the

cinema. In *Oxford Opinion*, in the new film section edited by Ian Cameron, Victor attacked a BFI booklet, *Fifty Famous Films, 1914-45*, which he felt embodied 'the standards and prejudices of this country's cinematic establishment' (1960: 36). When he, Cameron and Mark Shivas went on – with the addition of Paul Mayersberg – to launch *Movie* two years later, the first issue included an equally stinging attack on the new British cinema, an article which also has contemporary criticism and reviewing in its sights, and which ends with the phrase 'until it is accepted that style is worthy of passionate feeling and detailed analysis there will be no change' (1962: 7). It was not just a case of attacking the shortcomings of existing critical practice, however. Victor's work was at the heart of *Movie's* project: demonstrating the importance of film style through a detailed, substantive criticism.

Victor's own [tribute to Ian Cameron](#), published in the first issue of *Movie: a journal of film criticism*, gives a fine evocation of this moment of starting out (2010). Readers looking for further history of the emergence of *Oxford Opinion* and *Movie*, might also seek out *The life of mise-en-scène: visual style and British film criticism, 1946-78* (Gibbs 2013) which draws on interviews with Victor, Ian, Charles Barr and Alan Lovell as well as analysis of often inaccessible articles.

The two pieces selected here reflect two of Victor's most important interests as a critic, filmmakers whose work he returned to over decades: Nicholas Ray and Max Ophuls. In the case of the former, we have selected 'The Cinema of Nicholas Ray', from the 9th issue of *Movie*. This article is a development of an earlier piece in the film pages of *Oxford Opinion*, and both articles indicate the importance of film style in general, and of Ray's work in particular, to making an argument about the value of popular cinema. In this passage Victor employs the 'textures' and 'dynamics' of Ray's films as evidence to attack the 'occasionally valid, often silly, and always dangerous' distinction between 'commercial' and 'personal' cinema:

It is quite legitimate, for example, to point out that Nicholas Ray has frequently been obliged to work from a scenario with which he was not satisfied: *Run for Cover*, *Hot Blood*, *Party Girl*; that many of his films have been mutilated after completion: *The James Brothers*, *Bitter Victory*, *Wind Across*

*the Everglades*, *The Savage Innocents*, *King of Kings*; and that the stories of *The Lusty Men*, *Johnny Guitar* and *Bigger than Life* might look uninviting on paper. But film is not paper, and never can be except in the wishful imagination of a critic who regards his eyes only as the things that he reads with. The distinction between personal and commercial cinema has become a weapon for use against films which do not impress by the obvious seriousness of their stories and dialogue. The director's contribution is as irrelevant to the critical success of *They Live by Night* and *Rebel Without a Cause* as it is to the critical neglect of *Johnny Guitar*, *Bigger than Life*, or *Wind across the Everglades*. (1963: 5)

Victor returned to write about Ray's work at regular intervals, including one of his most recently published [works](#). A screening of *The Savage Innocents* (1960), then extremely difficult to see, moved him to tears at the Widescreen conference in Bradford, in 2003. He also became a personal friend of Ray's, working with him on an unproduced script in the 1970s.

From Victor's work on Ophuls, we have selected 'Letter from an Unknown Woman', originally published in *Movie* 29/30, an article which leads us to understand things about the film by exploring one of its most atypical sequences. The article analyses the passage of the film that depicts Lisa's exile in Linz, and appreciates both the sequence's particular qualities and its relationships to the film as a whole, through both contrast and continuity. Moreover, the article's extraordinary engagement with the specific details of the sequence represents one of the most remarkable and sustained achievements of the kind of detailed criticism with which *Movie* is particularly associated.

We finish this editorial with a personal reflection which provides an insight into working with Victor in the latter days of *Movie*, and the creation of this, its successor. Edward Gallafent writes:

I was the last person to be invited to join the Editorial Board of *Movie*, and one of the initiators of the setting up of *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* online. Some while before I had submitted a draft of an article on *Home from the Hill* (Vincente Minnelli, 1960) to the journal, and this led to my first encounter with Victor Perkins as a *Movie* editor. (At that

time we were both teaching at the University of Warwick, in different departments, Victor in Film and myself in the English department.) This was before the film was available in any electronic form; Victor contacted me and proposed that the department would hire a print and that we would watch it together and discuss my ideas. I recall clearly that after the screening Victor began the discussion on a generous note, remarking that I had certainly been right about one aspect that he had not previously noticed; this was followed by a careful and thorough discussion of where my readings could be refined, or revised, or extended. Very typically, but slightly confusing me at the time, Victor did not commit himself – or *Movie* – to publishing the piece. I was to come to understand that with this piece of writing, as with so much of his own, his scrupulous view of quality was everything. His position was – it is good, but is it good enough, as good as it could be?

The article, much revised after my discussions with Victor, was finally published, and later I was invited to join the board. My recollections of those meeting were that while there were issues of the practicalities and timing of publishing, or grand schemes for new initiatives, Victor's passionate commitment was to push for the published pieces to be of the highest possible quality. This was not a matter of his agreement with or dissent from specific intellectual positions. It was more a matter of asking if the pieces met, in the eyes of their writers, the high standard that he assumed they must set themselves, just as he did with his own writing.

In 2008, when a few of us were beginning to raise the possibility of reframing *Movie* as an online journal, Victor was unfailingly enthusiastic. His arguments for high standards were as important and as passionate as ever, and in the debate as to whether to charge for online access, he was a firm supporter of making it freely available. Once the journal was launched he continued, despite some ill health, to attend the editorial board meetings and contributed to them with the zest and wit that expressed the pleasure he found in both formal and less formal discussions of film. For all of us, he was a generous, friendly mentor and that invaluable thing, an honest critic. Just as his presence inspired

us then, his memory will continue to inform our work and our conversations.

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## V.F. PERKINS 1936–2016

### Obituary

The film scholar Victor Perkins, who has died at the age of 79, played a key role in laying the foundations for a new academic discipline. Few British universities now lack a department of film and / or media studies; a stream of books on film history and theory flows from the press. This was unimaginable in the late 1950s, when Perkins published his first writings as an Oxford student, and indeed for many years after: he was arguably the single most influential figure in validating this new field, both as writer and as teacher.

His Pelican book *Film as Film*, first published in 1972 and many times reprinted, has had an influence, in Britain and beyond, that continues to this day. Its 200 pages are devoid of images, an austerity somehow reinforced by his use, as always, of initials rather than his first name. The byline V.F. Perkins carried an echo of F.R. Leavis, who in an earlier age had done comparable work in helping to give the upstart subject of English its secure academic place. Perkins wrote with a similar seriousness and analytic rigour, and the clarity of his prose in describing film images and film sequences more than compensated for the lack of pictures. The book's classic status was affirmed by a new American edition in 1993, with an introduction by Foster Hirsch, who praised its 'language of refreshing clarity, directness, and simplicity. Written before

the French heavy-hitters had inundated the academic market-place, here is film theory cleansed of jargon.'

*Film as Film* had made it harder than ever to write off the study of cinema and its history as some kind of educational soft option. But it was some time before academia took this properly on board, and again Perkins was central to this process of change. He worked first in the British Film Institute's Education department in London, liaising with schools and colleges; then by training teachers at Bulmershe College of Education, Reading (now part of Reading University); and finally at the University of Warwick, where he moved in 1979 and where he stayed for the rest of his life, even after official retirement in 2004, becoming the best-loved kind of elder statesman.

It was typical of him to write, on the inside cover of *Film as Film*, that his education had begun at Alphington Primary School, Devon – not many authors reach back that far. His father worked in a local department store. Going to Oxford to read Modern History, after National Service, was a big step in terms of both class and geography, akin to that taken, in those increasingly fluid times, by a range of contemporaries such as Dennis Potter, Melvyn Bragg, and Alan Bennett. Already captivated by cinema, Perkins linked up with other enthusiasts, notably Ian Cameron and Mark Shivas, who went on to distinguished careers respectively in publishing and in TV production, to produce some outspokenly combative issues of the film section of the magazine *Oxford Opinion*, challenging the complacent critical orthodoxies of the time. In those days, an Oxbridge publication could make national waves, and this one did so. It led to the setting-up by this trio, in London in 1962, of *Movie* magazine, for whom Perkins wrote the initial unforgettable, coruscating, editorial, expressing scorn for the vaunted 'New Wave' British cinema of the time – and a vision of alternatives.

Some of those alternatives, basis of his vision for a liberal education in film studies, would stay displayed on his Warwick webpage up to the time of his death: 'My main academic aim is to develop a deeper and more clearly articulated appreciation of the work of some great film artists. I have a continuing engagement with films by, for instance, Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Max Ophuls, Yasujiro Ozu, Nicholas

Ray, Jean Renoir and Orson Welles.' This manifesto, which has echoes of the F.R. Leavis model of a 'Great Tradition' in literature, had become the basis of his later career as writer as well as teacher. He wrote eloquently about all of these directors, including studies of Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons* and Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu*. Part of the 'BFI Classics' series, they are themselves, like *Film as Film*, classics of their kind. Earlier, he developed a script in collaboration with the Hollywood director Nicholas Ray, but it was never shot, nor did he complete his long-planned book on Ray's films.

The great irony of Perkins' career is that, while he was so instrumental in opening up the field of academic film studies, he never benefited to the extent of himself becoming a full Professor, as so many less substantial, less influential, figures have done. One reason was the long hard slog of building up, at Warwick, the structure of a pioneering new degree programme in Film and Literature: colleagues attest to his selflessness in taking on the main burden, at the expense of his own writing. But he was never a quick writer, and he never cared to adjust to the modern academic necessity of accumulating a mass of peer-reviewed publications and of putting together lucrative grant applications. Teaching always came first, and he did this with care and dedication, as a mass of students have, since his death, been quick to recall on social media. Warwick made him an Honorary Professor on his retirement.

His marriage to Tessa, who died in 2004, had ended in divorce. He is survived by the two children of the marriage, Toby, Labour MP for Chesterfield, and film-maker Polly; by his second wife Liz; by his brother Brad and sister Shirley; and by three grandchildren.

Victor Francis Perkins, born Alphington, Devon, 22nd December 1936, died Coventry 15th July 2016.

CHARLES BARR

V.F. PERKINS  
1936–2016

## The Cinema of Nicholas Ray

All our critics distinguish, more or less explicitly, between commercial and personal cinema. The distinction is occasionally valid, often silly, and always dangerous. It is quite legitimate, for example, to point out that Nicholas Ray has frequently been obliged to work from a scenario with which he was not satisfied: *Run for Cover*, *Hot Blood*, *Party Girl*; that many of his films have been mutilated after completion: *The James Brothers*, *Bitter Victory*, *Wind across the Everglades*, *The Savage Innocents*, *King of Kings*; and that the stories of *The Lusty Men*, *Johnny Guitar* and *Bigger than Life* might look uninviting on paper. But film is not paper, and never can be except in the wishful imagination of a critic who regards his eyes only as the things that he reads with. The distinction between personal and commercial cinema has become a weapon for use against films which do not impress by the obvious seriousness of their stories and dialogue. The director's contribution is as irrelevant to the critical success of *They Live by Night* and *Rebel without a Cause* as it is to the critical neglect of *Johnny Guitar*, *Bigger than Life*, or *Wind across the Everglades*. It is nonsense to say that in *Party Girl* Ray's talent is 'squandered on a perfect idiocy' (Louis Marcorelles in, of all places, *Cahiers du Cinéma*). The treatment may or may not have been successful: there is no such thing as an unsuccessful

subject. Ray has himself criticised the literary preoccupations of some screenwriters. "It was all in the script" a disillusioned writer will tell you. But it was never all in the script. If it were, why make the movie? The disillusioned writer and the insensitive critic are alike in discounting the very things for which one goes to the cinema: the extraordinary resonances which a director can provoke by his use of actors, decor, movement, colour, shape, of all that can be seen and heard.

