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Close to you: Notorious Proximity in Cinema

Cinema can effect thrilling moments in which an object seems far too proximate. Towards the end of Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) has locked herself into an escape pod, securely away from the alien predator who stalks the main ship. We share this tiny safe space with her. Suddenly, however, some of the polished metalwork near the hero suddenly moves, and we realize, too late and too locked in, that the killing machine has made its way, with terrifying proximity, into our sanctuary. Too close: not close as in 'shot up close' but close as in closer than we want it to be. Proximity as contamination. The screen moment is emotionally effective – horrifying – because the audience senses itself to be more and more incapable of drawing away the more the proximity of the creature makes for a fearful inversion of desire. Yet contamination can also be erotic and wondrous, as we see in an extraordinary use of focal proximity in *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), where Grace Kelly's Lisa, leaning over Jimmy Stewart's Jeff as he dozes, is seen by the camera from Jeff's ostensibly half-awake – soon to be fully awakened – point of view. A face coming close, closer, literally looming before us, yet moving slowly and mysteriously rather than with alarming speed (as with what Yuri Tsivian has discussed as the 'train effect' [in Bottomore 1999: 178]).

A small amount of lens diffusion is used by George Barnes so that what might otherwise have been a sharp focal separation between three focal planes – the tip of Grace Kelly's nose, her receding cheeks, her ears – is slightly flattened and unified. Her head is sculpted by the camera to have seeming three-dimensional roundness, yet not so much depth as to disorient the perceiver. Her leaning toward us and becoming so proximate kindles our desire, not to 'feel what she feels' or learn about the intimacies of her life, but to sense that face, smell that perfume, catch the soft glimmer of the pearls around her neck, surf through her blonde hair.

The Kelly close-up is doubly fictive. First, we are to take it as Lisa Carol Fremont approaching us (approaching Jeff, through whose eyes we ostensibly watch), not Grace Patricia Kelly approaching the lens. This is the normal displacement of storytelling. At the same time, we are not seeing Lisa as Jeff sees her. The vision offered in macro-close-up is different than would have been possible in real life, had we actually become the Jeff we are presently identifying with so closely. In real space, within the realm of real optical action, there is a limit to how proximal something can be before we actually cannot see it clearly at all. Lisa would be a blur. Sitting in the theatre we adopt not only Jeff's (idealised) point of view rather than James Stewart's, but also nothing more than a 'point of view', since full perceptual realism would have had her face soften to imperceptibility. The camera's lens can focus at f/1.2 or f/2, but the human eye cannot. Thus it is that in order to get a very, very close view of someone we must reside at a slight distance, and that the cinema can dislodge our orientation and thought by coming in yet closer, and also with astounding

clarity. When technicians of any sort (doctors, for example) make a macro-examination of some body part – when they come superhumanly close and for superhuman clarity – they are able to do so only by means of some magnifying device that acts roughly like a camera's lens, a device that can achieve focus on a very near plane (even closer than f1.2).[1]

The result makes it possible to approach characters with the naked eye at an *extraordinarily* close range, achieving a proximity that is possible only in cinema. We can be close to secret conversations, indeed have the impression we are inside the onscreen listener's ear. And yet the screen and speakers remain at a constant distance from the viewer. Wherever she or he is placed in relation to the screen, proximity can be effected only by illusion, since when we look at film we look at a flatness that pretends to be otherwise. Ortega notes how in the Quattrocento the painting on the canvas – usually involving landscape – was conceived as a flat plane, where size differentials signalled distance and closeness (Titian's *Noli Me Tangere* [1514], for example). The bigger an object was in relation to other objects, the more one was meant to take it as being close to the eye.

Macro-close-ups in which something of the screen content is at f/1.2 or f/2 are not plentiful in cinema, perhaps because they are radically dramatic. One of the most celebrated comes at the beginning of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), as we are placed near the body of the perishing Charles Foster Kane (Welles) when he exhales his final breath with the word, 'Rosebud'. To catch this word, not only

as sound but as physical production, we are placed near Kane's organ of expression, as any eager listener would be in a case like this one; yet our placement, thanks to cinema, is closer still than an eager listener's while also being abstract, since the listener would put his ear to the mouth (as, in reverse, with James Stewart and Daniel Gélin in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1956]) whereas in *Kane* we hover directly above the uttering mouth looking directly and only at the moving lips. Kane's mouth and only his mouth fills the entire screen. This has the effect of magnifying the man's articulation, thus from the film's very beginning highlighting how everything that comes out of his mouth is aimed far and wide with full amplification. But it is also a technical study, a revelation to the viewer that language – this film is all about language; what is said and not said – is fundamentally the shaping by the flesh and bones of the oral apparatus of air knowingly expelled: every consonant and vowel is a shaping, a sculpting, as Hamlet put it an 'eat[ing]' of the air, promise cramm'd' (III.ii.1976-77).

The macro shot here tags the man on his deathbed as supremely important, magnified already at our first meeting (magnified because of his reputation and because of the gravity of the moment in which we meet him). But beyond our appreciation of the character's sizeable figure in culture, there is an alienation effect, since we recognise ourselves to be gazing at the mouth of a total stranger, and gazing, furthermore, from a position closer than any we would take outside of the magical kingdom of the screen. We are viewing not the fact of Kane's speaking (which could be seen from many other distances) but *the act of speaking itself*. Not what is said, but that this mouth is saying it. Saying it here. Saying it now.

The shifting proximity offered by the cinematic image reflects a variable quality of proximity in our world as we live it, mirrors our ability to bring ourselves near to things and either suggests or implies the sorts of motive we might have in that movement. However, there is no necessary correlation between proximity and involvement. The extreme close shot in film, the macro-close-up, does not inevitably offer us emotional closeness to the subject. The camera can come physically close, whilst as viewers we feel distant, alien, outside the action. An example would be some of the portrait

shots of the hero (Marlon Brando) in Elia Kazan's *Viva Zapata!* (1952) where we seem near enough to the character's face to evaluate it morally while Zapata remains, somehow, a remote legend, outside our purview. Or Lionel Lindon's spectacular track-side shot of the engine slipping off the rails in Frankenheimer's *The Train* (1964). Conversely, one might feel (dangerously) close to action even though it is not being staged to a camera at close range: the teenybopper sex scene in Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), where it is only the crumpling of the mauve seamless, its sound recorded distinctly as David Hemmings, Jane Birkin, and Gillian Hills pull each other's clothes off, that makes us feel engaged in the action.

A technical proximity can be achieved using close-ups, as we can see in Griffith's *Lonedale Operator* (1911): there, a trainman's wrench, clasped in the heroine's hand, is held up for the camera to observe with special interest, thus providing the viewer with an opportunity to identify it as the device by which the girl smartly thwarted the robbers (by pretending it was a gun). This kind of proximity is principally informative; it does not tickle us with a (haptic) sense of being near the object, or bring a thrill of contact, but only lets the eye come into a field of vision where the object can stand out against the ground with special articulateness.

It is always technically possible to use the (wide-angle or close-up) lens for bringing the viewer close, but even equipped with a normal (50 mm.) lens the effect can be achieved. Three distinct and illustrative examples from Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) are worth considering here. In the first, Devlin and Alicia Huberman (Cary Grant, Ingrid Bergman), having become romantically attached through their involvement in a secret spy mission, are engaged in a kiss on the balcony of her Buenos Aires apartment (an interesting matte shot). The close-up here is from the top of the shoulders up, and this formatting is maintained through the whole long conversational moment as, planting her lips on his she suggests he might stay for dinner and he asks what they could eat and she proposes chicken and he says they would have to eat it with their hands. They are stepping inside (close-up maintained) toward the door when he takes her phone and calls his hotel for messages, still smooching and still in close-up. A message is read to him while he is still wrapped up with Alicia. Hitchcock's camera is directly engaging us in the protraction of the characters' commitment, fiendishly maintaining its close position even when, turning their backs, yet still in that close-up, they stride toward the door. As to the focal planes of the shot: we can see elements of the architecture shifting in the background just enough to remain convinced that we are in the same space, yet never lose detailed concentration on the two intertwined faces.[2]

Had this kiss been photographed in long or medium shot, or in numerous differently-angled shots cut together, we would still have been able to take explicit note of the bodies travelling across the room. But the protraction of the close-up makes us feel exceptionally proximate, more so, indeed, as the travelling shot continues over time. Our eyebeam grazes the conjoined faces in a way it wouldn't have dared to in a shorter, more typical arrangement. We are a threesome now. A threesome from which we cannot remove ourselves.

What gains clarity and emphasis in this travelling close-up, instead of the two bodies as characterological frames and instead of the salon space in which the feet are necessarily carving out a pathway, is our own lingering proximity. Our not being permitted to turn away. Not only are we meant to feel voyeuristic in penetrating the private space so boldly and for such an uninterrupted spate of time, we are meant to feel impassioned and imprisoned in our voyeurism – quite as turned on by seeing them up close and unendingly as they are presumably turned on by one another. We become lost in the moment. The proximity (through temporal stretching) is confounding. To be noted: these two kissers are on the sharp edge of a dangerous blade, and at this time disorientation – for them as for us – is no mere fairground thrill, it is a threat to life. At this moment, orientation and alignment are everything. And one could argue the extended kiss, seen up close this way, is centrally about disorientation, a disorientation that raises the spectre of orientation; orientation that begs the question of propriety or impropriety, that is, who is where?, who is going where?, who is aligned with what outside forces? Is Alicia siding with the enemy and here distracting Dev? Hitchcock's enemy here is a Nazi cadre secretly regrouping just after the War, early 1946. They sip their brandy dreaming and planning a *Neue Anschluss*. While Dev and Alicia kiss, where – not only in the room but in the world political scene – are they going, these two, one by one? And therefore, where are we being led to accompany them? All of the motoring story of the film is conveyed through the aesthetic effect of this lovemaking as observed from 'too' close, for 'too' long.

The other much-noted, thus *notorious*, *Notorious* close-up is one that demanded immense concentration and technical planning: the soirée shot in which, beginning on a high balcony and looking down at the jewelled and tuxedoed guests past a glittering chandelier, the camera spots Alicia with Sebastian immediately below and slowly, methodically, relentlessly – even, for some viewers, nauseatingly – swoops down through the stuffy air, in what Bill Krohn notes as 'a high-angle shot of the foyer filled with people' (2000: 98), until first Alicia's decorously clad body and then her arm and then her hand become more prominent in their turn, and finally a key being clasped inside that hand. Indeed, that key is a 'wrench' to turn the 'nut' of the plot, a key to the lock of the story vault. We must see it; we must see it for what it is; we must see that she has it; we must see that she has it secretly. And further, because in this voyage through space we make a move that can be sensed only as extraordinary, we must see

ourselves seeing; see that key as something toward which we (storygoers) need to gravitate, upon which we need to focus, and which we need to grasp as she is grasping it.

In order to offer a gradual, relentless narrowing of focus on that key, it would not have been necessary for Hitchcock to begin far up on the balcony, looking down and out at the whole flickering scene, *and then to sweep down in one single fluid uninterrupted shot* toward the valued object. A special rig had to be built to stabilise the camera and enable the vertical movement (see Krohn 2000: 98). And a focus puller had to be labouring all the way through the extended shot, because if at the beginning the camera's focus were to have been what it becomes at the end we would have seen nothing but air, surely not the chandelier and the top of the swirling staircase. Since the beginning of the shot is in distant perspective and we end in macro-close-up, the effective 'meaning' is that in a complex and busy social array a single tiny object in precise placement can have an earth-shattering significance (earth-shattering because, in this case, the key leads to a wine cellar; the cellar to bottles of wine; bottles to a single bottle; the single bottle to its own contents, far from wine; and the contents to an understanding of the Nazis' secret plot.[3]

A query about our experience of that masterful shot, however. As it begins, we are watching a party being hosted at a stranger's house (Sebastian is alien to us in several ways,

as well as being alien to the characters with whom we side) for the benefit of strangers. We are not really invited. It seems as though we have a bird's-eye view, a good opportunity for spying but not a way of being socially involved. When we come to the terminus of that shot – and, by implication, through its process as we travel *toward* that conclusion – do we feel ourselves to be more intrinsically connected to the event? Are we *closer* in being put so close? Closer to the problem, closer to the people, closer to the moment? And here, I think, as in the Griffith, we have a kind of apathetic proximity, a way of seeing a technical detail clearly enough to read it but not a way of cultivating any particular *feeling* about that detail taken in itself. We can be given information without a door being opened to special, emotional involvement. With this *Notorious* shot, it even helps not to be involved, so that we may follow the 'keyed' happenings as the tale unfolds. The key seems to grant magical entry to the wine cellar, surely, but also to the remainder of the film. We do not relate with enthusiasm to the key as object.

My third *Notorious* case for examination takes place upstairs in the Sebastian sitting room as, after a meal, the 'family' sit quietly for coffee. This is the third scene involving Alicia imbibing coffee: first on the patio, in a conventional medium close shot – we see her experiencing ill effects directly afterward; next, a coffee cup virtually empty, with Alicia striding down to the lawn to meet Sebastian (Claude Rains) and again experiencing ill effects – this shot is no

closer than the first. But now, Sebastian, Alicia, the mother (Leopoldine Konstantin), one of Sebastian's tuxedoed confederates (Reinhold Schünzel) are gathered civilly. Alicia is in a gilded throne at the rear of the shot; the villainous mother-in-law is at right on a sofa, with a silver coffee service at her knees. For some of the shots, such as this establishing one, the lens appears to be shooting at f/16, which means there is focal clarity from f/1.2, directly in front of the lens, the very closest possible proximity, all the way to the very furthest distance in the space. The mother-in-law and Alicia are in clear focus, physically speaking, although they occupy different focal planes. To obtain this clarity, the aperture is closed down (this is the effective meaning of f/16), and when this happens

the image will not register – because of the serious reduction of light coming through the aperture – unless a very great quantity of light is used on the set. In one of the shots in this sequence, however – notable and intriguing – there is to be seen in the extreme foreground, as though our hands and face are near enough to graze it, indeed as though, were we to be clumsy in reaching forward, we would spill it, a china coffee cup upon its saucer, quite dominating the perspective. This cup is certainly dramaturgically critical, because, as we should have learned by now (but Alicia hasn't), the coffee contains a slow-acting poison introduced by the diabolical Mme. Sebastian with the intent of gradually and unobtrusively

killing her. Hitchcock is saying, most bluntly, 'Keep your eye on this cup (which now, for the third time, I have taken pains to position near your eye).' But that is not all.

The closeness of that piece of chinaware produces for us a sense in which the eyebeam, as Ortega names it, reaches out and embraces the object in view, embraces, indeed, with such a fulsome engagement of sense that the thing embraced seems to offer resistance to the hand (to be, in Ortega's argument, 'real' [1968: 111]). Objects may be in view; even clearly in view; even in view with *special* clarity, without touching or being touchable, without seeming 'real' in this affecting way. The optical embrace allows us to fondle and consider the thing in itself, quite aside from its monumental narrative significance: the roundness and smoothness of the cup, the ornamentation, carefully painted, indicating the fruitful work of delicate, finely focused hands.[4] The side-on view presents the cup-as-container more centrally than it presents the contained substance, the cup as a means of delivery and storage, for keeping the coffee and poison inviolate in readiness for digestive use. Indeed, this film is full of containers, humans as well as objects, acting to contain secrets: the secret that Devlin and the intelligence cabal give Alicia to hold in; Sebastian and his cronies and their nefarious secret, held in with gracile gemütlichkeit; the mother's secret lust for power (over the secret plan, and over her pathetic son); Devlin's

necessarily keeping secret his true feeling for Alicia until any further secrecy will result in her death. Beautiful, and beautifully ornamented, bodies seen up close for their ability to hold what we cannot see.

Hitchcock used this kind of elaborate macro-close shot earlier, in *Spellbound* (1945), where we see a pistol at f/2, protruding away from a hand that is also partly visible very very near, directly in front of the lens. This pistol, this partial hand, and the Sebastian coffee cup were all special props

constructed so that the illusion of extreme close-up vision could be fostered in a shot actually made with a deeper focus than appears. Earlier in *Spellbound*, Dr. Brulov (Michael Chekhov) had approached John Ballantine (Gregory Peck), which is to say the camera, with a glass of milk, this, too, finishing in a macro-close-up where the imbibing of the milk is performed by the camera, which is to say, the character and the viewer together.[5]

In the Sebastian salon, we have a similar sense in the coffee-cup shot that an object *actually* seen at f5.6 or even f8 'swims toward the eye' (at f2). Oversized in fact and decorated to appear sufficiently sharp even when the principal focal plane was behind it, the cup could dominate through artificial construction. Yet it is worth emphasizing: Hitchcock could have made shots of the Sebastian salon showing people in their seats, a coffee cup on a table, furniture in detail, and so on, without ruining the script structure which calls for a poisoned cup (that dramatic convention, at least since *Romeo and Juliet).* What stands out with that cup is precisely its astounding proximity, its ostensibly being closer to the audience than things of the screen are normally taken to be.

A respectful homage to the Hitchcock focal technique is Spielberg's 'finger shot' in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) where a group of observers come upon a vast crowd of Hindus spread across an Indian plain murmuring in chorus a five-tone melody they have heard coming from the sky. 'Where did it come from?' a voice asks off-camera, and suddenly a bevy of fingers come up from below the screen and point upward together, one of these at f2, directly proximate to the lens and thus hyperdramatic in its sudden movement: 'up into the sky', we might conventionally read, in accordance with the diegesis of the moment; but it is actually up toward the vertical limit of screen space, as though to suggest the sound

came from above the film itself. Again here, the proximal object is informative rather than affective. A finger indicating an orientation, but not a finger as part of some definitive body with which we might form an association. Information is given here, not touch; an idea, not a taste. Further, the signal is simple, far simpler than the ostensibly simple coffee cup, which in consideration is a repository of secrets.

Yet the proximal shot moves far beyond the merely informative in the Act I finale, conversational surveillance of Dave (Keir Dullea) and Frank (Gary Lockwood) by HAL9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968). We see them talking privately, away from the computer's hearing, but then, in extreme close shot, the red mouth-eye of HAL apparently attending. And *then*: in macro-close-up, first on one astronaut and then on the other, a view of the talking mouth, seen in profile, enough detail being made visible (to HAL) for a lip reading. We are not intended to be reaching desirously or curiously toward the mouths, but this vision indicates the computer's power and interest, indicates the astronauts' naïveté and vulnerability. Touch is not invoked, since only the fact of the dialogue is made apparent, not what the astronauts are saying. As we could already see quite clearly that a private

conversation was in play, there is nothing informative for us about seeing the mouths up close. And in the macro-close-shot of HAL's surveilling 'eye', there is no reaction shot to give away informational clues as to its digestion of the moment.

The precise alienation produced in visions of the greatest proximity, such as this shot of HAL and that of Grace Kelly's face in *Rear Window,* is worth discreet study. In the case of the Grace Kelly close-up, we sense ourselves being brought very close to a persona, close enough to inspect microfeatures of the skin (the bullet holes in Jason Bourne's back) and clothing (Fry's cuff in *Saboteur* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1942]). With Kelly, her character approaches us; in many other circumstances, through a zoom or dolly-in, we approach the character. In all these cases, were we to take up a viewing position so near in everyday life we would be self-conscious. As Kelly leans forward toward the lens, we sense ourselves slightly distanced from her, not straightforwardly intimate. She is a curious stranger. She lures, but we must not usurp her lover's position. The intimacy is to be read objectively, as a part of the diegetic construction involving her with Jeff: it is with him that she is diegetically intimate. But at the same time, close to us she seems intimate; or calls up a dream of intimacy.

As to the human face up close, how seriously do we wish to study, at the closest possible range, any such object, any human face at all? And the answer, rather directly, is, not very seriously. When we say we wish to 'come close' or 'be close', we do not mean proximate. At a critical moment in Sidney Lumet's *The Prince of the City* (1981), there is a full-screen macro-close-up of Carmine Caridi, looking straight into his face as it occupies all the available visual space; we are so desperately close there is no remedy but to perform a kind of medical inspection, something that might border on the erotic or the occupational but that is finally neither. It is partly because of its diegetic placement in the action stream that the shot is disturbing, but only partly so. Also working upon the viewer here is the sense of seeing another person *too closely and too well.* Or: taking up a mode of seeing in which one is pointedly blocked from knowledge and experience by the vitiating distraction of proximity.

With Caridi, we are confronted with a mask of degenerate fear and hopelessness, a facing off with the void. The sweat dripping down the face seems to be flowing from the eyes, and the eyes are two moist lakes, overflowing their banks in a natural storm. A confrontation with nature for us, then, and a subjection to nature's overwhelming power. With Kelly, she is a goddess about to devour us, a creature of immense proportions navigating our way. Her image, this disturbing proximity, was made to be seen on theatre screens measuring thirty-five or forty feet wide and more than twenty feet high, notwithstanding that it was not a VistaVision production; even in the Academy ratio the image was immense for the comparatively Lilliputian folk who ogled it.

The things of proximal cinema have existence in a kind of ultradiegetic domain, beyond the region of story action proper yet not so far beyond as to be resident in audience space. They strike us – before we attempt to decode their content and positioning – as phantom images lifted out of the film yet still belonging to the film, inhabitants of two spaces at once, or as elements that vibrate rapidly between our position watching and the characters' position playing out. Perhaps only part of a figure seems to emerge, a trick of the light, a matter of angling, but in emerging it enters that indeterminate space, the space of the imagination, neither easy to understand nor convenient to accept. The shaping organ of cinema is a complexity involving performers, décor, lens, film stock, processing, and editing; and the 'air' expelled in the sacred utterance is light itself. This, in cinema always. But in the proximal moment the light bears a special cargo, a shaping we have not taught ourselves fully to recognise.

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1 See also Pye (2010) who sees in the close-up a kind of restriction, not an expansion, of the viewing experience. Many other scholars have written about camera and spectatorial vision in *Rear Window*, including John Belton, Bill Krohn, William Rothman, and Murray Pomerance.

2 See the stable shot in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) for a good example of a protracted kiss where the background does not seem to remain coherent.

3 Hitchcock's gift to us is a kind of Jamesian perspective, with a social arrangement being defined and mobilised by way of a single tiny object, by the telling detail. Even more here: that telling detail is brought by intensive proximity into virtual contact with our imaginary hand, and in a voyage that began on the balcony (far off). The movement is the story.

4 Theorists of cinema and tactility, a growing field, have given a different sort of consideration to the place of haptic events in cinemagoing. Worth examining are Laura U. Marks (2000: especially Ch. 3) and Jennifer M. Barker (2009). Marks's attention to the relationship between hapticity and images that are either intentionally out of focus or blurred, while it holds its own interests, restricts our attention to image 'tricks', as I would call them, for 'faking' or 'imitating' an everyday sensibility in the viewer. The power of the proximal shot as I am discussing it is precisely that nearness alone brings us into a tactile zone, operates proxemically.

5 In the 1970s and later a shot like this one might have been made using a diopter lens, which allows for close-up and very deep focus in a single shot simultaneously. Many films show it, and a notable example can be found in a close-up conversation between Sean Connery and Kevin Costner in Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables* (1987). The diopter here helps create the illusion for the audience that the two actors are equally touchable, when they are not.

'A fair curve from a noble plan':
Certain Women

I.

Shortly before the midpoint of Kelly Reichardt's 2016 film *Certain Women* there is an expression on an actor's face, an expression that is held – by actor and camera – for about two seconds; just long enough to be more than momentary (not all moments, I think, are simply momentary). I am attracted and intrigued by this expression and by this moment. The image on this page is one frame from, or of, that moment (a moment excerpted from a moment):

I feel as if I know exactly what it feels like to give someone such a look, although I have no idea if I look like Michelle Williams in doing so. Presumably I do at least a little bit, or the expression wouldn't be legible, which is to say that we can understand facial expressions 'from the outside' only because we can comprehend something of how they would feel 'from the inside'. When watching this moment, as part of this sequence, I connect more closely to my feeling of 'expressing such an expression' than to my memories of having had such glances shot my way (though these moments, too, must also play into my experience of the glance). This, perhaps, explains something of the pleasure that seeing this expression gives me; if I felt myself more clearly the object of the gaze then it would be a much more awkward and, perhaps,

a less pleasurable experience. It might be possible to stop there: this moment is interesting and pleasurable because an actor skilfully evokes a familiar emotion (namely, irritation and anger at a loved one putting their foot in it). The pleasure comes from some combination of recognition and distance: the emotion is familiar (I have felt it), but I am not feeling it now (and thus in enjoying this expression I am able, to an extent, to laugh at myself).

What I have said so far has barely made reference to the narrative context in which this moment takes place, nor even to the character's name. For some scholars, this is to be expected, because – in reaction against more traditional aesthetic notions of the relationship between parts and wholes – it is characteristic of a distinctly cinephilic form of appreciation that the pleasure of a moment does *not* derive from its connection to the wider work. Rashna Wadia Richards, for example, suggests in her book *Cinematic Flashes* that there is something of a zero-sum game between investment in a

film's narrative, or absorption in its diegesis, and the specific attractions of unusual moments. She writes that 'cinephiliac moments may be regarded as moments of cinematic excess, insofar as they surpass their diegetic requirements', which is to say that such moments 'offer tiny glimpses of points where the coherent system of representation breaks down' (2013: 24). Comparably, albeit in less forceful language, Tom Gunning argues that 'if we dwell on the sense of a *moment* in its singularity, it seems less to evoke the momentum of a plot than something that falls outside the story and its pace' (2010: 5). I have no wish to deny the interest of such moments, or of thinking about moments in this way, and my intentions align in a way with Richards' in that I am not interested in 'moments that are designed to be unforgettable' (24); the moment with which I began is, instead, something smaller and quieter that nonetheless has the potential of grabbing and arresting the attention. I do, however, wish to argue that such moments need not undermine 'the coherent system of representation',

or thrive in its gaps or fissures, but can instead derive strength and intensity from narrative and diegesis, as well as intensifying them (and our involvement in them) in return. In his book *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees*, Christian Keathley makes the suggestion that 'if the cinephiliac moment is among the most intense of cinematic experiences, it seems to draw its intensity partly from the fact that it cannot be reduced or tamed by interpretation' (Keathley 2006: 9). The thrust of this passage might seem to be similar to Richards' argument, and to be that the cinephiliac moment somehow escapes or eludes interpretation, that it represents an excess for which any system – or pattern – can only be inadequate. I want to suggest that we might also, however, read Keathley's remark not as implying that interpretation is hamstrung – or outrun – by such moments, but that they can serve as opportunities for demonstrating that 'reduction' or 'taming' need not (indeed *should* not) be the aim of interpretation.

My own aims are perhaps a little closer to those expressed by George Toles when he writes, in an article entitled 'Rescuing Fragments: A New Task for Cinephilia', that he is

> not suggesting that the stray luminous passages in otherwise disposable or broken narratives ought to be scavenged catch-as-catch-can with no regard for the film worlds which engendered them. […]. The fragments warrant being respectfully placed and considered within their narrative context; it is, after all, the *felt* combination of a given moment with its surrounding circumstances that allows it to 'lift off' emotionally. (2010: 161)

Rather than pursuing Toles' focus on the ways in which 'the brief passages that rise above the rest are also, arguably, in communion with each other, sharing a higher pitch of awareness and a secret network of correspondences' (161), however, I am particularly interested in how moments such as this form part of a wider whole – in their relations to what surrounds them, rather than with other 'special' moments – and specifically in how they contribute not only to our experience of the plans or schemes of the characters represented in them but also to what we might call the schemes of the films of which they are a part (which is to say the aesthetic, ethical, and other matters towards which they are directed).[1] We need not think in terms of a zero-sum game between character and

form, in which a film that focusses on character must do so at the expense of its formal structure, and vice versa; instead, moments such as Gina's glare might prompt us to consider the ways form can express character, or how character can shape form. Another way of putting this might be to say that form does not *contain* action so much as it *consists of action*. If characters *are*, ultimately, what they *do*, this suggests that revisions of some common assumptions about the relationship between character and form are in order.

This article is, then, concerned both with a critical discussion of certain aspects of *Certain Women*, focusing on and radiating out from a single moment, and with the place of this moment in relation to the expressive patterns that inform it and to which it contributes. What, then, is the place of the moment in question? The segment of the film from which it is drawn is the second of the three lightly intersecting stories that make up *Certain Women*. Michelle Williams plays Gina, a businesswoman, wife, and mother, who plans to build a

house in the Montana countryside for herself and her family, although, as she says, they 'can't really move out here full time, at least not until our daughter gets through high school'. She is sitting in the front room of a bungalow belonging to an elderly man named Albert (René Auberjonois) from whom, as part of her plan for the house, Gina wants to buy some 'authentic' sandstone that he has in his front yard. The dirty look that she is shooting is directed at her husband, Ryan (James Le Gros). Although Albert has agreed to give the sandstone to them, Ryan has just told him that he doesn't have to sell the stone if he doesn't want to, thus threatening what had seemed to be the successful achievement of this part of Gina's plan.

Certain Women is based on some works of literature, specifically on three short stories by Maile Meloy, which Reichardt adapted herself. The corresponding moment in 'Native Sandstone', the story on which this segment of *Certain Women* is based, both does and does not match its counterpart in the film. The dialogue preceding Gina's glance is almost

identical, apart from changes to the characters' names: "'You don't have to sell it if you don't want to," Clay said. "Susan wants a house that's *authentic*."' (Meloy 2005: 36). In the film, Ryan says: 'You don't have to sell it if you don't want to, it's just that Gina wants this new house to be *authentic*.' The sentence in the short story that directly follows, and that corresponds to the moment under discussion, however, is: 'He grinned at her and she frowned.' (36)

Ryan certainly does grin – and not just smile – at Gina:

Ryan's raised eyebrows, furrowed forehead, widened eyes, and toothy grin all take his expression to the edge of the ridiculous, overstating his evident desire – and obvious invitation – for Gina to agree with him. I think we are to understand that by offering Albert the chance to back out, Ryan hopes in fact to convince him that he is not being railroaded into parting with the sandstone; the risk that Albert will indeed withdraw his offer is a calculated risk, on Ryan's part, intended to make this outcome less likely.[2] Gina, however, is furious at the prospect that what she thought to be in her grasp might now, owing to her husband's actions, slip through her fingers. We might also note that their differing strategies and reactions contribute to the sense that the stone means more to Gina than to Ryan. This fact is not simply something he accepts; he subtly deflects responsibility onto her: 'Gina wants this new house to be authentic'. It is also important to remember that the opening scene of the film shows us that Ryan is having an affair with Laura Dern's character, a lawyer also called Laura, and that he has, in a rather cowardly fashion, recently attempted to break off, or at least pause, their relationship. (Laura receives

a phone call in which he says, evidently disappointed, that he was expecting her voicemail, and that, 'well, it's just my situation being what it is, I just think, maybe ...') So we might expect Ryan to go out of his way to help Gina achieve her goals, yet he cannot bring himself fully to acknowledge those goals as also his goals, perhaps because he is all too aware that for him they are merely instrumental, a means of rescuing his marriage. What exactly lies behind Gina's desire for the stone is, I think, rather more opaque, or at least difficult to pin down; later I will suggest that one reason for this is that her reasons are not entirely clear to herself.

It is, anyway, crucial to the effect of the film, and to what makes this moment memorable, that Gina does *not* frown, as Susan does in the story. Or that she somehow frowns without frowning, by freezing her face and intensifying her gaze – the muscles around her eyes and mouth tauten, without (in direct contrast to her husband) any furrowing of her brow. In contrast to his exaggerated expression, hers is on the edge of not being an expression at all; she is shooting him an unmistakably dirty look, and yet the differences between this look and a neutrally inexpressive glance are subtle. This contrast contributes both to the eloquence of the moment in expressing their relationship and to its comedy. A novel could of course explore such a pair of expressions, such a moment, in great detail and with great power, but to do so would require the reader to spend a period of time reading about the moment described that greatly exceeded the fictional duration of that moment itself. The sparseness of Meloy's prose has its own strengths, but our highly developed ability to interpret the facial expressions of other human beings means that only in the film can the moment in question be expressed with such nuance and detail, and yet still be represented *as a moment*. In his 1921 book *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui, un nouvel état d'intelligence*, the twenty-three year old Jean Epstein compared film with modern literature, and claimed that although film was an 'emerging, still-hesitant mode of expression', it 'nonetheless stands as the most subtle one we have ever known, the most attuned to the moment' ([1921] 2012: 271). Film may have long since 'emerged', but its attunement to the moment remains undiminished, as this particular moment helps to illustrate.

II.

Critics routinely connect Reichardt's films to an aesthetic of the long take, and indeed she does make a powerful and distinctive use of long takes (perhaps most obviously in *Certain Women* during the scene in the film's third segment in which the rancher [Lily Gladstone] drives away from her final brave but disappointing and embarrassing encounter with Elizabeth [Kristen Stewart]). The sequence from which our moment comes involves three characters in a single room and could easily have been filmed in a single take. Instead, Reichardt – who edited *Certain Women* herself – uses different editing practices to move in and out of subtly different narrational modes (she once remarked that 'the language of the film is outside the dialogue. It's where the cut is' [cited in Holmlund 2016: 265]). Close attention to the way that this sequence is edited will clarify our sense of the way that editing can serve both to isolate moments of a film, precisely *as* moments, and also to connect them with, or embed them within, the wider film of which they are a part.

Visually, there are three distinct groupings of characters used in this scene. Sometimes we can see all three characters simultaneously; at other times we see Gina and Ryan together and Albert separately; and at still other times all three characters are seen separately. After Albert comes to the door and invites Gina and Ryan in, we see the three characters together in a single take; a mobile camera follows them as they cross the room to sit down. This take ends by framing Gina and Ryan together on a sofa, establishing them as a unit distinct from their host, Albert. There then follows a shot / reverse-shot sequence between Albert (seen in one-shot) and the two-shot of the couple on the sofa. During the last two-shot in this sequence Albert stands up and moves into view. The camera moves so that we see the couple from behind the sofa; Gina's face is visible but we can only see the back of Ryan's head, as Gina stage-whispers to Ryan her response to Albert's story of having had a fall ('Poor Albert!'). Gina gets up to look out of the window, and we see her view, including her reflection in the window and some of the crucial sandstone. When Albert returns and sits down again, Gina asks about the stone for the first time (something we know her to feel to

be an imposition, since she earlier asked Ryan to be the one to broach the subject; presumably he felt that this request was itself an imposition on him). Gina's request, which clumsily and transparently attempts to pretend that her aims align with Albert's ('Albert, so we were wondering about the sandstone in the front yard, and if you'd be willing to sell it to us. I mean, if you wanted to get rid of it we … we'd take it off your hands.') is seen from the same behind-the-sofa setup as before, but when we cut to Albert listening to her, we have entered an extended series of one-shots of each of the three characters, mostly filmed from fixed camera positions, that eventually ends with a return to the two-shot of the couple on the sofa, after Albert's question 'When do you need it?'.

The scene thus moves, gently and unobtrusively but rigorously, from visually representing all three characters as some kind of group, to setting the couple off against Albert, and finally to isolating them as three distinct individuals. We move, that is to say, from a 'three', to a 'two plus one', and eventually

to 'three ones', after which the pattern is reversed with a return to the two-shot of the couple and one-shots of Albert after which, as Gina and Ryan leave, we once more, albeit briefly, see all three characters together in a single frame. This editing strategy emphasises the complexity of the three-way conversation that is going on here. Its symmetry also serves to increase the scene's intensity as it approaches its denouement, and then elegantly diffuse the tension somewhat as the scene draws to a close. As the scene progresses, the editing and framing gradually isolate the characters further from one another, making us reconstruct their various relationships in our minds, as the film increasingly denies us the chance to see both action and reaction simultaneously (although at times we do hear one character and see another). The scene's range of intricately ironic patterns concerning what the characters (with varying degrees of self-awareness and self-consciousness) assume about each other, and assume that the other is assuming about them, are thereby emphasised. I have already discussed Gina

and Ryan's different attitudes to the accomplishment of Gina's plan. Albert, for his part, gives something of a *performance* of a confused old man, responding with what might appear to be non-sequiturs (about getting someone called Kyle to help build the house, for example); it later becomes clear that he was thinking hard about the sandstone all along. The differing priorities of the differing characters are often expressed in patterns of listening and not listening. For example, it is clear from the play of the muscles around her mouth that Gina's delight about Albert's acquiescence concerning the stone (a delight which she is attempting somewhat to repress, to avoid breaking into a grin) is distracting her from, even making her impatient with, Albert's story about the origin of the stone (it was formerly the old schoolhouse) – and this despite her professed interest in authenticity. Albert, for his part, has no interest in Gina's expressions of interest in authentic materials, and cuts right across her – 'edits' her dialogue himself – to announce that the stone was already there when, in 1966, he and his now dead brother built the house in which he still lives, but which remains unfinished; it lacks a back porch, for example. (It is worth noting that Albert tends very much to direct his remarks and his questions towards Ryan, not Gina, thereby hinting at a generationally conditioned misogyny, or at least discomfort around women. The film is delicate enough to suggest this without upsetting the balance of the scene, in which it is Gina's ethical shortcomings with respect to Albert that are most at issue.)[3] Albert states that since he is now seventy-six he is unlikely ever to finish the house. Giving up the stone, therefore, represents the evaporation of a scheme that Albert has had for half a century, the surrender of the unrealistic but comforting belief that it might one day still be enacted. (It is not clear that Albert actually intended to use the stone as part of his own house, but it still serves as a reminder of unfulfilled plans that are now, he admits to himself, unfulfillable.)

It is in the context of all this that Gina's glare at Ryan takes place. The look is just starting to form on her face as we hear Ryan begin to say that Albert does not have to sell the stone; we then cut to Ryan, who – as we have already seen – grins ingratiatingly at Gina after making his remark. Reichardt then cuts back to Gina's dirty look, which barely changes across a

two-second shot after which we cut to Albert, asking rather curtly, 'When do you need it?' The editing thus isolates Gina's expression so as almost to epitomise it, and in so doing corroborates Jean Epstein's sense that '[o]n the screen, the essential quality of a gesture is that it does not come to an end' ([1921] 2012: 273). It is as if the editing separates the gesture so that we can imagine it lasting forever; we do not see it come into being or pass away, so that this one moment is crystallised in our memory. But this isolation does not *remove* it from its narrative context; on the contrary, it *intensifies* its relation to this context, enriches this moment and what it encapsulates about the relationships at play and their shifting dynamics.

III.

One could, in fact, describe the editing (and generally the rhetoric) at this point in the film as broadly classical, in that their effects seem intended to be largely subliminal, or at the very least are not foregrounded; the editing does not call attention to itself in 'modernist' fashion.[4] The narration is also classical in its concentration on plausibly real human beings, their interactions and motivations; there may be ellipses in the narrative, but these are all relatively easily filled, and do not generate the kind of aesthetic and epistemological dilemmas we find in the canonical examples of modernist cinema. But there is something of a puzzle in the critical reaction to Reichardt's work, in that this classicism is underplayed; the films tend instead to be received as instances of modern American realist art cinema, with the focus put on the relations – and tensions – between their realism and their status as high art. E. Dawn Hall, for example, states unambiguously that Reichardt 'rejects mainstream form' (2018: 143). Elena Gorfinkel, for her part, argues that 'Reichardt's autonomous creative practice and relatively low budgets have linked her style with international art cinema, both historical (neorealism) and contemporary (slow cinema)' and that she makes the kind of 'slow films [that] evacuate eventfulness, in the pursuit of dedramatised scenarios in which incident replaces event, and sheer profilmic happening challenges structures of legible or discrete causality' (2016: 123 & 124). There is certainly an initial plausibility to this account in relation

to much of Reichardt's work, and particularly as applied to the film Gorfinkel concentrates on, *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), her reading of which I find broadly persuasive. The danger, however, is that, precisely because *Certain Women* is unlikely to strike anyone familiar with Reichardt's films as a radical stylistic departure, one might – if one isn't careful – assume that such an interpretation of her aesthetics is equally applicable here.[5] But – to take one example – does the rancher's labour in *Certain Women* seem to relate to 'the linkage of quotidian activity and forms of arduous, painful labour with temporalities of exhaustion and dispossession for subjects on the margins of American life' (Gorfinkel 2016: 124-5)? The answer can at most be a qualified 'yes and no'. The rancher is certainly, from any standard perspective, 'on the margins of American life', but it is also made clear that she enjoys and, at least to a degree, fulfils herself in such labour; she has spent time with horses, for pleasure, since she was a girl. *Certain Women* often facilitates our understanding of character by means of, and in relation to, action in ways that indicate that Reichardt's style is more amenable to an at least relatively classical treatment of cinematic narration than accounts such as Hall's and Gorfinkel's might lead us to expect.

Certainly, motivation is unclear at various points in *Certain Women* (both to the audience and to the characters themselves), but this is not quite the same thing as a challenge to 'structures of legible or discrete causality'. When we first meet Gina she is on a run near to the site of the planned house in the country, but she is also smoking. The way that she buries her cigarette after finishing it and later sucks on a

breath mint indicate that she is hiding her smoking from her family. It would be reasonable to assume that they know her once to have smoked, and so that what she is concealing is a failure to see a plan through, namely to quit smoking and stay quit. After running through the lion's share of its three narratives one after another, *Certain Women* concludes by returning briefly to each narrative, in the same order as they first appeared. When we return to Gina and Ryan, they are having a lunch party with friends at the site of their projected new house. When we last see Gina, she is sitting with a glass of wine, smoking openly, after which the film leaves this narrative thread for the last time with a shot of the sandstone, now piled up near the site of the future house, at which Gina is gazing. It is unclear whether this is better read as an image of acceptance (Gina has come to terms with herself, and part of that self involves being a smoker) or resignation (she has simply given up trying to pretend that she is different from how she actually is).[6] Does the neat pile of sandstone – as opposed to the shapeless piles that lay outside Albert's house – represent the next stage on the way to the house, the midway point of a plan that is being fruitfully exercised, or will this pile still lie here decades from now, as Albert's did? All these possibilities are in play, but expressed in this way as mutually exclusive options they are too crude; the answer lies somewhere between them, or in their mutual plausibility.

We gain the most insight into Gina's character, I believe, if we see something like these possibilities as also available to her, as possibilities. She may not know quite why she is so determined to build the house, but the tautness, toughness, and defensiveness that characterises her earlier in the film (see the way she tends to fold her arms across her chest) has somewhat diminished; it seems she has, at the very least, developed a flexibility that may help her to be more relaxed about not knowing, at every moment, exactly what she wants and how to get it. Just as was the case when we were first introduced to her, our last glimpse of Gina is accompanied by the sound of quail asking, as we have learned from Albert, 'How are you?' The response – 'I'm just fine' – is pointedly missing. The resonance of this is complicated, however, by the fact that we have seen that both Albert and Gina are familiar with this piece of folklore, and thus it forms the only real connection

between the two of them; looking at the sandstone and listening to the quail Gina may well be thinking of Albert as much as of herself, and thus could be said – in a more straightforward reading of the character's 'journey' – to have learned a lesson about selfishness and empathy (and their relation to self-acceptance) that she seemed, earlier, to be very much in need of.

Certain Women is (like all narrative films) a film about moments and their connections; the two main ways moments can be connected are as patterns or – if those patterns represent the way in which a goal may be achieved – as plans. A number of characters in the film have what we might call an impulse to a scheme, the feeling of having a plan, but not actually anything close to a fully worked-out plan. The two crucial instances of this bookend Gina's narrative; they are Fuller's (Jared Harris) hostage situation in the first segment and the rancher's trip to Livingston in the third. Both of these seem to me to be instances of activities directed towards goals (Fuller

wants to get his insurance money; the rancher wants to see Elizabeth again; these desires are what motivate their actions) without quite being *plans*, because plans need to involve a sense of how exactly the actions will bring about the goal. Both Fuller and the rancher, however, select actions where the need simply to take the next step precludes any genuine planning or reflecting. (The hostage situation descends into a ludicrous attempt to escape from the police, while the rancher's need simply to *find* Elizabeth allows her to avoid spending any time thinking about what exactly she will do when she does find her.) Gina's situation is a little different because it does involve making detailed plans for her house – but this in itself turns out to be something of an evasion, distracting her from, for example, really dealing with her relationships with her husband and daughter.

It may of course turn out that we are able to discover what our plans 'really' are only by embarking on them, even if we are incapable of formulating them in a completely lucid fashion.

Robert Pippin articulates this kind of possibility in explaining the sense of agency that he finds in Nietzsche (among other philosophers):

> I may start out engaged in a project, understand my intention as X, and over time, come to understand that this first characterization was not really an accurate or a full description of what I intended; it must have been Y, or later perhaps Z. And there is no way to confirm the certainty of one's 'real' purpose except *in* the deed actually performed. (2010: 78)

I think something like this is true of Fuller's intentions with regard to his hostage-taking, and what he comes to realise about them later in prison, though I do not have space to explore that aspect of the film here. One could also argue that *Certain Women* exhibits a rather Hegelian attitude to agency, along the lines described by Terry Pinkard, according to which:

> *we come to be* the kinds of agents we are; we *actualize* certain self-interpretations in the ways we carry them out in practice, and this 'negative' stance toward ourselves – of our never being just what we are, except insofar as we interpret ourselves as being that type of agent and sustain that type of interpretation – inflicts a kind of 'wound,' a *Zerissenheit*, a manner of being internally torn apart that demands healing. (2007: 5)

To be an agent both interpretation and action are crucial; it is not that we simply have to interpret correctly or can choose action *instead of* interpretation. Neither, of course, is it the case that we have some kind of abstract 'true self' that we simply have to discover, but nor are we free to be whoever we want to be, because becoming 'the kinds of agents we are' is a practical matter, and also involves who others take us to be. Pinkard goes on to argue that for Hegel 'the status of "being an agent" is not a metaphysical or empirical fact about us; it is a socially conferred, normative *status*, and becoming an agent is to be construed as an achievement, not as a metaphysical or empirical property we suddenly come to possess' (7). According to this way of thinking, then, who we are involves at least three things – who we *think* we are, what *we do*, and who *others* think we are, and none of these three factors can be discarded or simply equated with who we 'really' are. (It wouldn't make

sense, for example, to say that who we are is only a matter of what we do, because we only do what we do because of who we think we are.) One key distinction concerns those situations in which acting is a way of *avoiding* confronting 'what we are', and those in which it is a way of *accepting or becoming* who we are; the former just attempts to conceal or deny Hegel's 'wound', while the latter attempts to come to terms with it, if not necessarily actually to heal it. The rancher's drive to Livingstone is intriguing because it seems at one and the same time to be both a means of avoidance (we might think of her purposeless wandering and looking in shop windows as a way of avoiding the difficult cognitive activity of self-interpretation) and of becoming (because it is a proactive attempt to achieve something, even if it deliberately does not ask how exactly it will achieve this).

I hope it is clear that my discussion above of the last glimpse that the film gives us of Gina could also be explored in these terms. Gina's scheme to get the stone represents, it seems, one of the most worked-out plans in the film. If so, the crucial thing is that Albert sees right through it. Gina's plan has been predicated on telling herself that she (and her plan) have his best interests at heart (what use could Albert possibly have for the stone?), all the time, of course, knowing at least at some level that this is not true. Her commitment to authenticity is not itself authentic, or at least not fully so. This may in fact be where some of the venom behind her dirty look comes from; it can be painful to be confronted with the gap between one's intentions and what one has been telling oneself about them. When she and Ryan take their leave, Gina says to Albert: 'no more falling down', to which he replies: 'I don't plan to'. This is of course a joke, but how exactly does it work? It once again shows up Gina; her statement takes the form of a fairly familiar idiom in which a wish ('I hope you don't fall down') is expressed in the form of a mock-admonishment, as if Albert was responsible for falling over. It is perhaps a little cruel (or at least unsporting) of Albert not to play along with this idiom's game, but also entirely reasonable, because Gina is assuming an intimacy and a mutual understanding that is not merited; she is not, for example, actually promising to help, should he fall over again. Albert's statement is also, of course, literally true (he doesn't plan to fall over), which serves merely

to underline that this makes no difference to the likelihood of it happening again; nobody's future can be entirely a matter of planning.

The relationship between agency and intersubjectivity in *Certain Women* is frequently expressed in terms of small promises that are broken.[7] Laura promises Fuller to tell the police he's got a gun so that he will have time to escape, but immediately tells them he is unarmed; we also learn later that she has promised to write to him in prison but has not done so. Gina and Ryan break their promise to their daughter to go home straightaway by visiting Albert to ask about the stone, and Elizabeth breaks some kind of implicit promise in not telling the rancher that she's given up teaching the night class. It turns out that, just as sometimes one simply finds oneself acting without a detailed plan, sometimes it is best if such promises are simply kept, without any complicated reasoning behind them; Fuller tells Laura that it doesn't matter if she

has nothing to say, it's best just to write ('It doesn't have to be a tome').

Authenticity, then, doesn't seem to require elaborate planning. This is something that Gina might seem to come to understand, but to say that is not to say that she experiences any kind of dramatic moment of self-revelation; driving away from Albert's house, she still says to Ryan: 'I thought he knew he wasn't gonna use it' (which is of course what she *wanted* to think). She doesn't want to give it back, though: 'Someone else will just take it' (which still sounds like a self-justifying excuse). Thus: 'We just have to think of something really good to do with it; then it won't feel so sad to take it.' When they return to collect the stone, Gina waves at Albert and he – rather pointedly – does not wave back. It might, then, be possible to read Gina's final act of staring at the stone as her attempting to think of just such a thing ('something really good to do with it'), but the degree of relaxation that

finally appears on her face at this point – the absence of either triumph or determination in her expression – seems to me to be a hint that something about Gina's attitudes *to* plans (which is to say something about the kind of agent she is), rather than just her plans themselves, has changed or is in the process of changing. Perhaps the real importance of the plan to build a house was simply to have a plan, to occupy, distract, and drive herself. That plan has not necessarily been abandoned but it is the prospect of the house itself, rather than the plan to build one, that is – just – beginning to come alive, and in the process Gina is becoming more authentically who she is.**8**

IV.

Although I have argued that, in *Certain Women* at least, there is an under-recognised classicism in Reichardt's work, I have also been arguing that *Certain Women* might be said rather to undercut, or at the very least to complicate, the notions of the centrality to classical narration of goal-directed action most famously expressed by the likes of David Bordwell because, in Reichardt's film, desires and actions are not straightforwardly connected. Thus, the conclusion of Gina's narrative could be described as something of an 'open' ending, but it does not seem to me primarily directed at, say, a demonstration of the artificiality of narrative closure, or even the need for every viewer to contribute their own interpretation of what is shown; its openness tells us something about its protagonist. Characters can, as I think is the case here, be clear *that* they want something, or want to do something, but not entirely clear *why*. (Drawing on Stanley Cavell's observation that 'Hildy, in *His Girl Friday*, does not know why she has come back to see Walter' [1981: 163], Alex Clayton deftly teases out some of the crucial subtleties that can be obscured by thinking too rigidly in terms of characters' goals, even in the most classical of instances [2011: 32-37]; Robert Pippin has expertly explored related questions in another set of films that at least border on classical narration [2012].) Beyond this, I want to claim that there is a certain kind of reflexivity in *Certain Women* between the schemes of the film's characters, and what I suggested at the beginning of this article that we might call the film's own schemes. But for all this, however, it

is not a particularly – certainly not an aggressively – 'modernist' reflexivity.

We might find this reflexivity, in the first place, in the film's title (which comes from Reichardt, not Meloy). The film concerns 'certain' women: not just any old women, not extraordinarily unusual women, just a *particular* choice of individual women. But the irony is that in many ways these women are not that 'certain', in the sense of being clear and confident about themselves and their purposes. Or, rather, what certainty they have is – in each of the three narratives – somehow challenged and complicated by the ensuing events. In order for us to understand this – in order for the characters' actions and decisions to be comprehensible and interpretable – the film requires a certain realism, or naturalism, or perhaps neorealism. For Katherine Fusco and Nicole Seymour, in their book-length study of Reichardt's films,

> Reichardt updates neorealism with a relentless antisentimentality, retaining its 'revolutionary humanism' (Bazin, 'Cinematic Realism', 33) even as she alienates viewers from her characters through a focus on either unlikable or opaque protagonists. By making her characters less lovable than their neorealist predecessors, Reichardt draws attention to contemporary society's unwillingness to care for those with whom it may be difficult to identify. (2017: 23)

Certain Women was only released as Fusco and Seymour were completing their manuscript, and thus does not receive extended discussion. But it is easy to see Gina as another example of a somewhat opaque and certainly potentially unlikeable protagonist. (Hall argues that this aspect of the character is intensified in the film, that she receives 'a more sympathetic characterization in Meloy's story than Reichardt allows on screen' [2018: 137].)

The second sentence from Fusco and Seymour cited above seems to claim an allegorical purpose to Reichardt's films; the way the films challenge the viewer's ability to empathise with their protagonists allegorizes 'contemporary society's unwillingness to care for those with whom it may be difficult to identify'. As with Gorfinkel's claims about 'sheer profilmic happening' I find such a reading potentially fruitful, but I would also argue that it would be unhelpful and distorting were it to be taken as recommending certain interpretational

strategies to the exclusion of others. Thus, if we find it hard to identify or sympathise with certain characters in these films, that may well raise wider social questions about 'care'; but we should by no means merely take it as given that these characters *are*, for all viewers, 'either unlikable or opaque'. Nor am I at all sure that *relentless* antisentimentality is the right description of Reichardt's work, and certainly not of *Certain Women* (see, for example, the character of Fuller, the clear injustice he has suffered and the way that his skill at carpentry is emphasised, or the way he extols the pleasures of getting a letter – any letter – while in prison). If one is open to them there are a rather large number of touching, bittersweet moments in the film. It is certainly true (some of the undergraduates to whom I have taught the film could serve as proof) that some viewers find the characters difficult to empathise and identify with, but it seems to me more that the film's challenge is for audiences to move beyond this and find things to like – even to love – in these characters, a challenge which certainly renders the film vulnerable should one *not* manage to do this.

As well as their 'naturalism', however, Reichardt's films are also carefully, and highly, patterned; we have seen this in the rigour of the editing patterns during Gina and Ryan's visit to Albert. To give one more example: there is a motif that appears in both the first and third narrative segments in which an important character arrives in a car, seen out of focus in the background of an image with a shallow depth of field. We thus *feel* that someone is approaching before we really *notice* that it happens; our noticing thus somehow emerges gradually rather than abruptly intruding. And the simple fact of the pattern itself, of course, invites comparison between the two moments. Reichardt herself has observed that:

> I get lumped in with this 'neorealism' a lot, often with a lot of films that feel more 'flimsy' or experiential to me. I feel like my films are different, more structured. But it's all treated the same. And maybe it is! Maybe it's all realism. […]. I try not to follow the dialogue around and try to be as sparse as possible and rely on the filmmaking as much as possible. (interview in Fusco and Seymour 2017: 114)

So, as I suggested earlier, there seems a question as to whether or not 'realism' is somehow in tension with a 'more structured' form of filmmaking. In a straightforward sense, we

could easily observe that realism (and particularly Reichardt's brand of it) is likely to seem less realistic if it is too obviously wrought, because such operations would be likely to be distracting. Hence, presumably, Reichardt's desire to 'try to be as sparse as possible', to minimise distractions.

Beyond this, however, it might seem as though a certain kind, at least, of 'realism' is fundamentally at odds with a certain mode of expressing meaning through formal patterning – the more pattern, the less realism, perhaps. I would want to dispute any such claim. It is only by entering imaginatively 'into' the film that we will fully be able to comprehend its 'schemes'; we do not first understand its story and *then* appreciate how that story is 'artistically' arranged. It certainly seems plausible to say that diegetic schemes (Gina's plan for her house) are connected, by a kind of reflexivity, with the broader aesthetic schemes of the film in which they are represented. This kind of relationship is also achieved with a degree of irony. When Fuller is weeping self-pityingly in Laura's car, we hear on her car radio the song 'Boats to Build' (performed by Jimmy Buffett, written by Guy Clark and Verlon Thompson), which refers to achieving 'a fair curve from a noble plan'. Is the film's conclusion that we don't need 'noble plans'? That 'fair curves' and 'nobility' are achievable by other means? Or perhaps that plans are not quite what we thought them to be, that there is not a zero-sum game between fully working out a plan in detail and acting without thinking? (This might be one reason why we can learn things, not only about our desires, but also about our plans, by acting 'thoughtlessly'.)

It is one of the many extremely impressive accomplishments of *Certain Women* that in it Reichardt achieves a harmony between form and content where the former does not exactly mimic the latter (for this to be the case the film would probably have to – like Fuller and the rancher – exhibit a gap between its goals and its plans for achieving them, but it is much too meticulously structured and delicately balanced for that kind of gambit); nor is the form always directly at the service of expressing the content. But would it be quite right to claim, then, that the characters' schemes in *Certain Women* reflexively serve the film's artistic/narrative schemes? If anything, I suggest that it is the other way around. A focus on character does not entail a naïveté in which we think

characters are real people. It has, instead, a subjunctive quality – it is 'as if' characters are people. And reading in this way – for those films that respond to such a reading – can be a way of maximising interpretive richness, drawing on as much of our wider experience as is relevant and helpful while still remaining acutely sensitive to every aspect of a text, whether that be the rhythm of the editing or the emotional expression of a character. In *Certain Women*, the film's artistic 'schemes' are directed at exploring the human schemes exemplified by the characters in the film. These explorations of human scheming take a particularly vivid form at certain moments, a form whose sharpness is assisted, not hindered, by the wider aesthetic schemes to which these moments contribute. As viewers, we come to understand and engage with *Certain Women*'s exploration of human agency and subjectivity by tracing the 'curves' – the form – of the film and the actions of its characters in relation to the 'plans' – whether 'noble' or otherwise – both of these characters and of the film as a whole.

DOMINIC LASH

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1 In talking about 'the film's schemes' I mean something along the lines of Stanley Cavell's recommendation: 'Don't ask what the artist is thinking or intending, but ask why the work is as it is, why just this is here in just that way. […]. My formulation employing the work's thinking or intending or wanting something, is meant to emphasise the sense that the work wants something of us who behold or hear or read it.' (Cavell & Klevan 2005: 186) Also relevant to my practice here is the discussion between Cavell and Klevan about criticism that begins from the critic's response to a specific moment (180-2).

2 Having said this, it is also certainly possible that at some level – probably related to the affair that he has been conducting, as I discuss below – Ryan would not be sorry to be free of the obligation to continue pursuing Gina's plans for the house. His remark to Albert, that is, might be an attempt to have it both ways.

3 Gina's confidence and assertiveness would, of course, be deemed threatening by some men. (Does Albert perhaps think Ryan is emasculated by working for his own wife?) *Certain Women* explores the relationship between the qualities of confidence and assertiveness, and aspects of their gendering, throughout. In the first segment Fuller's assertiveness masks his lack of confidence, exasperating Laura despite her sympathy for him. In the third segment the rancher's particular kind of confidence is expressed via an absence of assertiveness, which is set off against Elisabeth's different blend of these qualities; this relationship is also given other dimensions by the fact that in this case both parties are female, something that is Reichardt's own contribution (in Meloy's source story, the rancher is male).

4 In saying this I wish to claim that the editing is largely aimed at the effects at which classical editing aims, not that it uses a strictly classical style. Just as this scene avoids long takes, it also avoids using master shots and insert close-ups, which would have been a more classical way of proceeding. At points, too, the editing is very delicately balanced. After Gina first asks Albert about the sandstone, the film keeps his rather blank expression on screen for slightly longer than we might expect, after which it cuts back to Gina, who is still grinning; only then does her face begin to fall. It is not clear to me if this is best described as a 'non-classical' attempt slightly to stretch time (would a more classical editing style have cut back to Gina with her face already fallen?), or as a wholly 'classical' method of representing quite how long Gina attempts to keep smiling, willing Albert to agree to her request. Thanks to Polly Rose for discussions on this point.

5 Though I will not pursue this argument here, I would in fact be inclined to suggest that, if anything, it is *Meek's Cutoff* rather than *Certain Women* that is something of an anomaly in Reichardt's oeuvre.

6 Hall appears to have a more straightforward reading of this moment – 'the sun is shining, the family is surrounded by friends and possibly family, and Gina seems to crack a genuine smile' (2018: 137) – but even here 'seems' works against 'genuine' to imply further complexity that needs accounting for.
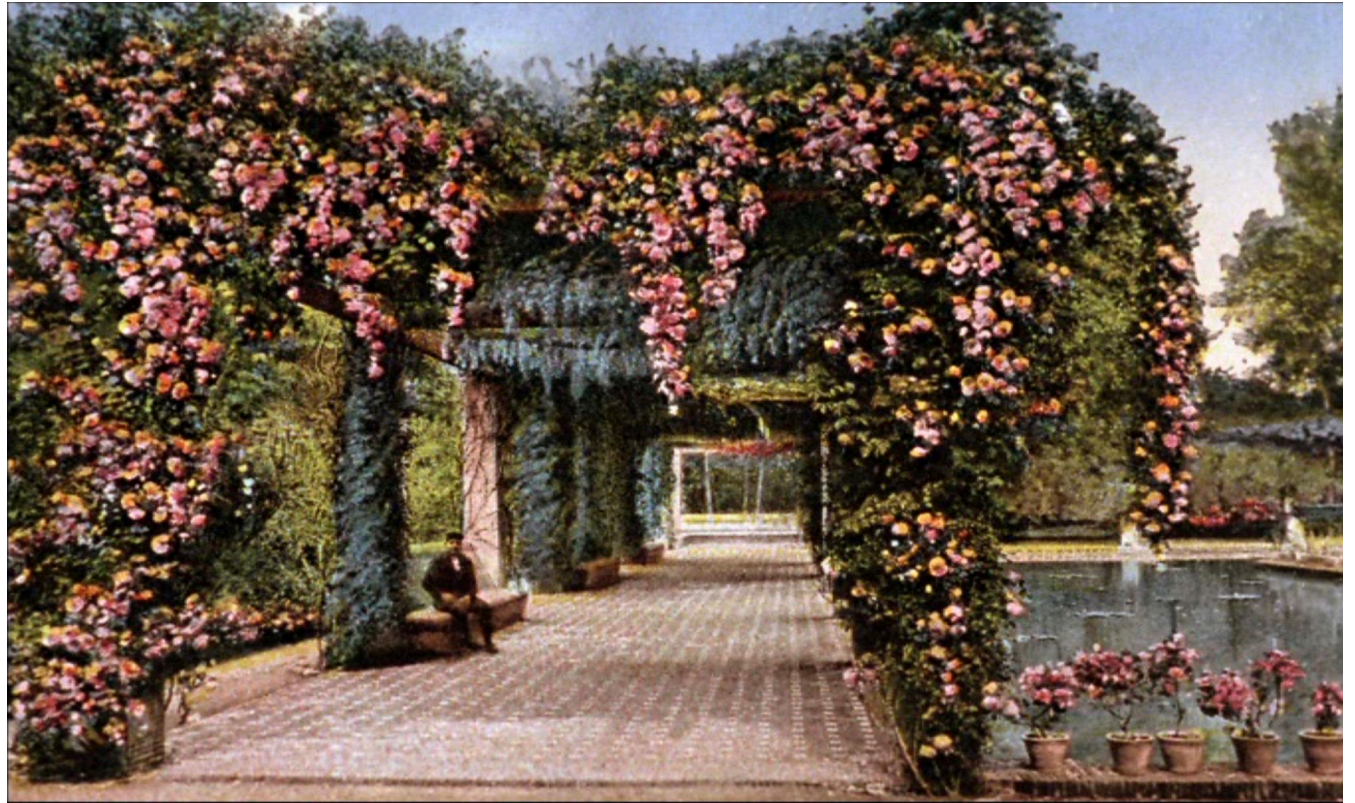
7 The film also gestures at a connection between promises among people and promise as what the future might offer (as that towards which plans are directed?). Before the rancher drives into town and first visits the night school, her television says: 'It's a mysterious realm, full of danger and full of promise.'

8 The source text is itself rather ambiguous on this point. Although we are told that Susan 'constructed the house […] the stone turning corners and supporting ceilings in her minds', she does this only '[w]ith effort', after initially finding that 'she couldn't picture the stone as part of a building, only as freestanding monuments on their undeveloped lot, upright versions of the ruin in Albert's yard' (Meloy 2005: 39).

El Sur (The South), or the Memory of Cinema

I

'My experience as a spectator is of a constant nature,' the acclaimed Spanish director Víctor Erice once wrote. 'It is the hub of my relationship with cinema' (2007: 54). He acknowledges that there is nothing unusual about a director situating himself in the role of the spectator. The distinguishing element in his case is that this experience is motivated by the possibility of a renewed encounter with people, places and histories whose fate is to remain never fully realised: 'An intimate necessity pushes us, undoubtedly to recuperate them – a necessity that is in many instances the symptom of a loss, the testimony of a social failure, and simultaneously, in its most vigorous expression, the rejection of a time when something we consider essential is denied us' (2007: 55). Erice's remarks bring together the two threads that encompass his films, one bound to the silences that characterised his childhood in the aftermath of the devastation caused by the Spanish Civil War and, the other, to an understanding of cinema's capacity to stand in for those aspects of historical experience that elude understanding. The question that I will pursue is: how do these silences and unrealised experiences leave their mark on Erice's films and the memory of cinema that they construct? In pursuing this question, I will focus on the director's 1983 film El Sur (The South), while also touching on the films that bookend this production, El espíritu de la colmena (The Spirit of the Beehive) (1973) and El sol del membrillo (The Quince Tree Sun) (1992). By doing so, I hope to shed light on the forms of reflexivity found in Erice's films – as well as the larger issue that cuts across his films, writings on cinema and interviews and that encapsulates the philosophical implications of this body of work: cinema's ability to elicit an encounter with what remains still to be realised in our relationship to the past.

II

El Sur begins with a shot of a darkened room that is gradually illuminated by the first rays of wintery morning light. From somewhere outside the room comes the sound of a dog barking and a woman calling out a man's name – softly, at first, and, then, with each iteration, with an increasing sense of urgency: 'Agustín!' Awoken by the commotion, Estrella (played as a fifteen-year old by Icíar Bollaín) discovers a small cylindrical box underneath her pillow. Inside the box is a pendulum that belongs to her father. 'That day at sunrise,' her adult voice-over recalls, 'when I found his pendulum under my pillow, I felt I knew that everything had changed, that he would never come home.' These events provide the starting point for Estrella's recollections of her family's arrival, seven years prior, in an unnamed town in the northern regions of Spain, their life in the two-story house located on its outskirts and the lead up to her First Communion when her family played host to two emissaries from the south: her father's mother (Germaine Montero) and Milagros (Rafaela Aparicio),

the woman who had primary responsibility for his upbringing. Their visit helps Estrella (played as an eight-year-old by Sonsoles Aranguren) to piece together a little of her father's past and his difficult relationship with his Francoist father in the years following the end of the Civil War. But it's clear from the equivocal nature of Milagros' responses to Estrella's questions about her father that the film's primary interest is not to uncover the reasons behind his decision to leave his home in the south and never return. Rather, it is to render the impact that this mystery had on her upbringing – its haunting by a place that demands something of her.

In 'Notes on the Phantom', Nicolas Abraham claims that while all the departed may return to ensnare the living, it is those individuals who took secrets to the grave that are destined to haunt. The role of the phantom is to objectify the gap created in the subject's psyche by this concealment. 'It works like a ventriloquist,' Abraham explains, 'like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography' (1987: 287). In *El Sur*, Estrella's efforts to piece together an understanding of her father's past centre around her encounters with a series of phantoms. There are the phantoms that look back at her from the postcards that she keeps in a cigar box and which she relies on to construct her own sense of the south. 'Not knowing the distances involved,' her voice-over recalls, 'I located it all on the other side of the globe, always with palm trees in the background.' Even more significant is the phantom whose name she first encounters on an envelope in her father's study: 'Irene Ríos'. Shortly after this discovery, Estrella recognises her father's motorbike parked in front of the town's cinema. Scanning one of the posters outside the building, she learns that the name written over and over again on her father's envelope belongs to the film's co-star.

Erice then does something that occurs elsewhere in the film. With a pronounced upward tilt of the camera, he leaves behind the viewpoint of his central character. In the scene that follows we witness Estrella's father (Omero Antonutti) seated in the darkened auditorium looking up at the screen on which Irene Ríos (Aurore Clément) is performing in a black and white melodrama, *Flor en la sombra* (*Flower in the Shadow*). For a few moments as Irene sits in front of a dressing room mirror brushing her hair, these two phantoms appear to look back at each other. Their reunion inside the darkened auditorium lasts only for a few moments. But this is long enough to clarify a key aspect of the film's rendition of Estrella's recollections: their occupation of a space that is neither wholly inside nor wholly outside the consciousness of the central character, a space in which remembrance is taken over by the power of images to not only speak for our history, but also to spirit it away.

III

'The ways in which we do not know things are just as important (and perhaps even more important) as the ways in which we know them,' writes Giorgio Agamben (2011: 113). In the same essay he proposes that giving expression to nonknowledge does not necessarily involve the admission of a 'lack or defect'. Rather, it is a matter of 'allowing an absence of knowledge to guide and accompany our gestures, letting a stubborn silence clearly respond for our words' (114). In Erice's films, giving expression to what remains still to be realised or understood is tied to an experience of cinematic figures that both determine and unsettle our place in the world. His first film *El espíritu de la colmena* begins with a van approaching a small village on the Castilian plain. The date, we are told in a subtitle, is around 1940. The excitement generated by the van's arrival is because it carries the reels of film and projection equipment that will transform the rundown building that functions as the village's town hall into a cinema. The film to be screened later that evening is James Whale's 1931 version of *Frankenstein*. A woman who serves as the village crier announces the cost of admission: one peseta for adults and two reales for children. In Erice's films, details that, in another context, might be considered incidental, play an important role in establishing a precise sense of the material conditions of a place. In the scene that follows, we watch the village children arranging their chairs in front of the screen. At the door, the rotund impresario responsible for bringing the film to the village is collecting the pesetas and reales. 'I hope it's good this time,' a woman tells him. '*It's magnificent,*' he replies. 'Don't start a fire, now,' he warns another woman, who has brought along a brazier to keep herself warm. Quite quickly, the barn-like room is filled with villagers excitedly chatting among themselves.

When the lights dim and the projector starts rolling, a man dressed in a tuxedo appears on screen. Cloaked in the guise of a content warning, his remarks are designed to prime the audience for the story to come, a story about 'the mysteries of creation, life and death'. After he walks off stage, the screen fades to black. When it fades back up, it takes a few seconds for us to realise that what we are watching is not the start of *Frankenstein*, but an unnamed figure tending an apiary. That the man's protective attire and awkward movements conjure images of the monster in Whale's film is one way in which Erice encourages us to view the emotions and affects conjured inside the cinema as contiguous with the life outside – a life that is marked by an acute sense of loss and grief. 'Though nothing can bring back the happy moments we spent together, I pray that God grant me the joy of seeing you again. That's been my constant prayer since we parted ways during the war.' Conveyed as a voice-over, these words link the scene of the man, who we will come to know as Fernando (Fernando Fernán Gómez), tending the bees to the scene that follows of an as yet unnamed woman (Teresa Gimpera) sitting at her desk writing to an absent lover.

The manner in which the woman's words play over the top of a close-up of Fernando's half-hidden face prompts us to question their provenance as well as intended receiver. Voices bleeding across scenes; footsteps announcing the presence of creatures that are as much imagined as real; train whistles reaching out to us through the night air: these are some of the ways in which Erice uses the acousmatic properties of sound to evoke a domain of experience that cuts across boundaries. Thus when Fernando finishes his labour with the bees and makes his way home, past the hall where the villagers are watching the screening of Whale's film, Erice floods the street with the whirring sound of the projector's mechanisms and the tinny snatches of the movie's dialogue. More surprising than this is the manner in which, a few moments later, these sounds penetrate the thick walls and windows of Fernando's study causing him to put down the magazine he had started reading. When he opens the large honeycomb windows leading onto a small balcony, the slow forward track of the

camera that follows behind seems to be driven by a need to trace the source of a sound whose volume and acoustic range expand and contract in a manner that enables it to connect otherwise discrete zones of activity.

Even at this early point, then, it is possible to glean at least two aspects of cinematic experience that are being memorialised in Erice's film: on the one hand, cinema as an actual place – noisy, squeezed together, intrusive – and, on the other, cinema as a way of relating to images and sounds that are defined by their capacity to escape their moorings. In *El espíritu de la colmena* these dimensions are realised in an image that brings together the two sides of the film's operations: as a record of a one-time only event recorded by the camera and as the telling of a fictional story. It occurs when the camera, enticed by the sounds penetrating Fernando's study, returns to the hall where the villagers are watching the film. From the mass of faces gathered in front of the screen, it picks out the two young girls who serve as the film's central characters, Isabel (Isabel Tellería) and Ana (Ana Torrent). After a few moments, it becomes clear that it is Ana, the younger of the two, whose responses hold a special interest. Cutting between the scene from Whale's film that shows the first meeting of the monster and the little village girl who befriends him and a hand-held shot of Ana gazing intently up at the screen, the film captures that 'unrepeatable moment' when the stunned responses of the young actress watching the movie for the first time become indistinguishable from the reactions of the character that she plays.

'I sincerely believe that it's the best moment I've ever captured on film,' the director confesses to an interviewer. 'It was an actual screening. She was really seeing the movie. He [Luis Cuadrado, the film's cinematographer] captured her reaction to the encounter between the monster and the little girl. So it was an unrepeatable moment, one that could never be "directed"' (2006). In the same interview, he observes that, in a film made in 'a very premeditated style', the key moment is one that escapes this premeditation: 'I think that's the crack through which the aspect of film that records reality bursts through into every kind of fictional narrative [. . .]. But without the substratum of fiction, it too would fail to acquire its fullest sense as an image recording reality.'

For Erice, the affective force of the shot of Ana's reaction is drawn from a dual action whereby the fiction created by the director is taken over by a response that both serves and supersedes its guiding structures. Echoes of this moment can be found in the work of a range of other filmmakers whose films evidence the same productive tension between fictional and documentary elements: for example, Roberto Rossellini, John Cassavetes, Maurice Pialat and Abbas Kiarostami. In the work of these filmmakers, as well, this tension has at its source the body of the actor – its capacity to not only serve the needs of the fiction, but also enable its disruption.

In *El espíritu de la colmena* two factors give this moment its particular force. First, its grounding in a child's view of the world. In a tribute to Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931), Erice claims that, at its most memorable, the experience of cinema 'gives the impression of passing over a threshold, as if images revealed life's multiple truths. Moments difficult to describe, belonging to those primordial stories we hold in our memories, in which often the silhouette of the child and of the adolescent we once were are present' (2007: 55). This claim has a close connection to Jean Louis Schefer's proposition in *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* that cinema's power lies in its ability to connect with an 'unfinished' childhood that inheres within the subject. 'It seems as if a part of ourselves is permeable to effects of meaning without ever being able to be born into meaning through our language,' Schefer proposes at the start of his book (2016: 12). The cinema aligns these unexpressed meanings to the operation of visible figures – bodies, gestures and actions – whose purpose is to reacquaint us with what remains still to be understood in our relationship to the past. 'Something of our own knowledge is in them,' Schefer writes of our attachment to these figures, a knowledge that speaks of 'our unfinished and now nearly invisible childhood' (2016: 61).