Primarily, one sees and hears actors. Ray's films contain a number of performances which can be called great because they give *complete* characterisations: Bogart (*In a Lonely Place*), Mitchum (*The Lusty Men*), Dean, Wood, Backus (*Rebel without a Cause*), Burton (*Bitter Victory*) and Christopher Plummer (*Wind across the Everglades*) spring immediately to mind. But the director's control is proved not so much by the perfection of individual performances as by the consistency with which Ray's actors embody his vision. This consistency is the result – it's an ancient paradox – of the director's search for the *particular* truth of each *particular* situation. Johnny Guitar's isolation is depicted in such specific terms that we appreciate, without directorial emphasis, the wider significance of his remark 'I've a great respect for a gun and, besides, *I'm a stranger here myself*'. In *They Live by Night* Cathy O'Donnell is unable to put her watch right because 'there's no clock here to set it by'. The remark has a specific, complex, dramatic context. We are aware, as the character is not, of its more general relevance for a girl who was 'never properly introduced to the world we live in'.

Ray works with his actors in such a personal way that he is able to utilise what we are accustomed to regard as their defects. The aggressiveness of Susan Hayward (*The Lusty Men*), the arrogance of Robert Wagner (*The James Brothers*), the coldness of Cyd Charisse and the self-conscious charm of Robert Taylor (*Party Girl*), these are all used to intensify situations and convey meanings. Ray is not unique in using actors for their weaknesses as well as their abilities, but he is in the very good company of Hitchcock and Cukor.

Throughout any Ray movie one finds a complete mastery of the – often contradictory – action which expresses more that it does, the ability to convey an idea through a gesture, a hesitation, a movement of the eyes. Much of the meaning

of *King of Kings* is contained in its intricate pattern of looking, glancing and staring. Salome's motivations are revealed almost entirely in these terms. The first image of *Rebel without a Cause* conveys a whole history of confusion and undirected tenderness in the protective gesture with which James Dean draws a newspaper over the body of a toy monkey. *Wind Across the Everglades* expresses the concept of understanding and compromise between two civilisations through the hero's action in sharing a 'peace cigar' with his Seminole friend.

Again, while insisting on Ray's genius in conveying the general through the particular, the abstract through the concrete, I have no wish to claim that it is uniquely *his* gift. It is simply the ability which distinguishes the true filmmaker from the pseudo-director who provides 'photographs of people talking'. And it is an ability which one feels not just in Ray's direction of his actors but in his use of the entire vocabulary of film.

### Time and Place

There are very few directors, for example, who have as great an appreciation of the suggestive powers of decor and locale. Critically, of course, one observes the appropriateness of place to action and theme. But beyond this, when the right location has been found, one becomes aware also of the influence of place on action. Decor, in Ray's films, is the entire visual environment, including (and here he is unique) the time of day.

It is Ray's intense sensitivity to time that makes one feel the night as something more than the absence of sunlight. *Rebel without a Cause* contains the most striking example of this sensitivity in its first planetarium sequence; here Ray makes us feel the intrusion of an artificial night into mid-afternoon. The sense of time is especially heightened in this sequence, but in fact it informs the entire structure of the film. Night is the time of confusion and insecurity, the time when parents are asleep. The film begins at night with a young man falling down drunk in the middle of a dark street. We follow him through two other 'nights', the artificial one in the planetarium and the real one during which James Dean engages in the 'chicken run' – itself an extraordinary evocation of confusion, the blind and dangerous rush along the path to extinction.







By contrast, morning offers the prospect of a new beginning, a journey in search of a new lucidity. On the first morning, Dean hopes for a fresh start because he is beginning life at a new school. His hopes are frustrated in the following 'nights'. But the next morning contains a more definite promise. It is dawn, the true beginning of day, rather than nine a.m. The film ends on an image of the renewal of life and effort, as the camera draws back to reveal a man walking towards the planetarium to begin his day's work.

Ray's use of decor to illuminate specific situations can best be seen in the various ways that he has employed the particular concept of 'upstairs'. In *Johnny Guitar* upstairs represents isolation. The saloon owner, Vienna (Joan Crawford), has completely divorced her public from her private life; the former is lived on the ground floor amid the drinks and the gambling tables, the latter in her upstairs retreat with its more delicate, feminine decor. She is quite explicit about the distinction. Standing halfway down the stairs, gun in hand, she wards off the posse which has come to search her place: 'Down there I sell whisky and cards. All you can get up these stairs is a bullet in the head.' In the last shots of the film, Johnny Guitar is shown helping Vienna to break through her isolation: he supports her as she walks down a (different) flight of stairs to rejoin the other characters.

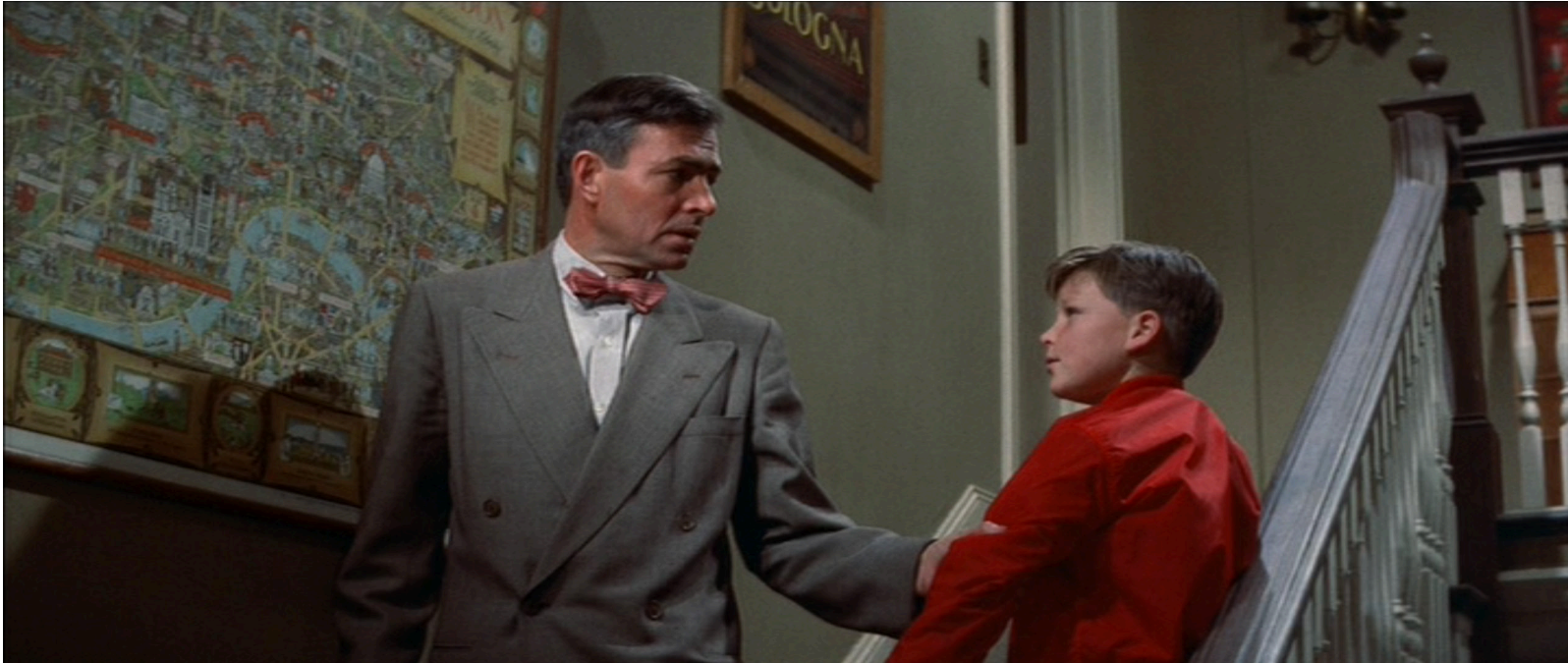
In *Bigger than Life*, as in *The James Brothers*, upstairs suggests both the possibility of a normal family life and the temporary retreat from responsibilities. Travel posters decorating the walls become more exotic as they progress from Grand Canyon, by the front door, to Bologna, on the top landing. Upstairs represents the desire of the middle-aged schoolmaster (James Mason) to 'get away sometime'.

*Rebel without a Cause* uses upstairs to point Jim Backus' failure as a husband and father. His son is shocked and hurt to find him, aproned, outside his bedroom and on his knees. He is timidly mopping up the mess he has made by dropping the supper tray he was bringing to his wife. The choice of place, as much as the conviction of the performances, makes us appreciate James Dean's anger and anguish.

## Structure

But places and objects have a structural, as well as an evocative or symbolic value. Ray takes full advantage of this in the architecture of his images. In *The Lusty Men* Arthur Kennedy, against the wishes of his wife (Susan Hayward), abandons the impoverished security of his job as a ranch-hand and becomes a rodeo-rider. It is a life without stability, lived in station-wagons and trailer-parks. In one sequence, Susan Hayward goes to a party at a hotel. Ray shows her sitting in front of a curtain, with a good deal of nervously exuberant action going







on behind her. The shot describes her dissatisfaction with the new way of life and her longing for a secure home: the curtain has a symbolic value of its own – the fabric is very ‘domestic’ in its design – but it also divides the image vertically, to separate her from the environment which she wishes to renounce.

Ray frequently uses static masses with bold lines – walls, staircases, doors, rocks – which intrude into the frame and at the same time disrupt and unify his images. In particular he uses objects in order to enclose his characters, to produce a frame within the frame. In *Bigger than Life* James Mason takes overdoses of the cortisone which has been prescribed for his heart complaint. Under their influence he becomes the victim of a delusion of intellectual and moral superiority which threatens to destroy his family. The frame is in perpetual movement; closing down, for example, on Mason during the argument with his wife which provokes one of his seizures; closing down on his son as he struggles to placate Mason by solving some far too difficult problems in arithmetic; opening up again for a moment of respite after the solution has been found. Through his use of line and structure Ray produces ‘compositions which make tangible and clear concepts as abstract as those of liberty and destiny’ (Jean-Luc Godard on *The James Brothers*).