The second factor concerns Erice's insistence on embedding this 'unrepeatable moment' in the distinctive features and particularities that characterise the mass of bodies pressed together in the crowded hall. Indeed, our response to Ana's reaction has a lot to do with the way it shares the screen with the reaction of the young girl seated immediately to her right who covers her eyes when the monster appears from behind

the bushes. Seen for just these brief moments, the unidentified young girl reminds us of those forces, personalities and histories that make up the life of the village, a life that both precedes the film and continues after its cessation.

This leads to a related point about the nature of the story told in the film. In *El espíritu de la colmena* everything that happens to Ana – her attempts to clarify the nature of the monster (real or fake? spirit or phantom?), her relationship with the wounded rebel soldier, her flight from her father and encounter with the monster on the river bank – is designed to shed light on the capacity of this moment to subsist within the social realities of Spain in the dark years immediately after the end of the Civil War. The return to a child's view of the world is not an escape from the pressures and restrictions of the social world. Rather, it is the means by which the film tests

their limits and solicit forms of engagement that they actively repress. The unrepeatable moment of disruption embodied in Ana's response is, thus, also a moment of renewal – for both the cinema and the social world in which it occurs.[1]

IV

This detour to a film made ten years prior to *El Sur* helps to clarify the implications generated by the film's decision to leave the eight-year-old Estrella's perspective outside the cinema and make its own way into the auditorium. On one level, this decision lends weight to the point made by a number of critics that the film's representation of Estrella's memories includes events and incidents that she observed directly as well as events and incidents that she has only imagined. But as suggested earlier, it also undercuts this conclusion by affirming that these memories are just as much the product of another force, one that is so memorably depicted in *El espíritu de la colmena*, the cinema, itself. The tendency of the camera to operate independently from the characters as well as the slow fades that create the impression of watching scenes drawn from and receding into the darkness of the past: in *El Sur* these are two of the ways in which Erice draws our attention to the fact that it is the cinema – as much as the character – that is remembering.[2]

The formal implications of this coincidence come to the fore when the film pauses to contemplate the postcards that Estrella uses to construct her understanding of the south. In the lead up to this moment, Estrella's mother relays what she knows of the south and her father's decision never to return to his family home. These details capture Estrella's imagination and drive her to scrutinise the postcards, as if they might fill in the gaps in her mother's account. The montage of still images interrupts the film's forward movement and enfolds Estrella's contemplation of the strangely coloured postcards within a larger space of contemplation that takes in the spectator's own presence in the auditorium.[3] Drawn from who-knows-where and jumbled together in the cigar box, the image of the south rendered in these postcards is one that, in the application of colour to what would have been black and white photographs and in the staging of exoticised scenes of

women dressed in mantillas and lush overgrown gardens, has been heavily worked over. The role of these *objets trouvés* is less about visualising what the south might look like and more to do with giving dramatic shape to the challenge that lies at the heart of the film's rendition of Estrella's memories: how to render the legacy of something that exceeds one's conscious knowledge, something that by its nature must remain unrealised in our relationship to the past.

'*Practically, we perceive only the past,*' writes Henri Bergson, 'the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future' (1988: 150, original italics). In Bergson's view, we experience the past in two ways, simultaneously: as that which enters into engagement with the present so as to determine a course of action and as an ever-expanding repository of memories that exceed the possibility of conscious realisation. Paola Marrati describes these unrealised memories as belonging to a past that 'does not pass: it is conserved in itself, endowed with its own virtual reality distinct from any psychological existence' (2008: 74). Similarly, in *El Sur,* the south is a set of events that had a determining effect on Estrella's upbringing and the shadow cast by what remains unfinished in her engagement with the past. How do *we* encounter this unfinishedness? Primarily as a type of indetermination that operates at the level of image and sound and is embodied in the responses of the central character: What is it that I'm seeing or hearing? What might this image or sound tell me about the enigmas that determine my experience of the past? In *El Sur* this indetermination marks the weight of a past that continues to press its claims on the present.

V

If the first part of the story told in *El Sur* concerns Estrella's attempts to understand the mystery of her father's past, the second part concerns the disillusionment that supersedes these attempts. 'I started wishing with all my heart that I would grow up and get away from there,' her voice-over recalls about the crises that came to dominate her childhood. As if responding to this wish, a shot of Estrella riding away from the house on her bicycle dissolves into a shot taken from exactly the same position that reveals a now adolescent version of the character riding back toward the house. 'I grew up more or less like everyone else,' her voice-over summarises, 'getting used to being alone and to not think about happiness.' The change in her relationship to her father is summed up in a scene that echoes their previous encounter outside the town's cinema. This time it occurs outside a bar, and, unlike the earlier encounter outside the cinema, the person that Estrella observes from a distance is not someone shrouded in mystery, but merely someone who appears disoriented, who must call on the steady hand of a passerby to light his cigarette. The scene is about the changed relationship between father and daughter. But it is also about the manner in which, even in adolescence, Estrella continues to mirror aspects of her father's own behavior. This is evident when Agustín pauses to contemplate a portrait of his daughter in the window display of a photography studio. The fact that a few minutes earlier Estrella was shown doing the same thing confirms her inheritance of her father's feelings of estrangement as well as his obsession with phantoms. 'I never forgot Irene Ríos,' her voice-over tells us at the start of this scene. 'I kept looking for her on film posters. But I never saw her name again. It was as if the earth had swallowed her up.'

The denouement of the film's story occurs one afternoon when Agustín picks up Estrella from school and takes her to lunch at the Grand Hotel. Apart from a wedding reception in an adjacent room, the restaurant is empty of other patrons. Their conversation hints at familiar sources of contention – her relationship with the boy referred to as *El Carioco*, Agustín's disapproval of her social life, his drinking – as well as the silences carried over from the years of Estrella's childhood. In the course of their conversation, she asks her father a question that she has long wanted to ask: 'Who is Irene Ríos?' She then tells him about the night that she saw his motorbike parked outside the cinema and followed him to the café where she watched him write a letter. Rather than answering directly, Agustín is content to dissemble. When he returns to the table after taking a few moments to splash water on his face, Estrella tells him that she has to return to class. It's at this point that Agustín's attention is grabbed by the sound of the Paso Doble that seeps into the restaurant from the adjoining room. This is the same Paso Doble that father and daughter danced to on the day of her First Communion. Although Estrella is able to remember the events of this day, it is clear from her expression that this memory does not have the same impact as it does for her father. When she rises from the table, the camera follows her movements across the room. This connection is interrupted when Estrella pauses to peek

through the curtains draped across the doors at the bride and groom dancing to the Paso Doble in the adjacent room. Rather than remaining with Estrella, the camera cranes up to a position above the doors, gazing down at the wedding party through the transom window.

What is it that we are being asked to remember at this moment? Most directly, it is the once deep affection between father and daughter. But the manner in which the camera cranes up from where Estrella stands looking through the curtains to a position above the doors prompts us to remember something else that was registered during the communion dinner, namely, the way in which the tracking shot that records father and daughter dancing together begins and ends on a close-up of Estrella's communion veil draped over the back of an empty chair. We remember this detail because it

marks another moment when the camera's tendency to assert its independence from the characters distances us from the fiction. The intention here is not to suspend the story. Rather, it is to enact at the level of the mise-en-scène an oscillation between two competing points of attention: one of which is the spectacle of the dance, the other an insistent image of absence conveyed in the shot of the empty chair. One speaks of the present. The other of its inevitable passing away. One binds us to the story of Estrella's childhood. The other to the camera's role in the telling of this story.

The conclusion to be drawn is that in *El Sur* the camera's movements are always for us: their purpose is to prompt us to reflect on the experience of cinema. 'The camera may speak in the present,' Gilberto Perez reminds us, 'but it is a present now past when we watch it on the screen.' Its poignancy, he adds, is 'the poignancy of what reaches us from the past with the urgency of the present' (1998: 35). Perez's remarks help to clarify what we are being asked to remember when the sound of the Paso Doble seeping into the restaurant prompts us to recall the dance between Estrella and her father during the communion dinner. Once again, it is the cinema. This time, not as a particular place that is visualised in the story. Nor as an engagement with an 'unfinished childhood.' But as a way of experiencing the present as always already passed. This is the sad note that is carried into the restaurant during the afternoon when Estrella spoke to her father for the last time. We absorb this note as a memory of and about the cinema and its capacity to render a past that undoes our place in the present.

VI

After Estrella leaves the restaurant, we observe Agustín sitting alone in the far corner of the room, listening to the Paso Doble. The film then returns to the morning when Estrella discovered her father's pendulum underneath her pillow. Craning down from a long shot of the city's walls, the camera reveals Agustín's body face down on the riverbank, his coat and rifle beside him. 'Before leaving the house,' Estrella's voice-over confides, 'he emptied his pockets. Among the things he left in his drawer was a small telephone receipt. That's how I found out that on the last night of his life my father had

called the south. A number I didn't recognise.' In the closing moments, we see her slip this receipt – as well as the cigar box of postcards – into the suitcase that she will take with her on her journey to the south. 'The night before I left I could hardly sleep,' her adult self recalls. 'Although I didn't show it, I was very nervous.' In the final shot, Estrella is standing directly in front of the camera – her gaze fixed on a point just to its right: 'At last I was going to see the south.'

That this is the film's final shot is only because Erice was not able to film the last third of the script, the part that deals with Estrella's trip to the south. From various accounts of the details included in the unfilmed portion of the script, it is easy enough to piece together how this material would have developed some of the threads left hanging in the story. For Mar Diestro-Dópido, this material promised to 'guarantee an emotional and geographical symmetry essential for Erice's moral schema in the film' (2017: 6).[4] For others, the problem with this hypothesising is that it discounts the significance of an unfinishedness that is already there in the film's rendering of the south. Unfinishedness is not something that befalls the film, we might say. Rather, it is something that it enables at the level of both the events that define its story and the formal structures that it employs to displace us from its unfolding. In their most powerful guise, this is what Erice's films do: they facilitate an engagement with experiences that, by their nature, must remain unrealised or incomplete. Moreover, they locate these experiences at the heart of a larger reflection about the nature of cinema itself.

This line of thought finds its confirmation in *El sol del membrillo*, the film Erice completed after *El Sur*. Stripped of the architecture of a script or fictional story (but still invested in the techniques of cinematic storytelling), *El sol del membrillo* documents the labour of the renowned Spanish painter Antonio López, as he tries to capture the ripening of quinces on a tree in the yard of the house that serves as his studio. The use of title cards allows us to track the progression of this endeavor – from its commencement on the 29th September 1990, when the artist began by constructing his canvas, establishing a plumb line in front of the tree and hammering survey nails into the ground to mark the exact spot from where, each day, he would stand in front of the

canvas, to its end on the 10th December 1990. In between, he covers the tree in a transparent plastic canopy to protect it from the rain, abandons the oil painting in favor of a pencil sketch and recruits his friends to prop up the sagging branches of the tree with a long stick, while he continues to work on the drawing. All this comes to naught, when, one morning, he discovers, among the discarded cigarette butts at the base of the tree, a fallen quince. A week later, after contemplating the fruit scattered on the ground, he breaks the plumb line and dismantles the remaining structures.

The opportunity to capture the light known as 'quince tree sun' is over. The implications that this failure has for Erice's own practice is alluded to in the concluding sequence that begins with Lopez modelling for a painting being undertaken by his wife, the artist María Moreno. The painting requires him to lie fully clothed on a bed holding a small crystal and a black and white photograph of two men standing in front of the Parthenon. We watch as the crystal drops from his hand and he falls into a deep sleep. This allusion to the opening of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) as well as the introduction of a non-diegetic score distance this sequence from the rest of the film. The reasons for this excursus become clearer when we are presented with a shot of the camera peering down at the fallen quinces in the darkened yard. Where once the artist had stood with his feet touching the top of the nail heads hammered into the ground, we now see the feet of the tripod on which the camera rests. To the right of the tree an arc light attached to a timer switches itself on and off.

The culmination of the sequence occurs when, over a close-up of the artist's face propped on the pillow, his voice-over begins to recount the details of a dream in which he is standing with his parents in front of the house where he was born, looking at the fruit on a group of quince trees across the square: 'Dark spots slowly cover their skin. In the still air, I feel their flesh rotting. From where I stand, I can't tell if the others can see it too. Nobody seems to notice that the quinces are rotting under a light I can't really describe. Clear, yet dark, that changes all into metal and dust. It isn't the night light. Neither is it that of twilight. Nor of dawn.' The artist's account of this mysterious light that animates and mortifies triggers a series of close-ups of the decaying fruit gathered at the base of the quince tree. Like the news items about events in the Middle East broadcast on the radio that Lopez listens to as he is working or the stories told by his friend and fellow painter Enrique Gran about their time together as students, the purpose of these images is to furnish the film's rendition of his labour with markers of what cannot be made to serve its purpose: duration, its constant transformation of the world that the artist seeks to capture.

'It is we who are internal to time, not the other way round', Gilles Deleuze writes in his summation of Bergson's theses on time (1989: 82). 'Time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live and change' (82). This inversion lies at the heart of Lopez's dream in *El sol del membrillo* as well as the broader operations of Erice's filmmaking, a filmmaking that draws its power from an encounter with images and sounds that speak of a past that has not been usurped by the needs of the present, a past that continues to flow and lend each moment an always unfinished dimension. The face of a child confronted by a creature that both fascinates and horrifies; the sound of a Paso Doble that calls us back to a former time; the accretion of decay on the skin of a ripened quince: the role of these images and sounds is to render an experience of time that leads not to action but to a form of thinking that takes as its instigator the gaps and lacuna that subtend our relationship to the past. They affirm the cinema's capacity to form a connection with those experiences that must remain unrealised or incomplete.

Tracing Erice's investment in these images and sounds leads us back to our point of commencement: the director's own experiences as a cinemagoer. In *La Morte Rouge: Soliloquy* (2006), the short film that was commissioned for the exhibition *Correspondences: Víctor Erice and Abbas Kiarostami*, first exhibited at the Center de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, Erice's voice-over recalls the dread evoked during a screening of Roy William Neill's murder-mystery *The Scarlet Claw* (1944). He remembers how this dread was echoed in the 'atmosphere of a devastated society' and being struck by the silence of the adults seated around him in the cinema, all of whom seemed to be complicit in 'a secret that explained everything'. For Erice and his generation of cinema-goers, the attraction of cinema-going lay in its ability to wound and act as a balm upon the wound: 'This double game of pain and consolation, of suffering and joy, that reached him from the screen, was the basis for his contradictory relationship with moving images.' In Erice's memory of cinema we are undone by images and sounds and able to draw from this undoing a renewed encounter with what remains still to be realised about the past.

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1 In the same manner, the film does not engage in an 'erasure' of historicity, as Paul Julian Smith claims (2000: 30). Rather, it locates its terms in the realm of the pro-filmic: the faces and expressions of the actual villagers as they are rendered by the camera and microphone. Historicity emerges in the interactions between the film's fictional and documentary elements as well as the capacity of these interactions to generate something new. Marcos Uzal provides a reading close to the one that I'm proposing when he argues, in relation to Erice's depiction of Ana's response to the screening, that the cinema 'is a means not to forget the world around them (ruined by war and fascism) but to reinvent it, to raise it to the level of films and dreams' (quoted in Darke 2010: 157).

2 To this list of reflexive devices we can add the use of allusions to the history of painting. For an illuminating account of Erice's use of this device, see Linda C. Ehrlich (2007).

3 The most influential account of the implications of this type of realignment of spectatorial space is Raymond Bellour's 'The Pensive Spectator' in *Between-the-Images* (2011: 86-98).

4 Diestro-Dópido outlines how the change from an 81 day shooting schedule to just 48 days of shooting was triggered by the withdrawal of production funds by the Spanish state broadcaster RTVE. She also summarises some of the events that comprise the unfilmed elements of the script: 'Estrella would meet in the south a young man she would intuit was her younger half-brother (a fact never made implicit in the script), to whom she would pass on Agustín's pendulum before leaving Andalucía, having uncovered its mysteries and making peace with her father [. . .]. It was in the unfilmed scenes in the south that Erice planned to establish a direct dialogue with the civil war, through Laura's [Irene Ríos' real name] brother' (2017: 6).

Two Rode Together

Given the overwhelming advantage of being white, in terms of power, privilege and material well being, who counts as white and who doesn't is worth fighting over – fighting to keep people out, to let strategic groups in, fighting to get in. (Dyer 1997: 52)

They are waiting. How long, one might vainly ask, are they waiting for Godot? How long until the curtain falls? How long until Godot comes? But even if Godot had come, they would have kept on waiting. "Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him," says Vladimir. (Schweizer 2008: 12-13)

Two Rode Together: the title of John Ford's 1961 film is descriptive of a number of his earlier Westerns (and, indeed, of the genre more broadly), or, at least, of memorable moments within them.[1] One may think of Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda) and his surviving brother, Morgan (Ward Bond), journeying off home at the end of *My Darling Clementine* (1946), or of Travis Blue (Ben Johnson) and Sandy Owens (Harry Carey Jr) travelling together to sell some ponies when we first encounter them near the start of *Wagon Master* (1950). The image of the Westerner as iconic loner holds far less sway than one may be tempted to assume. The most obvious and sustained reference point for *Two Rode Together* in Ford's work is provided by Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) and Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter) in *The Searchers*, Ford's complex psychological Western of 1956. In both these instances, the men of the films' titles ride off to Comanche camps in order to track down white captives who have, to varying degrees, become assimilated into the Comanche way of life and, at least in some cases, are beyond rescue. In each film a single female captive is sufficiently resilient and untraumatised by her experiences to be able to return, her 'whiteness' restored, though not in everyone's eyes.

The parallels between these two films are reinforced by certain continuities of casting typical of Ford's repeated use across his work of a familiar selection of actors. Most notable is the recurring presence of Henry Brandon as Comanche chief. However, his threatening aspect as Scar in *The Searchers* has been attenuated in the later film and displaced onto another Comanche, Stone Calf (Woody Strode), instead, though even Stone Calf, surprisingly, is never a substantial threat, despite the expectations raised by his aggressive opposition to the less militant chief, Quanah Parker, played by Brandon. Indeed, the obvious references to *The Searchers*, more generally, highlight significant differences between the two films, rather than merely re-treading familiar ground, and we will need to come back to these later. Similarly, passing reminders of other well-known Ford films provide pointed contrasts rather than links. For example, our first view of Marshal Guthrie McCabe (James Stewart) as he lounges in front of the saloon, his chair tilted back and his legs outstretched on the porch railing in front of him, recalls Wyatt Earp's very similar pose in *My Darling Clementine*, his chair also tilted back, with one leg outstretched against a wooden post. However, whereas Earp is a naïve and peaceable figure, McCabe is a cynical and disruptive one, at least initially. Whereas Earp indicates his intention to return to Tombstone, with the implication that he

will ultimately settle down with Clementine (Cathy Downs) for good, McCabe will end up leaving town for California with Elena (Linda Cristal), the woman he retrieves from the Comanches, since the town refuses to accept her back into its midst, justifying McCabe's cynicism yet offering him a chance at redemption and happiness elsewhere.

In this way, the ending of *Two Rode Together* recalls that of *Stagecoach* (1939), Ford's much earlier film from more than two decades before, when the Ringo Kid (John Wayne) and Dallas (Claire Trevor) head off to Mexico together to escape the repressive disapproval of 'civilisation' and its representatives. The key difference here is that it remains unclear how much Ringo knows about Dallas' dubious past: does he simply accept her having been a prostitute or is he genuinely unaware of this? The clues are blatant, at least to us and everyone *except* Ringo, but there is certainly no moment when we see the truth sink in for *him*, so the ambiguity persists right up to the end of the film: is he a complete innocent throughout, or, rather, so complete a gentleman that he withholds any acknowledgment of what he knows? In *Two Rode Together*, McCabe, of course, is neither innocent nor discreet. Like all the other characters, he is fully aware of Elena's life as Stone Calf's 'wife', and he discusses it openly.

Such awareness, and the verbal explicitness that expresses it, are crucial to the film and in marked contrast with the consistent verbal suppressions of *The Searchers*, where characters know much more than they are willing to say. For example, when Brad (Harry Carey Jr) asks Ethan whether Lucy (Pippa Scott) had been raped by the Comanches before she was killed, his words are riddled with lacunae ('Did they…? W…was she…?'), and Ethan angrily refuses to give him answers ('Whaddya want me to do, draw you a picture? Spell it out? Don't ever ask me. As long as you live, don't ever ask me more'). In contrast, McCabe is nastily explicit when telling Marty (Shirley Jones) of her brother's likely fate as a Comanche captive ('And he's taken scalps, white man's scalps. And given the chance, sister, he'd rape you'), while Elena tells the prurient white women at the army post who persist in questioning her exactly what her life with Stone Calf involved.

The insistent blurting out of such material in *Two Rode Together* is blocked in *The Searchers*, circling, as it does, around Ethan's frustrated desire for his brother's wife Martha (Dorothy Jordan) which can never be spoken aloud, but may merely be revealed to attentive viewers in gestures, hesitations and other non-verbal symptoms of the repression at work. This allows for the prevalent Freudian reading of that film which attributes a distorted version of Ethan's desires (both sexual and punitive) to his alter ego, the Comanche chief Scar, who rapes and murders Martha in Ethan's place, a reading encouraged by all the parallels the film makes between Ethan and Scar.

In *Two Rode Together*, there are certainly parallels between McCabe and Stone Calf: the former's observation to Jim Gary (Richard Widmark) – 'You're still giving the orders, huh?' – occurs shortly before Quanah Parker tells Stone Calf, 'I give the orders, not you', and McCabe's remark to Belle that 'I'm gonna beat hell outta you', when she makes offensive comments to Elena, may remind us of Elena's earlier description of Stone Calf as beating her from time to time. Not least, of course, Elena moves from being Stone Calf's woman to being McCabe's, thereby linking the two men through their respective relationships with her, as McCabe kills Stone Calf and takes his place with Elena. However, unlike the parallels between Ethan and Scar, those between McCabe and Stone Calf lead nowhere, except, perhaps, to link them as rebels resistant to the authorities above them, or to muddy any clear-cut affiliation between McCabe and the other white characters in the main settings where they appear: the town of Tascosa, the white encampment and Fort Grant. There is little mileage in developing an argument akin to the standard reading of Scar as Ethan's alter ego, simply because a comparable case of projection would need a similar bedrock of repression to provide its basis. Instead, *Two Rode Together* is concerned in a far less psychologically complex way – but one that is more interesting in sociological terms – with what it means to be white.

The white encampment

The film's opening scenes in Tascosa serve mainly to set the narrative in motion and to introduce the two men of the title: Marshal Guthrie McCabe, lolling about with beer and cigar on the porch outside the saloon, and his more conscientious army pal, Lieutenant Jim Gary, who arrives in town at the head of his men. As the two of them share a beer, a number of two-shots begin to establish the balanced give-and-take of their relationship, reinforced by the banter between them. We cut to a shot of Belle Aragon (Annelle Hayes) with a male employee inside the saloon she runs, as Guthrie and

Jim enter in the background, a roulette wheel prominent in the foreground and curtains festooning the whole scene as though it's a theatre onto whose stage the two men enter like a vaudeville double act.

It soon becomes apparent that Belle's longstanding affair with Guthrie is beginning to make him uneasy, as he jokes with Jim at Belle's expense and to Jim's evident amusement (the reason for McCabe's unease to be made clear in the following scene when he indicates to Jim that Belle has matrimony in mind). All this, along with a certain unpleasant hardness in Belle (as well as the information we get, again in the following scene, that McCabe gets 10% of her take, thus reducing their relationship to an unseemly financial deal), makes it obvious that she is not destined to be his wife, since viewers are likely to take James Stewart – if not yet McCabe – as being better than that. It also motivates McCabe to leave town and accompany Jim to Fort Grant, despite some initial reluctance to do so.

We dissolve to a landscape dominated by a shimmering river which the two men approach as they enter the frame on horseback, followed by the rest of the troop. During a conversation between Jim and McCabe, filmed in another two-shot

that continues at greater length than previously seen as they sit together by the river, they knowingly overplay their reactions to each other to humorous effect in a deadpan performance of mock sincerity as they talk. As Ronald L. Davis suggests, it's a scene 'in which their dialogue seemed almost improvised' (1995: 303). It is implied (through Jim seeming to know that Belle carries a stiletto in her garter) that, in addition to the companionship and cigars which they share, the two men may have shared Belle as well (anticipating the later 'sharing' of Elena by Stone Calf and McCabe), though this generates no genuine antagonism between them and McCabe is quick to believe – or to *appear* to believe – Jim's jokey dismissal of his suspicions. From this point onward, Belle's importance is little more than as a negative contrast to the new relationships that develop as the narrative moves on. The journey continues until we dissolve to the encampment of covered wagons in the grounds of Fort Grant.

This is the key setting of the film and the point at which its thematic concerns are suddenly made palpable in the striking disarray of the camp, a setting characterised by a tension between impermanence and a sense of frozen time. On one hand, normal home life seems to have been turned inside out as women cook and wash clothes in the open air, with bedsteads and other domestic paraphernalia littering the ground between and around the covered wagons, and cattle wandering through. On the other hand, despite the sense this produces of a group of refugees in transit, the wagons are parked and stationary, marking out their fixed territories within the camp, rather than purposefully on the road to any alternative destination. We later see the wagons en route to the Comanche camp, accompanying Jim and McCabe at least part of the way, but we never see them return to the fort, though they are ensconced there again as though they'd never left by the time McCabe and Elena return from their fatal confrontation with Stone Calf. Any travelling they do merely circles back to where they began.

We soon learn that the family members these people search for amongst the Comanches have been gone for years, so their own lives have presumably been put on hold for years as well, frozen in an ongoing state of waiting, a permanent impermanence, though with some intermittent traffic that we hear about but never observe. This contrasts dramatically with the lives of the scattered community of settlers in *The Searchers* which continue to carry on and develop while Ethan and Martin look for Debbie (Natalie Wood). In *Two Rode Together*, on the other hand, there is no visible nation building going on, just endless milling around in a cramped and unsustaining environment. Unsettled and unproductive, at least as far as we can see, these families seem trapped in an endless present from which they turn to the past in hope of recovering their missing wives and children as they once were, as 'white'.

Racial uncertainties

Despite such attempts to turn back time, the white identities of captive family members, apparently so secure in the past, turn out never to have been more than provisional. Racial identity in this film is not so much a matter of skin colour but is, rather, a way of life or, especially in Elena's case, a way of being treated by others: it is not so much an essence, in other words, as an existential process, a becoming (and, thus, potentially an unbecoming). McCabe brutally emphasises the otherness of the captives in his speculative, but accurate enough, speech to Marty about her brother, part of which I quoted earlier: 'He forgot his English. He just grunts Comanche now. Just grunts. And he's killed. And he's taken scalps, white man's scalps.' Further, when Quanah Parker hands Running Wolf (David Kent) over to Jim Gary and McCabe, though we don't yet know he is Marty's brother, the boy himself insists

in Comanche, 'I'm no white man,' spitting at Jim, who asks Quanah Parker for confirmation: 'Is he *white*?' Jim also says of Elena, the other captive traded for guns by Quanah Parker, 'Well, that's no white woman. She's a squaw', though McCabe correctly recognises her as Mexican, pointedly addressing her as 'Señorita'.

Back at the white encampment, Running Wolf, though known to have been a white captive, is nevertheless called 'Comanche' by one man and 'Injun' by another, and, even though Mrs McCandless (Jeanette Nolan) is adamant that he's her son, her delusion on this score undercuts her implied belief in his whiteness (that is, she believes he's white as part of her belief that he's her son, but, in fact, he's *not* her son). As her husband puts it, 'My Mary ain't ever gonna know what's real and what ain't.' Many members of the white families who, like Mrs McCandless, await a missing spouse or child, are either deluded or resigned, like Vladimir in *Waiting For Godot* (as quoted by Harold Schweizer in one of the citations that opens this essay) as he waits for Godot to turn up: 'Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him.' For both Vladimir and the waiting families in the film, to continue to wait is to risk not just disappointment but mounting absurdity. The film's white characters are caught up in an endless frustrated attempt to retrieve a lost past of racial certainties that no longer exist: instead, white identities have become hopelessly chaotic, ambiguous and liable to unravel. Misrecognition is rampant.

Further reinforcing the sense of shifting and permeable boundaries between Comanches and whites is the unexpected

American accent that Quanah Parker slips into when he talks with Jim and McCabe in his teepee, away from the rest of the Comanches, and other semantically firm boundaries loosen up in practice as well. For example, Marty dresses in male clothing and tells Jim that, when younger, she prayed to become a boy and continues to do so now, while Hannah Clegg (Mae Marsh), one of the captives who refuses to be rescued, answers Jim's question – 'You'd rather be listed as dead?' – by declaring emphatically, 'I *am* dead' (and McCabe too is wrongly assumed to be dead when he hasn't yet returned from his encounter with Stone Calf). These minor instances of slippage – or wished-for slippage – between being female or male, alive or dead, mirror the much more thematically central erosion between being Comanche or white.

In fact, whiteness has always been a matter of degree, rather than an absolute. In Richard Dyer's words, some whites 'are whiter than others. Latins, the Irish and Jews, for instance, are rather less securely white than Anglos, Teutons and Nordics' (1997: 12). Thus, blue-eyed blondes are 'whiter' than those with darker hair and eyes, and, on the evidence of both *The Searchers* and *Two Rode Together*, they appear to be less likely to recover from the imputed stains of their captivity. Jim Gary, for example, agrees that the dark-haired Running Wolf can be 'rescued' against his will, even in the face of his apparent savagery, but he insists of blonde Freda Knudsen (Regina Carrol) that 'she stays', even though her father, Ole Knudsen (John Qualen), had earlier shown himself to be the most willing to have his lost child restored to him regardless of what she may turn out to have undergone ('She's still my little girl Freda'), and McCabe agrees with Jim in considering her unsalvageable in spite of her father's uncritical acceptance. Of course, Freda's femaleness, and not just her blondeness, differentiates her from Running Wolf and makes her return more disturbing for the two men, though it remains the case that darker women – such as Elena in *Two Rode Together* and Debbie in *The Searchers* – appear to be less susceptible to racial and sexual corruption by their time as captives than 'whiter' ones.[2]

Far less tolerant than Knudsen are the Reverend Henry Clegg (Ford Rainey) and his sons, Ortho (Harry Carey Jr) and Greeley (Ken Curtis), the family of captive Hannah Clegg who,

as we've already noted, considers herself dead and unable to be reintroduced into their midst, knowing her family all too well. Clegg ends up acting as judge in Running Wolf's hasty unofficial trial for killing Mrs McCandless after she frees the boy and attempts to cut his Comanche-style braids, and, as presiding judge, he is the one to pronounce sentence on him: the boy is 'to be hanged by the neck until he is dead'. Clegg is thus a vindictive figure of white retribution, while Ortho and Greeley, who share his outlook but lack his patriarchal heft, are seen as objects of ridicule, vying for Marty's affection in

joint opposition to Jim Gary's more measured and welcome courtship. After Ortho and Greeley shake Marty's covered wagon to get her to come out, she laughingly throws flour over them both. Their insipid stupidity and the exaggerated visible whiteness of this floury coating are here intermixed in a parodic moment befitting a film where whiteness is provisional and readily lost. The flour in which the two are dredged provides no more than a thin veneer which can potentially be washed away, like the racial superiority to which the Clegg family's men implicitly lay claim.

So the film's racial underpinnings are more nuanced than may at first appear or than many of the characters are aware. The moment when McCabe first encounters Elena and correctly recognises her as Mexican is an early indication both of McCabe's perspective and that of the film as a whole. In restoring and respecting Elena's Hispanic heritage and its European roots, he refuses the tendency of many of the white characters in the film to ignore such fine distinctions, Elena herself appearing more dignified and respectable than many

of those who look down on her. However, if McCabe's position suggests a subtler three-part structure of Anglos, Comanches and Hispanics, it is also the case that numerous emphatic parallels between Elena and Marty, while recognising Elena's dignified Hispanic otherness, nonetheless maintain the fundamental sisterhood of the two women across the cultural divide.

Each woman is first seen on horseback (both of them riding pintos) and with her hair in braids (though Elena's are covered at first). Each dresses in a way deemed inappro-

priate for the dance they are encouraged to attend by Gary and McCabe respectively, and each turns up wearing one of Marty's dresses (McCabe having told Elena that Marty is 'about the same size' before he goes to borrow the dress on her behalf) and with her hair worn up. If such insistent parallels signal the physical links between the two women and society's need to normalise them both, the emotional connection

Imagery

As we saw earlier, the whiteness of the flour with which Marty covers the Clegg brothers provides a fleeting bit of sly symbolism, but much more persistent and significant is the film's recurring imagery of immobilised wheels. An early example of this follows fast on the heels of Ortho and Greeley's flour-dusting when Marty, having chased them away, walks around a bed on the ground outside her wagon, under a sort of awning, with a wheel dominating the right foreground of the frame as two men walk by in the background. Marty opens a chest at the foot of the bed and takes out and plays a music box associated with her brother and happier days together as an intact family in the past. The domestic topsyturveydom, endless waiting and lack of privacy in the camp – the sense of stalled and disordered lives, which was noted earlier – are here anchored both in the image of the stationary wheel and in Marty's circular walk around the bed, as well as in the music box's gear-driven and repetitive tune. Frozen movements and circular or repetitive movements alike reinforce the overwhelming impression of the camp as a place of purgatorial stasis.

is more moving and profound, as when Marty immediately offers Elena friendship on first meeting her at the dance and approaching her in a clear show of support, later putting her arm around Elena and accompanying her when she leaves the dance in distress.

Marty's wholesome decency is partly a component of the persona Shirley Jones brought with her to the role from a run of previous performances in such movie musicals as *Oklahoma* (Fred Zinnemann, 1955), *Carousel* (Henry King, 1956), and *April Love* (Henry Levin, 1957), though she had more recently won an Academy Award for best supporting actress in *Elmer Gantry* (Richard Brooks, 1960), where she played a prostitute. Nevertheless it would be misleading to describe her, as Eugene Archer did in a contemporary review of *Two Rode Together*, as 'a vapid ingenue' (1961).[3] Gallagher, incidentally, calls *Elena* 'one of Ford's most empathetic ingenues' (2017), though presumably not a vapid one, and finds both Elena and

Marty 'wide-eyed and trusting': wide-eyed, maybe, but clear-eyed enough as well.

In *Two Rode Together,* each of the two women ends up with the man of her choice, not in a passive embrace of a fate beyond her control, but through an exercise of free will. In rejecting the Clegg brothers, Marty tells Greeley, 'I'll go and come when I please, Mr Clegg, and with whom I please,' and, when McCabe tells Elena to choose between accompanying him to Fort Grant or remaining with Stone Calf, she turns her horse around to go with him, her act of will made even more manifest by his apparent indifference, at least for now.[4] As the two romances blossom, the scene where McCabe first kisses Elena is followed by a scene where Jim and Marty kiss for the first time (at Marty's instigation), reinforcing through the proximity of these paired moments the doubling of the women themselves which, in turn, is bolstered by their shared resilience and their self-determination, at least in matters of the heart.

Later, after McCabe's unkind words to Marty about her brother's likely fate as a captive, McCabe shouting after her, 'Is that what you want?' as Marty runs away in tears, we cut back to Jim reprimanding McCabe under an archway, with another wheel dominating the left foreground of the frame, while shadows of branches darken the setting overall. There are more instances of the wheel motif throughout the film, its importance underlined by the prominent placement of

wheels within the frame, including the two wheels of a cannon in the foreground of a scene in the quarters of Major Frazer (John McIntire) where Running Wolf has been brought. Here the peculiarity of the cannon's indoor location may further alert us to its non-naturalistic significance, both in terms of the wheel motif and the way the cannon itself is suggestively aimed at Marty and Mrs McCandless, the two women who will be hurt most terribly by Running Wolf's retrieval from the Comanches. However, the most striking example of a wheel being used to dramatic purpose is the one to which Running Wolf will be tied, his wrist bound to one of the spokes, after being falsely claimed by Mr McCandless (Cliff Lyons) for the sake of his wife, in order to give her the comforting illusion that her son has been restored. The negative connotations of the stationary wheel, here figured as virtually an instrument of torture, are difficult to miss. When Mrs McCandless releases her 'son' and is on the point of cutting off his braids, he kills her with a knife.

The lynching of Running Wolf greases the wheels that can now take the families back home again to a productive life and, certainly in the case of Henry J. Wringle (Willis Bouchey), a financially remunerative one. He'd earlier complained to McCabe about the impossibility of running a business with the constant camping and decamping involved

in the search for his wife's son, whom he'd promised to find before she'd agree to marry him. His deal with McCabe that Wringle would pay him $1000 for *any* boy for his wife to accept as hers and the handshake with which they seal the bargain set up an unpleasant parallel between the two men as practical entrepreneurs who, as Wringle puts it, make their own luck. The linking of money, luck and deal-making takes us back, in turn, to McCabe's relationship with Belle Aragon in Tascosa, near the beginning of the film, and to the film's first prominent stationary wheel in the foreground of the frame: the roulette wheel in Belle's saloon, temporarily out of use before opening hours. The wheel will, of course, resume spinning and making money (including McCabe's 10%) when Belle opens for business each evening.

In a striking moment, when Running Wolf is being dragged away to be hanged and he recognises the music-box tune from his childhood, the word he repeatedly calls out in English – 'Mine! Mine!' – momentarily both restores the white aspect of his identity and links him to the ideology of owner-ship and accumulation which characterises Wringle, McCabe, and Belle Aragon alike. The wagon wheels whose imminent turning marks an end to the white characters' waiting are simultaneously the wheels of entrepreneurial capitalism which herald this society's future. As Harold Schweizer puts it in his book about waiting:

> The person who waits is out of sync with time, outside of the "moral" and economic community of those whose time is productive and synchronized or whose time need not – in the habit of velocity – be experienced at all. The waiter's enforced passivity expels him from the commu-nity of productive citizens; his endurance of time estranges him from the culture of money and speed. (2008: 12)

Now such waiting is at an end. It's back to business as usual.