The turbulence of the frame is the product of the three sorts of cinematic movement – of the actors, of the camera, and of the shots, the montage. If there is a single idea which dominates Ray’s technique (and therefore his philosophy, but that comes later), it is the opposition of conflict and harmony. For example, a Ray movie is instantly recognisable as such by the director’s extremely individual use of editing. Many of Ray’s camera movements appear to be incomplete. Any simple guide to movie-making will tell you that a travelling shot must have a beginning, middle and end. Often Ray uses only the middle: the camera is already moving at the beginning of the shot, and the movement is unfinished when the next shot appears; or if the movement *does* end, it falls somewhere short of its apparent goal. Whole sequences are often built up from these ‘incomplete’ shots so that the montage becomes a pattern of interruptions in which each image seems to force its way on to the screen at the expense of its predecessor (e.g. the introduction of Scott Brady’s gang in *Johnny Guitar*). Ray



is one of the most 'subjective' of all directors. The world he creates on the screen is the world seen by his characters. His dislocated editing style reflects the dislocated lives which many of his characters lead.

Even a sequence composed mainly of static shots will frequently be interrupted by cutting in a close shot of a character who is, to all appearances, only peripherally involved in the immediate action: *Johnny Guitar* into the first confrontation of Vienna and Emma (Mercedes MacCambridge); Viveca Lindfors into a discussion between John Derek and James Cagney, in *Run for Cover*; Salome into the trial of Jesus before Herod Antipas. The effect has a remarkable duality. The abrupt cut contributes to a feeling of dislocation, of disharmony. But, through its integration of an apparently extraneous element it suggests also a hidden unity.

The use of colour in Ray's films, too, depends largely on the concept of harmony. He does employ colours in the classical, and excellent, manner of Cukor and Kazan, for their emotional effect: in the first reel of *Bigger than Life* they dissolve from the predominantly grey shot as Mason leaves school to a screen virtually covered with the glaring yellow of parked taxis makes us feel the strain that is imposed on him by performing two jobs each day. But more characteristic is Ray's manner of selecting colours for the extent to which they blend or clash with background. Although the reds which Cyd Charisse wears in *Party Girl* have an autonomous emotional value, their effect comes principally from their relation to the other colours in the shot: spotlighting her among, and isolating her from, the sombre browns of a courtroom; blending with, and absorbing her into, the darker red of a sofa on which she sleeps. Cornel Wilde's revolt against the traditions of his gipsy family in *Hot Blood* is expressed through the clash between the conventional colour of his jacket and the gaudy 'gipsy' upholstery of the chair on which he places it.

### Direct Speech

This sort of direct statement is common in Ray's films because he believes (unfashionably, perhaps, but so much the worse for us) that the cinema is a medium of communication, and that clarity is of prime importance. The directness of Ray's



approach is reflected in the construction of his screenplays. The principal characters in his films are presented as quickly and economically as possible. The first shot will usually introduce the hero, and by the end of the first reel all the important relationships will have been presented. There are exceptions to this rule, *The Savage Innocents* and *King of Kings* for example, but they only occur where the nature of the story itself makes it inapplicable. The exposition at the beginning of *Rebel without a Cause* is amazing in its speed and lucidity. The first shot – behind the credits – is a close-up of James Dean as he lies in the road; the second is a brief linking shot as he is taken into the police station; and the third introduces us to Sal Mineo and Natalie Wood. Less than ten minutes later we have learned about the family backgrounds of Mineo and Wood, and have even met Dean's parents and grandmother – again in a single shot which conveyed most of the details of a complex relationship.

The desire for direct communication also distinguishes Ray's use of symbolism. His images are never obscure; many of them are derived from nature, like the references to fire and water in *King of Kings*, or to rock and wind in *Johnny Guitar* – the first time we see Emma she looks as if she is being carried along by the wind, and for the rest of the film she acts entirely to impulse. These symbols are felt rather than noticed.





But when Ray wishes to convey an idea he is not squeamish about using an extreme image. Emma exploits the murder of her brother as a pretext for hounding Vienna; as she rides at the head of a lynch mob her funeral veil is lost in the dust of the horses' hooves. James Mason abuses cortisone to induce an inflated sense of his own significance: we see him pump life into a wilted football.

This use of extremes is not confined to symbolism. It involves the camera, most notably in the shots in *Rebel without a Cause*, *Hot Blood* and *Wind across the Everglades* which carry subjectivity to its logical conclusion; they show the inverted images which their heroes see and, in *Rebel*, the camera turns vertically through 180 degrees as James Dean swings his body round to sit upright. In *Johnny Guitar*, and at times in all his films, Ray uses extreme situations and extreme actions to provide an almost diagrammatic representation of ideas, characters and conflicts. Christopher Plummer expresses his disgust at the slaughter of the Everglades' wildlife by snatching the feathers from the hat of an overdressed woman and asking how she'd like it 'if this bird wore you for a decoration'. Lee J. Cobb, the gangster boss of *Party Girl* shoots holes in a portrait of Jean Harlow, when he learns of her marriage. One of Vienna's bartenders walks into medium shot and looks straight into the camera to tell us he's 'never seen a woman who was more like a man'. Howard da Silva smashes Farley Grangers' dream of domestic bliss (*They Live by Night*) as he smashes one of the trinkets on his Christmas tree.

### The Blind Run

Such directness, such extremes of expression, would result in the merest onthebeachified brain-fodder if they were not controlled by a profoundly personal vision. But in their context they form a moving testimony to the courage and lucidity of a filmmaker who communicates his pre-occupations on the screen with poetic intensity. Every one of Ray's 'devices' has its correlative in some aspect of his sensibility.

But conversely the majority of his films will make little sense to anyone who goes to the cinema simply to hear a good script well read. One must respond to the textures of Ray's films before one can understand their meanings. One must

appreciate their dynamics before one can see, embodied in their turbulent movement, an ethical and poetic vision of the universe and of man's place in it. In *Rebel without a Cause* Ray uses the planetarium to draw a close parallel between the isolated and insecure condition of his characters and that of the whole of mankind in the universe. Members of the lecture audience view the depiction of the end of the world with indifference, contempt or terror. But the commentator rambles on: 'destroyed as we began in a burst of gas and fire ... the earth will not be missed ... and man existing alone himself seems an episode of little consequence.' It is against this concept of a man's life as an episode of little consequence, rather than against society, or his family, that Dean rebels.

Ray's original title for the film, *The Blind Run*, reflects a view of life as a too rapid journey under no guidance, with no *apparent* direction or purpose. The actions of Ray's characters are conditioned by this view. Some of them, like the director, engage in a search for an alternative, for a real unity dominating our seemingly chaotic, unstable and indifferent world. Others, failing in the search, accept chaos but with no equanimity: there can be few more anguished statements on film than Burton's in *Bitter Victory*: 'I kill the living, and I save the dead.' *Run for Cover* shows Matt Dow (Cagney) as a man who is able to come to terms with the world because he has found an interior stability which few of Ray's characters are privileged to share.

There is one reaction to the harsh realities that Ray presents which invariably leads to disaster: the refusal to recognise life's terms. In *The Lusty Men* Robert Mitchum, a retired rodeo-rider, goes back to the shack in which he spent his childhood 'looking for something I thought I'd lost'. The door is locked. At the film's climax he returns to the arena because he needs to prove himself: 'I used to buy my own booze ... A fella just likes to see if he can still do it.' In the sequence before he signs on for the contest, a commentator describes the opening parade through the Texan town as 'an exciting display of old glory'. Mitchum dies from injuries received in the arena. The final failure and death of Jesse James results from his increasingly fantastic way of life: he attempts to divorce his two characters, as Jesse and as the respectable small-town family man, Mr. Howard. His band disintegrates during a bank raid which

fails because it takes him *too far from home*. Mason's abuse of cortisone very nearly causes him to murder his son. At the end of the film Mason can only regain sanity if he can base his life on its realities rather than on a comforting illusion: 'If he can remember everything that happened, and face it, he'll be alright.'

The acceptance of life's terms involves the acceptance of turmoil and change. Ray's characters share his sensitivity to time. Vienna tells the posse: 'I intend to be buried here – in the twentieth century!' But Emma's quarrel with Vienna is partly caused by her desire to resist change: 'You'll never see a train run through!' Christopher Plummer rejects an invitation to contribute to the development of Miami: 'Progress and I never got along very well.' And Richard Burton describes a tenth century Berber village disdainfully as 'too modern for me'.

Progress contributes to the instability of our lives. Emma opposes the extension of the railroad because it will destroy the isolation which protects her. In one very violent and moving speech she says that the trains will bring 'Farmers. Dirt farmers! Squatters! They'll push us out! ... You're gonna find you and your women and your kids squeezed between barbed wire and fence posts. Is that what you're waiting for?' Even Emma, who early in the film announces her intention of killing Vienna, has her justification.

There are no pure villains in Ray's pictures. There are simply, and more dramatically, failures of communication and understanding. In *Run for Cover* Viveca Lindfors says that the wife who divorced James Cagney 'must have been bad'. 'No', says Cagney, 'She just hated the sight of me.' Each man acts, with whatever degree of lucidity, according to his own code or his own deepest needs. Almost every man acts from a position of profound uncertainty and insecurity. Because he is insecure in his own estimation Ray's hero often seeks to win or retain his self-respect through the admiration or submission of his fellow; but this struggle only increases the instability of personal relationships. An unambiguous victory in the battle for prestige is impossible, since it inevitably makes the victor's life less worth living: Herod Antipas is haunted by guilt because he has granted Salome's request for the head of John



the baptist rather than 'let it be known that the word of a King is worthless.'

Men will make almost any sacrifice in order to protect their prestige. In *Bitter Victory* Curd Jurgens is unable to act at a vital moment in the attack, which he commands, on a German headquarters. Richard Burton tells him that 'what happened tonight has nothing to do with me, that's (a matter) between you and you.' But Jurgens is sure that his men regard him as a coward. He risks his life, by drinking from a well that he suspects has been poisoned, in order to demonstrate his courage.

Ray's films contain a large number of variations on man's appreciation of his insecurity. In *Party Girl* Robert Taylor, as defence counsel for a gangster John Ireland, is able to secure an acquittal against the evidence by giving the jury a sense of superiority: he wins their pity for himself – by exaggerating his lameness – and for his client, by suggesting that the press has already condemned him without trial (and therefore deprived the jurors of their right of decision). In a precisely parallel situation in *Run for Cover* we are shown John Derek's self-destructive willingness to exploit the sympathy of selves even from these unconventional others. He also is lame. In an attempt to win the pity of James Cagney he leans towards him across a desk exactly as he did, on the floor, when making his first attempt to walk without crutches. Christopher Plummer in *Wind across the Everglades* says that he has been given no choice but to arrest the leader of the feather-pirates (Burl Ives). In fact, he was offered *in public* a warrant for Ives' arrest provided that he would serve it personally. Inuk (Anthony Quinn), the Eskimo hero of *The Savage Innocents*, uses a man's fear of contempt positively, in order to save his life. He shames a trooper into putting his frozen hands inside the hot stomach of a husky, by asking if white men can stand pain.

The need for acceptance by society, with its conformist pressures, inevitably conflicts with the desire to live one's life according to one's own code. The heroes of *Johnny Guitar*, *Wind across the Everglades*, and *The Savage Innocents* are nearly destroyed in the attempt for recognition on their own terms. Ray's adventurers are adventurers not by choice, like Hawks or Walsh heroes, but through interior compulsion. They are 'displaced' persons whose isolation is emphasised by

their involvement with a group which stands apart from society and, often, outside the law. Indeed their non-conformism such that they isolate themselves even from these unconventional groups: Dean shocks a teenage gang whose chosen weapons are switch-blades and stolen cars by threatening its leader with the shaft of his car-jack.