Elena de la Madriaga

All of this may make *Two Rode Together* sound like a cynical account of the degeneration of the Old West into something far less appealing than the seductive myths – whether primi-tivist or pastoral – of so many other Westerns. Indeed, 'cynical' is a term that crops up frequently in discussions of

this film, for example in J. A. Place's comment that '*Two Rode Together* is Ford's first obviously cynical Western', as cited by Brian Spittles in his own account of Ford (2002: 78). Certainly we are shown a number of characters who are motivated by money or who are intolerant and prurient towards white captives 'tarnished' by experiences imposed on them against their will. However, there are also characters who take a firm stand against such materialism, racial prejudice and condescension, and the film itself is clearly on their side. McCabe himself may begin as a cynic opting for a life of indolence and easy money, but he is ready to reject this by the end of the film.

That his former life is only a superficial affectation to be readily sloughed off is made evident when we return to Tascosa near the end of the film. We see a man relaxing outside Belle's saloon, a hat covering his face, in a pose and situation obviously reminding us of McCabe at the start of the film, and wearing almost identical clothes, enticing us to assume that we have come full circle and that McCabe is back where he began. However, the man under the hat turns out to be Ward Corby (Chet Douglas), whom we came across briefly as McCabe's deputy in the earlier sequence in Tascosa, his lightweight and foolish persona recalling the inanity of Ortho and Greeley Clegg. We learn that Ward's clothes are from the same place in San Antonio as those McCabe wore earlier, ordered for Ward by his new fiancée, Belle, and that he has been elected marshal in place of McCabe.

McCabe's playful indignation when faced with Ward's taking his place belies a deeper sense of relief due largely to his growing allegiance to Elena and the sense of purpose and escape she provides. The only genuine anger he displays is in response to Belle's nastily aggressive comment to Elena: 'I know all about you, Mrs Stone Calf.' He is more than happy to relinquish Belle and his sinecure as marshal of Tascosa, and, once he joins Elena on the stagecoach out of town, his affability and smiles return. In this way, McCabe breaks out of a circular reversion to his situation at the start of the film and heads out in a new direction, with Elena's own imminent departure for California providing the catalyst for his decision to make a fresh start with her.

I think it is important to the effect produced by the film's ending that Elena decides on the move to California prior to

and independent of McCabe's decision to accompany her, a further example of Elena's strength and self-reliance. However, unlike Laurie (Vera Miles) in *The Searchers*, whose refusal to wait for Martin nearly leads to her marrying the wrong man, Elena's refusal to wait ends up bringing her the right one. It also counteracts a certain complacency in McCabe. This over-confidence in his own point of view had earlier shown itself in his well-intentioned attempts to help her when she is confronted with the hostility of the men and women at Fort Grant. Having advised her to get rid of her Comanche-style braids (thus aligning himself with the unfortunate Mrs McCandless who was killed when on the verge of cutting off Running Wolf's braids) and to dress more suitably in one of

Marty's dresses, he takes her to the dance at the army post, but these superficial changes to her appearance do little to remove the perceived blemishes of her time with the Comanches amongst the army men and women who snub or confront her.

Explaining why she hadn't committed suicide rather than live as Stone Calf's woman, Elena begins to speak but is unable to continue, and McCabe turns on her inquisitors, completing the answer for her: she didn't kill herself 'because her religion forbids it'. This is a moment that strikes me as remarkably presumptuous, if well meant, on McCabe's part, and it is unmotivated by anything we have heard Elena tell him previously. Elena is far enough away to make it difficult to read her reaction accurately: we merely see her looking quickly up at McCabe, then lowering her gaze and walking outside, away from the camera, with Marty's arm around her. McCabe follows up his explanation by saying that Elena had

asked him, that afternoon, to take her back to the Comanches 'because she was treated much better by [them] than she's been treated by some of you'. This sits uneasily with his assertion that, if not for her religion, she would have killed herself rather than live amongst the Comanches.

Is it not possible that Elena refuses suicide not because of her religion but because, unlike the other captives, she is neither left adrift – as good as dead, like Hannah Clegg – when the mainstays of her white identity are taken from her nor does she embrace a new Comanche identity to the exclusion of anything else, as Running Wolf has done? Perhaps Elena alone is able to reconcile her experiences amongst the Comanches with her previous life because she is both fully grown when captured and less than wholly 'white'. She also has no family waiting for her to come back to them exactly as she was before. Elena therefore doesn't experience her captivity as a trauma: rather than her white and Comanche experiences being irreconcilably at odds, her clear-sighted attitude to captivity may allow her to integrate them in a single coherent identity. McCabe may not fully grasp much of this, though he nevertheless shares Elena's refusal to believe that her captivity is cause for shame. In time McCabe may even come to realise that Elena has saved him as much as he has saved her.

Jim Gary utters the last line of dialogue in the film, after Belle comments on how little she'd understood McCabe after all: 'Yeah. Well, guess old Guth finally found something he wanted more than 10% of.' In place of the roulette wheel in Belle's saloon that is part of a money-spinning set-up from whose profits McCabe could have benefited, he chooses

another sort of gamble detached from the prospect of effortless financial gain, as the stagecoach wheels start turning to take him and Elena out of town. The open-endedness of their future life together is nicely captured by the dangling preposition that ends Jim's remark to Belle, a fitting and uncynical conclusion to the film as a whole.

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him on the way to the Comanche camp, "From now on we ride together", there is an equally telling moment, described by Gallagher (2017) in his video essay on the film, when Elena chooses to ride back to Fort Grant with McCabe rather than remaining with Stone Calf and the Comanches, and Ford 'lingers lovingly on her hesitation, her turning her horse', and, of course, Elena and McCabe ride off together on the stagecoach at the end of the film.

2 Douglas Pye has also discussed the symbolic significance of hair colour in a Ford film, focussing on Debbie in *The Searchers* in his essay, 'Double Vision: Miscegenation and Point of View in *The Searchers'* (1996: 234).

3 The phrase could more fittingly be applied to another Ford heroine, Philadelphia Thursday in *Fort Apache* (1948), portrayed by Shirley Temple when not quite out of her teens. Jones herself remarks that, 'Although I was named Shirley after the saccharine child star Shirley Temple, I've always been far more full of spice than of sugar' (2013: 5): here she seems to be talking about herself rather than her film persona, though the comment seems relevant to both.

4 Marty's rejection of Greeley provides another contrast with *The Searchers* where Laurie nearly marries the ludicrously ill-suited Charlie McCorry, played (like Greeley) by Ken Curtis, a misstep only averted when Martin Pawley – the actual object of her desire – turns up fortuitously and in the nick of time. In the same film, Marty's namesake Martha is not as lucky as Laurie and has long ago settled for second-best. Intriguingly, Marty not only shares her given name with Martha, but she also shares her nickname with Martin Pawley, and her comment to Greeley that she'll 'go and come when I please' may remind us of Martin's comings and goings throughout *The Searchers*. So *The Searchers'* women are much more the victims of circumstance rather than agents of their own desires, in contrast to Marty and Elena once they have left their past sufferings behind them.

1 Or, indeed, of competing moments within the same film: Tag Gallagher suggests that 'it is not clear even to whom the title's "Two" refers' (1986: 376). Although Jim Gary tells McCabe, when the latter catches up with

STUDENT ESSAYS

Introduction

Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism wants to encourage a new generation of critics working on the aesthetics of film and television style. To that end, we are introducing a regular section for publishing outstanding work by Masters and Undergraduate students. We aim to print two or three student essays per issue, as part of our move to rolling publication; we will also award an annual prize for the best essay, kindly sponsored by Palgrave, publishers of the book series, *Palgrave Close Readings in Film and Television*.

We are delighted to launch this initiative with Joshua J. Taylor's analysis of framing in *Late Spring* (Ozu Yasujiro, 1949). Taylor develops a nuanced account of aesthetic choices, seeking to 'reconcile the rupture between form and narrative' (2020: 22) found in previous approaches to the film. The essay engages the reader in a carefully staged argument, persuasively demonstrating ways in which frames are 'integral to the film's narrational strategies' (2020: 33), through exemplary attention to detail both within individual sequences and as systematic patterns across the film.

Taylor's exploration of mise-en-scène in a canonical film by an admired director evokes traditional areas of interest for *Movie* (in both its original and online forms). Aesthetic criticism is not limited to these areas, however, and we trust that publishing student work will also give voice to new critical perspectives. As Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan note, the best film criticism 'can confront our assumptions about value' (2011: 1). François Truffaut was only twenty-one when he chastised the French 'Tradition of Quality' for its aesthetic failures as cinema and its bourgeois representation of the working class. In the 1960s and 1970s, *Movie* played a key role in re-evaluating Hollywood genre films and popular cinema as expressive aesthetic forms – an approach that is now so normalised we forget it was once considered shocking.

What are the critical issues that will define film and television aesthetics in the 2020s? The digital generation is open to new possibilities. Students may well choose to write about more contemporary films, transforming the canon through inclusion of marginalised filmmakers and forms. While essays written for taught courses are likely to rehearse and reproduce the ideas of those who came before, they can also question, challenge and critique.

In this spirit of nurturing new talent, we invite lecturers to submit outstanding work from Masters and Undergraduate students for potential publication. All submissions should focus on questions of aesthetics and style, including close reading of specific screen-based texts. Essays should be in the range of 4,000-6,000 words and are subject to appropriate editorial review as part of a rigorous selection process. Please email submissions to movie.journal@gmail.com.

Masters and Undergraduate students who wish to submit their work should approach their lecturer in the first instance; this gate-keeping system is to ensure all submissions meet our remit, since we have limited administration resources. PhD students are encouraged to submit work independently as part of the journal's standard submission process.

KATHRINE GLITRE

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Ozu's frames: Form and narrative in *Late Spring*

Ozu Yasujiro's *Late Spring / Banshun* (1949) depicts the reluctant but inevitable path towards marriage of twenty-seven-year-old Noriko (Hara Setsuko) in an exploration of the slowly simmering tensions embedded in the minutiae of humble domestic experience – principally between the stability of routine and the inevitability of change caused by life's inexorable march forward. Noriko desires the stability of her current life, enjoying an amicable relationship with her father, Somiya (Ryu Chishu), along with a rare degree of independence. But now in her 'late spring', the pressure to conform to the expectation of marriage builds, as does the inevitability of change. Marriage represents a complete rupture in Noriko's life, by which she would lose the unconditional affection of her father's company as well as much of her independence. Yet the film's intention is not to simply denounce the institution of marriage as oppressive of Noriko's autonomy, but to portray, with even-handed sympathy, how she negotiates such tensions: between modern liberties and traditional sensibilities, filial affection and marital obligation, routine and disruption, stability and change. With restraint, poise and sensitivity, the film is empathetic to Noriko's resistance, vacillations and eventual submission, leaving us with the deeply poignant sense of loss shared by father and daughter

as an inextricable consequence of life's inevitable patterns of change.

Late Spring's nuanced consideration of these themes is presented in a reserved and understated style without recourse to formal flourishes or melodramatic performances. The film's characteristic formal features, including a persistently low camera height, 'straight-on' angles, a 360-degree shooting space, sparse use of camera movements and sequences of 'transitional' shots between scenes are those that would come to define Ozu's distinct aesthetic, as catalogued by Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell in their pioneering *Screen* article (1976). However, as I will discuss, the exact functions of Ozu's formal rigour have long been points of critical disagreement. Whereas Thompson and Bordwell suggest Ozu's techniques are purely modernist, functioning in spite of narrative concerns, Robin Wood robustly argues that Ozu's techniques are in fact crucial to our understanding of narrative and characters, working 'to guide our concentration firmly upon them and define a particular way of regarding them' (1998: 108).

In Wood's sketch of what he considers to be Ozu's most effective techniques he identifies the use of frames within the cinematic frame – internal frames fashioned from décor, doorways and *shoji* screens. A related feature is Ozu's tendency to preserve 'the intactness of the cinema frame', for characters to enter and exit the image from behind internal frames, rather than break through the boundaries of the image (Wood 1998: 109). Such trends in Ozu's treatment of spatial composition and movement are certainly striking across his post-war films, and are particularly salient in *Late Spring*. However, besides suggesting a general stylistic gesture towards the still life or portrait (a rich association I will develop later), these techniques do not figure in Wood's analysis of the film. Despite their arresting presence, the nature and function of internal frames in *Late Spring* have not yet been properly examined.

It is my contention that the frames in *Late Spring* are a vital component of the film's careful visual patterning, one of a number of sophisticated and symbiotic formal devices woven into the film's narrational strategies, such that they come to bear on our understanding of the narrative, our empathy with its characters and the film's nuanced exploration of its thematic

centre – Noriko's uncertain trajectory towards marriage, negotiating the tension between stability and change. First, I will situate my argument within the debates surrounding critical treatment of Ozu's aesthetic, attempting to reconcile the rupture between form and narrative in both culturalist and formalist approaches. I will then present four encounters with frames in *Late Spring*. The initial device of internal frames will be expanded into four iterations, a multivalent concept with interdependent effects, intimately connected to the broader formal strategies of the film. My essay will elucidate how *Late Spring's* frames structure space, modulate movement, create a motif of the portrait and activate actionless spaces in ways that determine our understanding of the narrative and its complex themes.

Framing Ozu

Ozu's restrained, methodical style has long been a site of critical contention. In examining a prominent formal strategy such as frames in *Late Spring*, we must consider the grounds on which it might be interpreted. On the one hand, we might speculate that the internal frames as a graphic element echo a kind of quintessential Japanese aesthetic, perhaps imitating the arrangement of space in *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. Indeed, this has been the approach of culturalist critics, who have sought to decipher Ozu's aesthetic by postulating its cultural sources. Donald Richie's early and influential monograph opens with the claim that Ozu was the most 'Japanese' of directors – pointing to a resemblance with *sumi-e* ink drawings and *waka* poetry to illustrate his 'real Japanese flavour' – whose sole subject was the 'Japanese family in dissolution' (1977: xiii, 1). Similarly, Paul Schrader's description of Ozu's 'transcendental' style argues for the 'unmistakable' influence of Zen philosophy, such that Ozu's 'personality, like that of his characters, merges with an enveloping sense of *mono no aware* [the pathos of things], and […] becomes undistinguishable from it' (1988: 38).

These accounts have been criticised for essentialising (and Orientalising) Ozu's style. Bordwell has astutely observed that aesthetic concepts such as *mono no aware* are historically contingent; to invoke them without sensitivity to their

shifting historical meanings is to misrepresent them, and Japanese aesthetics generally, as fixed and homogenous (1988: 26-29). Wood criticises Richie's discussion of 'Japaneseness' for painting Ozu as unambiguously conservative and traditional (1998: 99-100), whilst Thompson similarly resists the assumption that Ozu paints a sentimental picture of the Japanese family in terminal decline; 'Ozu's vision of family life is far from the simple, traditional, nostalgic one that most Western critics attribute to him' (1988: 325). Although Jinhee Choi argues these culturalist approaches may not be as essentialising as their critics suggest, offering not a direct causal explanation but a 'heuristic value' to account for Ozu's aesthetic sensibility and its effects (2018: 8), they nonetheless fail to consider how this sensibility shapes our understanding of narrative, and risk abstracting the films beyond their principal explorations of the personal, prosaic dramas that animate everyday existence.[1]

On the other hand, *Late Spring*'s frames might strike us as a kind of modernist pictorial game, a Mondrian-esque play with intersecting lines and fields of space. This would fit with strict formalist approaches that have argued for a complete severing of Ozu's formal rigour from narrative concerns. Thompson and Bordwell's thorough compendium of Ozu's techniques explicitly places them in a dialectic with what they describe as the classical Hollywood paradigm – the subordination of spatial and temporal structures to the logic of narrative causality. They claim, 'Ozu's films diverge from the Hollywood paradigm in that they generate spatial structures which are not motivated by the cause/effect chain of the narrative' (1976: 45). The effects of such disruptions to narrative logic, however, are considered to be indifferent to narrative concerns. Rather, they are evidence of Ozu's style as 'parametric' – style built from a set of predetermined, 'arbitrary' choices (parameters) unrelated to narrative that 'create a complex stylistic play to engage our perception' (Thompson 1988: 344). It is certainly true that some of Ozu's techniques, such as transitional shots and still lifes, do not progress narrative action; however, to reduce them to purely spatial exercises fails to recognise how, as I will argue, they in fact shape our experience of Ozu's films and their narratives.

The Japanese critic and theorist Hasumi Shigehiko criticises both Richie and Schrader's engagement with Ozu through Japanese aesthetics and Zen, and Thompson and Bordwell's characterisation of him as a modernist.[2] Dismissing such positions as interpretive myths, Hasumi instead argues that we must turn to the difficult task of re-looking at Ozu's films free of associations, such that we might begin to notice their 'infinitely open meanings'; for Hasumi, 'looking at Ozu is ideally a form of de-mythologizing, a resistance to dominant, often national meanings, one that makes one see anew' (Gerow 2018: 47). Having surveyed the contested critical ground on which Ozu's work has been discussed, it is my intention here to argue for the intrinsic relationship between *Late Spring*'s style and its narrative. In considering the functions of frames, I suggest that Ozu's rigorous aesthetic is essential to what affects us in our experience of the film – the complex and nuanced exploration of Noriko's reluctant but inevitable journey towards marriage, navigating tensions between routine and disruption, stability and change – in the hope that we might see it anew.

Frame one: Structuring space

The use of frames within the cinematic frame is an ever-present feature of the meticulously composed images of *Late Spring*. Internal frames are produced by the clever and methodical arrangement of elements in the mise-en-scène: in interior scenes, it is primarily doorways, furniture and *shoji* screens, whilst in exterior scenes, it may be railway infrastructure or the architecture of a streetscape. This works in tandem with the careful positioning of the camera (its own framing), such that these elements take on a strong graphic quality, as dominant vertical and horizonal lines intersecting the image at perpendicular angles, dividing the space into a collage of squares and rectangles. Importantly, it is amongst these squares and rectangles that characters enter and exit the image, appearing and disappearing from within the limits of the image.

Let us take two exemplars. First, Noriko's arrival at the tea ceremony. The camera peers from the far end of a hallway into another room, such that the subjects of the shot (the women

formally seated around the ceremonial apparatus) and the space they are in only occupy only a fraction of the whole image (a common occurrence across the film). In the foreground, a screen obscures the right extremity of the frame, whilst on the left is a series of slatted sliding doors along the length of the corridor. Their horizontal lines direct our eye towards the centre of the image where the women are gathered, neatly enclosed by the architectural beams supporting the structure. The vertical poles in the image clearly demarcate fields

of space: the framed space of the ceremony, the hallway and the immediate foreground distinguished by the screen on the right; we can certainly sense here the pictorial quality of a collage of squares and rectangles. Noriko enters the image midway along the left-hand side of the corridor. Importantly, the framing of the shot denies us a view of the space outside the hallway, where she enters from; rather, she appears from between the vertical poles in the image, and immediately her figure is framed by the architecture, drawn into the central space outlined by the composition.

Our second example is when Noriko runs into her father's friend, Onodera (Mishima Masao), in Tokyo. The obliquely angled shot looks out onto the street between three dominant lines at varying distances from the camera, drawn by the concrete and glass structures of the shopfronts. The windows filled with metallic goods take up more than half of the image, whilst the entire left fringe of the frame is encroached upon by a concrete column, leaving only a narrow gap through which to observe the street. Noriko emerges in the background from behind the central pole into the centre of this gap, before walking across the street and towards the camera, where we see her greet Onodera. In both this shot (exterior, obliquely angled) and the opening of the tea ceremony (interior, frontal), Noriko has entered the image internally and moved not across but *through* depth in the frame. The sense of space in these shots is narrowed by the compositions which obscure the fringes of the frame; rather than surveying the space, our eyes are directed inward, into depth, to the space where Noriko will emerge from behind an internal frame.

The immediate effect of internal frames in their structuring of space is to create a sense of interiority, filling the image with inanimate but compositionally integral objects that focus our gaze inwards, away from the limits of the frame that border the world beyond. As such, the film's internal frames, in relation to the frame of the image, diminish our sense of off-screen space, as characters so frequently emerge from within, rather than breaking through the boundaries of, the image. This spatial configuration constitutes a formal pattern, organising space and movement in the film – adherence to or deviation from which both create narrative significance.

Concomitant with this sense of interiority is the association of spaces structured by internal frames with the stability and routine of domestic life. In the above examples, Noriko has travelled into Tokyo for a doctor's appointment and to buy her father new collars, and her participation in the tea ceremony is a premise to meet with her aunt, Masa (Sugimura Haruko), who duly gives her a pair of trousers to repair.[3] In another early scene, Noriko assists Somiya with simple domestic tasks upon his arrival home. As Noriko prepares the dinner and assists Somiya to change into his kimono, they move between the living room, kitchen and bathroom, playfully passing in and out of shot behind internal frames formed of doorways and screens. The intrigue of the scene is how Noriko gradually reveals the details of her trip to the beach with Hattori (Usami Jun), whom Somiya thinks might make a good husband for her; unbeknownst to him

(and the viewer, also seduced by the possibility of a budding romance), Hattori is engaged, of which Noriko is fully aware. The suspense of Noriko's teasingly evasive answers to Somiya's questions is heightened by the characters slipping in and out of view. Yet their fluid, unimpeded movement around the house as they complete their chores suggests the familiarity of routine, briefly criss-crossing paths, toing and froing as they pass household objects to each other, choreographed like a

dance. As Andrew Klevan writes, the film presents these 'cat and mouse negotiations in terms of a pattern of exits and entrances [… by which] the film can establish the interlocking rhythms of the two characters in the home' (2001: 143).

These rhythms of domestic movement unfold within and behind the internal frames built into the mise-en-scène. The effect is not to suggest entrapment in domestic servitude – on the contrary, Noriko is content with this lifestyle – but to align these quotidian patterns of movement with the routine and stability of domestic life. The internal frames thus establish a spatial norm suggestive of the norms of Noriko's everyday life, departures from which carry narrative significance.

Frame two: Movement within and breaking beyond the frame

Indicative of the synthesis of *Late Spring*'s formal strategies, we have already touched on what is the subject of our second frame: movement, of both characters and camera. The predominantly static camera is one of Ozu's most distinctive stylistic traits; the very occasional camera movements in *Late Spring* are thus prominent as departures from the film's prevailing aesthetic scheme. Importantly, the film distinguishes between different *registers* of camera movements and the resulting impressions of movement in the image,

determined by the relationships between internal frames and the cinematic frame.

The train sequence features three instances of camera movement, along with several more conventionally static landscape shots, intercut with interior shots of Noriko and Somiya on their journey to Tokyo. Two of these moving shots have the camera attached to the side of the train, whilst the third mimics the view of a passenger looking out the window, its perspective fixed as the world passes by. Wood regards the train sequence as 'a sudden burst of energy' that celebrates 'Noriko's personal autonomy' (1998: 117); however, the sequence's impression of movement and its relationship to Noriko's independence are more nuanced than he suggests. Whilst the soundtrack is certainly sprightly, it is significant that in all three instances movement is imparted not by the autonomous mobility of the camera but by the motion of the train. Here, movement passes *through* the static frame, which is locked onto the rhythms of the train's movement – its daily journey, as if the camera were a passenger. Furthermore, the sequence employs internal frames to structure its images, akin to the frames in the scenes I described above, though here they are cleverly created by the camera's framing of railway infrastructure. In the shots affixed to the side of the carriage – which itself takes up the right side of the frame, counteracting

patterning, dividing the image into squares and rectangles through which the train travels. The effect of this sequence's internal frames and related constraints on movement is to invoke this journey as one of everyday ritual. Even in this scene of travel, the extremities of the image are de-emphasised and our focus turned inward. As a representation of Noriko's independence, the freedom of travelling to Tokyo is a routine experience, such that we sense not the exhilaration of Noriko's autonomy but the relative freedom afforded by her domestic circumstances.[4]

A different effect is achieved in the bicycle sequence, in which Noriko and Hattori accompany each other on an impromptu ride by the beach. As I mentioned, Hattori's engagement is unknown to us at this point. We view this scene intrigued by its romantic potential, encouraged by the soundtrack's swooning *ritardando* transition from jaunty to tender variations on the theme over a suggestive shot of two bicycles parked on the dunes, before a passage of flirtatious dialogue ensues. The sequence builds momentum through various types of camera movements. Beginning with a static transition shot of the sea, the film cuts to a lateral tracking shot moving along the beach, recalling a similar impression of movement from the train sequence – as if fixed to a vehicle, the landscape moving through the frame. The film cuts to

movement as an unmoving, constant element in the composition – the succession of passing telegraph poles, reaching up the left side of the image and over the train, form a tunnel of frames through which the train travels. This extends to the wider, static landscape shots. Most are positioned close to the tracks, the passing train framed amongst the telegraph poles and overhead wires; even when the camera is further away, looking through a window, it continues this spatial
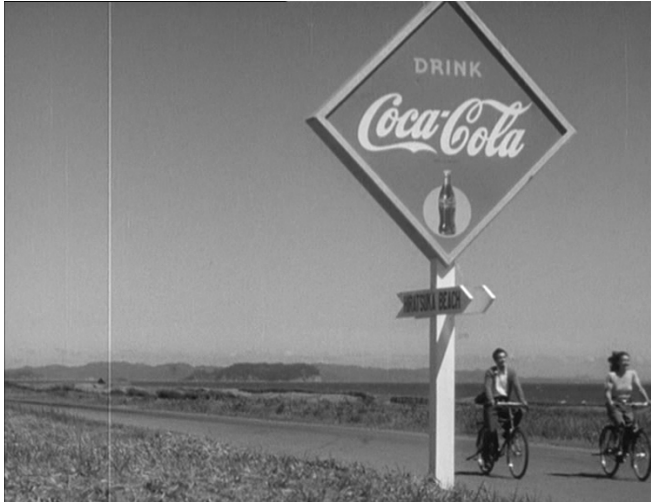
separate medium close-ups of Noriko and Hattori. We are yet to see that they are riding bicycles: the movement suggested by the wind in their hair, the occasional jolt of their torsos and brief appearances of the passing landscape at the very bottom of the frame is offset by their fixed central position and low angle framing against an empty sky. Movement is muted, such that the impression is less of the characters moving through space, than space moving behind them, through the

frames that divide space in other scenes. Their entering and exiting through the boundaries of the frame, a rarity in the film, connects their movement to off-screen space – where the characters have been or will go, somewhere in the world beyond, not contained within the image we see.

This sequence is certainly important for suggesting Noriko's freedom – that she can take a spontaneous jaunt with a man, enjoying a capacity for movement and leisure unavailable to most women. But within the film's broader patterning, this scene is more significant as an anomalous event, one that exists outside the confines of Noriko's everyday routines, those marked by enclosed, framed spaces. The interplay of movement and the cinematic frame inverts the quality of interiority created by internal frames throughout the rest of the film, allowing both the camera and Noriko to move through the world, connecting the sensation of movement to the revelation of off-screen space. The film's aberrant movement is suggestive of the excitement of potential change – of the apparent romantic temptation of Hattori, with whom Noriko has an obvious affinity.

But this potential exists in tension with the stability of Noriko's life with her father. Like Somiya, we are playfully misled by the suggestion of an erotic charge; Noriko knew all along. Her coquettish charm in this scene, pushing back her hair and giggling about being 'the jealous type,' is predicated

on this knowledge. Noriko is free of inhibitions because she knows there will be no consequences.[5] It does, however, catch Hattori's attention, leaning in closer to Noriko as they flirt on the dunes. When he later attempts to escalate the relationship, inviting Noriko to a violin recital, she declines out of consideration of his fiancée, to avoid the potentially scandalous repercussions. After her refusal, the sequence concludes with two slow tracking shots in which Noriko remains statically centred – the exploratory movement of the bicycle sequence

reverting to an impression of movement *through* the frame – followed by her turning a street corner in long shot, once again exiting via an internal frame. We return to the quality of interiority, the diminished sense of off-screen space, as Noriko evades the possibility of disruption and change in favour of maintaining her lifestyle with her father. Here, as throughout the film, the interplay of movement with internal

frames and the cinematic frame is presented in different registers that reflect Noriko's autonomy in constant negotiation of routine, stability and change.

Frame three: Noriko's portrait

The pathos of *Late Spring* comes from the *inevitability* of change, despite Noriko's resistance to it. Her eventual submission to change is where the film finds its poignant emotional centre, that of life's inexorable march forward. The film incrementally builds this sense of inevitability through the motif of the portrait.

Internal frames direct our focus away from the extremities of the image; the breadth of the image is curtailed in favour of an impression of verticality. For example, when Aya (Tsukioka Yumeji) visits, Noriko goes downstairs to the kitchen where she is framed by a doorway in long shot; or after she has met Mrs Miwa (Miyake Kuniko) at her aunt's, we again see her in a doorway. In both instances, the clear lines of sight created by the compositions draw us into the narrow fields of space in which Noriko appears – spaces that impress their verticality, gesturing towards a portrait orientation.[6]

From this initial association, the portrait motif emerges as a subtle pattern across the film. Following his wedding, Hattori brings a gift to the house, a wedding portrait of him

and his bride received by the housekeeper, Shige (Takahashi Toyo). A close-up over-the-shoulder shot of the photograph shows us the couple's wedding attire and rigid poses – framed by the photograph, but also by their new status as husband and wife. Shige says, 'I always figured he'd marry Miss Noriko one day.' Shige expected to see Noriko occupying the place of the bride in this portrait, hinting at the failed opportunity of a romance with Hattori, but also at the social expectation of her eventual marriage.

After Noriko succumbs to pressure and accepts an arranged proposal, she indeed moves closer to occupying the space of a wedding portrait. This is conveyed by the appearance of two mirrors, internal frames that gesture towards the portrait through their framing of Noriko's reflected image. The first mirror appears at the beginning of the Kyoto sequence, as Onodera asks Noriko about her engagement. She is seated in front of the mirror, but we only see part of her shoulders and hair. When she stands and exits the shot, her reflection is caught in the mirror, keeping her in the shot even as she crosses the edge of the frame, such that her exit is from *within* the internal frame of the mirror. Her movement into off-screen space is contained by her reflected image, visualising a tension: the still unmarried Noriko, enjoying her final trip with her father and the last of their amicable life together, but now enclosed by the frame of the mirror, suggestive of her becoming an *image*, to be framed in a wedding portrait.

This initial move towards framing Noriko's image is completed by the second appearance of a mirror on her wedding day, within which we now see Noriko's full portrait reflected back to us. Noriko's desire to hold on to her stable lifestyle with her father, that which enabled her independence, has yielded to the inevitable. Both Klevan (2001: 147) and Wood (1998: 119) make the point that this shot gives us Noriko's *reflection* rather than her true self, and the repeated view of the now-empty mirror at the end of the scene conveys the loss of her independence and mobility. Indeed, Noriko's image has become that of 'wife' in a direct echo of the wedding portrait we saw earlier: like Hattori's bride, Noriko is rigidly posed, weighed down by the elaborate wedding regalia, immobilised by her new social role. When the mirror

is emptied, Noriko's image now belongs to the wedding portrait that we know will be taken later that day. Rather than a blatant entrapment, the subtle patterning of the portrait motif works to suggest the inevitability of Noriko's marriage, her preordained place as a wife in a wedding portrait, despite her resistance to it and the deep feeling of loss it will cause, the very tension and poignancy at the film's heart.

Frame four: Framing shots

A unique feature of Ozu's style that has been the source of much critical discussion is his peculiar use of spaces devoid of human action to bookend and interrupt scenes. These shots – often of landscapes, empty rooms or objects arranged in the manner of a still life – are usually spatially contiguous to the scenes they precede or proceed (often forming transitional sequences between them), but have been thought to be extraneous to narrative. Thompson and Bordwell characterise these as 'intermediate spaces' that exceed narrative economy and demonstrate an 'interest in the *spaces between points of narrative action*' (1976: 46). Nöel Burch famously described them as 'pillow shots' akin to the role of 'pillow words' in classical Japanese poetry. Wary of the specificity of each instance of this device, Burch suggests they '*suspend the diegetic flow*,' presenting the diegetic spaces they cushion 'out of narrative context […] as a pictorial space on another plane of "reality" as it were' (1979: 160-61). Whilst they might at first appear excessive in that they do not directly advance the narrative, these shots are far from functioning on an entirely separate plane. Taking up Klevan's suggestion that *Late Spring*'s transition shots be seen as 'framing devices' that 'inflect the viewer's perspective on the [narrative's] human incidents' (2001: 144), I would similarly posit the film's actionless spaces as frames that modulate the shots, sequences and narrative elements with which they are contiguous, shaping our engagement with narrative, character and emotion.

As an exemplar of such framing shots and their evocative effects, let us consider one of the film's most complex moments: the (in)famous still life shots of the vase during the Kyoto sequence that have been the source of a persistent critical conundrum.[7] Having turned in for the night, Noriko attempts to express to her father how the prospect of his remarriage had bothered her, but when she turns to him, Somiya has rather quickly fallen asleep, perhaps deliberately avoiding the topic. The film cuts from Somiya back to Noriko, who returns her gaze upwards, adjusting her head on the pillow. Her expression gently shifts from slight concern when looking at her father (having broached, unsuccessfully, a difficult subject) to a pleasant but thoughtful contentment as

she stares at the ceiling, at which point Somiya's soft snoring enters on the soundtrack. Then comes the first cutaway to the still life of the vase, sustained for seven seconds. The film cuts back to Noriko, whose expression is still pensive, but now decidedly concerned. She once more adjusts her position, turning her face away from the camera, moving her hand (barely visible in the previous shot) closer across her body. Light glints in her glassy left eye as she makes this gesture, and it's not quite clear if a tear swells. Over the course of this

movement, we witness an astounding passage: from concern to anxiety; to uncertainty and fear; to resignation and sadness. Each emotion emerges from the subtlest shifts in expression, accumulating across the duration of the shot. By the time the film cuts to the second view of the vase, we are left with Noriko's quietly turbulent emotional state. Somiya's snoring continues over this final shot of the vase, held for ten seconds. The solemn score enters midway through, providing a bridge to the subsequent shot of the Ryoan-ji rock garden.

Amidst what is a remarkable performance of subtlety and restraint by Hara Setsuko, these still lifes act as framing shots that inflect our engagement with Noriko's complex state of mind as she continues to wrangle with imminent change. Indeed, this moment is key to the film drawing us into Noriko's tumultuous negotiation of the tension between her desire for stability and the inevitability of change.

On a surface level, the still lifes frame Noriko by virtue of montage, immediately following each of the emotionally charged medium close-ups. But the film goes further. The shot of the vase itself is peculiar, much of it obscured by shadows, and framed at a slightly oblique angle, unlike so much of the frontal framing that characterises the film's interiors. A boundary between the left and middle thirds of the image is marked by a strong vertical pole. It intersects two further wooden beams, one that emerges from the shadows of the left foreground, the other marking out the raised tatami on which the vase stands, running across the image then receding towards the wall behind, into which is set a *shoji* window with elliptical sides. Here we can see internal frames at play: a frame is traced around the vase, down the vertical pole, along the edge of the raised platform, framing it against the *shoji* window, which itself forms another internal frame. Echoing Noriko's frequent appearances within internal frames throughout the film, the link between Noriko and the still lifes implied by montage is strengthened by the continuation of one of the film's dominant pictorial patterns.

An important effect of the vase shots is their temporal ambiguity. Of course, these still lifes are not exactly still, but filmed in duration. Behind the vase, we see silhouettes of spindly vegetation through the *shoji* window, gently swaying in contrast to the static forms of the interior. The duration of the shots (seven and ten seconds) far exceeds the time required to perceive them. Our engagement with them moves from deciphering their content and composition to registering their *impression* of passing time – the *sensation* of time itself. Alongside the tea ceremony and Ryoan-ji rock garden sequences, this is one instance in the film in which 'time itself seems to elongate […] becoming […] serenely indistinct and undefined' (Pigott 2008: 13). The still lifes of the vase evoke temporal ambiguity, as we register the feeling of passing time with a warped sense of its duration, without attachment to any specific action, any movement forward. The temporal

qualities of these shots echo the aural qualities of Somiya's snoring – a drone, monotonous and formless, a sound without rhythmic markers to indicate temporal passage, the *continuous* accompaniment to a night's sleep. As they frame and thus inflect the views of Noriko's shifting emotional state, the still lifes suggest that this is a long night of restless contemplation for Noriko, whose complex emotional passage endures well beyond the four shots of this sequence, stressing the difficulty of reconciling her desires with her impending marriage.

As well as framing Noriko, these still lifes are themselves framed by shots of the Ryoan-ji rock garden that follow them. There are pictorial continuities between the vase and the garden: the vase stands alone on the bare tatami, meticulously framed, much like the rocks standing in the sparse field of pebbles, arranged with curatorial precision. Given Ozu's propensity for graphic matches, we can claim that these are deliberate continuities drawing a link between the garden and the vase.[8] Without getting lost in its Zen origins, it is worth noting that from wherever one stands to view the Ryoan-ji rock garden, at least one of the rocks remains hidden; we are reminded of the limitations of our perception, that we can shift positions for new perspectives, but that we can never comprehend the totality (Burch 1979: 160; Parks 2016: 299-300). The shots of the garden that frame the vase, and thus Noriko's complex emotional state, conjure a sense of that which can't be entirely comprehended or resolved: Noriko's anxieties, swirling around thoughts of her uncertain future, as yet unable to relinquish her independence and submit herself to the inevitable, unable to reconcile her desires and her obligations. Moreover, the rock garden implies a state of permanence: there will be no immediate or simple resolution to Noriko's emotional turmoil, but rather, these are tensions that will persist, that Noriko must endure and continue to negotiate throughout her life, well beyond the change to come through marriage.

When Noriko humbly kneels before her father on her wedding day, we are reminded of the still lifes through another pictorial echo: like the vase, Noriko kneels on a tatami, whilst the elaborate graphic patterns of her exquisite wedding kimono recall the intricately decorated ceramic of the vase.[9] This moment affirms that the vase is not an arbitrary object,

but one which, amidst the swirling, vacillating waves of Noriko's emotions, suggests her fear of marriage taking away her mobility and independence, becoming the ossified *image* of 'wife' (that of the wedding portrait) through its connotations of what Klevan insightfully describes as 'ornamental lifelessness' (2001: 137). The still lifes of the vase do not carry definitive, concrete meaning. Rather, their arresting power comes from their function as *evocative* framing shots that

draw out and enrich Hara's delicately nuanced performance, inflecting our understanding of this moment through their temporal ambiguity and graphic patterning with other images across the film.

Ozu's frames

Late Spring's deeply affecting narrative is presented in a restrained style that eschews overtly expressive devices and excessive cinematic rhetoric. Where both vague culturalism and strict formalism have been insufficient, my approach has sought to reconcile the film's rigorously systematic aesthetic with its profound emotional gravity through the four encounters with frames I have presented. It is clear that Ozu's frames – symbiotic and multivalent, interconnected in their form and function – are integral to the film's narrational strategies, shaping our understanding of the narrative and its characters. In regulating space and movement, building a motif of Noriko's portrait and evocatively inflecting our experience through framing shots, the frames of *Late Spring* are essential to its nuanced and poignant exploration of its thematic centre: Noriko's vacillating journey towards marriage, and the endless negotiation of tensions between freedom and obligation, routine and disruption, stability and change.

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1 This concern motivates the analyses of both Wood (1998: 112) and Klevan (2001: 167n10).

2 Hasumi's book *Director Ozu Yasujiro (Kantoku Ozu Yasujiro*, 1983) has not been translated into English, but its arguments have been explicated by Gerow (2018).

3 Thompson explains that, by 1949, the tea ceremony was becoming an increasingly popular social event, far removed from its origins as a privileged aesthetic experience (1988: 325).

4 This view is affirmed by Klevan, who discusses the repetition and extended duration of shots in the sequence as exceeding the function of establishing tools, providing only similar visual information about the journey so as to emphasise its ordinariness (2001: 139).

5 This is discussed by Wood (1998: 118).

6 Wood hints at this effect, describing internal frames as 'intensifying the general tendency of [Ozu's] style toward the still life or portrait' (1998: 109).

7 This debate has been chronicled by Nornes (2007). For their individual interpretations, split along the culturalist / formalist divide I have discussed, see Richie (1977: 174), Schrader (1988: 49-51) and Thompson and Bordwell (1976: 64-65).

8 Ozu's use of graphic matches is discussed by Thompson and Bordwell (1976: 66-70). However, I disagree that this technique functions independently of narrative.

9 The only other occasion Noriko wears a patterned costume is during the tea ceremony, which, unlike the wedding kimono and vase, features a delicate and sparse floral pattern with minimal contrast.

AUDIOVISUAL ESSAYS

Desegregating the Two Shot: The Use of the Frame in *The Defiant Ones*

In this audiovisual essay, I offer a close reading of a single formal device – the patterned use of the two shot – across the unfolding of a single work. I hope to suggest how aesthetic significance can be found in surprising places, even in a film that seems almost devoid of craft and subtlety. Stanley Kramer's *The Defiant Ones* (1958) is often dismissed as a prime example of the crudities of the Hollywood 'message movie' in its desire to correct the behaviour of a white racist by chaining him to a black man (and setting the two on the run together). But if one can see past its shouts for racial tolerance, one may find something more complex at work. The audiovisual format allows me to draw attention to an understated aesthetic development, one perhaps drowned out by a bombastic narrative. Here, I privilege a few of the film's quieter moments, where an expressive interaction between image and character unobtrusively complements and complicates the film's otherwise blunt 'message'.

More specifically, I draw attention to the left-right pattern developed by the film's use of the frame. Initially, the two men are kept in separate parts of the two shot – white man left, black man right – as though the space of the screen was itself racially segregated. But eventually this will change. The white man, about to be lynched, will see the world from the perspective of the black man, something he recognises the first time he occupies the other's half of the screen. Later, when the two men encounter a small home hidden away in the woods, the black man encounters a white version of his fantasy: wife and child hidden away from the rest of the world. He too sees from the other half of the two-shot, but only for his fantasy to exclude him from the frame.

By organising its character interactions into a spatial pattern, the film invites us to consider its treatment of race beyond the narrative insistence on interpersonal understanding. Rather, we are invited to consider race relations as a consequence of the kind of spaces that bodies are allowed to occupy, and to explore the possibility of those spaces becoming more open. In this way, the film resonates with its moment in American history – when the segregation of black and white spaces weakened (though at other times was violently reaffirmed) in the successive struggles of The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In part, I hope to show how the aesthetics of *The Defiant Ones* participated in this context. Perhaps the film's aesthetic unfolding recognised something more difficult in the complexity of racial relations during its historical moment, something that it could only whisper beneath its own fantasies of a racially tolerant America.

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Watch 'Desegregating the Two Shot' here:
https://vimeo.com/378416180

AUDIOVISUAL ESSAYS

Music and Point of View in
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

When Alfonso Cuarón was preparing to direct *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), he proposed a new approach to the series. 'I felt very strongly that the third film should be told from Harry's point of view' (quoted in McCabe 2018: 97). Clarifying this decision, Cuarón explained that he had no intention of creating a succession of subjective shots; rather, he would structure the story around Harry's growing awareness. In the resulting film, Harry appears in nearly every scene, and each important twist is disclosed only when Harry discovers it.

Cuarón's distinction between point of view as a type of subjective shot and point of view as a way of organising story information around a single character is important, but the term carries even more implications – implications that can help us better understand the complex construction of Cuarón's movie. In film studies, two influential accounts of the term's nuances are George M. Wilson's discussion of epistemic distance, reliability, and authority (1986: 4-5), and Douglas Pye's consideration of the spatial, temporal, cognitive, evaluative, and ideological axes of point of view (2000: 8-12). While creating this video, I took particular inspiration from Deborah Thomas's argument that point of view includes an 'attitude or orientation' toward the characters and their world,

producing a sense of detachment, sympathy, or condemnation (to list only a few possible attitudes) (2000: 20). Even though the film presents its story events as Harry encounters them, it produces a surprising amount of detachment from its likable but error-prone protagonist.

One of the most powerful tools for managing our relationship with Harry and his world is the music, composed by John Williams. As the accounts of Wilson, Pye, and Thomas would suggest, music contributes to point of view in various ways: shaping our evaluations of various characters, expressing sympathy for their emotional states, and managing the overall sense of epistemic distance. In particular, Williams uses leitmotifs to guide our interpretation of the unfolding events – sometimes reliably (as when an inspiring musical theme connects two scenes of flight), and sometimes unreliably (as when a distinctive three-note motif tricks us into thinking that the mysterious dog is an omen of doom rather than an

ambiguous ally in animal form). It may seem odd to describe an auditory technique in terms of a 'view', but including music within point-of-view studies has the distinct advantage of steering us away from an overly spatial conception of point of view. As Pye explains, 'We are not in several *places* at once […] but responding in various ways at the same time' (2000: 13). In any given scene, the spatial organisation may favour Harry's perspective, but the music may hint at plot developments that Harry cannot predict and at thematic connections that he can never recognise.[1] To experience Cuarón's film is to experience a lightly ironic relationship with a character who remains sympathetic and understandable even though he misreads almost every clue he sees.

https://vimeo.com/459186604

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1 After completing the first draft of this video, I discovered several other audiovisual essays addressing music in the Harry Potter films. See the video's closing credits for details. I particularly benefited from Sideways, 'Harry Potter and the Musical Secrets of the Marauder's Map,' *YouTube*, 29 December 2019.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FQcuENRhJw&ab_channel=Sideways

AUDIOVISUAL ESSAYS

The Sacred and the Profane: Visualising Patriarchal Capitalism in *There Will Be Blood*

When I first read Mircea Eliade's book, *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959), it felt like I had finally found the terminology necessary for explaining the origins of organised human life. Or at the very least, I could explain all those shots of bell towers in my favourite westerns. After all, the genre is filled with visual examples of sacred and profane space: a stagecoach travels across a desolate, horizontal landscape eventually arriving in a town whose verticality alone feels like an appeal to the heavens above, a testament to the unseemly ideals of manifest destiny. But the more one tries to apply these concepts, the more one realises how complicated this division of sacred and profane, organised and chaotic, centralised and decentralised, really is. How to explain the Overlook Hotel, for example? Or, better yet, Paul Thomas Anderson's Southern California?

In studying Paul Thomas Anderson's work, I realised the filmmaker's oeuvre covered many decades of Southern California history. In *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002) and *Magnolia* (1999) we have a very contemporary and postmodern vision of the San Fernando Valley. Rewind a little and we have *Boogie Nights* (1997): VHS and cocaine on the cusp of the 80s. Rewind again and you're in the land of *Inherent Vice* (2014), a

convoluted Pynchon plot following another turn-of-the-decade event: the Manson murders.

Rewind even further and you have *The Master* (2012), a pseudo-historical account of L. Ron Hubbard's establishment of the church of scientology – that uniquely Los Angeles institution. Rewind for the last time, and you're at the turn of the century – Daniel Plainview and the oil derrick — the subject of this video essay. In applying Eliade's concepts to *There Will Be Blood* (2007), we discover a complication of sacred and profane space that challenges not only Eliade's terminology, but also common criticisms of the filmmaker's own thematic concerns.

In an early essay on Anderson's work, Brian Michael Goss asserts that while capitalism and a dominant patriarchy are typically portrayed as socially disruptive in Anderson's films, 'the narratives also posit, at least tentatively, that the market furnishes the materials for their solution' (2002: 171). One thinks of Dirk Diggler (Mark Wahlberg) returning to Jack Horner's (Burt Reynolds) arms at the end of *Boogie Nights*.

Jason Sperb affirms this view in his book *Blossoms and Blood* – a study of Anderson's filmography up to 2013 – observing that the films 'often end on a more cautious note

of reconciliation that implies patriarchal capitalism is the solution to the same problems it created' (2013: 3). But is it really the case that Anderson's work, in revealing an intense awareness of patriarchal capitalism, is ultimately submissive to said systems of oppression?

In this video essay I aim to challenge these criticisms of Anderson's work, through a close reading of the sacred and profane image system of *There Will Be Blood*. By pairing the film's visual appeals to sacredness and profaneness – and all the transformations and complications of said appeals – with a voiceover analysis that blends Eliade's constructions with Anderson's themes, I reveal a layered and coherent system of meaning within the film. Eliade's compelling articulation of the processes by which humankind establishes its place in the universe enhances our understanding of this image system, thus deepening our appreciation of Anderson's filmography while alluding to the darkness that lurks within it.

https://vimeo.com/457938690

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Nonprofessional Acting
in *El Perro*

When does a non-actor become an actor? The question has concerned many filmmakers and critics who have, throughout history, ventured a wide range of answers. More often than not, these concern issues of repetition and exposure. Reflecting on the use of nonprofessionals in post-war Italian cinema, André Bazin ([1948] 2005), for instance, suggests that as soon as an actor appears in more than one film it becomes significantly easier to recognise the on-screen behaviour as acting and the performer as an actor. Jacqueline Nacache terms this phenomenon the 'actor-effect' ([2003] 2006: 158) as, in this case, rather than any specific quality in the acting, it is the point of comparison brought about by a second performance that inevitably conditions how we perceive the actor. Vittorio De Sica was particularly concerned with preventing such an effect. For him, the anonymity of nonprofessionals was one of their greatest virtues and an important reason why he chose them over professionals.[1]

Other filmmakers have foregrounded exposure when discussing the transition from non-actor to actor. Jean-Luc Godard, Renato Castellani and Adrián Caetano, for example, agree that as soon as someone is performing in front of the camera, they are already actors.[2] This might be because their behaviour and appearance are exhibited and, thus, offered as

interpretable, or because the performers are, from this initial contact with the filmmaking devices, modifying their behaviour and incorporating gestures and mannerisms. For these filmmakers it is the contact with the camera (the recording device) that inevitably changes the person's behaviour and their status as film performers.

Robert Bresson, who made the use of non-actors a distinctive feature of his filmmaking style, would disagree. For Bresson what radically altered the non-actor's behaviour and their status was not performing for the camera but watching their own on-screen performance. Bresson explains:

> Do not use the same models in two films. […] They would look at themselves in the first film as one looks at oneself in the mirror, would want people to see them as they wish to be seen, would impose a discipline on themselves, would grow disenchanted as they correct themselves. ([1975] 2016: 55)

For Bresson, it is the combination of (self)exposure and repetition that, as with Jacques Lacan's mirror stage ([1949] 2006), leads to a heightened level of self-consciousness and, inevitably, to more rigorous self-control. For both Bresson and Lacan, these reflexive experiences awaken the individuals' concern with their bodies as objects perceived and evaluated by others. This self-discovery is irreversible, as, once the non-actors go 'outside themselves, [they] will not be able to get in again' ([1975] 2016: 31). Bresson's cinematograph is an intrinsically perverse medium that, while capable of capturing the non-actor's behaviour in the cinematic pre-reflexive stage, also inevitably corrupts their alleged innocence. Because of this, Bresson and many others suggest, non-actors should only act in one film and their exposure to their on-screen image should be prevented as much as possible.

The Argentine director Carlos Sorin, who has worked with non-actors in most of his films and commercials, partly seems to share these beliefs. Sorin explains that, in his films, '[the non-actor who] plays the character is very similar to the character, almost the same […]. The person standing in front of the camera […] does not play somebody else. He/she constructs a character of him/herself' (2006).[3] To further enhance the symbiosis between non-actor and character, Sorin rewrites his scripts once the non-actor has been cast

(2006). The character is also renamed after the non-actor, which makes it easier for the performer to identify with the role. On set, scripts are withheld from the non-actors, favouring instead the use of cues and verbal explanations. (This alleviates the performer's possible difficulties memorising lines.) Non-actors are also encouraged to adapt words and sentences to their natural way of speaking. Sorin also shoots in chronological order (Sorin in Ponce 2004), a technique facilitated by the use of a small production crew. The shooting ratio is very high, often above thirty to one, as scenes are not rehearsed; rather, all rehearsals are filmed.

These choices, popular among social realist filmmakers such as Ken Loach, help withhold fictional events from the performer so that actor and character discover them simultaneously.[4] The emphasis is on preserving a quality of spontaneity in the performances to reinforce the impression that they are unrehearsed and recorded as lived. The idea is for the non-actor to ignore the practical business of filmmaking as much as possible and not worry about their acting. Free of worries regarding what is to come, the ideal non-actor (and character) wanders through the narrative like Alice through Wonderland, or, as Bazin put it, 'like laboratory rats being sent through a labyrinth' ([1952] 2005: 66), curious and expectant but ultimately unaware.

However, Sorin also uses directing techniques that depart significantly from this tradition of working with non-actors. Most notably, Sorin edits the film as he shoots it and, in contravention of Bresson's rule, regularly screens early cuts for the non-actors. He explains: 'I assemble and discover, alongside the actors, the path of the film and we modify both mise-en-scène and performance as we go along, while I also show them the filmed footage' (2012). Instead of delaying the non-actor / actor transition by preventing the performers from seeing themselves on film, Sorin involves them in the editing process, precipitating their discovery of their on-screen image. When considered alongside Sorin's more naturalistic techniques such as shooting in chronological order, his overall methodology seems geared towards eliciting the performer's self-consciousness to emerge progressively as the film develops, incorporating the non-actor's gradual self-recognition as part of the filmmaking process.

This essay examines how the transition between non-actor and actor is integrated in Sorin's *El Perro / Bombón: el Perro* (2004). Described as a 'rugged neo-realist fable' (Scott 2006), *El Perro* follows Juan 'Coco' Villegas (Juan Villegas) a humble and good-hearted knife artisan who struggles to make a living after being made redundant from his job as a service station attendant. Villegas drifts through the arid plains of Patagonia trying to sell his knives while looking for the odd job until an unexpected turn of events changes his luck. In exchange for altruistically aiding a stranded driver, Villegas receives a neglected though exceptional pedigree dog bred for exhibition. With his new companion, Villegas embarks on a journey in which he learns the tricks of dog exhibiting from illustrious dog trainer Walter Donado (Walter Donado)[5], wins a prize at a local canine competition and ultimately changes his precarious situation, going from aimless drifter to professional dog exhibitor.

The first two parts of the essay offer sustained close analysis of Villegas' performance in key scenes from the film to demonstrate how the character's transformation in the fiction is informed by the performer's transformation from ingenue to relatively seasoned actor. As the non-actor becomes more conscious and in control of his acting so does the character become more aware of and comfortable in his newly found profession as dog exhibitor, which, notably, also involves public performance and self-presentation. The third part of the essay considers the reverse of the actor-character exchange and argues that the significant parallels the film draws between the character's and the non-actor's work allow for the plot to be read as reflecting on what's at stake in the transition between non-actor and actor. The film's reflexive project is to show how cinema is drawn to the very feature acting usually tries to dispel: the exhibition of self-consciousness.

Creating a character of oneself: self-consciousness and repetition

One common reason for filmmakers using unknown actors might be to foster a sense of authenticity by blurring the distinction between actor and character. Another might be to showcase the discovery of new acting talent. Stanley Cavell has identified a further reason. He observes that some films:

> require physiognomies for their subjects which not merely happen to be unknown but whose point, whose essence, is *that* they are unknown. Not just any unknown face will do; it must be one which, when screened, conveys unknownness; and this first of all means that it conveys privacy — an individual soul's aliveness or deadness to itself. A natural reason for a director's requirement of this quality is that his film is itself about unknownness, about the fact and causes of separateness or isolation or integrity or outlawry. ([1971] 1979: 181 emphasis in original)

Unknownness, integrity and isolation are important themes in *El Perro* and features that define the character of Juan Villegas. Cynthia Tomkins notes that 'Villegas is completely isolated: he hasn't seen his wife in twenty years. His daughter […] yells at him for having turned up with a dog. While Villegas seems buried in contemporary anomie, he displays a traditional code of honor' (2013: 108). As Tompkins implies, Villegas' sense of integrity emerges as the tension between an adverse social milieu and a code of behaviour he seems incapable of letting go of. Several scenes in the first half of the film illustrate the protagonist's difficulties navigating his environment. For example, as soon as Villegas has acquired the dog, he is hired to guard a warehouse overnight. The owner specifically warns Villegas not to let Galván (Adrián Giampani), a recently fired employee, inside the warehouse. However, when Galván shows up, he dramatically pleas for Villegas to allow him in. Crying profusely and exaggeratedly, Galván nonetheless convinces Villegas, who ends up contravening his employer's request, letting Galván inside, and leaving the site without receiving payment.

Villegas' sense of integrity, though, is not only a consequence of a set of values. Rather, it appears to be primarily motivated by his acute self-consciousness. That is, Villegas inhabits a persistent state of concern over his behaviour that makes it impossible for him to convincingly sustain a front and pretend to be that which he is not. In his exchange with Galván, Villegas seems uncomfortable adopting the role of strict gatekeeper. Though he greets Galván with the dog barking violently, Villegas struggles controlling the animal.

He also hesitates and stutters as he explains that he has orders not to let Galván in. While he tries to stand tall alongside the mastiff, Villegas' body language betrays his performance. His posture is uncomfortably stiff rather than firm; his puppy eyes and insecure lips, not quite knowing what to say or do, make him appear self-doubting and weak despite the imposing barking dog. Galván seems to notice Villegas' insecurity as rather than leaving at once, he insistently pleads his case until he is allowed in. Villegas gives up rather quickly and although he appears to feel sympathy towards downcast Galván, he also seems relieved not having to pretend anymore.

Villegas' difficulties pretending can be seen across many scenes in the film. He has a hard time lying about his skills when asked by an agent at an employment office. 'Mechanic' Villegas answers initially. 'Light mechanic' he corrects himself. 'Are you a mechanic or not?' the agent enquires as he fills the form. 'Yes, yes, write "mechanic"' Villegas answers unconvincingly.

Though Villegas' self-consciousness manifests most vividly in scenes depicting awkward social encounters, it also permeates moments when he is alone. A noteworthy example is the scene in which Villegas drives home after picking up the dog. In a two shot with man and dog sitting side by side, Villegas throws suspicious glances at the animal. The unaffected and unreadable dog stares straight ahead (See previous page). Peter Bradshaw notices 'something very funny about the sight of stately Bombón riding in the front passenger seat of Juan's car' (2005). Though Bradshaw is right in that the image is funny, I would argue that the comedy depends not so much on the dog's indifference, but on Villegas' self-conscious attitude. The doubtful and timid glances he gives the animal, coupled with his embarrassed frontal stares reveal Villegas' awareness of how absurd he probably looks while driving in the middle of the night with a strange dog as co-pilot (in the film) or displayed side by side with the animal for comedic purposes (on set).

Villegas has a particular way of performing integrity where his self-consciousness is refigured into a seemingly involuntary, and therefore sincere, display of honesty. His tendency to withhold effusive expression suggests insecurity and embarrassment but also a strong sense of manners or a concern with how his actions might affect others. His smiles are tenuous and hesitant; his serious expressions never emphatic enough to display anger. Villegas' preoccupation with himself and his actions is so pervasive that even in scenes that verge towards comedy his dignified expression prevents us from laughing at him without sympathy. Regardless of how out of place Villegas may look or how inappropriately he may approach a situation, he appears both aware of it but also proud of his efforts, confident that he has given it his best and that there was nothing wrong in his intentions.

The impression that a heightened state of self-consciousness is a trait of the character's personality, though, is most vividly articulated through the actor's minute and apparently unconscious gestures. Andrew Klevan has called attention to such details, noting that:

> films create a living world, and responsive performers
> inhabit the world built for them. Consequently, any piece
> of their behaviour, no matter how slight, may arise out

of sympathy with the dramatic environment and contain significance. Yet this behaviour might appear as incorporated (in the fictional world) rather than presented (to the viewer), so noticing it feels like the discovery of a secret. (2012: 37).

In the following paragraphs I want to examine one such piece of behaviour which Villegas performs regularly throughout the film (a total of twenty-four times). The gesture, perhaps best described as a tic, consists of the quick running of the tongue across the lips. At first, it may prove hard or even inappropriate to attribute concrete meaning to this action. It only lasts a handful of frames and can, perhaps should, go unnoticed as a casual, inconsequential and unconscious body inflection. However, as I will try to demonstrate, detailed analysis of the gesture in relation to other performance and non-performance elements can illuminate how Villegas' self-consciousness is incorporated in the film's dramatic environment to aid in its narrative progression.

El Perro begins in the middle of a conversation, with Villegas trying to sell his handmade knives to a group of factory workers during their break. This is the first time Villegas licks his lips (see images). In this sequence, the lip-licking gesture appears unconscious and habitual. It does not serve a distinct communicative function; it is neither replacing spoken words nor triggering reactions from other characters. It does not appear to be directly linked to the dramatic action either. Rather, it feels like a casual piece of the performer's habitual behaviour has found its way into the film. Filmmakers seeking naturalistic performances often cherish such unrehearsed details as they lend scenes a sense of spontaneity. Sorin explains: 'Acting is also fiction [...]. I try to have a few moments of truth. If I have four or five such moments in a film I am pleased with the actors' (2012b).

Note, though, that Villegas is not alone in licking his lips; the worker in the yellow cap also performs the very same gesture at virtually the same time, precisely one frame before Villegas. The worker in the yellow cap has no lines in the scene; his performance is virtually reduced to this specific gesture. The way both Villegas and the worker lick their lips further stresses the habitual dimension of the gesture, encouraging its reading as an inflection of what Vivian Sobchack and other

phenomenologists refer to as an individual's pre-personal body. Sobchack defines the pre-personal body as 'culturally habituated [... yet] spontaneous beyond our will [... it] escapes conscious control in a variety of visible responses and movements that, nonetheless, serve to "define" us' (2012: 431-432).

How does this tic define Villegas (and the worker) for us? Firstly, we might regard the gesture as a reaction to the arid winds of Patagonia, the region in which the film is set. Secondly, licking one's lips is considered uncouth or vulgar in some social contexts. Enabled by the two-shot framing, the lip-licking gestures draws a parallel between Villegas and the worker. Both characters belong to the same social class. Villegas could be one of the workers.[6] The fact that we can read the tic as an unconscious habit indicative of the characters' social or cultural background does not mean that it is a piece of the actors' everyday behaviour. It may be a reaction

to shooting the same scenes for many hours in windy and dry locations or it could have resulted from the pressure to perform in scenes without receiving clear instructions. What is important is that however slight, the repetition of such casual gestures not only helps establish the characters as thoroughly integrated within their social milieu. It also contributes significantly towards creating the very impression of a recognisable milieu with its codes, rules, areas, classes.

Though details such as the licking of the lips can convey information about the characters' background, they might also serve dramatic functions and carry narrative weight when incorporated in diegetic situations. If the performer's unconscious gestures help establish the fictional character's background, the fictional situations condition the meaning we attribute to the performer's gestures. In the case of *El Perro*, the action in the opening scene quickly reveals Villegas is not a professional knife seller. His speech sounds insecure and he often corrects himself. He explains that a piece of a knife is in fact 'A rhea's leg … bone'. He also fails at highlighting the virtues of another part of the knife's hilt. He explains that a certain piece of walnut wood was sent to him from his relatives; yet it is a worker who points out how resilient the wood must be in what appears an attempt at helping Villegas sell the knife. To this, Villegas quickly answers, 'Oh yeah, yeah, very … resilient ….'

Villegas seems uncomfortable as the centre of attention; he is daunted by the spotlight and the workers' questions. Even the matter of price is wrongly approached by the protagonist. He suggests the sum of 'A hundred pesos' which immediately feels overpriced. We sense that perhaps he is anticipating a bargaining situation, yet this never occurs: the workers are simply put off by the price; one of them says, 'If I had a hundred pesos I wouldn't be working here.' Laughter ensues; Villegas cannot find his words and stutters, with a smile on his face, insecure. Finally, with a sense of despair as he sees the chance wither, Villegas adds, 'Make an offer, make an offer, lads', a line that poorly imitates a street seller's chant. Coming from Villegas, it sounds flimsy, unconfident and pathetic, his wimpy way of seeking a final stroke of luck.

Villegas' lip-licking gesture, frequently performed in the opening sequence, becomes a detail representative of the

character's (and maybe the actor's) self-conscious mixture of integrity and insecurity. The gesture, akin to sucking one's thumb or biting one's tongue, is used by Villegas throughout the film in moments when he is not sure about what to say or do. In the opening sequence, the second time he licks his lips is after he is interrupted by one of the workers. There is frustration here, as though Villegas were putting a gag on himself. However, the gesture also conveys modesty and timidity. Villegas is not confident insisting, and, to a certain extent, he seems to sympathise with the workers. As the film will later confirm, he too thinks the knives are overpriced.

As the film progresses, the lip-licking gesture is used to convey Villegas' consistently insecure responses to a range of situations. We can see Villegas licking his lips as he drives off after stopping at a gas station to refuel and winning 'A litre of oil and a pair of sunglasses'. The service station attendant adds: 'Like the ones that appear in the film *Men in Black*'. In this scene, Villegas' licking of his lips frustrates his attempt at

showing attitude by stressing the fact that the pair of glasses look foreign on a face that cannot but emanate a sense of self-conscious embarrassment. It is as though Villegas was in full knowledge of his pretence and his body refused to play along. As was the case in previous examples, the scene's comedy is bittersweet. Villegas' dignified expression, and his capacity to keep on trying despite repeatedly failing, invite compassionate amusement rather than laughter of superiority.

The lip-licking gesture is also Villegas' reaction as he sees the dog for the first time. Here the gesture is emphasised by

and timed to a dolly-in that draws attention to the character's expression as he first sets eyes on the dog. In this case, Villegas probably waited for the camera to close in on his face and then performed the specific gesture. The gesture helps convey Villegas' uncertainty regarding whether or not to take the dog. Klevan writes that when a performer suspends an action he 'allows us to wonder at the different stories available to his character' (2005: 13). Brenda Austin-Smith adds that in such cases, 'Because of what the performer does, we believe in the freedom of the character to have done otherwise and to have decided on this rather than that course of action' (2012: 21). Here, Villegas' lip-licking gesture serves an important dramatic function as it creates anticipation by suspending the character's decision in one of the film's critical turning points.

Another relevant example of the gesture's use can be found in the scene that takes place in the banker's office. The banker briefly leaves the room at which point the dog urinates on the floor. Villegas glances across the table, making sure the banker is still busy and the coast is clear before gently moving a chair to cover the urine stain. Here the lip-licking gesture helps convey Villegas' insecurity as he is forced to perform improvised trickery to get out of a hairy situation. The gesture once again serves the film's comedy, yet now it is used by Villegas to reveal a state of nervousness to the audience, the very same nervousness he is trying to conceal from the banker. Unlike in the previous example of Villegas driving with the sunglasses on, where the comedy came from the impression of unintended embarrassment projected by the gesture, here the gag depends on Villegas using the gesture

to convey his nervousness as he executes a scripted action. In the first example the gesture appears like Villegas' natural reaction to a joke played on him. In the second one, it feels like a deliberate action deployed to enact a gag.

As these examples show, Villegas begins deploying the lip-licking gesture in specific dramatic contexts to achieve concrete effects as the film goes on. By repeating the gesture in a range of situations, the film keeps it alive as a pattern of the character's habitual behaviour while also investing it with diegetic functions and meaning. However, the last two examples, in contrast with those from the opening scene, appear non-improvised and calculated. They feel like conscious acting. Evoking Sorin's earlier words, Villegas appears to be gradually figuring out how to deploy his behaviour to create a character of himself.

Sorin also contributes, through his editing, to the professionalisation of Villegas' performance. A particularly significant example corresponds to the moment in which Villegas, among the audience at the canine competition, licks his lips as he nervously watches the judge evaluate the dogs. In this sequence, the gesture helps convey the character's anticipation as he awaits the decision his future hangs on. Sorin, seemingly aware of the dramatic potential the lip-licking gesture has acquired, uses the very same shot twice in the sequence, prolonging the audience's anticipation both on and off-screen. Villegas' 'moment of truth' is artificially duplicated, recycled for the sake of enhancing the film's suspense and increasing even further the character's sense of insecurity.

The journey's point of no return: self-consciousness and exposure

As Villegas (nonprofessional actor) reconfigures himself as Villegas (actor) so does Villegas (character) reconfigure himself from purposeless drifter to professional dog trainer. A critical milestone in Villegas' journey of transformation is undoubtedly the moment in which he is awarded the prize in the canine competition. This scene begins with the judge ordering the participants to perform a ceremonial run around the stage. The judge attentively examines the participants amongst whom we can see Villegas and his dog Bombón. There is something awkward and unpleasant about the sight of Villegas, a humble and reserved man, brought to parade himself in a stage filled with groomed poodles and decadent middle-class owners. The judge gives the first two cups to other competitors; Villegas receives the third prize. As he shyly walks to take the trophy, the music intensifies, muffling the speaker's voice and the clapping of the audience. The camera glides in on Villegas' face, his eyes quickly scanning the audience from right to left, his mouth open in a slowly receding smile that blends the pride of success with the embarrassment of the spotlight.

This moment marks an important turning point in the film's narrative. The success in the competition changes Villegas' fortune and introduces a glimmer of hope in his hitherto miserable situation. However, the event also appears to crystallise a transformation in the character's self-regard.

This is the first time in the film Villegas is praised or acknowledged rather than neglected or frowned upon and the applause and recognition of the audience seem to finally validate him in his own eyes. Rather than sheer jubilance and delight, his smile is optimistic but also confused. It is as though Villegas were happy with and satisfied by the acknowledgment but also unsure as to what exactly he has done to deserve the applause. Sorin explains how Villegas' vivid expression was achieved:

> The moment in which the character Juan Villegas receives the third prize in the competition, the take where he lifts the cup and receives the applause of four hundred and six people. It is the same emotion the authentic Juan Villegas felt in front of the four hundred and six extras that clapped for him. He didn't know that they were going to clap. (2006b)

For Sorin, what makes Villegas' gesture captivating is that it appears genuine. The performer's uncertainty regarding how to perform – the set-up compels him to react, but he has not been told how – is refigured as the character's surprise when receiving the trophy. Sorin's words also reflect the feeling of compassion the scene evokes partly thanks to the impression that the actor is unable to restrain conflicting emotions. In this case, the sincerity of the actor's expression informs the character's state of vulnerability which the scene needs to achieve its pathos. In Villegas' smile we recognise a genuine, unwilled and spontaneous surge of feeling that is visibly different from an actor trying to project, in this case, pride plus blushing.

However, Sorin does not explain what precise emotion Villegas might be feeling. Like many of his gestures throughout the film, Villegas' smile in this sequence conveys embarrassment. Erving Goffman, who drew from theatre terminology to analyse social interaction, saw embarrassment as instances when the social actor is not in control of her / his performance. In such moments, the social actor is, according to Goffman, still involved in social interaction – that is, still available for others to engage with – yet not presently 'in play' (1956: 266). Goffman sees embarrassment as combining 'displeasure and discomfiture' (1956: 266) and, in turn suggesting qualities such as 'weakness and inferiority' (1956: 266). Goffman's views on embarrassment adequately describe

the impression Villegas conveys. His arms are awkwardly bent and overloaded with items (the cup, the leash) and the bright ribbon on his chest appears as miscalculated as his combination of blazer and cap. Alongside these elements, Villegas' puny smile reflects a genuine lack of comfort that encourages sympathy tinged with vicarious embarrassment.

However, Demetrios Matheou suggests that what is particularly striking about Villegas' gesture is not the impression of embarrassment it conveys but, rather, a much more optimistic sense of self-discovery:

> Could it be that as Coco discovers his true *métier*, something that makes him almost inexplicably happy, the real-life Juan Villegas also discovered himself, in front of the camera? Actor, character, man, merged in their own Borgesian moment of self-discovery. (2010: 331)

Matheou's words imply that Villegas' performance collapses different kinds of discoveries. The character discovers a new vocation that gives him satisfaction and recognition. The performer, on the other hand yet at the same time, appears to be finally recognising and accepting himself in front of the camera. I think Matheou is right in that Villegas' smile is not just one of embarrassment or helplessness. Partly a smirk, it also projects a sense of confidence that Sorin does not mention and which Goffman's theory cannot account for. However, Matheou's words 'inexplicably happy' feel too strong and rather miscalculated as they overlook Villegas' cautious and embarrassed body language in this scene. Matheou's and Sorin's accounts show that it is hard to pinpoint exactly what makes Villegas' smile so compelling. Though they both provide important clues, in the process of emphasising certain qualities, they appear to reduce the very sense of internal conflict the gesture so successfully projects.

When watching Villegas' smile, I feel optimism (like Matheou) and compassion (like Sorin) but also a sense of bitterness. Though I am happy for the character's success I also have the impression that his apparent happiness is contingent on the fraudulent and degrading parading of his insecurity. Both in the film and in the diegesis, Villegas is presented and displayed like a curiosity for the audience to judge and respond to. More importantly though, Villegas' receding smile suggests to me that he himself is coming to terms with the fact that his success depends on his capacity to display himself (and the dog) for the pleasure of others. Villegas does not appear simply perplexed by the applause. He does not respond to the ovation with the kind of baffled expression professional actors often use to show their characters' astonishment. Nor does he appear completely embarrassed, which he could have shown by fidgeting self-consciously, licking his lips, or making an attempt to remove himself from the frame. Furthermore, Villegas appears to be prudently abstaining from smiling jubilantly which suggests restraint and, therefore, control.

Rather than sheer happiness, Villegas' wary smirk and slightly squinty eyes show that he is aware of, though has also accepted, the demeaning applause. He appears like someone who is, to a certain extent, comfortable exposing his discomfort. Unlike in some of the scenes discussed earlier, Villegas' expression here is not that of a vulnerable victim troubled by his own image and the way it might be apprehended by others. Instead, Villegas appears to be learning to accept that performing involves exposing oneself for the amusement of others. Although Villegas' receding smile shows a sense of disappointment at this realisation, the fact that he continues smiling also suggests that this discovery is not enough to sour his moment. On the contrary, Villegas embraces his success well aware that it comes at the expense of losing his sense of integrity.

A bittersweet self-discovery: the end of the non-actor's journey

Like Vittorio De Sica and Vsevolod Pudovkin, Carlos Sorin is a filmmaker who has been criticised for having a rather tactless approach to his subjects. With regards to *El Perro*, Aguilar cites film critic Leonardo D'Espósito who writes: 'Professionally filmed, this "minor story" stretched to its limits utilises the landscape and music cloyingly, pointing out the emotions that the spectator should experience in each sequence' (Aguilar [2006] 2008: 20). D'Espósito's comment partly evokes Jacques Rivette's polemic essay, 'On Abjection' (1961), in which Rivette criticises what he perceives as a tasteless camera movement in Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapò* (1960).

In this essay, Rivette mentions both De Sica and Pudovkin as examples of formalist directors who should be despised for similar misuses of the medium. Similarly, Joanna Page notes that in *El Perro* the use of hand-held camera in the opening scenes turns to steadicam and into a more polished style and argues that 'in this way techniques associated with independent filmmaking are redesigned and packaged for box-office success' (2009: 123). Like Rivette before them, Page and D'Espósito are partly right in noticing a sense of indecency or betrayal in the relationship between style and subject matter. For these critics, the devices these filmmakers use are inadequate with regards to the content of the film and, therefore disrespectful towards their subject matter as well as towards the audience, whose emotions are emphatically requested rather than allowed to develop through more measured approaches.