But even though a man may *choose* isolation, as an escape from the pressures of society, it can never be a permanent or satisfactory solution. In *Johnny Guitar* and *Party Girl* we are shown a man and a woman, both deeply dislocated, withdrawn characters, both intensely vulnerable, each trying to escape isolation and restore his self-esteem by earning the respect of the other. *Johnny Guitar* contains a sequence of extraordinary power in which Johnny and Vienna are alone together for the first time, after a long and painful separation. Each of them hides emotion in a cynically contrived 'dialogue', designed to test the other's feelings without involvement. Johnny tells Vienna 'Lie to me ... Tell me you've waited', and Vienna 'reads' his words back to him, saying exactly what she's asked to say but trying to suppress every trace of feeling. Similarly, the relationship between Robert Taylor and Cyd Charisse in *Party Girl* starts with injured pride and mutual resentment. But it is built gradually through a series of tests until each is able to provide the conditions of trust and respect which the other needs. It is only through such a relationship, based on instinctive sympathy and explicit dependence, that Ray's characters escape the double threat of isolation and subjection.

The delicate balance needed to create and sustain any harmonious relationship can only be achieved at cost, and it is in constant jeopardy. The useful extension of a character's emotional or moral range can only follow the painful destruction of those barriers which are intended to protect him, but which in fact oppress him: false relationships, unjustified hopes and outmoded rules of conduct. In *Rebel without a Cause* James Dean looks for guidance and support from a father who is by nature incapable of providing them. Eventually, through anguish and tragedy, he is forced to accept the realities of his situation. Only then can he begin to build a more useful relationship.

## A Stranger Here

'Often', says Burl Ives in *Wind across the Everglades*, 'the longest way round is the shortest way through'. But often Ray's characters attempt to find an easy way out of their difficulties. Like Mason in *Bigger than Life* they mistake the panacea for the cure. Or like Arthur Kennedy in *The Lusty Men* they allow a *method* to become an end in itself. Kennedy and his wife long for the security represented by 'a place of our own'. As a short cut towards this goal, Kennedy competes for the prizes of the rodeo arena. But the prestige which he earns there side-tracks him from his original intention. Instead of buying a house he buys a trailer, a symbol of permanent instability.

Similarly, the laws and conventions which a society devises are valuable insofar as they meet its particular needs. But they are too easily regarded as moral absolutes; and they can only provoke chaos and injustice when applied beyond their necessarily limited context. In the first half of *The Savage Innocents* we are shown a life lived in strict accord with the terms dictated by the Arctic environment. But a missionary comes to the Eskimos, Inuk and Asiak (Yoko Tani), to persuade them that the Lord – a character who has played no previous part in their lives, and whose existence corresponds to no felt need – is angry with them for living in sin: a concept which has never suggested itself to them. Inuk is himself disgusted by the missionary's refusal of the traditional hospitalities of his race and in particular of Asiak's loving services. In his anger he accidentally fractures the missionary's skull. Much later, when Inuk has forgotten the entire episode, troopers come to arrest him and take him away to be tried according to laws of whose existence he was unaware, and whose authority he does not recognise: 'My father's laws have not been broken.' The conflict in the latter part of the film is entirely the result of an attempt to impose on an alien way of life rules which have become stronger than the men who made them. Asiak speaks for Ray when she tells the trooper that 'when you come to a strange land, you should bring your wives and not your laws'.

The rigidity with which men enforce their particular codes is a further response to insecurity. Ray's films show man as an intruder in a turbulent and indifferent, or hostile, universe. His hero often journeys into a primitive landscape like that

of the Everglades in search of a lost certainty, a lost harmony between man and his environment. But he brings with him his own inner conflicts which make that harmony unattainable. Burl Ives and Christopher Plummer represent opposite responses to nature, the former wanting to be its master, the latter its servant. Ray looks for an integration of these attitudes, towards an ideal relationship of man to nature, like that of man to man, in which the struggle for domination is resolved by the recognition of interdependence.

But such a harmony can only be attained when a man finds the purpose of his life in the conquest neither of nature nor of his fellow, but of himself. For this is the one conquest which does not imply a defeat or need a victim. In *King of Kings* Ray uses a dissolve, during the temptations in the wilderness, which absorbs the figure of Jesus into the earth. By coming to terms with himself, and only in that way, man is able to come to terms with his environment.

This is not simply a moral point. Ray has often shown us characters who are, psychologically, incapable of attaining stability and who, like the heroes of *Bitter Victory* and *Wind across the Everglades*, become victims of the basic rule of nature, the survival of the fittest. Ray makes his moral judgments from a position of sympathy and understanding: while we recognise the defects and conflicts which destroy his heroes, we are forced to recognise them also in ourselves and in our society. Until recently, one might justifiably have supposed that Ray found these contradictions so deeply embedded in men's personalities as to forbid any real stability. His most successful films were also those whose attitudes seemed the most pessimistic: their resolutions were unconvincing when they were not either tragic or extremely ambiguous. One could not believe that the hostility of the world, so concretely depicted, was entirely the reflection or the product of the hero's neurosis.

Ray refuses to guarantee the futures of his characters: at the end of *Johnny Guitar*, *Rebel without a Cause* or *Bigger than Life* the hero has reached a point from which he *may* progress towards a more meaningful and ordered existence. But we are not permitted to believe in any magical transformation of his personality. Even after the death of Sal Mineo at the climax of *Rebel without a Cause* James Dean's agonised cry of 'I've got the bullets!' symbolises for us the continuation of his inner

conflict. There is always the danger that the hero will again fall back into chaos and self-destruction.

The danger is no less real at the end of *Party Girl*, but it is less oppressive. One feels, for the first time, that the hero has recognised it and is therefore better equipped to deal with it. Also, Robert Taylor has reached, by the middle of the film, the position which other Ray heroes attain only at the end. Because we have *seen* him survive and grow through several trials we are more confident of his ability to survive the hazards of the future.

This is not a purely formal achievement. It suggests, rather, a considerable extension of the director's range. In the two films since *Party Girl* – *The Savage Innocents* and *King of Kings* – one still finds the anguish and confusion of *Rebel without a Cause* or *Bitter Victory*. But at times in both films anguish has been replaced by a passionate placidity. All Ray's films balance an immediate conflict against an ultimate unity, but his more recent work suggests a place for man within that unity.

#### V.F. PERKINS

Originally published in *Movie*, 9, 1963.

With the kind agreement of the Estate of V.F. Perkins and Cameron & Hollis.



**ABOVE** Frame: *Letter from an Unknown Woman*  
Frau Berndl (Mady Christians) about to announce the move to Linz.

## V.F. PERKINS 1936–2016

### *Letter from an Unknown Woman*

*Have you any idea what [a woman's] life is like in a little garrison town?*

*Letter from an Unknown Woman* is unusual, among the great movies, for the volume and quality of discussion it has received. In particular, Robin Wood's essay in his book *Personal Views* (1976) gives a finely argued reading that I would wish to contest in very few matters of substance. Writing in that context, I thought it might be useful to examine one quite brief section of the film in more detail than an overview allows. I chose the Linz sequence partly because it enters very little into the already published discussion.

It seemed also to be characteristic and highly effective without being astonishing. Where other episodes in the film are of immediately striking brilliance, the Linz sequence appeared to be excellent in a straightforward and rather marginal way. That seemed to set up a test case for the impression the film creates of extraordinary unity and coherence. My examination of the sequence is therefore centred on, first, the relevance of its details to the overall structure of the film and, second, the interlock within its *mise-en-scène* between choices related to film craft (that contribute to its dramatic effectiveness) and those which inflect its story material thematically.



For the purposes of my discussion, the sequence consists of two scenes. In the first of them, Lisa (Joan Fontaine) is taken by her mother and stepfather, the Kastners, to be introduced to a young lieutenant, Leopold, and his uncle, a colonel. A some-time-later dissolve takes us in to the second scene, in which Leopold walks Lisa round the town square during a band concert. The pair are clearly established as a couple, and recognised as such by the parents, whose open air café table they pass on the way to the public garden where Leopold begins to propose. The negotiations are broken off when Lisa claims to be engaged to a musician in Vienna.

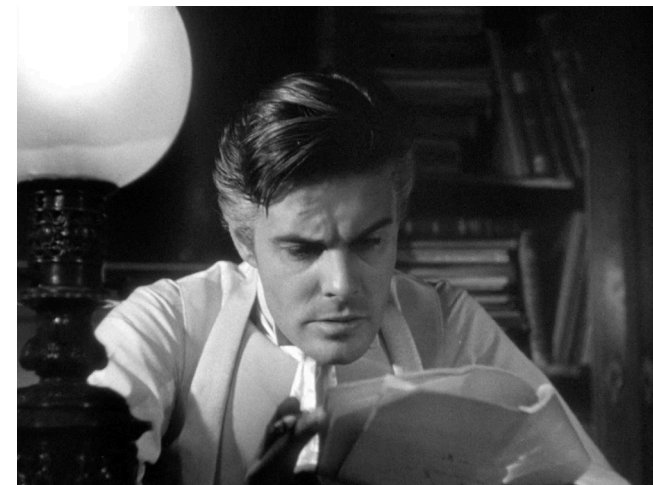
The Linz sequence breaks with one of the main lines of the film's construction: that whereby Lisa's presentation of her life (which 'can be measured in the moments I've spent with you and our son') is also a drastic re-presentation, an overhaul, of Stefan's. In reviewing the crucial episodes of her life, Lisa's letter asserts, at last persuasively, that Stefan's life – his 'vivid and real' life – must as well be measured by their moments of meeting, parting or tantalising proximity. The film's narrative is shaped by Stefan's presence. But the Linz episode is defined by his absence.

'There was nothing left for me. I went to Linz.' The words which open the sequence contrast bleakly with the promises of renewal, re-birth, in the introductions of the other episodes: Lisa's first contact with Stefan is the second of her 'two birthdays ... the beginning of conscious life'; her return to Vienna is 'a new beginning' and the final episode opens as she receives a birthday gift from her husband. The stress on emptiness, lifelessness is associated with the confinements of provincial life. In the original Stefan Zweig story, the episode is covered in a few paragraphs generalising Lisa's state of mind across a period of two years. The burden of the passage is that throughout that time Lisa did nothing of interest, refused to do anything of interest and retreated from society into a morbid nourishment of her passion. The episode thus presents in miniature the problems of dramatisation inherent in the whole project of filming Zweig's tale: apart from its value as an exercise in literary style, its main point of interest, and the thing that distinguishes its plot from the standard saga of unrequited obsession, is the motif of non-recognition. But that is also, from the filmmaker's viewpoint, its most

treacherous feature. It hazards credibility since the audience, itself performing the act of recognition throughout (of Lisa and of Joan Fontaine), is more likely than the reader to gag on Stefan's failure. Moreover, it gives the plot a negative centre. The focus is on an event which (repeatedly) does not occur and which thus threatens to resist expression within the specific times and spaces of the film frame.

At the general, structural level, some of the problems are solved by a double dramatisation: first of the act of narration (writing) through the use of flashback with Lisa's voice-over – a bold move against logic that responds to, but goes beyond, the extreme subjectivism of Zweig's narrative; then of Stefan's act of reading, through the invention of a framing story which makes the time of reading crucial. Thus the Linz episode is framed by images of Stefan which register not so much the passage of time (no clocks, chimes or overfilled ashtrays) as the growth of involvement and perhaps commitment. The reading began casually as Stefan stood over his desk, the curiosity roused by the letter's opening not strong enough to absorb him completely; with the pages open at arm's length before him, he could still attend to the lamp, to cigarettes and matches. Now, in counterpoint to 'You who have always lived so freely ...', tightly framed by the image and with a slow minor variant of the Liszt theme to darken the tone, he sits at the desk with the letter held closely and does not notice even his own act of turning the page. At the close of the Linz episode, the camera will react, as he will not, to his servant's arrival with coffee and cognac. The passage of hours in Stefan's night is transferred from the passage of days, months and years in Lisa's story – whose very deliberate pacing enacts the erosion of the time Stefan needs to make good his flight. But the cognac will speak differently, perhaps of his intention: if time is what is needed to escape the duel, 'no more cognac' has been prescribed as a condition of surviving it. But perhaps, too, at *that* moment, Stefan's main concern will be for his own reappearance at the centre of Lisa's tale. For Stefan at this point it may really feel as if 'all the clocks in the world have stopped'.

Within the Linz sequence, the problem of dramatising inaction is allied to the problem of creating a distinct character for the episode, so as to evoke Lisa's sense of the



absolute separateness of her existence without Stefan from her life with, or within reach of, him. The first problem is one that Howard Koch in a valuable essay published in *The Hollywood Screenwriters* (1972: 125-132) characterised as the need to provide actable situations for Joan Fontaine. It is met by dramatising, not the renunciation of the world that Zweig evokes, but the effort and the failure of Lisa to ignore her 'destiny' and take her place in society. The screenplay succeeds in 'carrying the emotional progression of Zweig's story' at this point by reversing its specific content: inaction is pictured as action advanced and undone in Lisa's near-submission to Linz and her parents' plans for an advantageous marriage.

That pattern of action yields the elaborated build up to an abrupt and definitive reversal (culminating in a comic play between parental excitement and the suitor's disappointment) and it shapes the incident as a self-contained, diversionary chapter in Lisa's life. The enclosure is furthered by a presentation that is overtly humorous. At this point alone is the film's irony matched in the phrasing and delivery of Lisa's commentary: 'twice a month that summer we listened, the lieutenant and I.'

The isolation of the sequence results, too, from its setting. The most important thing about Linz is that it is not Vienna, but it is given a variety of ways in which not to be Vienna. It is seen only as an exterior, a public setting with none of the delicate (and delicately erotic) play between public and private spaces that characterises Vienna. Where Lisa's Vienna is mainly nocturnal, Linz is entirely a daylight world, and a summer world. It is enclosed within its season like the spring of Lisa's girlhood, the winter of romance and the autumn of the denouement – a further dimension of the play with time.

It might have been the Mozartian connection of Linz that occasioned the change of locale from Zweig's Innsbruck. At least, to think of Linz as the recipient of the Symphony No 36 does sharpen the irony in the use of music. Lisa's eager lieutenant is clumsy enough to compare Linz's music with Vienna's; her mocking affirmation of the town's musicality comes after a military band has pumped out four bars of effortful waltz-time. Vienna, too, has musicians who can play that way, with the emphatic beat that flattens and unsprings a three-quarter rhythm: most obviously, the disgruntled quintet in the Prater

ballroom. But they are marginal elements in the flow of music around the life of the city. The sense that this is Linz's best and only music is given not just by the dialogue and situation but by a use of sound specific to this episode. Apart from Lisa's narration, which exists in a different space, the only sounds we hear are the sounds of Linz itself. They are again insistently public sounds, beginning with the cathedral bells that summon the community to its Sunday obligations. 'Background music' is customarily intimate in that its reference is to the interior life of the characters, or to the feelings that we should have about their situation. But there is no intimacy here. The music, like the decor, is entirely exterior and ostentatiously irrelevant to Lisa's emotion. The insistence and the irrelevance are equally important: the music provides backgrounds appropriate to the scenes that society expects Lisa to enact. The slow, wistful waltz could encourage her in a shy exchange of tender sentiment. To these strains she, as well as her Lieutenant, might play out the role of respectfully ardent young lover. Then, the razzmattaz of the Radetzky march at the concert's end would supply a perfect, if cliché celebration of the outcome. The Radetzky is the ultimate display piece, polka as much as march, and exuberantly ceremonial rather than warlike. This most fitting herald of the general joy sets the wrong pace for the disarrayed return of an offended suitor and his confusedly resistant intended.

The eruption of disharmony at this point has been implicit in Lisa's appearance throughout. For once she is dressed with more effort than success: she carries the costume of a miscast, impossible role. High-waisted and full-bodied to give an impression of adolescent puppy fat, it engulfs her in ribbons, frills, flowers and bows, and it suggests (or fails to disguise) that the star has round shoulders. If that makes the design a Hollywood catastrophe, the effect is carefully judged. While the lines and proportions are all wrong, at odds with the human figure caught within and below, they are only just so – enough to enforce Lisa's sense of the ridiculous and demeaning in her situation without making her a grotesque. The outfit can be read as defining her mother's sense that this is as far as expense and ornament can sensibly go to overcome unpromising material. Lisa's dejected submission is pictured not just in the costume – with a hat that seems to be wearing





her – but in the awkwardness of Fontaine's movement. Her parasol is held as an unwieldy prop, endangering the lieutenant so that they have difficulty in synchronising their steps to parade as a couple. In the stroll round the town square, Lisa is made to negotiate the hazards of puddles and pigeons as well as the greetings of Leopold's friends, to one side then the other. The camera is set back far enough to show the effort invested in the (only partial) achievement of grace.

In almost every particular, Lisa's introduction to Leopold reverses the characteristic shape of her contacts with Stefan. The Viennese pattern is that Lisa detaches herself from society and hastens to an isolated spot where, as a silent, still and solitary figure, she can await Stefan's approach. (If he *does* approach, that will count as Destiny.) While this shape dwells on what is willed and calculated in Lisa's 'submission' to her Fate, Stefan's experience of the meeting as fortuitous is marked in the way that Lisa is discovered to one side (in the margin) of his chosen path. Lisa's appearances are diversions from the course of Stefan's life (a life lost in diversion). Like the letter itself, they cut across and distract him from some other action or intention.

By contrast, the rendezvous in Linz is prearranged on both sides and presided over by parents and society. Its movement is into, rather than away from, the flow of surrounding life. Lisa is conducted to the appointed place, flanked by her parents, at a regulated pace which suggests the importance of arriving neither before nor after the appointed time. There is no period of silent waiting before the Colonel is discovered, in charge of his nephew Leopold, facing Lisa's party from immediately in front. The camera pans away from Lisa's group but continues its line of movement to reveal the two soldiers already in place. That they are also above, at the top of a flight of steps, and must descend for the introductions, makes its own comment on the social opportunity in prospect. The shot develops as a track that charts the progress of Lisa and Leopold in the wake of the parental group until they arrive in the town square and become part of the general stream of movement into the cathedral. The couple's actions are enclosed within parental direction by the way in which shot and scene begin and end with comment from Frau Kastner, begin with parents in the lead and end with parents shepherding from the rear.

The distinctness of the Linz episode is, perhaps, summarised in Ophüls' muting, for this period, one of the film's most marked visual effects: the presentation of Lisa's face as a globe of radiance, lit from within (because from no material point in the film's world) to shine in the surrounding darkness. The elements that heighten the contrast are removed from Linz by dressing Fontaine all in white and providing a rational source, the sun, to cast light (almost) evenly across the objects and figures around her. The radiance of the Viennese Lisa is one of the main resources through which Ophüls balances the recognition that his heroine, in her stubborn fidelity, is also a fixated adolescent. It images the intensity of the private vision which she asserts against material, psychological and social reality and makes of it, even or especially in its folly, the source of an extraordinary glamour.

The effect is appropriately muted in Linz because it is there that we see Lisa most nearly accommodating herself to society and suppressing her romantic conviction of the impossibility of a life not centred on Stefan. Indeed, one of the episode's most important functions is to offer a portrait of that life, so as to anticipate the conditions of Lisa's marriage to Johann Stauffer and thus remove the need, at that point, for fresh exposition (or for the more extended presentation of Stauffer that would detract from our awareness of Stefan Jnr as the new centre of Lisa's world).

The Linz that is defined by its difference from Vienna, defined as the non-Vienna, is the one seen and experienced by Lisa. The contrasts are with a Vienna perceived, very selectively, as Stefan's world. There is another Linz that she floats through like a sleepwalker, an exigent social world that anticipates the pattern of life in the other, and ultimately more powerful, Vienna. In music, for instance, Lisa measures the sounds of Linz against the private efforts, furtively appropriated, of a soloist. The 'music of Vienna' is that music with which she feeds her fantasy of romance. The music of Linz is band music, emphatically regulated by a conductor whose uniform is redolent of the official, the dutiful and the public. The bandmaster is a military grotesque, one that you could chuckle over all the way to the firing-post. What he is grotesque in is a pompous and unyielding propriety that emphasises hierarchy: his leadership (only ceremonial, yet threatening) consists



in ensuring that those under his command are, or adequately pretend to be, as completely responsive to external direction as he is himself. He is a master of uniformity, thus its slave, and the uniformity he imposes is particularly a matter of time and movement.

The power of this public world of enforced regularities is asserted, rather against Lisa, by Ophuls' decision to begin the proposal scene with the bandmaster's image at the moment of his first command, and then to orchestrate the complex movements of characters and camera (and even the delivery of Lisa's narration) to the bandmaster's tempo. Foreshadowed here is that other occasion of public music-making disrupted by Lisa's pursuit of her destiny: the opera. The episodes are similarly structured, and in each case we see society as a performance, a show, with Lisa alone unable to carry through her allotted role. The Linz concert and the Viennese opera are alike musical pretexts for the display of solidarity at the top level of society.

In each of them the dutiful leisure of the upper classes is visibly maintained on the work of others. In Linz the bandmaster drills his cadets in the *labour* of music-making. His unsmiling grunts of command do not even hint at the possibility of enjoyment. The stiffness of the actor's baton movements emphasises subjection, as does the framing of the image, which places a faceless horn player in the left foreground so as to present the weight to be lifted as he raises his instrument on the beat of order. Meanly-dressed, the players have no share in their leader's splendour and they are marched away, at the scene's end, like a convict squad.

The foregrounding of servitude and menial labour (often explicitly alienated) as the condition and cost of 'splendour' is a constant of Ophuls' later work, but it has a particular role in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. As the disregarded support for an often dazzling way of life, servitude is the skull-beneath-the-skin: both of elegance (achieved or attempted) and of romance. For if the bandmen are conscripted into Leopold's attempt to pass off a parental scheme as his heart's vocation, Lisa, too, will avoid recognising the mechanics that construct and maintain the fabric of her idyll with Stefan – for example, the tired 'railway' workers and, most notably, the bandswomen of the Prater whose mock-military garb stresses



their correspondence to the Linz cadets. What Lisa cannot see, and this relates to her misreading of Stefan himself, is the substructure of routine on which she elaborates her fantasy of the unique and ordained.