The formal features and impressions noted in these critiques are certainly relevant. However, I would argue that the film is well aware of the effects it is achieving and, more importantly, that these play a crucial role in the film's ironic project. The progressive finessing of the film's style mirrors the growing professionalisation of both character and actor, and enables the film to highlight and satirise, precisely, how our grotesque fascination with displaying and observing individuals in a state of vulnerability is what often brings these individuals to forgo their sense of integrity. In this regard, *El Perro* is not only a film about the hardships of life in post-crisis rural Argentina, it is also a film about the consequences of exhibition and the demands of social interaction.

While it begins as a social realist quasi-improvisational piece, once Villegas is given the canine golden ticket, he relocates and is forced to adapt to the grotesque environment of dog competitions and bourgeois breeders. As Villegas undergoes this journey, the style of the film changes to show the concessions Villegas needs to make in order to survive in this milieu. It is through the changes in filmmaking style and performance that Villegas is portrayed as a character who, in the process of becoming a successful professional, appears to lose the awkward but also honest self-consciousness responsible for safeguarding his integrity.

One of the main ways in which the film mourns Villegas' change of behaviour is through the consistent analogies it draws between Villegas and the dog. In the early stages of the film, man and pet are presented as equals or as being in similar situations. Both are neglected outcasts whose virtues are not valued in their respective milieus. Yet soon both Villegas and the dog begin to receive the attention of other characters, such as the banker who examines the dog and comments, 'It is a very good specimen.' As he speaks this line, the camera, instead of showing the dog, remains pointed at Villegas. Both dog and non-actor are 'good specimens' removed from their 'natural' habitat for the purpose of display. In a later scene where Villegas is told how to prepare the dog for exhibition, he learns how to apply a white paint-like product that 'covers all the imperfections', disguising the animal to make it fit within a certain ideal and desired standard and, therefore, 'correcting' its idiosyncrasies. This scene, again, is analogous to the way in which Villegas adapts to new social environments by disguising his idiosyncrasies such as his lip-licking gesture, which he performs much less often in the second part of the film.

However, Villegas' self-consciousness or his preoccupation with regards to the way others see him, is a quality that the dog does not show. Charles Darwin (1872) was among the first to suggest that blushing and embarrassment are distinctly human expressions not available in quite the same way in animals. This observation remains generally accepted today by sociologists and psychologists studying what they refer to as 'self-conscious emotions', which besides embarrassment, also include shame and pride.[7] I'm in no position to endorse or dispute Darwin's claim, but I am interested in the fact that the film appears to offer a similar proposition. Towards the end of the film, the analogy between dog and human is irreparably shattered. Villegas and his partner Donado want to earn money by mating the dog with another purebred, yet Bombón 'refuses' to perform when the moment arrives. Unlike Villegas, whose self-consciousness leads him to exhibit himself, alter his comportment and ultimately betray his integrity for the pleasure of others and his benefit, the dog remains oblivious to and unmoved by this external pressure and, therefore, preserves its integrity.

This relationship between dog and man recalls De Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952) and its ending where, ironically, the dog reminds its owner of the value of his humanity. A similar scene occurs in *El Perro*. After losing the dog, the penultimate scene of the film shows how Villegas finds it in an abandoned site privately mating with a stray bitch, showing that it was indeed capable of performing, yet not for the benefit and pleasure of others. Sorin, with self-conscious and ironic tastelessness, accompanies the images of the dogs mating with the film's melodramatic music score. This grotesque moment partly parallels Villegas' self-discovery as he receives the trophy – a scene also accompanied with similarly sentimental music. In the scene where the dogs mate, though, Villegas, rather than being the centre of attention, has become another spectator whose pleasure, like ours the film seems to imply, depends on watching others exposing themselves. The scene in *El Perro*, though, is more ambiguous than *Umberto D.*'s when it comes to answering whether or not the human protagonist has learnt a lesson from his dog. Villegas' wide smiles of joy as he watches the dogs mating don't clarify whether he is happy because he has found the dog or excited to find out that the dog can mate and, therefore, he can make a profit from the animal.

The final scene in the film partly answers the question. The last we see of Villegas is him picking up a couple of hitchhikers on a motorway. One of them asks 'What do you do?' to which Villegas confidently answers, 'I'm a dog exhibitor. I display dogs and compete for prizes.' When the hitchhiker asks if Villegas has won many prizes, he answers, 'Yes, a few.' Villegas' first answer clarifies that he is ready to continue displaying the dog, which he sees mainly as his professional tool. Moreover, as we have seen in the film, Villegas has won just one prize, so the answer to the hitchhikers' second question is a lie. This confident display of dishonesty concludes Villegas' journey of self-discovery. It is not the moment when the character discovers his true vocation or when the non-actor discovers himself in front of the camera. Rather, it is the moment that shows Villegas has finally learnt to pretend convincingly.

However, before the final fade to black, Villegas cannot contain one last licking of his lips. The gesture could be an uncontrolled sign of embarrassment, the character's body betraying his dishonest front in an attempt to preserve a sense of integrity. This time, though, Villegas merges the licking of the lips with a confident smile that recalls the moment he receives the trophy or his reaction to seeing the dogs mating. It feels as though Villegas is aware of his deceit yet this time he has tools to govern his behaviour and prevent his self-consciousness from giving him away. Villegas has learnt to act like a professional. He has learnt to present himself confidently in front of others at the expense of his integrity.

Conclusion

Rather than offering an answer to the question of when the non-actor becomes an actor, this essay has examined how the question and its implications are meaningfully mobilised in *El Perro*. Through the progressive professionalisation of Villegas' performance, his self-discovery as a performer, and the persistent analogies between nonprofessional actor and dog, *El Perro* appears to be meditating on Stanley Cavell's idea that:

> our condition as actors is shown [...] by film itself [...]. It is not merely that we occupy certain roles in society, play certain parts or hold certain offices, but that we are set apart or singled out for sometimes incomprehensible reasons, for rewards or punishments out of all proportion to anything we recognise ourselves as doing or being, as though our lives are the enactments of some tale whose words continuously escape us. ([1971] 1979: 180)

In the case of Villegas, the lip-licking gesture could be one such incomprehensible detail defining him. However, *El Perro* takes an ambivalent stance with regards to what is at stake in film showing us, or Villegas in this case, our condition as actors. For Sorin, as for many other directors, cinema is an inherently artificial medium that cannot record without contriving the performer's behaviour. The more the performer is exposed to the camera and shown on screen, the more he loses his idiosyncrasies: precisely the reasons why he was originally selected. Ironically, however, it is by means of exposing and inducing this loss that cinema can also capture and show the performer's arresting idiosyncrasies.

Unlike Bresson and others, though, who sought to prevent the non-actor from seeing her / himself and, therefore, losing her / his pre-reflexive behaviour, Sorin invites the non-actor

to reflect on his performance and fictionalises the resulting transformation. Bresson seems interested in preventing the non-actor from acting at all, that is, from becoming an actor of any sort (professional or nonprofessional). For Sorin, who works in a period where most of us have inevitably seen recordings of ourselves at some point or another, the non-actor is already self-conscious, he / she is already a nonprofessional actor, even before he / she stands in front of the camera. Therefore, the film, rather than showing the non-actor in a pre-reflexive stage, can only show Villegas as he comes to terms with his own performance, a possibility unavailable to the dog who, unlike the human, appears incapable of feeling shame or embarrassment.

While for Bresson and many others before and after him, cinema corrupts the purity of the non-actor by making him self-conscious, for Sorin the non-actor is already self-conscious – he is already a (nonprofessional) actor – and, therefore, corrupted. What cinema can do is professionalise him and show him as he progressively overcomes his self-consciousness even if by doing so, he loses the very quality that makes him a unique specimen. This is not, as in Bresson, a pure non-reflexive comportment. It is no more and no less than the honest and idiosyncratic way in which each of us inhabits a condition of self-consciousness.

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1 De Sica recalls in many interviews that, after *Ladri di biciclette / Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948), he made Lamberto Maggiorani (Antonio) promise he would not act again. See: Snyder and Curle (2000), for example. In his recently published memoirs, De Sica also explains that the nonprofessional's anonymity was an important concern when casting *Umberto D.* (Vittorio De Sica, 1951): 'The truth is that I wanted a professional's face, but a new, anonymous face, a man that had not lent his persona to any other character, only to my Umberto D' (2015: 124).

2 In a rather heated interview with Robert Bresson, Godard explains with regards to the non-actor that 'as soon as he has done something, as soon as he has filmed one twenty-fourth of a second, he is less virgin by that one twenty-fourth […] there is something that he does not have but he is going to acquire it, as soon as he is plunged into cinema' (Godard & Delahaye [1966] 1967: 16). Castellani sardonically explains that 'When a young boy or a girl encounters cinema for the first time and are in front of the camera for ten minutes they are already professional actors: and then, with experience, they might become optimal elements' (Castellani cited in Pitassio 2008: 163). Caetano reflects on the subject in León and Martínez's documentary *Estrellas / Stars* (2007) where he explains that 'as soon as the non-actor stands in front of the camera and works, he is already a professional actor'.

3 All translations are by me unless specified.

4 For a discussion of Loach's methods see: Jacob Leigh (2002) and Louise Osmond's film *Versus: The Life and Films of Ken Loach* (2016).

5 Like Villegas, Walter Donado was played by a nonprofessional actor. However, Donado (the actor) was (and still is) a professional animal wrangler who works frequently in the film industry. In the case of Donado, a clear benefit of casting him is the possibility of controlling the dog during the actual takes, which tends to be an important challenge when working with animals. However, there also seems to be a further analogy between nonprofessional actor and character. The character's role in the fiction – he confidently navigates the world of dog breeding and exhibition though is not fully part of it (he works maintaining a race track) – partly resembles the actor's – he is a professional and seasoned film worker acting for the first time. Since acting in *El Perro*, Donado has played secondary roles in several Argentine films, including the successful *Relatos Salvajes / Wild Tales* (Damián Szifron, 2014), which was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film that year.

6 Besides the twenty-four times Villegas licks his lips, other actors / characters perform the gesture a further nineteen times throughout the film. The security guard outside of the factory where Villegas sells his knives licks his lips twice; so does a service station attendant and a digger Villegas meets towards the end of the film. Most of these characters are manual labourers who work in the open. Characters who do not lick their lips are the dog enthusiasts, a banker who introduces Villegas to the world of canine exhibitions, a man who works at an unemployment office, and a Lebanese singer who Villegas meets in the final third of the film. All these characters work indoors and inhabit urban spaces such as the city of Bahia Blanca. This is not entirely consistent. Some characters who we understand as being working class, such as Villegas' daughter, do not lick their lips yet we barely see her outside her house.

7 See the work of Jessica L. Tracy in general and Tangney and Tracy (2012) in particular.

A Plea for Intention: Stanley Cavell and Ordinary Aesthetic Philosophy

[J.L.] Austin, in a seminar discussion at Harvard in 1955, once compared the role of intending with the role of headlights […]. An implication he may have had in mind is that driving somewhere (getting something done intentionally) does not on the whole happen by hanging a pair of headlights from your shoulders, sitting in an armchair, picking up an unattached steering wheel, and imagining a destination. (Though this is not unlike situations in which W.C. Fields has found himself) […]. Even if some theorists speak as though intention were everything there is to meaning, is that a sensible reason for opposite theorists to assert that intention is nothing, counts for nothing, in meaning? Is W.C. Fields our only alternative to Humpty Dumpty?
(Cavell [1986] 1988: 117)

In 1967, Roland Barthes published a brief polemic entitled 'The Death of the Author'. Taking the baton from the New Critics of the mid-20th Century, Barthes sought to provide philosophical justification for a paradigm shift in aesthetics away from author-based criticism.[1] From a historical perspective, this incendiary tract marks a significant moment in the history of aesthetic philosophy. Situated alongside the work of Jacques Derrida, who at this time was setting about 'deconstructing' his white whale, which he referred to as the 'metaphysics of presence' ([1967] 1997), and Michel Foucault, who was carrying on about how 'the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse' ([1969] 1979: 28), Barthes' effort in 'The Death of the Author' to deconstruct aesthetic philosophy and strip authors of their roles as the creators of artworks was the decisive blow in what the literary critic E.D. Hirsch characterised as the 'heavy and largely victorious assault [throughout the 20th Century] on the sensible belief that a text means what its author meant' (1967: 1).

Having critiqued this philosophical and aesthetic legacy elsewhere (Barrowman 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b), in what follows, I will return to this revolutionary moment in the history of aesthetic philosophy in order to explore a path not taken. At the same time that Barthes was trying to take the concept of authorship off the critical table once and for all, Stanley Cavell was trying to redirect scholarly attention

to it. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, Cavell's anachronistic 1967 essay 'A Matter of Meaning It' was largely ignored by scholars of the day. More surprising is the fact that, still to this day, at a time when Cavell has become a canonical reference point in film studies, literary criticism, and aesthetic philosophy more broadly, the profound insights contained in this provocative essay have remained unexamined.[2] In an effort to redress this neglect, my goal in what follows will be to situate 'A Matter of Meaning It' at the heart of Cavell's aesthetic philosophy. To do so, I will explicate Cavell's ideas and arguments in and beyond 'A Matter of Meaning It' vis-à-vis authorship and critical practice, which significantly coalesce in an extended thought experiment inspired by Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954), toward the goals of demonstrating the probative value of author-based criticism on the one hand and pointing the way toward an 'ordinary aesthetic philosophy' on the other (cf. Cavell 1996b, 2004).

To begin, it is worth mentioning that 'A Matter of Meaning It' was not written in a vacuum. Quite the opposite. In 1965, as part of the Proceedings of the 1965 Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy, Cavell joined Monroe C. Beardsley and Joseph Margolis to discuss, principally, music. In 1967, these Proceedings were published under the title *Art, Mind, and Religion* (Capitan and Merrill 1967). Cavell's contribution to the Proceedings was an essay entitled 'Music Discomposed' ([1967a] 1976). This essay served as the initial grist for the philosophical mill. Beardsley and Margolis each responded to what Cavell had to say, and their responses provided Cavell with the material and the directions for what became 'A Matter of Meaning It'. In the first two sections of his response essay, Cavell takes time first to clarify his ideas and arguments from 'Music Discomposed' and then to catalogue some misapprehensions, problematic assumptions, etc., on the parts of Beardsley and Margolis. In the third section, however, by far the longest section of the essay, Cavell uses Beardsley's remarks as an occasion to take a substantial detour on the subject of authorial intention, a detour which importantly brings him into the realm not merely of aesthetic criticism generally but of film criticism specifically.

In his response to Cavell's musings on music, Beardsley took the opportunity to elaborate a conception of 'musical worth' absent any notion of authorship; as he explained, his conception of 'musical worth' bespeaks 'patterns of inner relationship that give [a particular piece of music] shape' (1967: 109). Cavell objects to this conception on the grounds that 'one can find' such vague things as 'patterns of inner relationship' in virtually anything, from 'hand claps' to 'feet taps' to 'the sound of spoons tinkling'. These things, Cavell contends, 'may be *related* to music in various ways', that is, they may be musi*cal*, but they are *not*, strictly speaking, *music*, for 'what is missing' from Beardsley's conception of 'musical worth' (and his implicit conception of aesthetic worth more broadly) is 'the *point*' of the piece of music in question (and, implicitly, of any given artwork). Hence Cavell's charge that, in Beardsley's critical practice, artworks are erroneously regarded 'as more or less like a physical object, whereas the first fact of works of art is that they are meant' ([1967b] 1976: 227-228). Cavell supports this charge by adducing Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt Jr.'s contention in their landmark essay 'The Intentional Fallacy' that judging an artwork 'is like judging a pudding or a machine […]. [A given artwork] *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what [was] intended or meant' (Beardsley and Wimsatt Jr. 1946: 469).[3] This as opposed to Cavell's contention that an artwork is, 'whatever else it is […] an *utterance*' ([1967b] 1976: 228). Thus, to Cavell's mind, *contra* Beardsley and Wimsatt Jr., first, the existence of artworks (that is, their being what and as they are) is by no means simple, and, second, artworks (insofar as they are intentionally made by individuals to communicate ideas) do not merely invite or allow for investigations of intention, they require such investigations.[4]

On this point, Cavell is aware that to speak in this register – that is, to conceive of art as a medium in which individuals, call them authors, communicate ideas, on the one hand, and to conceive of aesthetic criticism as the investigation of authors' intentions toward the goal of understanding and evaluating (*their*) artworks, on the other – is to reject the quasi-Kantian conception of artworks as being uniquely 'without purpose' and hence available to us for us to do with as we please, a conception which has buttressed countless nonsensical arguments against author-based criticism.[5] This, however, does not perturb Cavell; he simply asks (primarily Beardsley but secondarily anyone for whom criticism is important) if there is 'any reason other than philosophical possession which should prevent us from saying, what seems most natural to say, that [aesthetic criticism involves] discover[ing] the artist's intention in a work' ([1967b] 1976: 225). In what remains of his essay, Cavell does not find any valid reasons which should prevent us from saying this. Moreover, three decades after the publication of 'A Matter of Meaning It', by the time that he was writing about classical Hollywood melodramas in his book *Contesting Tears*, Cavell still had not found any valid reasons. As he explains with reference to his practice of referring to the 'signatures' of authors in the course of analysing films:

> As long as a reference to a director by name suggests differences between the films associated with that name and ones associated with other such names, the reference is, so far as I can see, intellectually grounded. It may be intellectually thin in a given instance. But that is more or less pitiable, not a matter for metaphysical alarm. (1996a: 8-9)[6]

In other words, as far as Cavell was concerned, there are no valid reasons for being sceptical of author-based criticism. Yet, if this 'most natural', or ordinary, conception of aesthetic criticism – namely, as, whatever else it is, the investigation of authorial intention – is so commonsensical, one may wonder, as I certainly have, why it is not more common in scholarly circles. This leads precisely to the ideas of 'philosophical possession' and 'metaphysical alarm'. Significantly, the manner in which Cavell responds to philosophical possession in 'A Matter of Meaning It' and metaphysical alarm in *Contesting Tears* is indebted to the manner in which J.L. Austin responded to 'philosophical worries' in *Sense and Sensibilia* (Austin 1962). Austin, of course, was not only the foremost practitioner of what became known first as 'Oxford philosophy' and later as 'ordinary language philosophy', he was also an influential teacher of Cavell's during Cavell's time as a student at Harvard in the 1950s. Methodologically, Cavell was and remained throughout his career an ordinary language philosopher through and through (cf. Barrowman 2019a, 2020), and, in 'A Matter of Meaning It', Cavell significantly follows in the methodological footsteps of his teacher.

In *Sense and Sensibilia*, Austin set about interrogating the prevailing position on sense-perception – in particular, the position that 'we never see or otherwise perceive (or "sense"), or anyhow we never *directly* perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, sensa, sense-perceptions, percepts, etc.)' (1962: 2) – in order to prove that this 'typically *scholastic* view' (3) presents not a riddle to be solved, not a question to be answered, not even an argument to be refuted, but rather, a conception in need of revision (4). As Austin explained:

There is no simple way of [encouraging conceptual revision]. […] It is a matter of unpicking, one by one, a mass of seductive (mainly verbal) fallacies, of exposing a wide variety of concealed motives – an operation which leaves us, in a sense, just where we began. In a sense – but actually we may hope to learn something positive in the way of a technique for dissolving philosophical worries […]. [For] there is nothing so plain boring as the constant repetition of assertions that are not true, and sometimes not even faintly sensible; if we can reduce this a bit, it will be all to the good. (1962: 4-5)

Analogously, in 'A Matter of Meaning It', Cavell sets about interrogating the prevailing ('typically *scholastic*') position on authorial intention in aesthetic criticism – in particular, the position that, in aesthetic criticism, we never will encounter and should never try to discover, or anyhow we never will *directly* encounter and should never try to *directly* discover, authorial intentions in artworks, but instead only construct subjective interpretations of artworks (based on our own ideas, impressions, desires, convictions, biases, etc.) – in order to unpick a mass of seductive fallacies relating to notions of intention and meaning. This operation leaves him, in a sense, just where he began, namely, with the common sense, or ordinary, conceptions of authorial intention and aesthetic criticism. But only in a sense. For, through Cavell's efforts in 'A Matter of Meaning It', we may learn something positive in the way of dissolving philosophical worries (or exorcising philosophical possession, or silencing metaphysical alarm, etc.) in relation to notions of intention and meaning, and thereby encourage conceptual revision vis-à-vis authorship and criticism.

For an illustrative example of Cavell's investigative method in 'A Matter of Meaning It', an example which illustrates the influence on Cavell's philosophical practice not only of Austin but also of Ludwig Wittgenstein, in particular Wittgenstein's fondness for developing arguments through conversations with imagined interlocutors, consider Cavell's rehearsal of an exchange between himself and an imagined interlocutor on the subject of Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' (1867):

I will be told that it is not Mr. Arnold speaking to us, but a mask of Arnold speaking to…anyway not to us: we don't so much hear his words as overhear them. That explains something. But it does not explain our responsibility in overhearing, in *listening*: nor his in speaking, knowing he's overheard, and meaning to be. What it neglects is that we are to *accept* the words, or refuse them; wish for them, or betray them […]. What is called for is our acknowledgment that we are implicated, or our rejection of the implication. In dreams begin responsibilities? In listening begins evasion. (Cavell [1967b] 1976: 229)

This is a decidedly productive exchange. First, Cavell unpicks a fallacy, which his imagined interlocutor proffers in the following form: In the course of analysing a given artwork, such as 'Dover Beach', we never (indeed, we *cannot*) encounter the author; rather, what we encounter is some sort of authorial mask, or stand-in, or facsimile, or projection, etc. To Cavell's mind, 'this explains something'. What does it explain? For one thing, it explains, epistemologically, *where* opponents of author-based criticism go wrong, namely, in the belief that it is impossible to encounter or discover the intentions of authors. At best, this is a faulty generalisation. With respect to film, for instance, particularly in this day and age, when filmmakers regularly record audio commentaries for DVD and Blu-ray releases of their films in the course of which they often explain their creative processes at length and in detail – to say nothing of the preponderance of interviews and roundtables, podcasts, screening Q&As, etc. – the opportunities to encounter and discover the intentions of authors are so abundant that the sceptical conclusion that it is impossible to do so is an almost comical nonstarter.[7] For another thing, it explains, ethically, *why* opponents of author-based criticism go wrong, namely, in an attempt to evade,

for whatever reason(s), the responsibility of acknowledging authors (cf. Cavell 1979: 329-496; see also Cavell [1969a, 1969b] 1976). So patently ludicrous is the sceptical conclusion that it is impossible to discover authorial intentions that to want to jump to this conclusion indicates, à la Austin, the presence of a concealed motive, namely, the desire to deny 'the human being's absolute responsibility for the intentions and consequences of his actions' (Cavell [1971] 1979: 188), which manifests in the aesthetic realm in 'the absolute responsibility of the artist for the actions and assertions in his work' (188) on the one hand and 'our responsibility [in aesthetic criticism] for *claiming* something to be so' (Cavell 1979: 216) on the other.

Nevertheless, the takeaway for Cavell vis-à-vis scepticism in any realm, aesthetic or otherwise, is not that it is 'incoherent', or that it has 'incoherent presuppositions', for this is so obvious that it is hardly worth mentioning; rather, the takeaway is that scepticism 'does not *begin* incoherently', that 'it is not clear [prior to investigation] that any given [or which particular] step is avoidable' ([1967b] 1976: 257). From this perspective, Cavell's philosophical orientation is more Wittgensteinian than it is Austinian. If Austin's philosophical project can be thought of as, for lack of a better term, a 'defense of the ordinary', that is, as an attempt to prove that there are no valid reasons to search for concepts beyond our ordinary array of concepts in the already 'rich and subtle […] field [of] ordinary language' (Austin [1957] 1961: 130), Wittgenstein's philosophical project can be thought of as, for lack of a better term, an 'investigation of the extraordinary', that is, as an attempt to understand the motivations of people who find it necessary for whatever reason(s) on whatever occasion(s) to search for concepts beyond our ordinary array of concepts, to try, as Wittgenstein described it, to 'sublime' the logic of ordinary language (Wittgenstein [1949] 2009: 46e-48e). Both Wittgenstein and Austin agree that, in Wittgenstein's formulation, our ordinary 'forms of expression' can 'send us in pursuit of chimeras' and can 'prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing extraordinary is involved' ([1949] 2009: 48e). They differ insofar as Austin's concern was to exclude those chimeras from philosophy, whereas Wittgenstein considered a crucial aspect of philosophy to be investigating the terrain

covered in pursuits of chimeras (cf. Cavell [1993] 1995: 58-61, 2004: 17).

This Wittgensteinian spirit was very much alive in Cavell's work; he, too, was keen to investigate the terrain covered in such pursuits, including in the field of aesthetics. For, as Cavell maintained, effectively synthesising Wittgenstein and Austin, any 'formidable' defence of any given 'ordinary' proposition must be more compelling than the sceptical argument against it, but in order to prove that said ordinary proposition is more compelling than its sceptical counterpart, it is necessary to give scepticism a proper hearing ([1969a] 1976: 257). Hence the second thought experiment conducted in 'A Matter of Meaning It' in relation to Fellini's *La Strada*. Throughout his essay, in relation to several different issues relevant to aesthetic criticism, Cavell discourses with imagined interlocutors on the myriad ontological, epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic implications / ramifications of various grammatical formulations vis-à-vis authorship. This is evidence of Cavell's inheritance of Wittgensteinian philosophical investigation. Just as Wittgenstein did before him, Cavell uses imagined interlocutors to specify occasions on which one may be prevented from seeing that nothing extraordinary is involved in the ordinary phenomenon in question, to give voice to the reasons why one may be inclined to go off in pursuit of a chimera – in short, to steelman rather than strawman scepticism.

In the context of this second thought experiment, Cavell and his imagined interlocutor discourse on authorial intention and film criticism. To begin his thought experiment, Cavell states that, as he understands *La Strada*, 'it is a version of the story of Philomel: the Giulietta Masina figure is virtually speechless, she is rudely forced, she tells her change by playing the trumpet, one tune over and over which at the end fills the deserted beach and whose purity at last attacks her barbarous king' ([1967b] 1976: 230). This is an example of, in Cavellian terminology, an 'act of criticism' ([1971] 1979: 219), an instance of his taking the aesthetic responsibility for claiming something to be so. But what if Cavell wanted to know if it *actually is* so? That is, what if Cavell wanted to know if Fellini *intended* his film to be a version of Philomel? On this point, Cavell imagines different scenarios. In one, he simply

asks Fellini directly if he intended *La Strada* to be a version of Philomel and Fellini affirms it. In another, he asks Fellini but Fellini denies it. In this latter scenario, Cavell admits that his 'conviction' in his sense that *La Strada* is a version of Philomel is 'so strong' that, in asking Fellini about his intentions, he 'would not so much be looking for confirmation' as he would be 'inquiring whether [Fellini] had recognized this fact about his work', so that, even if Fellini denied it, he would not 'take [Fellini's] word against [his own] conviction' ([1967b] 1976: 230).

This, to Cavell's mind, is the point where scepticism gains a foothold; it is also, therefore, the point where an imagined interlocutor arrives on the scene. Having admitted that he would stand by his own interpretive conviction even against the author's word, Cavell avers that 'one may ask: "Doesn't this simply prove what those who deny the relevance of intention have always said? What is decisive is what is there, not what the artist intended"', but he clarifies that, actually, what this proves is that 'a particular formulation of the problem of intention has been accepted' ([1967b] 1976: 230). His imagined interlocutor is not satisfied by that response, however, so the interlocutor continues pressing: '"But you admit that Fellini may not have known, or may not find relevant, the connection with Philomel"', which, his interlocutor alleges, is to admit precisely that '"what [Fellini] knew and what he intended are irrelevant to our response. It is what he has *done* that matters"'. To this, Cavell replies that 'it is exactly to find out what someone has done, what he is responsible for, that one investigates his intentions' ([1967b] 1976: 230-231).

As should be evident, Cavell's argumentative procedure here is not to refute or to counter his imagined interlocutor's sceptical arguments. Instead, Cavell is trying, after Austin, to encourage conceptual revision, that is, he is trying to get his imagined interlocutor, after Wittgenstein, to 'see an aspect' of the issue to which he is currently blind (cf. Wittgenstein [1949] 2009: 224e-225e). First, by stressing the importance of the investigation of intentions in determining what someone has done, Cavell is encouraging his interlocutor to check the premise that 'what someone has done' and 'what someone intended' are so conveniently and neatly separable, that there can never under any circumstances be any relevant connection

whatsoever between the two, let alone that the one, namely, intention, is never and can never be relevant in any context. Second, by claiming that the issue of 'what someone has done' versus 'what someone intended' indicates that 'a particular formulation of the problem of intention has been accepted', Cavell is encouraging his interlocutor to check the premise that 'what someone intended' is a sensible locution only if by 'intention' is meant *conscious and explicit* intention, quite as if short of Fellini walking up and gathering his cast and crew, telling them explicitly, 'The film that we are going to make is my version of Philomel', and then setting out with the express purpose of realising his version of Philomel, to say that 'Fellini meant to realise with *La Strada* a version of Philomel' can have no sense whatsoever.

The relevance and utility of Cavell's musings on this point extend far beyond just the case of Fellini and *La Strada*. For instance, in my own critical practice, in the course of preparing to analyse the crime drama *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004) nearly a decade ago (Barrowman 2011), I opted to watch the film while listening to the audio commentary track recorded by Michael Mann for the DVD release. In so doing, I came to realise that my understanding of a key moment in the film's major action set-piece did not align with Mann's stated intention behind the scene. Though at first this appeared to be quite the impasse, one which all but invited a sceptical conclusion, it became clear to me soon enough that the source of the problem was my faulty conception of intention, namely, referring back to Cavell's imagined interlocutor, the (mis) conception of intention as conscious and explicit intention. In other words, in the course of my confrontation with Mann, I was able to avoid succumbing to scepticism by simply revising my conception of authorial intention.

In brief, *Collateral* follows Vincent (Tom Cruise), a contract killer, as he forces Max (Jamie Foxx), a Los Angeles cab driver, to drive him around the city all night while he kills five Federal witnesses set to testify against a drug lord named Felix (Javier Bardem). Additionally, as the story unfolds, we come to learn that part of Vincent's M.O. is not merely to get cabbies to drive him around cities to his targets' locations, he ultimately kills and frames the cabbies for the murders that he commits. While this action plot is the driving force of

the narrative, one of the major subplots, and ultimately the psychological and emotional core of the film, is the breaking down of Vincent's carefully constructed psyche. Having successfully turned himself into a Terminator, Vincent has constructed a psychological shell that effectively protects against the intrusion of emotions. Over the course of his night with Max, however, his shell slowly begins to crack. Not one for whom friends are plentiful, Vincent finds that he actually likes and respects Max. After several meaningful interactions and events, a bond seems to develop. This invites the question: Will Vincent be able to conduct his business as usual and kill Max at the end of the night?

A possible answer to that question emerges during the film's major action set-piece. As Vincent goes after his next target – a Korean gangster named Peter Lim (Inmo Yuon), who hangs out with a full protective detail at a Korean club called Fever – all the narrative threads are weaved together by Mann in this set-piece. First, Felix's crew is monitoring Max (Vincent had deceived them into thinking that Max was him in an effort to protect his identity) with instructions to kill him if anything goes wrong; second, the FBI, who were monitoring Felix's club and who saw Max there and are now operating under the same misapprehension of thinking that Max is Vincent, are trying to get to Peter Lim to protect him before Vincent kills him; and third, LAPD detective Fanning (Mark Ruffalo), the only person besides Vincent and Max who is aware of who is who and of what is going on, is trying to find Max and get him out of everybody's crosshairs.

As it usually does in an action set-piece, and as it always does in a Michael Mann action set-piece, chaos quickly ensues. Lim's Korean bodyguards do not speak English, so when the FBI approaches, weapons drawn, they draw their weapons under the assumption that Lim is under siege. In the struggle between the FBI and the Korean protection detail, a gun goes off and fires into the crowded dance club, inciting a massive stampede and setting off a gunfight between all parties involved. Vincent is working his way through the club to Lim; however, when he notices that Felix's gunmen are about to shoot Max, Vincent stops pursuing Lim and intervenes to save Max's life. Realising that Vincent just saved his

life, Max looks over, and the two exchange a look between them.

Between my first viewing of *Collateral* in theatres in 2004 and my viewing of it with Mann's audio commentary in 2011, for all of those years, I interpreted the look between Vincent and Max, in particular the look on Vincent's face as he looks at Max after saving his life, as an indication that Vincent does not want to see Max dead. More specifically, I interpreted the look on Vincent's face as irritation masking embarrassment over his feeling compelled to save his new friend's life. However, in discussing this scene during his audio commentary, Mann described this look in different terms:

Vincent in reality would be really focused on what's happening, almost like a fugue state, and then it's gonna get interrupted by a threat to Max and as Vincent deals with it I wanted [him] to have – and he absolutely has – a kind of look on his face almost as if he's irritated because Max has been so inconsiderate to allow himself to have his life jeopardized and Vincent's had to intervene to save him.

On one score, my interpretation aligns with Mann's intention: He wanted Vincent to have a look of irritation on his face. On another score, my interpretation does not align with Mann's intention: He thought of Vincent as being irritated because Max was screwing with his work – which *is* something that Vincent had gotten irritated with Max for earlier in the film – whereas I thought that Vincent was irritated because he had realised that by saving Max's life he had tipped his hand regarding his emotional attachment to him – which *is* something that Vincent and Max discuss in the scene following this action set-piece. To be sure, some scholars would say at such a crossroads, 'Who cares what the author intended? The only faithfulness required in aesthetic criticism is to your own personal experience'. And if I were to admit to them, as Cavell admitted to his imagined interlocutor vis-à-vis Fellini and *La Strada*, that my conviction in my understanding of that look is all but unshakeable, then they would say in response, as Cavell's imagined interlocutor said to him, 'Doesn't this simply prove what those who deny the relevance of intention have always said? What is decisive is what is there, not what the artist intended'.

Though this appears to be quite the impasse, it is actually rather easy to dissolve this philosophical worry. All that is required is, first, a conception of *layers* or *levels* of intention, and, second, a *holistic* approach to aesthetic criticism. With reference to *Collateral*, it is not so much that I want to deny that what Mann explains as going on in that exchange of looks is actually there. I am happy to concede that it is there. Rather, it is more that I would not want Mann to deny that what I think is going on at a deeper level in that exchange of looks is actually there. I would hope that he would concede that it is there. In short, I think that what Mann was focused on during the shooting, and what Mann was explaining in his commentary, was the surface level, the basic constituent of the scene,

whereas I was going below the surface and mining deeper character and thematic constituents of the film as a whole.

In 'A Matter of Meaning It', Cavell comes to a similar conclusion in relation to the dilemma of (*ostensibly*) being at cross-purposes with an author. Imagining a scenario in which Fellini denies that he had Philomel on his mind during the making of *La Strada*, Cavell considers possible continuations in the event that he were to press Fellini to consider the relevance of the former to the latter:

> Everything depends upon how the relevance is, or is not, acknowledged. Suppose [Fellini] says, 'Of course! That's just the feeling I had about my character when I was making the picture. Odd the story never occurred to me'. Or: 'How ironic. I had tried to translate that story into a modern setting several times with no success. Here, without realizing it, I actually did it'. In such cases I am inclined to say that the relevance is intended […] [as opposed to] *unconscious*. [The latter] may well describe certain cases, but its usefulness will have specifically to be made out. What would prompt it here is the idea that intentions must be *conscious* – the same idea which would prompt one to deny that Fellini can have intended the reference if it hadn't occurred to him at the time, if he hadn't been aware of it. But […] to say that works of art are intentional objects is not to say that each bit of them, as it were, is separately intended. (Cavell [1967b] 1976: 232-233, 236)

This is perhaps the most crucial contribution made by Cavell vis-à-vis the practical relevance of authorial intention in aesthetic criticism. To return to *Collateral*, suppose that I were to tell Mann my understanding of the exchange of looks between Vincent and Max in the Fever set-piece. The 'worst-case scenario' would obviously be him flat-out rejecting my interpretation and denying that Vincent had any emotional attachment whatsoever to Max. I cannot imagine him saying that for the simple reason that everything in the film to this moment and everything after it seems to point in the opposite direction. As I mentioned, immediately after the Fever set-piece, Max confronts Vincent in the cab with his knowledge that, for whatever reason(s), Vincent is postponing the inevitable and refusing to kill him, either because he does not

want to kill him or possibly even because he cannot bring himself to kill him. Even more tellingly, in an earlier scene in which Vincent similarly acted as Max's protector and helped him deal with his aggressive and obnoxious boss, afterwards, before exiting the car to execute his next hit, Vincent paused and gave Max a similarly enigmatic look.

So, instead, suppose that Mann accepts my interpretation but admits that it did not occur to him at the time, that at the time of filming he was solely concerned with the professionalism aspect of Vincent's character and was not thinking about the deeper emotional implications regarding the film as a whole. Rather than jump to a self-serving conception of 'unconscious intention' with reference to which intention can effectively be theorised out of existence and meaning can be asserted as wholly within the province of the critic cum psychoanalyst who alone, in a perverse parody of the Lacanian 'subject supposed to know', has access to capital-K 'Knowledge' (cf. Lacan [1964] 1981: 230-243), Cavell simply encourages scholars to revise their conceptions of intention.