The peasant cart which interrupts our view of the introduction of Leopold to Lisa rumbles across the screen to submerge formality in graceless racket. It is forcibly presented to us as an element in the life of Linz that conducts itself without reference to the schemes and protocols of the bourgeoisie; its direction of travel down the street and across the screen opposes the flow of Society's movement towards the Cathedral. While its lumbering progress does comment, in bathos, on the effusive attempt at etiquette by Lisa's stepfather (Herr Kastner), its unscheduled eruption in the midst of a carefully drilled ritual is significant largely for the notice it



*fails* to receive from the characters on the screen. They pay it the attention only of avoidance.

The effect here is echoed in that at the end of the sequence, after Lisa's desperate declaration that she is not free to marry Leopold. The couple have to cross the line of the departing bandmen in order to make their way to their parents' cafe table. The camera's movement is interrupted so that the image stays on this side of the procession while Leopold and his uncle withdraw from the scene in abrupt propriety. Our access to the action is again restricted by the passage across the foreground not just of the band but also of the following rag-tag of peasants, children and old people. We hear no word of what is spoken between Leopold, his uncle and the Kastner family.

Considerations of craft are involved here: for instance, the effort so to deploy limited resources of set and cast as to create the sense of an extensive and fully-populated world. More immediately relevant is the avoidance of redundant action. In dumb show, Leopold's exchange with his uncle can be abbreviated; we no more need to be told its content than we needed to hear Leopold's third repetition of 'I'm very honoured to make your acquaintance.' But beyond that, Ophuls' treatment is a means of telling us that we don't need to be told, of stressing protocol: the curt civilities of renunciation are referred back to the elaborate forms of introduction, while controlled outrage and baffled dismay are set in the frame of exuberance and simple pleasure.

Summarised here is the imperviousness of this world to any but its own orders. Immersed in its performance of itself, the official world of bourgeois propriety – on its journey from Mayerling to Sarajevo – has as little perspective on its goals as Lisa has on hers. Her romantic hallucination is compared with, and preferred to, its social blindness. She is trapped in fantasy: 'He writes music,' she tells Leopold of Stefan, with a mixture of apology and pride, as if even the Stefan of her inflated vision needed some further push towards grandeur. But Linz is trapped in pretence, the extent of its entrapment being conveyed through the barely containable ecstasy of Frau Kastner at the prospect of her daughter's engagement. Lisa may need to construct the man of her dreams, but the parents

have an equal need to see the triumph of young love in the convenient transactions of the marriage market.

Linz is the site, then, for a preliminary confrontation between the strength of inner conviction and the power of social institutions. Everything external is on Leopold's side. The breeze which ruffles Lisa's dress during his monologue opposes the flimsiness of her exterior to the unyielding stiffness of Leopold's, as the hard vertical sheen of his helmet tyrannises the fruit-salad frivolity of her hat. This stiffness of dress unites Leopold with the bandmaster and with his uncle but also with the non-military figures of Frau Kastner and, later, Johann Stauffer; Herr Kastner's bearing indicates, comically, his aspiration to the same condition. (Compare the looser, softer stuff of which Stefan's clothes and movement are made.) Leopold's uniform, too, is as strikingly 'black' as Lisa's is 'white' – and this relationship anticipates the distribution of costume-tone between Lisa and her husband.

Lisa is trapped by the setting chosen (by Leopold, by Ophuls) for the proposal. The corner of the public garden to which he leads her is encircled by railings, shrubs, benches and statuary. It is a hard little alcove which offers no means of evasion or convenient distraction, small and private enough to enforce the intimacy that Leopold needs and Lisa fears. Yet its enclosure is not so complete as to put the pair on equal terms. It is under the eye of the parental group: an effect achieved partly in the cutting, against spatial logic, but also produced by their position as distant guardians of the only exit. A couple with a baby carriage is present within the gates to ward off any suggestion that the park is a place of romantic assignments. It is continuously open (through the railings) to the sights and sounds of the surrounding community-sufficiently public, then, to stifle any strong move towards resistance.

Leopold's speech is a juggernaut of long sentences like 'It may be unnecessary for me to mention that ever since you came to my attention I have been most favourably impressed.' Their cunning accumulation of heavy vocabulary and staggered syntax would not normally be inflicted on an actor, but here the resultant awkwardness in performance can be absorbed into the characterisation. The task of holding on to these lines is complicated by Ophuls' filming the bulk of them within one shot; but the actor's concentration becomes









Leopold's effort in delivering himself of a speech to which he has given long and careful, if scarcely inspired, thought. Against the weight of his words, in their continuity and their preparedness, Lisa is given – by the writer and the situation – only frantic spasms of improvisation.

Her sense of being cornered, and Leopold's of having cornered her, are acted out in the use of eyeline. The lieutenant's courtesy obliges Lisa to be the first to sit and so allows him to take up a position that both places her under his inspection and puts a strain on any effort of hers to reciprocate. His scrutiny is interrupted in several moments of anxiety and embarrassment, but his gaze has its point of rest on her face. Conversely Lisa's glance flits up and across to him by moments, in appeal or to acknowledge his presence and her obligations, but her eyes return constantly to look forward and down, away from his stare. To have allowed her to meet his look steadily would have been to offer her in either submission or defiance, and while she is never quite ready to submit, she certainly has not the power to defy.

The effect of Leopold's dominance is amplified by images whose framing takes his height as a pretext to diminish Lisa's presence. The top of the picture consistently crops close to, or across, the lieutenant's helmet but just as consistently it leaves space (and most of the time a lot of it) above Lisa's hat. Even in her close-up, Joan Fontaine's figure does not fill the frame. The effect is particularly pronounced in the matched pair of shots covering the speech and Lisa's intervention. The shot that favours Leopold has Lisa in, but far from dominating, its foreground. In the answering shot of Lisa, Leopold is the foreground.

It would be possible to read these procedures as a registration of male authority as against the natural frailty of women. But such a reading would need to ignore much that Ophüls emphasises, in particular his pervasive insistence on the playing-out of social roles and on the bonding of manners to social structure. (Similarly, interpretation of the motifs of stiffness as phallic should be at least restrained by the recognition that these motifs regularly surround characters who are symbolically impotent and/or sterile. It is as if too firm a devotion to the tokens of male authority were either cause or consequence of emasculation.)

These points are borne out in a further element in the film's gestural vocabulary: the use of hands. It embodies the invisible fact that the power of action has been given to Leopold, leaving to Lisa only the responsibility of re-action. (This might be the gestural correlative of Frau Kastner's injunction to 'Let him do the talking – but not all the talking.')

From the beginning of the proposal scene, in the progress round the town square, Leopold has free use of his hands to guide, to salute and to give emphasis to his conversation. Lisa's meanwhile are fully engaged in the management of her parasol, handbag and skirt. On the park bench, Lisa's hands never leave her lap, at most twisting there in resourceless agitation at the neck of her handbag, but Leopold again has command of his gestures, to such an extent that he can silence Lisa's first attempt to arrest the flow of his speech by peremptorily raising his stiffly gloved arm. This abruptly commanding movement is combined with the (albeit reproving) courtesy of 'Oh, please allow me to finish.' The gesture inflects that apparent request as an order, a reminder – where none should be needed – that it is her place to listen and not, yet, to speak.

The sense of Leopold's having command over her movements is climaxed at the end of the interview, after he has accepted the disintegration of his prospects. He terminates the conversation by rising (in one movement, like a released Jack-in-the-box) to salute her and then extending his right arm to her with a disjointed 'Oh ... then ... please!' as his sense of correct procedure asserts itself over his confusion. Ophüls chooses this moment to cut away to the parental group: misreading, it seems, the distant (and in fact unavailable) sight of Leopold's movement Herr Kastner predicts that 'It won't be long now' and bustles to order the celebratory wine. When we return to the park, the couple are already on the move with Lisa on the lieutenant's arm, which makes her having risen to his side to accept his support a simple result of his having offered it. They are both, but not equally, prisoners of form.

Leopold need not have offered her his arm; he had not done so for the walk to the park. Gallantry is his to employ for the imposition of his will, even in defeat. He sets an uncomfortable pace that leaves Lisa to grab for her parasol. When their route back to the parental group is obstructed by the band parade, he uses his arm and authority to direct her





through the line of bandsmen, but chivalry ('Make way for the lady') again covers the pursuit of his own desire, for speedy relief from a now profitless responsibility.

The sense that the forms of gentlemanliness give access to the structures of male dominance emerges with all the more force because Leopold 'in himself (fresh of face, light of voice and making a youthfully awkward assumption of the role placed upon him) is far from being a commanding figure. Leopold is his uncle's puppet, and the Colonel – in his relaxed and condescending certainty of his place in the social chain and in his sense of crime when thwarted – is what Leopold will become once the authority of his sex and rank has been so internalised as to emerge as 'innate' confidence and steely poise. Thus it is the older man (as containing Leopold) rather than Leopold himself that Lisa ends up by marrying in Johann Stauffer. The explicit link between the two figures is the cigarette smoked in the white-gloved hand. But it's worth noting that the Colonel, too, displayed his control over movement, in the scene of introductions, when he signalled the Kastner party to proceed towards the church with a 'Shall we walk?' arm gesture. At any rate, this gesture re-emerges with Stauffer, in the full strength of its imperiously protective ambiguity, at the Opera, when he summons Lisa back to her place at his side from her contemplation of Stefan. Then, in his surprise appearance in the carriage after the rendezvous on the Opera steps, what might be a considerate reluctance to let Lisa take her 'headache' off home alone is quite blatantly a form for the demand that she stay within his sphere of movement.

To this extent, Lisa's disarrayed return to the carriage (the confined space provided for her within the social circuit) is parallel to her return, in Linz, to her parents' cafe table where – before and after the proposal – we see two chairs reserved for the happy couple. But Lisa's place at the table, unlike her place in the carriage, does not *have* to be taken up. It can be avoided at only a moderate cost in embarrassment and disapproval: she sinks into the Colonel's vacated chair to meet her mother's demands for explanation. Lisa's crime in Vienna is like but not like her quiet demolition of the schemes of Linz; there, even in resistance, she submitted her will to that of her protector by accepting to be led everywhere at his side. At the Opera, acting 'the pursued', she reverses the course laid down for her

by Johann. And when Stauffer looks out from the carriage on the act that seals her fate, it is certainly crucial to the intrigue that he has seen her entering the gates of Stefan's apartment but it is equally important, within the scheme of images, that what he has witnessed is her gentle, reluctant, and inadmissible seizure of the power of independent movement.

The vastly escalated cost of Lisa's pursuit of her destiny in Vienna is pictured in the crossed sabres on the wall behind Johann as he urges her, in effect, to spare him the executioner's role. In Linz, the armoury of social power lies in reserve as decoration, posing its sanctions, certainly, but not activating them: thus in the panning shot as Leopold leads his miscreant out of the park they pass between a 'cross-fire' of cannon (to the right, then the left of the screen) which have been incidentally visible in the backgrounds of earlier shots but which are now brought to prominence. Their threat is however *only* symbolic and their ammunition is stacked ornamentally beside them. Lisa may *feel* that she is being taken to the firing squad, but only blanks will be exploded. It is a lightly humorous effect, almost a gag, in keeping with the mood of the sequence.

The crucial distinction when we get to Stauffer's Vienna (a difference that fissures the continuities of situation, structure and image and that underwrites the drastic contrast in tone) is that Lisa is now accountable, not to her parents, but to her husband. What alters everything – to a life-and-death matter – is the change in Lisa's *social* role, brought about by marriage, not in her 'nature as a woman'; for instance, neither her natural nor her social role as a mother weighs much in the course of events, however great the surrounding emotion. There is certainly no change in her psychology.

When she tells Johann that she can't help herself, that she's 'had no hope but [Stefan's] ever,' this Romantic Nonsense is no more than a re-phrasing of her statements to Leopold. It is surely by one of the master-strokes in the design of the Linz sequence that Lisa is made not to *refuse* marriage but to declare it impossible, not to reject Leopold but to improvise the truthful lie of her engagement. This presents an exact definition of her feelings and character. It does not occur to her that her will is involved in her inability to accept Leopold. Despite making what from her point of view is every effort to take the place in society desired for her by her parents, she is







finally brought up against the desperate fact that she is already and irrevocably spoken for.

Lisa's enslavement is directly contrasted with the subjection to the social order that is evident in Leopold's struggle to comprehend: 'You mean you're engaged to a man and your parents don't even know him?' These two kinds of unfreedom, romantic and institutional, are closed around Lisa by marriage. It is Stauffer who emphasises choice and responsibility, both for Lisa and for himself: committing himself to act out the role of the injured husband, he still sees himself as *deciding* his course. When he says that he will do everything in his power to oppose Lisa's folly, he is deliberately not claiming (as he could readily have been made to claim and as seems to be true) that his actions will be the simple and inevitable consequence of hers. By contrast Lisa, accepting but not seeking the role of social outcast, shows no more thought of defiance in going to Stefan than in refusing Leopold. Johann can take the initiative simply by acting out the male role; Lisa can take it only by contradicting the female one.

Lisa's tragedy is that, being morally the product of Linz and fully a member of Stauffer's world, she has nonetheless fixed her affections on a man who is a stranger to that world's commitments. As a complete daughter of this bourgeoisie, Lisa shows in romance the punctiliousness that Leopold and Johann display towards form.

In both respects, these nicenesses of observance are directly contrasted with the tissue of broken engagements in the life of Stefan who, as he says, almost never gets to the place he starts out for. The Linz sequence is immediately set in the context of that life and of the world which supports it – preceded by a demonstration of the manners of Stefan's promiscuity (witnessed by Lisa from the staircase outside his apartment) and followed by a sketch of the life that revolves around Madame Spitzer's dress shop. It is a world where 'Congratulations, my dear' will echo cheerfully round a conquest that promises pleasure and profit, a regime every bit as meticulously constructed and serviced as Johann's for its own purposes of sophisticated hedonism. In that world Stefan is as available to Lisa as he is to any other beautiful woman, and with impunity even from censure. Its particular terms – the terms of its difference from 'Linz' – are the acknowledgement

of the mutability of appetite and affection. If the bandmaster is Linz's extension into grotesquerie of what Leopold and Johann represent, the equivalent figure in Stefan's Vienna is the drunken soldier who offers to take Lisa 'anywhere [because] it makes no difference': his eruption on the scene is so placed, immediately after Lisa's final disillusionment with Stefan, that his words must be taken to represent the most appalling notion that she could be asked to confront. Her recoil from his proposition (as distinct from his somewhat repulsive person) merely confirms that she has only, ever, been as missionary in Stefan's world. Her most un-Spitzerian refusal to tell Stefan of her pregnancy is explicitly the result of her wish to distance herself from all the other women in his life, that is, to enact the most complete rejection of the ways of his world.

Lisa believes in the recklessness of her passion. She believes that she must have Stefan come what may. But she does not, in fact, want him on any terms. She wants him on very strict terms indeed. He must freely recognise their meetings as brought about not under the stars of a particular time and place, but in eternity's grand design.

Herein lies the profundity of the invention which makes reflections on freedom open and close the Linz sequence. 'You who have always lived so freely,' she addresses Stefan at the start; then, within the action at the end of the sequence, responding to her mother's demand to know what caused the collapse of Leopold's proposal, 'I only told him the truth ... I told him I wasn't free.'

Lisa, like her husband, like 'responsible' society – but unlike Stefan and his circle – insists on living in a world of binding, life-and-death commitments. She demands a stability that is to be secured not by 'such things as honour, decency' – not by dutiful submission to social ties – but by the common and spontaneous recognition of asocial romantic destiny. A bond sealed, outside society, by Fate must surely subdue the randomness of appetite and opportunity, uniting Stefan's freedom with the steadfastness of a Stauffer.

But nothing human is ever outside society, as is manifest in the stream of sideline comment, gossip and inquisitive witness that runs through the film. Lisa's position is quite incoherent. When her letter asserts the inevitability of the encounter at the Opera and says that nothing happens by

chance, could she thoughtfully mean that it was Stefan's destiny – to miss his destiny? And what, concretely, does she hope will follow from her visiting Stefan to offer him her life? Its one certain result, after all, must be to make him the target of Johann's fury. (Lisa's devotion here is every bit as murderous as her husband's.) Stefan's forgetfulness, which Lisa represents as the cruellest blow of fate, at least spares her the possibility that he might recognise her, say thanks for the memory and nonetheless send her packing. The fine irrationality of 'If only you could have found what was never lost' shows her at last reduced to using 'what might have been' to protect her vision of destiny against the press of reality. Her letter itself, a final attempt at vindication, is pointless except as an invitation to suicide, persuading Stefan to let death prove what life could not.

There is a danger of misrepresenting the film, though, in stressing what is morbid in Lisa's attitude as if this were the (individual, moral) flaw that propelled her tragedy. It is certainly established that Lisa is locked into a particular moment of her adolescence, but if she were broken mainly on her perversity, the film would surely not be entitled to pass her off as a figure of nobility and purity. Also involved, however, is a desperate struggle to live authentically and not to give her life to a convenient denial of her inmost conviction and deepest feeling. It is that which makes the success of her resistance to Linz a kind of triumph, even in its confusion and its comicality. But the struggle dooms her, too, by trapping her in the determined acting-out of her role as a woman (in that society) at a point when its conflicting elements have been split apart.

The correspondence of 'You who have always lived so freely' and 'I told him I wasn't free' is constructed by the film and not observed by Lisa. What the film sees, and she doesn't, is the conflict between a man's freedom and a woman's lack of it. (Lisa sees herself and Stefan as complementary; the film presents as different.) While the rigidities of Linz are set against the amenability of Madame Spitzer's, the transition offers Lisa no release from the frame of decorative compliance. The price of a woman's entry to Stefan's world of freedom is a place in the higher reaches of prostitution. Already explicit here is the theme developed most fully in *Lola Montès*: that the typical result of a woman's seizure of freedom in matters of the heart

is confinement within the role of Woman of Scandal. 'The mutability of appetite and affection' has very specific consequences for a woman, and Lisa presumably discovers that offering herself autonomously in the Spitzer market is no more rewarding – as it is certainly not more authentic – than offering herself under contract to Johann Stauffer. Her world has, after all, a less brutal way with ageing wives than with ageing courtesans. It is important that Lisa does not enter into marriage solely for the sake of her son; it was 'as much for his sake as for mine'. But Stauffer's Vienna repeats the pattern of Linz in this: that Lisa reacts to Stefan's indifference by embarking on an accommodation with society (arranged marriage/marriage of convenience) only to rediscover the depth of her prior commitment; and it's her passion's *integrity* that disorders the social mechanism, interrupting the musical performance.

Marriage is the given site for the expression of a woman's incorruptibility. When it functions as it's supposed to do, love 'covers' the woman's submission to an unequal contract so that the moment of her subjection to a tightly constrained role is dissolved into the moment when she freely acknowledges the choice of her heart. Thus she is invited to believe that her fulfilment and her servitude are the same thing because they are accomplished in the same act of her will. So long as this belief can be sustained, she has a means of reconciling the conflicting imperatives of love (emotional integrity) and duty (subordination). Her unfreedom becomes what she freely desires. But Lisa's role explodes in her face: married to Johann, she comes to see herself as his mistress while society identifies her still as a wife. She is fully persuaded that love and duty go together, and cannot but insist on their unity, even when society is brought to assert the priority of the contract. Lisa's offence is the 'excessive' enactment of those qualities which are held out as being woman's nature and woman's glory. It's when she defies marriage that she is being true to the self that her world has offered her, first in the absoluteness of her commitment (her uncompromising fidelity makes her unfaithful) and then in the emotional honesty which refuses the discreet indulgence of an affair.

Here again it might be claimed that the film offers not a *presentation* of Lisa's role, but an indulgence of the stereotyped opposition of emotional woman (a slave to her feelings) and

rational man. Yet it is surely clear that Ophuls' irony embraces *all* the film's characters and that the behaviour of the men is by no means remarkable for its rationality. More importantly, Lisa is articulated as an *exceptional* figure rather than a typical one: throughout the film she is systematically contrasted with a range of other women. All of them – from the coyly opportunist friend of her girlhood onwards – are shown to have made quite different kinds of accommodations to their roles and circumstances. None of them manifests the purity, emotionality and commitment of 'essential womanhood'.

Unable to follow their complaisant or resigned acceptance of the best available bargain, Lisa seeks to live out, in purity, the meaning of a woman's life as a thing to be given. Her insistence on awaiting Stefan's approach and recognition (like her refusal to exploit her pregnancy) holds her free from the predatory taint on a woman who actively acknowledges her needs and desires. That this leaves her with only her passivity to exploit is articulated in Stefan's hideously acute observation on her flight from the Opera: 'where there is a pursued there must be a pursuer'. The letter, after her acceptance of defeat, is the one place where she can tell Stefan of the depth of her need without accusing herself of shamelessness.

Living as a woman, Lisa can dedicate herself to others or she can function for them in a social role which is essentially a thing of gestures and of show. She is incapacitated from living for herself because no terms are available, beyond these, in which to grasp what that might mean. Her fulfilment is to be discovered in submission; if it can't be, there is something wrong with her (with her soul or with her luck). Her nature – as *that* society has defined it for her – will find its highest expression as a Madonna. But that selflessness produces the cult of sacrifice which makes Lisa obsessive, egocentric and ultimately, like Lucia Harper or Madame de ..., a killer: her stubborn purity is one agent of Stefan's death.

If Ophuls' film is nonetheless in love with her, it thereby acknowledges the madness of a role in which the exercise of her integrity propels her and those around her to catastrophe. Ophuls' delight in Lisa and his sympathy for her surely derive from her construction as a heroine who lives her role, in impossible circumstances, as fully and finely as that role allows. Anything more would require the lucidity that would

challenge the role and make her a rebel. It is equally a part of her charm and a source of her deadliness that she is so locked into her role as to preclude her achieving the perspective on her predicament that the film gives us. (We should not pretend that the achievement would necessarily have done her much good.) Her innocence is inseparable from her blindness.