In calling attention to the fact that 'to say that works of art are intentional objects is not to say that each bit of them, as it were, is separately intended', Cavell highlights an aspect of artistic intention that has often gone unremarked. To his credit, in the context of literary criticism, E.D. Hirsch sought

to refute the psychoanalytic picture of unconscious intention along the same lines as Cavell. To the issue of 'authorial ignorance', Hirsch noted that 'there is a difference between consciousness and self-consciousness'; the fact that a given author 'may not be conscious of all that he means is no more remarkable than that he may not be conscious of all that he does', which is to say that, nothing extraordinary is involved in acknowledging that there simply is not enough room in our conscious minds to hold everything that we know, and believe, and want, and intend, etc., at the front of our conscious minds every second of every day. Indeed, considering the complex vicissitudes of artistic creation, it should not be surprising in the least that no author can 'possibly in a given moment be paying attention to all [of a given artwork's] complexities' (Hirsch 1967: 22). This is not to say, however, that anything that is not at the front of an author's conscious mind is unconscious, or inaccessible to consciousness, or what have you, nor is it to say that anything that was not at the front of an author's conscious mind cannot properly be said to have been something that the author intended.

To go back to *Collateral*, on the basis of the preceding explication of intention, I would argue that, while Vincent's emotional attachment to Max may not have been at the front of Mann's conscious mind, it was nevertheless always present

as an organising premise, hence the film's unity in plot, character, and theme. In sum, a simple revision of the concept of intention is all that is required to dissolve this particular philosophical worry and thereby nullify scepticism. Even though, when faced with such seemingly intractable philosophical problems, it is sometimes difficult, as Wittgenstein averred, to 'keep our heads above water, as it were, to see that we must stick to matters of everyday thought' ([1949] 2009: 51e), the ability to stay on track rather than go off in pursuit of chimeras allows for the possibility of recognising 'distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook' (56e). In this case, to speak of intention seems, per Cavell, to just mean the picture of intention as conscious and explicit intention. But there are nuances to the concept of intention provided by our ordinary forms of language which make it clear, provided that we are able and willing to recognise and acknowledge these nuances, that there is nothing extraordinary involved here.

'Fair enough', a sceptical scholar may be willing to concede, 'but what happens when it is not a matter of "layers" or "levels" of intention? That is, what happens when there absolutely *is* a contradiction and it is an either / or question of either your conviction or the author's intention?' For this scenario, I will offer another example from my own critical practice. Recently, I took the opportunity to conduct an ordinary language investigation of the communicative protocols discernible in the Aaron Sorkin-scripted and Danny Boyle-directed tour de force *Steve Jobs* (2015) (Barrowman 2020). As I did with *Collateral*, I once again opted during the research process to watch the film while listening to the audio commentary tracks recorded by Boyle and Sorkin. By the time that I got around to these audio commentaries, I was on perhaps my eighth or ninth viewing of the film, which is to say that, as Cavell was with *La Strada*, I was fairly confident in my understanding of the film. But then there came a moment where, just as it had happened with *Collateral*, my understanding of a scene did not match the intention behind the scene.

In brief, *Steve Jobs* is a biopic which proceeds according to a clearly delineated and tightly plotted three-act structure with the three acts corresponding to three product launches. In act one, which takes place in 1984, Steve Jobs (Michael

Fassbender) prepares to launch Apple's Macintosh computer. In act two, which takes place in 1988, Jobs, no longer working at Apple, prepares to launch a new computer sold by his new company NeXT. In act three, which takes place in 1998, Jobs, having returned to Apple and taken over as CEO, prepares to launch the iMac. The dramatic conflicts throughout the film – between Jobs and his friend and Apple co-founder Steve 'Woz' Wozniak (Seth Rogen), his friend and Apple CEO John Sculley (Jeff Daniels), his daughter Lisa (Makenzie Moss [act one], Ripley Sobo [act two], Perla Haney-Jardine [act three]), his ex-girlfriend and Lisa's mother Chrisann Brennan (Katherine Waterston), and the Head of Marketing and Jobs' closest confidante Joanna Hoffman (Kate Winslet) – all take place backstage ahead of the three product launches.

Needless to say, with a screenplay written by Aaron Sorkin, the pace is frenetic as the ensemble cast machine guns through Sorkin's characteristically rapid-fire dialogue. In the film's two-hour runtime, Jobs seldom has two consecutive seconds to himself during which time he is not engaging someone in verbal warfare. It is therefore more than just anomalous, it is clearly significant, when there are moments of quiet. One such significantly anomalous moment occurs in act one. Having just gone several rounds with Chrisann over their daughter Lisa and now on the way to go a few rounds with Woz over the Apple II team, Jobs experiences a few moments of silence as he rides the elevator down to where he will meet Woz.

Alone in the elevator, Jobs stands still, exhales, closes his eyes, and appears to go into a sort of meditative headspace. During this brief interlude, there are cuts between Jobs standing still with his eyes closed and the audience awaiting the Mac launch doing the wave to amuse themselves. It is as if, in the midst of all the verbal warfare on the one hand and the excitement of the product launch on the other, Jobs does his best to take a moment of solace to recharge. In fact, as he goes from Chrisann to Woz, the ding of the elevator as Jobs reaches the ground floor seems to serve as the bell that signals to a fighter in between rounds that the rest period is over and the next round of action is set to begin. I say 'appears', 'as if', and 'seems' because this is how I had formerly interpreted the scene. In the course of listening to the audio commentaries featuring Boyle and Sorkin, I came to realise that my

understanding of this moment and the reasons for its composition was actually a woeful misunderstanding.

In his audio commentary, Sorkin discusses this moment – 'another unscripted moment', he explains, giving credit to director Boyle for this stroke of artistic inspiration – as follows:

It's a very nice, quiet moment. It was Danny [Boyle]'s idea to put [Jobs] in an elevator […]. Danny always [said] that the script felt to him like the sound of Steve Jobs' mind […]. There are just a couple or three moments in the movie when Steve is alone and in that quiet is when I feel like it's the loudest in his mind.

In Wittgensteinian parlance, this 'aspect' of the scene, namely, the paradox of moments of external silence resulting in moments of overwhelming internal loudness, had not been visible to me prior to Sorkin directing my attention to it. For my part, I had been operating on the simple premise that a moment of quiet in a film just simply *means*, as if *by itself*, regardless of the narrative context or the authorial intention, that the quiet is peaceful and relaxing. In so doing, I was violating a principle once expressed by V.F. Perkins, namely, that 'a theory of judgment cannot remove the necessity for judgment' ([1972] 1993: 193). That is to say, aesthetic judgments cannot be made as if they correspond to an aesthetic 'playbook' or some pre-existing set of aesthetic 'rules'; rather, aesthetic judgments must be made on case-by-case bases (cf. Morgan 2011, 2020). As Cavell himself outlined:

I say, in effect, that any and every gesture of the camera may or may not mean something, and every cut and every rhythm of cuts, and every framing and every inflection within a frame – something determined by the nature of film and by the specific context in which the gesture

occurs in a particular film […]. [These] are the bearers of the filmmaker's intentions […] [and] this intentionality […] dictates the perspective from which a critical understanding of a film must proceed. It is a perspective from which a certain level of description is called forth, one in service of the question 'Why is this as it is?' – the critical question – which may be directed toward works of art as toward any of the acts and works of human beings and of their societies. Suppose that it would be true to describe what is shown on the screen as a shot of a stairway. This description may or may not have a point (beyond cataloguing the shot). If one calls what is shown a 'point of view shot', one may go on to say that such a shot may be established by, for example, cutting to it from the face of a character and cutting from it back to that face […]. If, however, you go on to say why *this* way of establishing a point of view is used, and why *here*, and why with respect to *this* character, and why by way of *this* content, then you are proposing a critical understanding of this passage [the interest of which] will depend upon its faithfulness to the intention of this work. ([1971] 1979: 186-187)

As it relates to *Steve Jobs*, I had correctly *described* the scene in question – namely, as a solitary moment of silence experienced by Jobs – but I had failed to correctly *understand* the scene in question – namely, as a solitary moment of silence the quickness of which Jobs was grateful for, as opposed to my misunderstanding of it as a moment of silence which Jobs was hoping would last for considerably longer. And my failure to understand the scene, both in and of itself and in relation to the film as a whole, is evident in the fact that, per Cavell, my 'critical understanding' was not faithful to 'the intention of the work'.

Once again, some scholars would say here, 'Who cares what the author intended?' Beardsley would certainly be one of the voices in that chorus. For his part, Beardsley valorised the concept of 'experience' precisely because he (erroneously) believed that it would ensure artwork-directed attention, as opposed to author-directed attention, which he (erroneously) believed would take scholars away from the artwork in question and would thus ruin (if it would not preclude entirely) the aesthetic experience. As this example from my

own critical practice makes clear, however, *contra* Beardsley, this is by no means *always* or *necessarily* the case. In fact, there are instances, surely multipliable beyond my personal experience with *Steve Jobs*, where the investigation of authorial intention, far from taking one away from the artwork in question, is precisely that which allows for 'further penetration into' the artwork in question (Cavell [1967b] 1976: 236). In my case, it was only after I had come to understand the scene in and of itself – which would not have been possible had I not learned of the director's intention behind the scene (that is, had I remained solipsistically wrapped up in my own experience) – that I was able to understand and appreciate the film on a much deeper level.

To wit, one of the most powerful moments in the film is a decidedly similar moment of silence and stillness. In act three, after a contentious backstage encounter in a conference room ahead of the iMac launch with former employee Andy Hertzfeld (Michael Stuhlbarg) about a personal matter involving his daughter Lisa, Jobs again finds himself alone in quiet but not in peace. As soon as Hertzfeld leaves, rather than sighing in relief, Jobs grimaces and violently shakes the table on which he was leaning while going over his launch notes. At that instant, an image flashes on the screen of Lisa as a small child in a scene from act one. Clearly, Jobs' emotions are overflowing, quite literally spilling out onto the table. He tries to keep his emotional turmoil at bay, dryly reciting information from his launch notes, but images of Lisa continually flash on the screen as they are going off like flashbangs in his mind. No matter how hard he bites down on the bullet of his work to ward off the emotional pain that he is going through, the emotional turmoil does not abate.

This is plainly evident in the scene itself, thanks to the performance of Michael Fassbender and the editing of Elliot Graham, yet, if not interpreted in conjunction with the *correctly understood* elevator scene from act one, the purpose of this scene from act three – and, by extension, one of the most important thematic motifs in the film on the whole – will be indiscernible. A recurring motif throughout the film is Jobs' inability to prioritise his work over his daughter in his mind even as it appears to outside observers, his daughter included, that he prioritises his work over everyone and
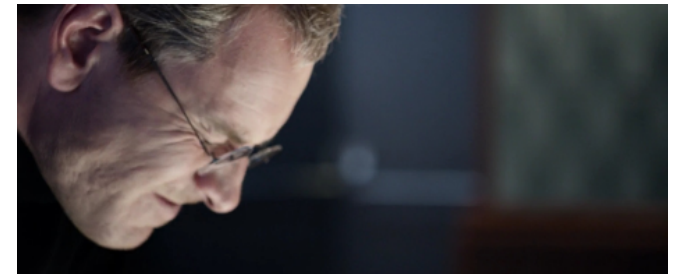
everything. In the elevator scene in act one, the loudness in Jobs' mind, absent the welcome distractions of dealing with the Mac launch, is emanating from his having just had his first moment of genuine connection with his daughter. When the elevator dings and he goes off to talk with Woz, it is not so much signalling the interruption of a reprieve (from having to deal with people) as it is signalling the arrival of a reprieve (from having to deal with himself). In the conference room scene in act three, Jobs is once again trying to quiet his emotional demons, and he once again seeks a reprieve in his work. But at this point in the film, having spanned two decades of his life – during which time Jobs has accumulated

two additional decades of emotional baggage – Jobs cannot even so much as muffle the loudness in his mind.

In the elevator scene, Jobs closes his eyes and stands still. In this moment, his face is blank and serene while his body language is controlled and motionless. In the conference room scene, he again closes his eyes, only this time he is visibly straining as he closes his eyes, as if he thought that if he could just squeeze his eyes shut tight enough then thoughts of his daughter would not be able to penetrate his brain; his jaw clenches, an external manifestation of the internal effort that he is expending to avoid dealing with the thoughts and feelings that are rushing in; and he takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes, a sign of the emotional fatigue that he is feeling by this point in the film.

Not only is this crucial character information, the ability to see in the construction of the elevator scene in act one – the solitary silence, the physical stillness, the intercutting of images to indicate what is happening inside of Jobs' mind – the reference point for the construction of the conference room scene in act three allows for, first and foremost, a deeper understanding of the film and the emphasis throughout the narrative on Jobs' desperate desire to avoid having to acknowledge and express his innermost thoughts and feelings, but also, and by extension, a greater appreciation for the inspired meticulousness of the narrative construction and aesthetic composition. And if facilitating such understanding and appreciation is not the ultimate goal of any activity which claims the title of 'criticism', then what is?

Hopefully, in conjunction with the preceding explication of Cavell's ideas and arguments vis-à-vis authorship and its vicissitudes, these two examples from my own critical practice, in the first of which the threat of scepticism inspired me to challenge and ultimately revise my conception of authorial intention and in the second of which the threat of scepticism inspired me to challenge and ultimately revise my conception of a film, are indicative of the probative value of author-based criticism toward the goal of understanding and appreciating art. To be sure, far more can and should be said with respect to aesthetic philosophy and critical practice in general and the aesthetic philosophy and critical practice of Stanley Cavell in particular. And I hope that more is said. This has merely been

a prolegomenon. My goal is not to put an end to any conversations. On the contrary, my goal is to encourage scholars to (re)start a series of conversations on authorship, intention, and meaning in relation to the practice – the *ordinary* practice – of criticism.

To this end, my modest hope is to contribute to such conversations a sense of trust in and patience with ordinary language as exemplified in Cavell's writings, and in particular in his conception of an 'ordinary aesthetics', which I submit points the way to an ordinary aesthetic philosophy (cf. Cavell 1996b; see also Cavell 2004). In order to defend and fortify the ordinary practice of criticism, Cavell encouraged scholars to learn how to 'philosophize by means of ordinary words (which often means identifying words that have been enclosed by philosophy – such as understanding, reason, accident, necessity, idea, impression – and retrieving their ordinariness)' (1996b: 371). To Cavell's list of ordinary words 'enclosed by philosophy', I would add the words 'author', 'intention', 'meaning', 'criticism', and even 'art' itself. Toward the goal of establishing what I am calling an ordinary aesthetic philosophy, one of the principal tasks would be to retrieve the ordinariness of words such as these, or, in Wittgenstein's formulation, to 'bring [such] words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use' ([1949] 2009: 53e). This task would involve 'plac[ing] philosophy's conviction in itself', as well as criticism's conviction in itself, 'in the hands, or handling, of ordinary words' (Cavell 1996b: 377). To my mind, there is no better place, nor are there better words.[8]

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1 It is worth mentioning that situating poststructuralism as a continuation of New Criticism is more than merely a rhetorical gesture on my part. In 'The Death of the Author', Barthes explicitly situates his project as a radicalisation of New Criticism and the efforts of people like Monroe C. Beardsley to invalidate the concept of authorship ([1967] 1977: 143), while, in 'What is an Author?', Michel Foucault implicitly tips his hat to New Criticism and incorporates its language when he writes that 'it has been understood [thanks to the project of New Criticism] that the task of criticism is not to re-establish the ties between an author and his work or to reconstitute an author's thought and experience through his works […] [but rather] should concern itself with the structures of a work, its architectonic forms, which are studied for their intrinsic and internal relationships' ([1969] 1979: 16).

2 For the only substantial discussion that I am aware of by a film scholar of 'A Matter of Meaning It', see Catherine Wheatley (2019).

3 Significantly, Beardsley maintained this position throughout his career. As late as *The Possibility of Criticism*, he was trying to argue that meaning is not, and cannot be, determined by the intentions of authors. In an effort to prove this, he adduced random computer-generated texts, which, he alleged, have meaning even though 'nothing was meant by anyone' (1970: 19). For the canonical refutation of the notion of 'intentionless meaning', see Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels (1982). As it relates to Cavell, his interest was in finding a space somewhere between these two poles – that is, with reference to the epigraph to this essay, between W.C. Fields and Humpty Dumpty – where he could acknowledge authorial intention, perhaps even give it pride of place, without thereby excluding as irrelevant considerations of medium, genre, history, culture, etc.

4 Interestingly, in the context of one of the only attempts by a film scholar to provide a foundation for a Beardsleyan film criticism, William Cadbury sought a compromise between the Cavellian conception of an artwork as the intentional communication of ideas by an author and the Beardsleyan conception of an artwork as an object that 'simply *is*'. For his part, Cadbury sought to loosen the authorial grip on meaning, as it were, by conceiving of artworks as 'aesthetic statements' with the caveat that, 'unlike ordinary statements, they are not *asserted* but merely *presented* for contemplation' (1982: 161; cf. Beardsley 1958: 419-437). Leaving aside the fact that 'presenting' is no less intentional than 'asserting', I would imagine that even Cadbury would have a hard time denying that the 'aesthetic statements' of filmmakers as diverse as Sergei Eisenstein (e.g.

Strike [1925]), Dorothy Arzner (e.g. *Dance, Girl, Dance* [1940]), Jean-Luc Godard (e.g. *deux or trois choses que je said d'elle* [1967]), and Spike Lee (e.g. *BlacKkKlansman* [2018]) qualify as aesthetic assertions. To avoid such torturous circumlocutions, it must simply be acknowledged that, while authorial intention may not be all that matters in aesthetic criticism (to argue that it *is* all that matters would be the W.C. Fields line), it is what matters *first and foremost* (to argue that it does not matter *at all* would be the Humpty Dumpty line) (cf. Cavell [1986] 1988; see also Barrowman 2017, 2018a, 2018b).

5 For critiques of the problematic tendency of scholars to formulate aesthetic arguments with reference to Kant's philosophy of beauty, see Noël Carroll ([1991] 2001, 1998: 81-109), Michelle Marder Kamhi (2003: 414-416, 2014: 15-21), and Barrowman (2018b).

6 For the record, I, like Cavell, regard directors as the authors of films. On this subject, there are two issues worth considering in addition to intention, namely, attribution and collaboration. With respect to the issue of attribution, to the extent that my focus in this essay is narrowly on the concept of intention, the further question of 'Whose intention?' is not directly relevant. However, it is worth acknowledging that, given the collaborative nature of filmmaking, the 'credit' for certain ideas or choices is not always due, and therefore should not automatically be attributed to, the director. For instance, it is hard to imagine Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019) being so profound without the 'underdog' character arc of Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio). In particular, Dalton's breakdown in his trailer after a rough day on-set followed by his 'comeback' is one of the standout sequences in the entire film. While it would be easy to credit Tarantino for constructing such a tight character arc which so perfectly feeds into his larger thematic meditation on redemption in Hollywood, this was not in the script. The idea to have Dalton mess up his lines was DiCaprio's, not Tarantino's (see *Quentin Tarantino 2-Hour Exclusive Interview*, 2019: 00:01:34-00:09:00). Stories like this are easily multipliable throughout the history of film, to the point where some might ask: Is 'author' even a valid term in the context of such a collaborative art form? Given the specificity of each medium, playwrights, painters, novelists, and filmmakers, as authors, are as different as their respective media. However, I would still argue that 'author' is worth preserving even in as collaborative a medium as film and that the director is the figure most deserving of the 'author' label. For something as massive as a film to succeed, there must be someone with whom the buck stops, someone who ultimately says 'Yes' or 'No' to every logistical and creative idea based on a unifying vision. For example, Nicole Kidman has explained, with respect to the sense in which actors can be said to collaborate in the making of a film, that 'the director has a vision [and] ultimately it's the director's choice. Film is the director's medium … [and] we serve the director. It's that simple' (see *Actresses Roundtable: Lady Gaga, Glenn Close, Regina King, Rachel Weisz, Nicole Kidman | Close Up*, 2019: 00:18:21-00:18:55). The sense in which actors, screenwriters, cinematographers, editors, etc., collaborate in the making of a film, then, is in the sense that they bring as much to the table as

possible based on the vision of the director, and any and all ideas are either accepted or rejected by the director based on whether or not they help him / her to realise his / her vision. This is the sense in which directors *direct*: They do not literally imagine / do *everything* that ends up on the screen, but they do *direct* everyone in their individual jobs toward the goal of realising their particular vision of the film. This is the sense in which Cavell writes that 'good directors know how to mean everything they do' while 'great directors […] discover how to do everything they mean' (Cavell [1971] 1979: 188).

7 On this point, one of the anonymous readers of this essay lamented – rightly, in my estimation – that 'there is still too little critical / theoretical work on the relevance (or otherwise) of commercial (DVD / Blu-ray) commentaries for the realm of critical practice'. To this point, my habit in my own critical practice of always starting at the source, so to speak, with the filmmakers responsible for the films that I write about, harkens back to the earliest days of auteurism in film studies and specifically to the work of the early *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *MOVIE* critics. That is, my habit bespeaks a certain 'attitude' to art and criticism, as Ian Cameron once put it ([1962] 1972: 12), namely, an attitude of not just interest in art but interest in, and respect for, artists and the artistic process. The extent to which this attitude informs my critical practice will be evident in what follows, as will, I hope, the potential critical benefits of consulting filmmakers themselves in the course of analysing their work.

8 For their patience and generosity, as well as their diligence and shrewdness, I would like to thank Kathrina Glitre, James MacDowell, and the two anonymous readers for the time, energy, and care that they devoted to my ideas.

'Why Does It Look Like This?' A Visual Primer of Early CinemaScope Composition

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'Why Does It Look Like This?' A Visual Primer of Early CinemaScope Composition

A Hollywood studio would be unlikely to stake a major investment in a widescreen spectacle and leave the visual style to chance.
(Tashiro 1998: 52)

Thanks to CinemaScope, sets will play a more integrated part in the picture than ever before. Just as on the stage, width, not depth, will represent the typical setup.
Lyle Wheeler, Head, Twentieth Century-Fox Art Department (quoted in Anon 1953: 133)

Primers present the most basic elements of subjects. This essay is a visual primer that describes and makes visible the basic rules that organise the composition of early CinemaScope films. What follows, then, aims to answer the question posed in the essay's title: CinemaScope images look the way they do because from the time CinemaScope production began, filmmakers throughout the motion picture industry settled upon the same strategy of composition. Thus the illustrative examples I have chosen from the first year or so of CinemaScope production share the same basic compositional organization even though they come from different production companies and range among different genres.

Like most primers, this one begins with the simplest of illustrations, and then, progressively, presents more complex variations, until it concludes with a discussion of a sequence from a specific film, *The Girl Can't Help It* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1956; director; Frank Tashlin; production designers: Lyle Wheeler and Leland Fuller) that makes this underlying compositional logic explicit for dramatic purposes.

Normally, composition is thought of as part of a film's mise-en-scène, the conscious choice, usually made by the director, of positioning objects and actors within the frame. This essay radically relocates the genesis of CinemaScope composition to the set designers' use of an underlying grid to define the proportions of sets. Rather than something that directors arrange on a set in front of the camera, CinemaScope composition, then, is designed into the sets before they are even built. Set designers are the primary determiners of composition because they follow a well-established compositional strategy called rabatment.

Visual artists long ago recognised that within every rectangle – which is what the CinemaScope frame is – there are two implied squares. One need only rotate the shorter ends to construct the squares at either end of the rectangle. This process is called rabatment. Its aim is to provide a geometrical pattern whose guidance for the placement of objects and figures in a drawing or painting produces a unified, harmonious, and balanced composition. When both squares are constructed, as in the diagram below, the result is called a two square rabatment.
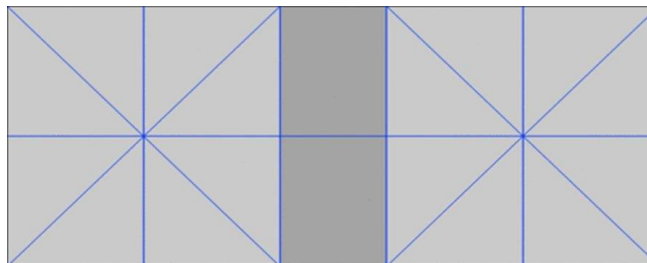
Consider how the design of the set in this frame from *Hell and High Water* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1954; director: Samuel Fuller; production designers: Lyle Wheeler and Leland Fuller) has been constructed as a two square rabatment

in nearly its most elemental form. The central curtain, like the central section of the accompanying grid, separates the two rabatted squares. Conduits extend down the centreline of both squares in the frame, dividing them in half, just like the vertical lines dividing the squares in the diagram. Indeed, the conduit in the left square leads to a red light precisely at its centre. The curtain at the right of the frame fills half of the right square. Professor Denise Gerard (Bella Darvi) is positioned on the vertical midline of the right square. As examples from other films will illustrate, her position there is almost a rule in compositions based upon rabatment.
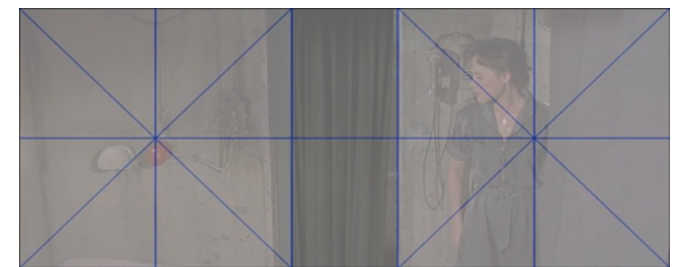
While CinemaScope sets appear plausibly realistic, like the submarine's cabin in *Hell and High Water*, one should not forget that they begin as two-dimensional designs, drawn to conform to the grid, then constructed to be photographed within a rectangular CinemaScope frame. The set determines the placement of the camera since capturing the frame's compositional balance on film requires that it be at the centre of the set. The examples that follow will illustrate that this requirement also determines the camera's positions during re-framings within a shot. With actors generally positioned on the mid-line of the rabatted squares or on its inner edge,

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built sets limit both a director's positioning of actors, as well as a cinematographer's freedom to choose a camera setup.

The view from the terrace into the women's apartment in the Villa Eden in *Three Coins in the Fountain* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1954; director: Jean Negulesco; production designers: Lyle Wheeler and John DeCuir) is also a two square rabatment. The central section between the squares is noteworthy because it is formed by details from two different planes. The door frame and pleat of café curtain that constitutes its left edge are in the *foreground*, while a column from the *background* forms its right edge. Reading the combination of foreground and background elements as being on the same plane highlights the flat two-dimensional basis of the image's three-dimensional illusion. (Also notice that two of the women are positioned on the midlines of the squares.)
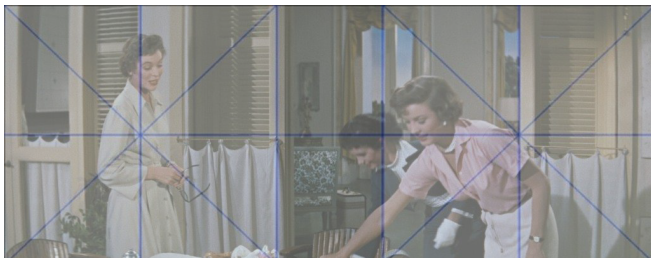
As one can see by comparing the details in this frame from *The Robe* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1953; director: Henry Koster; production designers: Lyle Wheeler and George W. Davis) with their equivalents in the diagram, this shot of the richly decorated interior in Senator Gallio's home is also a two square rabatment. As a three-dimensional illusion, the wall angles away from us, receding with the stairway into the depth at the upper right of the frame. Viewed this way,

it is a real space. At the same time, however, this is also a flat two-dimensional pattern of shapes whose underlying skeletal organisation has been determined by the geometrical division of the rectangular CinemaScope frame. The central section – defined by the door and nearby pillar – separates the frame into two equal squares. The width of this central section of the frame is precisely the same width as the darker section of the diagram.


The precise matching of realistic details to the pattern of a two square rabatment is quite common in early CinemaScope films. For example, while their ship rolls in heavy seas in this frame from *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* (Walt Disney Productions, 1954; director: Richard Fleischer; production developed by Harper Goff), Ned Land (Kirk Douglas) leans nonchalantly against a funnel that separates the frame's two squares. Poles coincide with the centre of each square; Conseil (Peter Lorre) tightly grasps the left one. Here, too, his position, half way between the centre of the frame and its edge is determined more by the geometry of rabatment, than by the director.

The narrow central section in the diagram that separates the equally sized squares is a recognisable feature in sets whose design has been determined by a two square
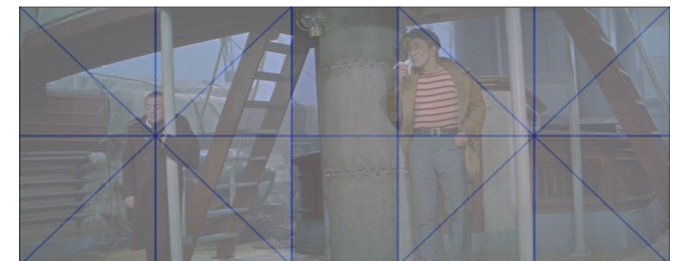
rabatment. However, it is not always as obvious as it is in the previous examples. It can be defined in any number of ways. It can be rendered less substantially, for example, by the panel of a sheer curtain, as in this frame where Elizabeth Burns (Lauren Bacall) looks out a hotel window in *Woman's World* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1954; director: Jean Negulesco; production designers: Lyle Wheeler and Mark-Lee Kirk). Both she and the vertical window frame that balances her in the composition are situated on the midline of the squares. Even more minimally, the central section may be defined only in outline, as by the wall decoration in Fiona Campbell's (Cyd Charisse) kitchen in *Brigadoon* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp., 1954; director: Vincente Minnelli; production designers: Cedric Gibbons and Preston Ames). (Notice how the
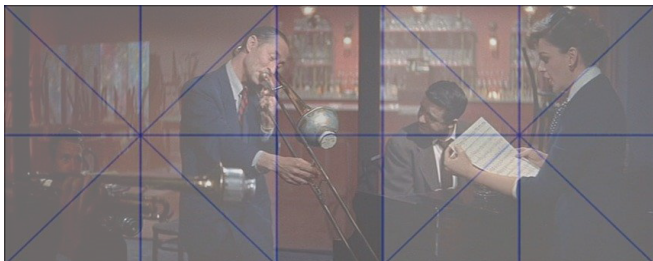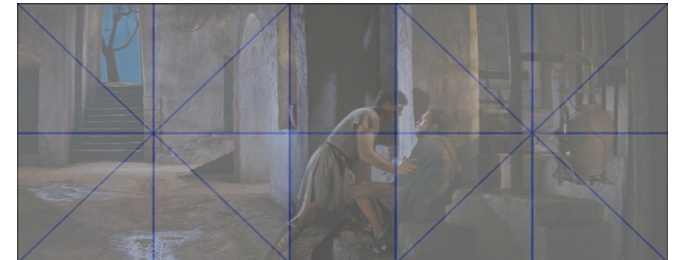
division of the squares into halves further defines the symmetry of the frame. Fiona's position at the edge of the central section is an alternate position for actors in a two square rabatment.) The central section is defined even more subtly by the position of the trombonist in *A Star is Born* (Warner Bros., 1954; director: George Cukor; production designers: Gene Allen, Malcolm Bert, and Lemuel Ayres). The composition is balanced additionally by the placement of a figure in each half of the two squares.

The continuing use of a two square rabatment to balance the frame from shot to shot during a sequence is illustrated by Demetrius' (Victor Mature) frantic night time search of Jerusalem for Jesus in *The Robe* to warn him that Pontius Pilate has ordered his arrest. It begins with the centred shot

of the doorway through which Demetrius leaves the baths where he has overheard the arrest order being discussed. It then continues through a series of streets and passage ways. Until he encounters a distraught man who turns out to be Judas (Michael Ansara). Judas reveals his identity in a closer shot.

Judas then wanders off, leaving Demetrius shocked at the revelation that Jesus has already been betrayed to the Romans.

The extended use of a two square rabatment in this sequence, as well as the interior of Senator Gallio's home discussed above, demonstrate that filmmakers at Twentieth Century-Fox consciously understood how to use rabatment

to organise the CinemaScope frame from the moment they innovated the format.

In addition to a two square rabatment, it is possible to inscribe only one square within a rectangle at either of its ends, thereby creating either a left or a right rabatment. This turns the rectangle into a square and a smaller rectangle. Generally the most important element within the frame is placed inside the square or on the interior line that defines it. Most clearly it can be done as a sharp delineation, as illustrated by the right rabatment in this frame from *Woman's World* in which Carol Talbot (Arlene Dahl) purposely arrives early at a reception so she will be its centre of attention. The unimportant decorative trim filling the rest of the frame accentuates the focus on her.
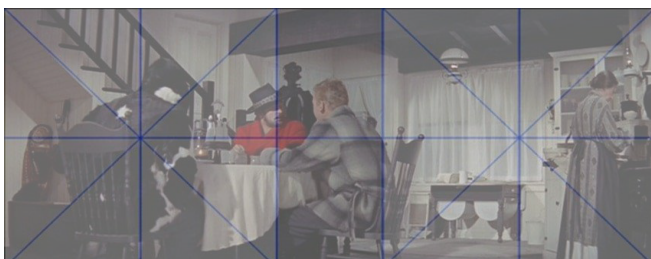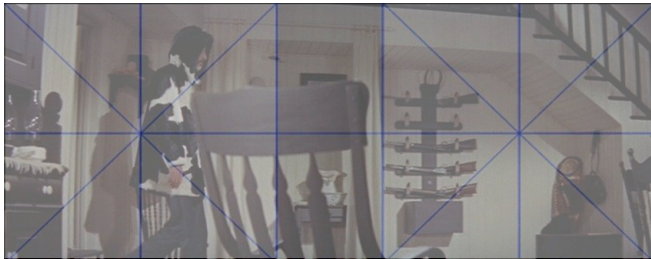

The same emphasis is true in this frame from *A Star is Born* where a curtain fills the entire left rabatment. The focus is increased by the curtain at the other end of the film frame filling what would be the right half of a square had one been
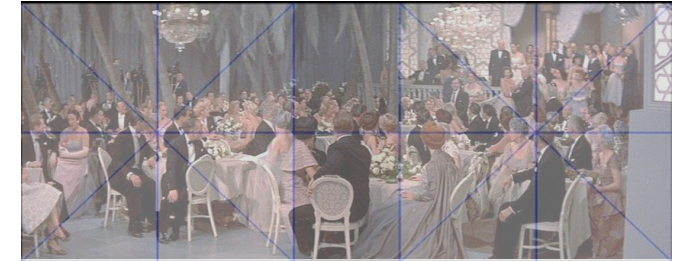
constructed at that end of the rectangle. Another frame from *A Star is Born* illustrates how what's omitted from a left rabatment can be defined more softly by filling the remainder of the frame with a rack of costumes. These three examples illustrate how one square rabatments can effectively focus audience attention by reducing what there is to look at within the frame.

The organisation of a frame with a single rabatment can be quite complex. Although the inner edge of the right rabatment in this film frame from *A Star is Born* is delineated by the slender trunk of a palm tree, it is the solid greys in the upper half of the frame that visually announces the separateness of the right rabatment's square. It is worth studying how colour functions in the shot. The entire lower half of the frame is a sprinkling of blacks, greys and flesh colours that differentiate it from most of the upper half of the frame. The woman in the grey dress in the foreground, positioned on the edge of the right square, acts as a hinge to hold the square to the rest of the lower frame. While everyone's eyes are fixed upon Norman Maine's (James Mason) entry in the Academy Awards banquet at the upper right, it is the curve of her grey dress, along with the flow of blacks, greys and flesh tones, that lead the viewers' eyes to him in the brightest section of the frame.

Tracking shots can maintain a rabatment from beginning to end. This lateral tracking shot from *Track of the Cat* (Wayne-Fellows Productions, Inc., 1954: director: William Wellman; production designer: Alfred Ybarra) begins as a right rabatment as it follows Arthur Briggs (William Hopper) making his way to the kitchen table for breakfast. The muzzles of the guns in the gun rack point to the curtain that constructs the interior side of the square. The camera maintains its

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relative position to Alfred throughout the shot, so that when he reaches the table and sits down with his brothers, he is still at the left side of the frame. The re-framed shot concludes as it began with a right rabatment in which his mother prepares breakfast.

A leftward tracking shot across the entire interior of Sylvia's restaurant in *Black Widow* (Twentieth Century-Fox,

1954; director: Nunnally Johnson; production designers: Lyle Wheeler and Maurice Ransford) captures the expanse of the wide set by marking its limits with an initial right and a concluding left rabatment. It begins as a right rabatment as Sylvia (Mabel Albertson), standing by Ann (Hilda Simms), the hatcheck girl, greets Claire Amberly (Virginia Leith) and her brother, John (Skip Homeier), at her restaurant's front door. She asks Nancy Ordway (Peggy Ann Garner) to lead them leftward to a table where the shot ends in a left rabatment at the left side of the restaurant. The change from a right rabatment at the beginning of the shot to a left rabatment at its conclusion acknowledges the traverse from the limits of the right end of the set to the limits at its left end. Notice how the actors are positioned at the midlines of the squares and at the edges of the centre section.