Lisa never sees, never approaches the insight, that her predicament is related to the definitions and constraints that her society imposes on womanhood. Instead she rationalises her servitude and naturalises her passivity through her submission to Fate. The myth of destiny is generally available both to give misfortune the comfort of cosmic meaning, and as a magical resolution of the conflict between an experience of unfreedom and the conviction (however derived) of individual liberty: one's fate is one's own, just like one's actions. But the myth has a particular significance for a woman faced, like Lisa, with society's insistence that she must hold herself accountable for her actions and simultaneously accept her subordination to men as a product of her nature. Beyond that, since marriage will be the free act that ratifies her inequality, there is discomfort in any suggestion of contingency in her choice of partner. Destiny romanticises the contract by presenting submission to Heaven's Plan as the only true freedom. Fulfilment lies in the discovery of 'the mate that fate had me created for'. Having made the discovery and missed the fulfilment, Lisa has to shift the terms of her commitment. Destiny becomes Malign Fate, through the obscurity – 'If only ...' – of Stefan's vision. Thus when Fortune crushes, it is still someone's fault. Lisa can embrace her unfreedom in its metaphysical guise, she can recognise her misfortune as the product of a moral failure, but (or because) she can never see her predicament in its social dimensions. To do so would be to break the unity between her role and her perceptions. Passivity and blindness are laid down as the terms of her account at its very start: 'What happened to us had its own reason beyond our poor understanding.' What is at stake is Lisa's attempt to give coherent shape to her experience.

In this sense, the *notion* of Destiny governs her life, and, perhaps more than anything else, it wrecks her life. To be worthy of her great love, she cannot present herself to it impurely, as a clever deceiver. To enact her conviction of destiny, she has

to wait until Stefan's recognition freely responds to hers; she cannot do any of the 'practical' things that might break the deadlock without compromising her life's foundation. Thus the same commitment that lets her feel her life's integrity propels it to disintegration. In this she is not typical, but she might be exemplary.

#### V.F. PERKINS

Originally published in *Movie*, 29/30, 1982.

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# AUDIOVISUAL ESSAYS

## *The Phantom Carriage:* A revaluation

Although Victor Sjöström's extraordinary film *The Phantom Carriage* (Körkarlen, 1921) is widely celebrated as one of the major achievements of Swedish silent cinema, it has received very little extended analysis. In its time, the film was extremely famous and was praised by critics in many countries – indeed, Charlie Chaplin called it the greatest film ever made.<sup>1</sup> Film histories and surveys of Swedish cinema (and overviews of Sjöström's work) largely agree on the film's stature and invariably refer to its complex use of flashbacks and its remarkable multiple-exposure special effects, but rarely go further.<sup>2</sup>

Our two-part audiovisual essay argues for a revaluation of Sjöström's achievement in *The Phantom Carriage*. We attempt to bring a critical and interpretative approach to the film's style into conversation with historical accounts of the evolution of film form that are central to recent silent cinema scholarship. Part 1 explores a single sequence in detail, revealing a mastery of editing and of film space which is remarkable for its period. Specifically, we analyse a segment which is in several respects at the heart of the film: it shows the first meeting between the two central characters, David Holm (Victor Sjöström) and Sister Edit (Astrid Holm); it spans the film's exact mid-point; and it is the longest uninterrupted passage to take place in a single setting. We explore ways in which Sjöström's creation

of three-dimensional filmic space – with no hint of frontality – becomes the basis for a reciprocal relationship between spatial naturalism and performance style. Part 2 considers how the rich articulation of action, character and space that Sjöström achieves in collaboration with his cinematographer, Julius Jaenzon, becomes the basis for a mise-en-scène that can take on discrete interpretive force. We also argue that relationships articulated through the detailed decisions in our chosen sequence take on their full resonance within patterns and motifs that develop across the film. The essay complements our chapter on the film in the volume *Silent Features*, edited by Steve Neale (Exeter University Press, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> See Bengt Forslund (1988).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2002: 68).

Watch the audiovisual essay here:

Part 1 <https://vimeo.com/154707928>

Part 2 <https://vimeo.com/156256091>



# AUDIOVISUAL ESSAYS

## Motifs of movement and modernity

In 'Modernity and Cinema: A Culture of Shocks and Flows', Tom Gunning proposes a dialectical approach to modernity, contrasting experiences of 'chaotic dissolution' with patterns of 'systematic organization' (2006: 310). My audiovisual essay takes this intriguing idea as a point of departure, contrasting two distinct motifs of camera movement. In the first motif, the camera follows one or more characters as they wander across a dangerous city street. In the second, the camera dollies along a row of similar people or objects, evoking the repetitiveness of mass production. Although these motifs were transnational, most of my examples come from Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s, suggesting that the dialectical culture of modernity shaped even the most classical filmmaking tradition.

Some scholars, such as Charlie Keil, have argued that 'modernity' is too broad a context to be of much use to film historians, especially for those looking to explain the 'fine-grained' nuances of stylistic change (2004: 63). In a thoughtful response to Keil's thorough critique, Gunning points out that much of the best scholarship on the relationship between modernity and cinema remains deeply committed to the methods of close analysis (2006: 312). My own 'motivic' approach shows how Hollywood filmmakers expressed ideas about modernity by manipulating historically identifiable

strategies of camera movement. Just as an art historian might track the shifting meanings of a recurring pictorial strategy across a series of paintings, so might a film historian chronicle the diverse but related ways of representing particular spaces and story situations across several films. Striking a balance between the close analysis of individual scenes and a broader history of cinema as a generalised manifestation of modernity, a history of motifs shows filmmakers working within a complex and shifting tradition, developing a shared iconography of modernity to address both sides of the dialectic that Gunning has discussed. The crossing-the-street shot allows filmmakers to address the vitality of the modern city by producing unusually dynamic images; the seriality shot gives filmmakers an equally flexible resource to address modernity's mass repetitions.<sup>1</sup>

I develop this argument at greater length in an ongoing manuscript, but this audiovisual essay is designed as a stand-alone work. Indeed, the audiovisual essay seems like an ideal tool for a 'motivic' approach to film history. By juxtaposing several instances of each motif, we see how the meaning of each motif may be repeated, revised, or even reversed with each new iteration.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the representation of traffic in the cinema, focusing on earlier examples, see Kristen Whissel (2008).

Watch the audiovisual essay here:

<https://vimeo.com/170535380>



ABOVE Detail from *Sunrise* (1927).

# AUDIOVISUAL ESSAYS

## Opening choices: *Notorious*

This audiovisual essay looks at the first sequence of *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946) in the light of Bill Krohn's research into the film's production history (2000). It was intriguing to discover, after many years of teaching the opening in close analysis seminars, that the first sequence was re-shot and considerably re-modeled when the film was already in post-production. This was the most significant of a range of new material that Hitchcock shot after principal photography was completed – a freedom he would almost certainly not have enjoyed under David O Selznick's obsessive supervision but which came about as a consequence of Selznick selling the movie to RKO. On *Notorious*, as Krohn puts it, Hitchcock was effectively able to act as his own producer.

We set out to trace the major decisions Hitchcock took in the revised opening and to explore some of their far-reaching effects. We argue that in changing the first sequence when the whole tapestry of the film was becoming clear, Hitchcock was able to introduce and begin to interweave subjects, motifs and ways of seeing that had evolved as he shot the rest of the film.

As originally shot, the first sequence began inside the courtroom where John Huberman (Fred Nurney) is found guilty of treason; Alicia (Ingrid Bergman) was revealed as she stood up, and the camera pulled back with her as she left

the court and ran the gauntlet of the reporters, who would have been glimpsed rather than clearly seen (Krohn 2000: 94); finally, the camera left Alicia to disclose two watching agents.

The main dramatic material of the sequence is retained but its handling is transformed. The essay begins by following Hitchcock's revised choices in some detail; in three further sections it then examines relationships between the opening and the rest of the film. The first of these ('Male Groups') deals with developments from the all-male gathering that awaits Alicia as she leaves the court, and from her position as the daughter of a convicted Nazi spy – notably the implications for Alicia of being trapped in-between in both love and spy stories. The second and third look at how Hitchcock's decisions in staging and shooting the first sequence initiate key ways of understanding the film's relationships to its characters and their world. The second ('Ways of Seeing') examines the film's extensive and very varied use of the point of view figure and also outlines ways in which Alicia is from the outset the object of others' looks. In the third section ('Acts of Looking') we think about the film's varied ways of shaping our access to the action and the alertness these encourage to the implications of our own spectatorship. We look particularly at evaluative dimensions of looking, from differential relationships between alignment and engagement with the characters in the point of view figure, to the effects of the most independent of Hitchcock's camera movements.

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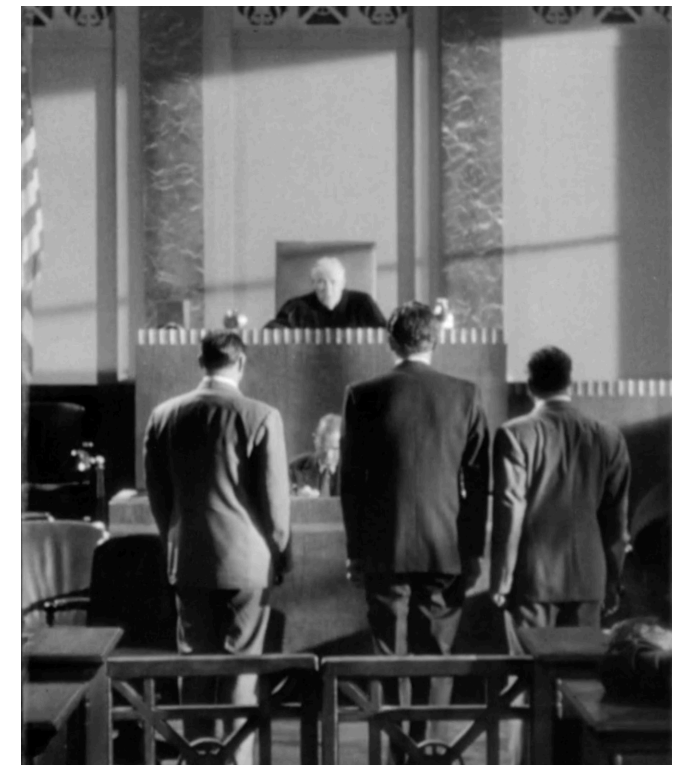
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Watch the audiovisual essay here:

<https://vimeo.com/185350060>



ABOVE Detail from the opening sequence of *Notorious* (1946).



# MOVIE

A JOURNAL OF FILM CRITICISM

## Credits: Issue 7

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With thanks to Jill Hollis, James Lloyd, Polly Perkins, Kerry Webb  
and the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication  
at the University of Reading.

ISSN 2047-1661

Contact the editors at [movie.journal@gmail.com](mailto:movie.journal@gmail.com).

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*Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* is a joint venture between the  
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