A pan and track-in to the right across General Maitland's living room in *King of the Khyber Rifles* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1954; director: Henry King; production designers Lyle Wheeler and Maurice Ransford), which takes in the width of the set, starts centred on one two square rabatment and ends on another after it follows Susan Maitland (Terry Moore) across the room, passing Lt. Heath (John Justin) in the process. At the conclusion of the shot, the actors are positioned on the midlines of the two squares.
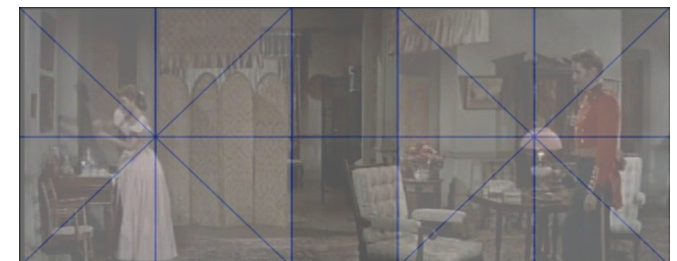
Though rabatment provides a degree of standardisation, the ambiguous organisation of a pair of remarkably complex shots in *A Star is Born* illustrates how the underlying grid also lends itself to the construction of intricate compositions. At first glance, this frame of Norman Maine in front of a night court judge appears to be a right rabatment. The

flag defines the left edge of the right square. At second glance, however, there is the presence of the shadow cast by the flag to consider. Together with the flag, the shadow roughly outlines the central section of the frame. Thus there is reason to interpret the organisation of the frame as a two square rabatment. This interpretation is reinforced by the symmetrical positions of Norman and the Judge precisely on the midline of each square. This is a visual conundrum. Does the frame contain a right rabatment, or is the frame a two square rabatment? It is either or both, depending on how one interprets it.

Similarly, depending on how one reads it, this frame of Vicki Lester (Judy Garland) and Oliver Niles (Charles Bickford) in her dressing room may be either a left rabatment or a two square rabatment—or both. It depends on what one

makes of the vertical light at the left of her mirror. Considered one way, it is the vertical that defines the right edge of the empty left square. Considered together with the reflection continuous with it in the mirror, the light is part of the central section between two squares. Here, too, this perception is supported by the symmetrical positions of the light's reflection on the midline of the left square and Oliver Niles' position on the midline of the right square. Like the well-known rabbit and duck optical illusion, this frame, and the previous one, alternates between being a one or two square rabatment.

In *The Girl Can't Help It* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1956; director: Frank Tashlin; production designers: Lyle Wheeler and Leland Fuller), former gangster Marty 'Fats' Murdock (Edmund O'Brien) plans to marry his girlfriend, Jerri Jordan (Jayne Mansfield), as soon as publicist Tom Miller (Tom Ewell) launches her successful singing career. In the process of promoting Jerri, Miller has fallen in love with her. Worried that Marty might kill him if he finds out, Tom decides to treat Jerri in a strictly business-like manner. He takes her to a practice studio in order to make musical arrangements in her key. The practice room they rent has large sloping windows whose framework casts angular shadows on one wall. The set designers and director use the window, shadows, and a section of intervening wall to externalise the normally hidden grid of a two square rabatment to mirror the pair's changed relationship.

As one can see in the frame in which Jerri leans over the piano to talk with Tom, the angled space between them mimics the central section of the rabatment, but skewed to the left instead of presented vertically. In contrast to the unbroken horizontal line that transects the grid's two squares and central

section, here there is the discontinuity of the horizontal frame of the window and the horizontal barre behind Tom. Bent and disconnected, these visual equivalents of grid elements suggest the sudden disconnect between the couple. In place of the easy banter that had developed between them, Tom now addresses Jerri tersely, by her formal name, Georgiana.


The shadows cast in the background of the reverse shot of Tom after Jerri asks him to explain what has happened to change his behaviour toward her are curiously muddled. The reason for their uncertain pattern is explained in the shot that returns to Jerri: where the windows previously angled to the left, they now angle to right as though reflecting Jerri's

perspective. Indeed, when she declares that she thought they were friends and positions herself closer to Tom, the new camera angle partly straightens the window frame. It is as if
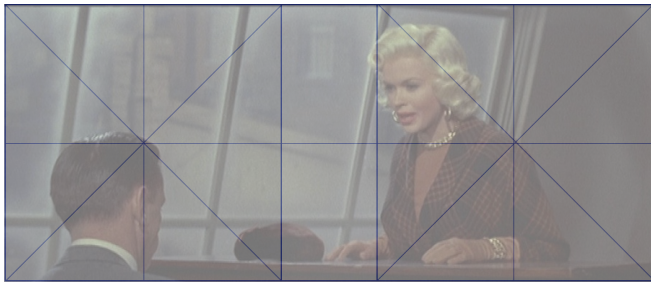
the background were responding to Jerri's hopes of restoring their relationship to what it had been. She suddenly realises, however, that Tom's silence is the result of his fear of Marty's jealous reaction to their closeness. This realisation propels Jerri across the room to the furthest she has been from Tom. And with her realisation, the windows and their shadows return to their original orientation.
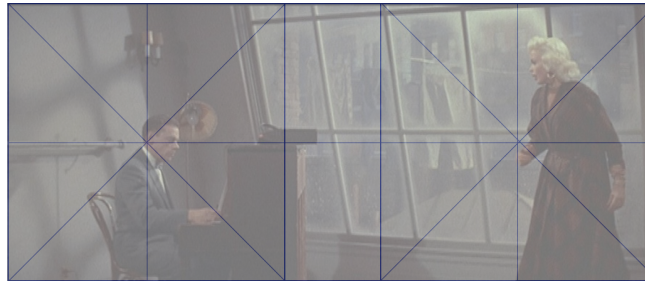
Taken together, these examples of the use of rabatment in the set design of eleven films from five different companies illustrate how widely and how well this compositional strategy was understood and applied throughout the industry during the first year or so of CinemaScope production. Because excerpts can be selective, it is important to emphasise that rabatment is used consistently throughout the films mentioned in this essay. Again and again, embodied in their set designs, its geometry guides composition, the placement of actors, and the positioning of the camera. The effects of rabatment explain why the early CinemaScope image looks as it does. In 'The Age of Metteurs en Scène', written largely in response to *The Robe*, Jacques Rivette termed that film's style 'ambiguous and confused' ([1954] 1986: 277). The continuing

two square rabatment in the shots of Demetrius' search for Jesus, however, demonstrates exactly the opposite. Indeed the recognition of how rabatment was used as the basis of rational composition in early CinemaScope films justifies a rethinking of CinemaScope composition in general and should encourage the search for other painterly strategies that were employed to define it.

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Marshall Deutelbaum is Professor Emeritus in English at Purdue University. This essay is part of his continuing research into widescreen composition. I want to express my appreciation to Kathrina Glitre and *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*'s anonymous readers for the suggestions which clarified and strengthened my argument.

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Closing Choices in *Hostiles*: Stepping onto a Moving Train

The purpose of this essay is to make sense of a feeling experienced during a particular film moment. This makes it an evaluation in film aesthetics as described by Andrew Klevan: 'The assessment, based on close examination, of the merits (or demerits) of the form that something takes' (2018: 1). I will suggest there is value in the scrutiny of this moment (even though others won't have experienced an identical sensation) in accordance with Immanuel Kant's concept of 'subjective universality' ([1790] 1953: 51) that while judgements of taste are subjective they carry an imperative to attest universal merit. At stake is the aesthetic merit of this film moment, and it will be championed through a close analysis of its formal constitution and genre variation. This makes it an example of genre criticism in the manner discussed by Douglas Pye: 'To identify and analyse tendencies within the tradition and to consider the variations developed by particular films' (1996a: 10-11). Ultimately, through these frameworks, I will add to our appreciations by suggesting that this moment is both a melodrama about the relationship between nationhood and manhood and a metatextual meditation on the western genre it belongs to, achieved through aesthetic means.

The movie in question is *Hostiles* (Scott Cooper, 2017) and the moment is its final shot. To understand this moment, we must account for the scene it sits within and make reference to earlier moments that are relevant to its affect – the cumulative parts that make up the sum. The thematic dramaturgy of the scene can be helpfully summarised as a question borne out of philosophical scepticism: how does one make sense of the irreconcilable complexity of historical experience? This question operates threefold in the movie: characters struggling with the consequences of violence within the diegesis; metacinematically as the film negotiates the legacy of the western genre it belongs to; and symbolically as the film seeks to narrativise and reckon with real-world violence and exploitation on which the modern nation-state is established. These thematic questions are expressed in a melodramatic mode aptly summarised as 'A combination of suffering, pathos, and a particular form of suspense' (Deleyto [2011] 2012: 229). This melodrama works to exploit the faculties of the film medium and communicate the ineffable tension between subjective fantasy, or appearances (which is tied to the verisimilitude of value systems and metanarratives) and the world as it is, or the things-in-themselves (which are objects and realities independent of observation). In the context of the western, in which there is 'inevitable confusion of history and myth' (Maltby 1996: 37), this gap is widened further, the scepticism made stronger, and the moment in question functions as a 'working out' of these antinomies through an aesthetic experience.

The scene opens to the screeching whistle of a moving train and the engulfing sight of steam billowing from its smokestack. This clamorous introduction signals a transition between frontier life and the new industrial society. But it feels more like a schism, for we have not yet seen a train throughout *Hostiles*' duration and its sudden presence feels incongruous and invasive. Tearing through the landscape fought over between white settlers and indigenous peoples, this cantankerous symbol of settler power makes it unambiguous who has won the American Indian Wars, especially as the railway reshapes sacred Cheyenne land. Steam trains have been used to represent settler conquest as early as the lithographs of Frances F. Palmer in the 1860s, and we can see examples in cinema, albeit with a more ambivalent perspective, in westerns such as *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1953), *Man of the West* (Anthony Mann, 1958), *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone, 1968) and *The Lone Ranger* (Gore Verbinski, 2013), in which the railway has an alien and invasive reputation. The symbolic use of the train in *Hostiles*' case, then, isn't particularly innovative. Rather it is a generic trope of the western, part of the generic verisimilitude which *Hostiles* embraces throughout in order to dramatise the sociological transformation taking place in wider society, which is deeply relevant to the characters' situation – as we shall see.

We have reached the point in the narrative in which the central conflict has been resolved but the fate of the surviving characters remains uncertain. The scene that plays out is the emotional apotheosis of the movie. Captain Joseph Blocker (Christian Bale), a long-serving US soldier circa 1892, is the last man standing from a military convoy ordered to escort the imprisoned Yellow Hawk (Wes Studi), a dying Cheyenne chief and old adversary, and his family across the American wilderness to their original tribal land in Montana. This mission is orchestrated as a public relations gesture from President Harrison, which Blocker, at the beginning of the story, is forced to accept despite the racist hatred he harbours towards the dwindling Native populace – which he has been instrumental in reducing through conquest and genocide. Therefore, the mission that makes up the bulk of the movie is, from the outset, framed in storytelling terms – a manufactured publicity stunt for the press. Blocker is forced to partake in a narrative construction he has no authorship over and yet, as a soldier in a chain of command, must forcibly, albeit reluctantly, manifest in the world. Only it is a new narrative of hollow reconciliation between Natives and Whites that contradicts the one ingrained within him through years of violent conquest, which he has justified through racist dehumanisation and a desire to avenge fallen comrades. The imperative to force subjective fantasy onto the world – from individuals and wider socio-political forces – is part of the film's examination of the tensions and contradictions that arise when said fantasies clash with the reality of the world, such as the cost of sanctioned violence, the fraught relationship between myth and reality, and the moral imperative to reckon with history. The scene and the moment which is the

concern of this essay is the film's aesthetic negotiation of these tensions, a melodrama of Blocker's moral scepticism.

Surviving alongside Blocker are the young Little Bear (Xavier Horsechief), the last descendent of Yellow Hawk, and the white settler Rosalee Quaid (Rosamund Pike), who accompanied Blocker's entourage on the journey to Montana after her family were massacred by Comanche raiders. By the end point of the movie, Blocker and Rosalee have developed a deep emotional bond and together the three form a quasi-familial unit. We find them all on the station platform facing each other but silent. There is only the noise and bustle of modern life while no character speaks for 16 seconds, which is a considerable amount of time. It's important to emphasise this pause of silence as it is a trait endemic to the film's rendering of human relations. As we see in the scene, and have witnessed throughout the film, communication between characters is typified by prolonged hesitation, pregnant pauses, sheepishness, and a general inability to express thoughts and feelings. We know the characters have experienced, or inflicted, horrific violence and have been defined by such violence, but this is rarely, or willingly, discussed – disproportionately to its influence. Interactions are reliant upon social organisation and punctilious decorum to function smoothly; impersonal etiquette protects social engagement from deeper, unseemly realities of experience; to be articulate and expressive of this reality becomes inseparable from indiscreet faux pas. Blocker, Rosalee, and Little Bear have undertaken a tremendous journey together, but Rosalee can only muster a bashful 'Well … I suppose this is it', as she anxiously rubs Little Bear's back. Following Rosalee's line, the film cuts to Blocker's reaction in a medium close-up. He performs a slight correction in his posture, like a soldier at attention, followed by a gentle nod of acceptance. He remains stoic, resorting to military instinct to deal with any emotional intrusion that their departure may have on him. The audience, however, has already been given privileged access to Blocker's private emotional outbursts. In this way, the film accentuates the distinction between interiority and exteriority, constructing melodrama in the persistent tension between the two. Christian Bale ably performs performance throughout the film, whether it be as a strong and unrepentant military leader or a deferential

gentleman dictated by gendered decorum. It is a fine example of what Andrew Klevan describes as '[a]ppreciating the performer's capacities for revealing and *withholding* aspects of the character's sensibility' (2005: 9). Although Blocker conveys exceptional moments of intense emotion (he weeps twice in the film), it's clear that he struggles, or is unwilling, to reckon with his inner life, and discourages others from doing the same, insisting to soldiers who suffer from 'the melancholia' that it 'doesn't exist'. We are left to decipher Blocker's interior world through Bale's highly modulated performance, which communicates through subtle gestures, cadence of voice, and ambiguous facial expressions. We are never wholly clear about what his thoughts, experiences, or feelings are only that they are deeply buried and seldom expressed – a vision of monosyllabic neurosis.

Blocker is, for sure, a type that we recognise: a morally dubious protagonist and a figure of masculine self-command in the tradition of the kind of western chiefly associated with the work of Anthony Mann, late John Ford and later Revisionist westerns from Sam Peckinpah and Clint Eastwood. The consequence of violence is a perennial theme amongst these works, and it is this tradition that *Hostiles* consciously plays up to, for it makes direct allusions to them. For example,

during an exchange earlier in the film, one soldier remarks to his colleague, 'I've killed everything that's walked or crawled.' To the genre-literate, this will recall the ruminations of William Munny (Clint Eastwood) in *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, 1992), who remarks in a dramatic showdown, almost verbatim, 'I've killed just about everything that walks or crawled at one time or another.' We see further evidence of citation within the scene itself: the characters are waiting at the platform in the city of Butte, Montana. Of all the towns that exist within the area of Great Bear Wilderness ('Valley of the Bears') where Yellow Hawk and his family are buried in the final act, this location is very likely chosen in homage to its association with Monument Valley and the picturesque butte formations that were made iconic by John Ford in multiple westerns. This thought is given more credence in the knowledge that Ford is very much on the film's mind. Blocker is characterised in a very similar fashion to Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) of *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956); Edwards and Blocker are both military-men on perilous journeys combating Comanche antagonists, motivated by explicit racist hatred, and well-versed in indigenous cultures to the extent that they speak local languages – a case of learning in order to destroy. Also, in the exact moment we see the name

Butte, Montana

of Butte on screen, the framing and lighting looks inspired by the iconic closing shot of *The Searchers*, which makes a firm interior / exterior distinction through high contrast lighting choice. (This is a recurring choice of composition and lighting within the film; a strikingly similar shot occurs during the raid on Rosalee's home, too.)

There is nothing particularly meritorious about homage, nor in the lifting of dialogue from other movies. It could, in fact, be seen as a cheap or opportunistic citation. Yet, in light of the way the film is interested in storytelling as a theme of study, it reveals the film's metatextual ambition. I have already referred to narrative construction at the level of a character's subjectivity and wider society, but it's also the case that *Hostiles* is unembarrassed to make oftentimes quite obvious quotations and embrace type for the purpose of highlighting the fact that it too exists within a construction of fantasy – the iconic movie western, a genre which does not easily align with historical reality, in the same way that Blocker's experience of the world does not always align with his personal fantasy

of righteous action. It's worth reminding ourselves that the mission of the movie only exists for storytelling reasons, both in the sense that it is a movie with a story to tell and, diegetically, as a newspaper story motivated by political forces, which is to say the manifestation of ideology – itself a way to make sense of the world in a narrative fashion. In this way, Blocker's subjective figuring out is mirrored in the film's figuring out in relation to its genre. *Hostiles* strives for verism and seeks to offer an aesthetically 'realistic' reckoning of history through its depiction of psychological turmoil and violence. At the same time, it often contradicts these principles by alluding to the mythology to which it belongs for the purpose of distancation. The relationship between fantasy and reality then is, according to the film, intensely fraught and heavily intermingled. This exacerbates the dilemma of scepticism for the characters, but also for us in the audience.

My assertion that the film dramatises the tensions and contradictions between interior and exterior is reflected in

performance but also in the scene's costume choices. Along with seeing a train for the first time, we see Blocker, Rosalee and Little Bear in attire that isn't survivalist, agrarian, or militaristic. They all now wear the markedly tight, restrictive clothes of reputable citizens. Blocker's hat has changed from the Stetson designed by John B. Stetson Company, which is the durable and waterproof (as evidenced in the film) hat of the pioneering West, to the semi-formal homburg, sometimes mistaken for a bowler hat. Popularised in the 1890s, the felt homburg signifies fashionable modernity and European-style refinement, with little exposure to the elements implied. Little Bear, too, no longer dons the clothes of a Cheyenne, but that of a European child, as if assimilated into white

culture and its family unit with Rosalee as the maternal figure. Europeanisation is striking in the scene and, like the train, signifies a new hegemony. But while the frontier thesis entailed the Europeanisation of the land, it was also the process by which Europeans became Americans. For better or worse, they're all Americans now. Fully aware of Blocker's capacity to act in a barbaric manner and Rosalee and Little Bear's inarticulable suffering from their familial losses, the 'civilised' attire feels contrapuntal to the bloody violence and earthly viscera we've become acquainted with through the film. The affect of this is ironic, or close to parody; we are encouraged to see the society that they now belong to as made of surface imitations, the genteel garments little more than a performative or repressive disavowal of a sinister and troubling past. Indeed, the fitting looks particularly restrictive for all involved, even choking. Bale's moustache, also, completely conceals his upper-lip – a reference to 'stiff upper lip' stoicism, as well as an acknowledgement of said stoicism's futility against the burden of History. We cannot see Blocker's lip tremble and yet we *know* he suffers.

These costume choices invite the audience to make a link between the repressive and taciturn psychology of the individual and the suprapersonal level of society, which is the fruitful domain of melodrama as expressed through mise-en-scène. According to David Lusted, 'A central trope of melodrama is the dramatic connection between social and psychic repression, leading to an excess of misery in the central protagonist and matched by emotional tension in the audience' (1996: 65). *Hostiles* builds on this melodramatic tradition by linking codes of masculinity with nation-building projects generally – nation-building as a masculine endeavour, and a manifestation of seemingly irresolvable contradictions, or even psychosis. Blocker is a nation-builder who reads the literature of fellow nation-builders; in quiet moments we have seen him reading Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (58-48 BC), which concerns Caesar's campaigns against Germanic and Celtic tribes. But, as with Caesar himself – a military general fighting for a Republic on its outermost outskirts – Blocker is expanding a civilisation that would later betray him. His suspicion about the legitimacy of the conquest narrative – known as Manifest Destiny – is sown almost as soon as he gets

the order to escort and protect Yellow Hawk, which contradicts his previous imperative to wage war against the Native population and which now, in his mind, offends the sacrifice of soldiers who fought and died. This is tantamount to the realisation of metanarrative as relative to power, politics and ideology, and not higher, more estimable values. For example, Blocker is a Christian, and we know he is educated as he reads Caesar in Latin, which insinuates he's an idealist and a soldier for such reasons. Therefore, the journey up until the final scene has been one of gradual narrative re-formation within Blocker's now-sceptical psyche. His apostasy is manifest in the penultimate scene which depicts Blocker defending the right for Yellow Hawk and his family to be buried on land that has become privately owned by white settlers. In other words, confronted with the unambiguous hypocrisy and ignobility of ownership on stolen land, Blocker ends up defying property rights, which is the staple of the new American society he has, ironically, helped to build. The collapse of one's subjective metanarrative does not, as a corollary principle, mean the emergence of another; so with the war won and his subjective metanarrative in tatters – particularly as he develops respect for Yellow Hawk over the course of the journey ('A part of me dies with you,' Blocker tells him) – who does Blocker become?

This is the dramatic crux of the final scene and we find this existential question imbued in his response to Rosalee's deterministic statement that 'this is it'. After a characteristic pause, he says to Rosalee: 'Came sooner than I thought.' This line, on the surface, appears to be little more than polite small talk as they wait for the train to depart. In light of the theme of change that is highly prevalent in the scene, and aware that Blocker's sense of meaningful narrative has been tossed adrift by the tide of history, when he declares that time has come, quicker than anticipated, Blocker is signalling his now-tenuous position in society, and resigning himself to obsolescence. What was once only an ideal has come into reality, only the fabled City Upon the Hill does not seem to have justified the carnage and warfare inflicted and suffered, and whatever idealism Blocker had leaves a bitter aftertaste when faced with the reality. Had Blocker maintained his brooding concentration towards Rosalee when speaking this line such an interpretation may not be justified; yet, upon

delivering the line, Bale averts his wounded gaze away from Rosalee and looks towards the train's intended direction – which is East, towards Chicago. By looking away, it becomes less of a gesture to be read as something directed at *her*, but something directed at the world. Needless to say by going East we are not going West. Ian Cameron remarks: 'If there is a single feature that characterises westerns, it is setting, and even this has to be defined negatively: the setting is not the East' (1996: 7). As such, on one level the train is quite literally scheduled to depart from the western itself and the generic paradigms of conflict and tension that constitute it, and which Blocker suffers from. Pye has written a helpful summary of these tensions, which concern 'The hero's inbetween position […] a battle between the pulls of isolation and separateness and of relationship and community, a conflict which can have no definitive resolution' (1996a: 14). While this theme is observable in many westerns, it can take different forms. Most relevant here are films such as *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946) and *The Searchers*, where the man of violence has no place in the social edifice he works to build, or defends, and so wanders back into the wilderness come the resolution. As Steve Neale puts it, 'Memories of the films within a corpus constitute one of the bases of generic expectation' ([1990] 2012: 189). Blocker is regulated by generic expectation in such a manner, damned to be trapped within the western paradigm just like he was damned to manifest a newspaper story. He is a prisoner of fantasy, left only to look towards the possibility of relief – which is exactly what he does when delivering his line and gazing eastward. We've witnessed Blocker's lack of agency as someone who enforces the will of his superiors, and his statement of finitude expresses this despondent and regretful fact. And, yet, at the same time, he appears to accept his redundant fate as the appropriate, or inevitable, course of action, or inaction.

Following Blocker's remark, the film cuts back to Rosalee, who begins to tear up at the prospect of departure, likely aware of Blocker's essentially expendable existence, before composing herself to tell him, with conviction, 'You're a fine man, Joe Blocker.' Whether Blocker is indeed a fine man is highly questionable, in light of his actions. But Rosalee says it as if, by way of masculine codes, this is what he needs to hear most

before she leaves him. Blocker nods again, seemingly automatic as before, offering no words of response and we're not sure if he believes it or not. Following another silent pause, Rosalee offers more words that are, on the surface, polite sentiments of gratitude: 'We can't thank you enough.' This expression of gratitude reinforces the feeling that Blocker, as a working man enacting orders, has essentially done his job. Throughout this exchange the words themselves are unmoving and unspectacular, but the scene is pregnant with a complex intensity due to performances that communicate internal turmoil – Bale's clenched jaw and Pike's conflicting expressions, for example. What precisely anyone is feeling at this moment is unclear, but the obvious banality of the words spoken fails to match the intensity of feeling that the characters are experiencing. In other words, there is a striking disconnect between what is said and what is not; the deliberate literalness and politesse of the dialogue only emphasises the absence of real outpouring and the things left unsaid. The framing contributes to this intensity; the camera is positioned in close-up, signifying a depth of feeling that is never explicitly articulated. It's as if the camera is examining the faces for a breach in the facade, a meaningful detail that may offer insight into the unknowable interior world, a case of what Andrew Klevan describes as 'The actors' and the camera's behaviour [being] mutually considerate; each trusts the other to enhance understanding and to relieve them of the sole burden of making themselves known' (2005: 14).

Blocker then turns his attention to Little Bear and a soft piano key is heard from the soundtrack, which brings about a slight tonal shift. Blocker's reserve gives way to a level of parental tenderness. He takes off his hat and kneels down before Little Bear and offers him the Caesar book, declaring,

'It's now your time to put this to use.' This is an odd gift and a strange thing to say to Little Bear; what exactly is he to learn from this book? This seems to contradict the impression of remorse or guilt that we are led to believe Blocker now feels about his imperial function in history. The fact that Blocker then refers to Caesar as 'one of the bravest men I've ever read' is confusing in this sense, but it isn't insignificant that he gives it to the only other male as it reveals Blocker's fantasy of masculine honour and a desire to pass something on in a fashion that makes Little Bear a quasi-son figure. While Blocker has found a semblance of bitter understanding in the self-aware acknowledgement of his historical role as a pawn in larger historio-political currents, by gifting the book it's as if Blocker has come to realise the extent to which he has failed to live up to the mythical reputation of 'Great Men' such as Caesar. By giving Little Bear the book, Blocker is expressing the wish for a future braver, freer and more just than his own, and regret over his inability to live up to his ideal of moral manhood and a just nation-state, which is the consequence of fantasy disrupted by the world.

Blocker's failure in this regard functions similarly to what Pye refers to as 'the collapse of fantasy' in the films of Anthony Mann, which depict '[p]risoners of masculinity coded in hopelessly contradictory ways' (1996b, 173) – men who come to learn that ideal manhood is seemingly impossible in a world of unsettling contradiction. This collapse is discombobulating but not wholly negative, an ambivalence discernible in the subtle detail on Blocker's face as he imparts the gift – pensive reflection, ashamed downward glances, and wrinkles of displeasure around the eyes borne of a painful thought, noticeable between insincere, avuncular smiles directed at Little Bear. The final scene of *Hostiles* fits neatly into what Deborah Thomas refers to as a melodrama of '"Becoming a man" which draws on male-centred fantasies of augmentation and diminishment within the domestic space and on a flight into violence elsewhere' (2000: 26). The film is acutely aware of this masculine melodrama and refers to it with the feminine / domestic / communal aspect represented by Rosalee and Little Bear on one side of the staging – a family unit, of sorts – and Blocker on the other, showing little intention of coming along as he questions his masculine role. This

moment serves to dramatise the ambivalence associated with the collapse of Blocker's masculine fantasy, symbolically tied to the nation-state ideal.[1]

By now, the soundtrack composed by Max Richter is functioning to add a fitting solemnity and rumination to the scene. It is a soft, melancholy score made up of string instruments, including violin and cello, percussion via piano, and a unique acoustic instrument called the yaybahar, which gives off a haunting and plaintive impression quite appropriate to Blocker's feelings. 'Whatever may come, I want the best for you,' Rosalee says. Again, after a pause, Blocker nods, offering little by way of reciprocation. In reluctance to terminate the exchange, it is as if Rosalee is attempting to wait out the fatalistic verisimilitude of the genre she belongs to, perhaps harbouring a chimerical hope for Blocker to come too, even if he's resigned to his fate. Rosalee seems unsure how to end the farewell as she attempts to get the words out, but in her communicative failure resorts to grabbing Little Bear and hurrying onto the train. Turning to face him one last time, Rosalee looks towards Blocker and forces a smile even as a tear simultaneously descends her cheek. Here is a moment that, through the performance of the actor, clearly visualises the tension between something unsaid and the visibly

expressed. The scene as a whole revels in a melodramatic tension between the feeling that something needs to be said, a revelation or confession of some kind that may bring closure, and the film's consistent rejection of sentimentality. Rosalee doesn't have anything particularly eloquent to say, and Blocker certainly does not (his name is suggestive of verbal inarticulacy), although the occasion seems to demand it. Yet it never comes and tension is felt. Rosalee swiftly turns into the carriage and we cut to a long shot of Blocker now alone in the crowd, the emotional intensity somewhat released. As Blocker puts his homburg back on, accepting of his fate, he turns and walks away as Rosalee and Little Bear watch him leave from their train seat. The train whistles, indicating finality and the tenor of the moment is of resignation, melancholy and sufferance typical of the kind of western ending it self-consciously identifies with.

At this point *Hostiles* could conclude and roll credits. But what happens next I suggest to be the moment of primary aesthetic achievement, in light of the sophisticated and rewarding manner in which it usurps a specific expectation. As the train begins to depart in what could be a satisfactory final shot, the film cuts *back* to Blocker. He is walking away but then stops, pauses, and turns around to watch the train depart. The

orchestral soundtrack, previously subtle, quiet and restrained, increases in volume as the camera glides towards him. Here, we are witnessing what amounts to defiance of expectation. Rather than depart into the horizon, and in contrast to the specific kind of western to which it has alluded, Blocker changes his mind and walks back towards the train – quite literally turning his back on the mythology. Now we see that the explicitness of the aforementioned citations, particularly

that of *The Searchers*, has established a *false* impression of reverence, which gives its sudden genre-defying direction a factor of surprise. Indeed, a genre-savvy audience could regard this with incredulity and experience the displeasure that Roger Scruton calls 'a spasm of recoil' (1999: 386), which is the risk of unconventional gestures. However, I regard the defiance to be rewarding due to a number of shrewd formal decisions that effectively dramatise the interior process of Blocker's decision-making. For one, we tolerate the variation because it cunningly maintains its established sense of character. Blocker's expression when deciding to disregard deterministic resignation remains as unmoving and inexpressive as usual. He stands statue-like, merely looking. His surface is unchanged. Yet, we know the shift is occurring *within* him due to the movement of the camera in partnership with the swelling music. It is important that the music swells; by slowly building the music, the character shift feels like the result of a stifled, recrudescent energy – the eventual expression, and unburdening, of his agonising scepticism as musical denouement. The gliding camera, also, moves closer and closer towards Blocker. We have experienced close-ups, but the tracking motion sets it apart. It is the only time this mobile formal move has been executed in the movie, and the sense

that, alongside the music, it implies an end-point – a teleology of sorts – dramatises the feeling of something being arrived *at*. We are not told what to think, or feel, but we are invited to think, or feel, *something*. In this way, it's a rebirth of affect within Blocker, of sentiment otherwise buried, and an anthropocentric gesture that signifies a dawning of consciousness and an affirmation of agency from a man previously trapped in a chain of command and the sweep of history. More so, the

shallow focus isolates Blocker from the background which he was destined to go towards and the camera ponders his face. No longer simply the product of his environment, which is the fate of animals, in this moment he is making a *decision* – which is unique to human consciousness, as well as a type of revolt as he salvages what vestige of agency he can. Again, it's impossible to know his exact thoughts, but we are made fully aware that something meaningful and significant is taking place inside of him, some inexplicable shift.

This moment of emancipation on Blocker's part works in tandem with the film's grasp at individuation as a cultural object. While *Hostiles* exists firmly in a genre, and has been referring to genre conventions, now the film is making itself known as an individual within the historical group by showing itself to be 'alive to creative variation' (Klevan 2018: 149). It asserts its claim through formal flourishes that are markedly different to its hitherto style, in a way that recalls Pye's assessment of the dance scene in *My Darling Clementine*: 'The episode tends to unbalance the film structurally by being so markedly different from what has gone before. Yet it is partly the reduction of the narrative interest that gives the passage its particular force' ([1975] 2012: 246). It is precisely the same in this case; the scene's formal

excesses risk tipping into mawkishness or pedagogic obviousness, particularly when, in the next and final shot as Blocker walks towards the departing train, slow-motion is employed, which is a distinctly formalist move that brings attention to itself. Yet, I suggest the shot is successful *because* of its emotive excesses, which appear declamatory but remain enigmatic and complex. The emotional ambiguity of this closing shot maintains an agreeable aesthetic balance while also functioning as a breaking-out from the rest of the film. Credit can go to Bale's physical performance; he retains balance by *casually* striding to catch the moving train. By walking slowly, and not running or jogging, it does not betray his characterisation, there is no sense of bathos, nor does it sabotage the movie's established verisimilitude. This movement is consistent with the film's emotionally restrained world in which characters do not gesticulate in any expressive manner, even as the action and form are highly expressive. It reflects Blocker's subjective experience when making a seminal decision and it is quite conceivable that the character would do this and in this manner – but no other manner, and fittingly so.

The act of stepping onto the moving train is, because of these factors, performed with a felicitous solemnity that respects the significance of the divergence while, at the same time,

showing resolve in its decision – and Blocker in his. Blocker's last-second hitch onto the back is performed gracefully, and it's timed perfectly so that Bale need not run or bestir himself *un*gracefully. But despite his grace, it's as if he is a stowaway who shouldn't be going – a refugee from a fatalistic genre tradition. One cannot underestimate the logistical effort involved in this shot; with Blocker moving towards the train, and the train going into the distance, there is also the movement of the camera, which glides horizontally as the pro-filmic objects move vertically. This is highly complex choreography, which dramatises and, simultaneously, consolidates, both Blocker's and the film's tandem claim to individuality through an excess freedom of movement. Crucially, the slow-motion, which could otherwise imply emotionality or excitement in partnership with the movement, works here to *subdue* the moving parts, becoming ceremonial and contemplative – a continuation of Blocker's disposition and a moderation of the complex parts. The action that we see would, in real-time, make up less than a few seconds. Through slow-motion, it is extended for the exercise of sensibility and contemplation of the action. Nor does Blocker immediately open the door. Instead, he pauses in reflection. All of this encourages us to accept the dramatic apex as believable, meaningful, apposite and important.

At the level of soundtrack, where newly animated music could otherwise be intrusive, the relative austerity that the film has erstwhile adhered to allows it to function as a sudden expression of repressed sentiment which is cathartic and earned. Its audible prominence works against the pattern established, which is a calculated strategy for expressing emotional self-actualisation unique to this moment. Yes, the music is now loud, and therefore risks seeming declamatory, but it's not, without interpretation, entirely clear *why* it is loud,

and what the music is intended to signify exactly other than something broadly significant, the ambiguity of which incites interpretative engagement. Furthermore, while the music is loud the shot is diegetically silent. The only comparable use of such joint formal devices occurs when Blocker learns of his unwanted mission to escort Yellow Hawk. In response, he rages and howls at the world in a desert lightning storm. This highly dramatic scene is likewise moderated by the use of diegetic silence – the howl is seen, not heard, as if the world is deaf to his agony – and the score is pronounced. However, jump-cuts and a hand-held camera are employed to indicate the fracture and rage of the character, which contrasts to the final shot that uses a smooth, unbroken long take. As Blocker steps onto the moving train, the camera glides elegantly into a position of symmetrical order and pleasing harmony. So while there is a meaningful pattern between the two scenes, in the exceptional use of diegetic silence and prominent use of soundtrack, there is also meaningful divergence in how the camera is used and the scene edited. In other words, the pattern encourages us to see the aspects of meaningful divergence: compared to the earlier scene's depiction of despair, the result of Blocker being forced to confront his subjective fantasy (by protecting a man he has desired to destroy), the final shot expresses a

falling-into-place, a teleological sense of something coming together, and a perceptual realignment which equates to an emotional closure of the narrative – a hopeful and centred, if uncertain and wounded, future is contrasted to the pains and trauma of the past. Where once Blocker was howling in rage against the desert sky that symbolises the cruel tensions of the genre he is subject to, now he is escaping those confines – freeing himself from the expectation to suffer, which is to reject a notion of masculine fantasy tied to his individual psychology, the nation-state he helped build, and the genre which mythologises that nation state.

It is, then, very significant that the camera mimics the sensation of floating; as it moves across space it feels light and mobile, and quite literally suspends itself into an impossible position in the air, in the middle of the tracks, as the train departs. This camera motion and framing, in tandem with a unified tableau, I regard as a visual dramatisation of epoché – the notion, from ancient scepticism, that one can refrain from drawing a conclusion for or against anything as the decisive step for the attainment of ataraxy – serenity and relief. This, I suggest, is the source of the moment's catharsis – it conveys, through aesthetic means, an attainment of epoché. Blocker, if only for a moment, suspends judgement about himself and

the world, thereby alleviating himself from the repressive tensions and contradictions that constitute his experience and the genre he belongs to. By stepping onto the train, Blocker is rejecting the subjective narrative he has hitherto known and accepted the possibilities inherent to unknowing and divergence. Quite literally his decision is impromptu and without forethought or planning; he doesn't know what awaits him in Chicago; if it is a semblance of family life, which is implied in his reunion with Rosalee and Little Bear, the emotional and practical realities of this future remain unclear also (crucially, we do not see the reunion itself).

The ending is almost certainly intended to be a metatextual rejoinder to the ending of *The Searchers*, in which Ethan Edwards does not enter the domestic realm and instead returns to the wilderness – perhaps the most iconic of all western endings. *Hostiles* diverges meaningfully in the sense that it has consciously and deliberately teed up an identical – identifiably so – emotional drama: a *type* of ending, as it were. But, in this instance, contrary to an expectation it has itself established, the protagonist joins society and the domestic sphere. In other words, the door shuts on Edwards but opens for Blocker. This is symbolic of Blocker's integration, both psychic and social, which are, as we have seen, intimately tied in melodrama and expressed by such stylistic means. Therefore, Blocker is not damned to wander the desert which symbolises his inner pain, as Edwards is, and is allowed to escape the contradictions endemic to the genre, no longer '[s]tranded in some sense by historical change, whose assertions of identity are increasingly undermined' (Pye 1996a: 20). There is, then, a moral anti-dogmatism that retains and respects the unknowability of experience while, at the same time, expressing through melodrama a feeling of productive reconfiguration which is self-effacing and not obtrusive or obvious. It asserts itself with formal panache but without insistence, done within the confines of genre expectation while defying them in interesting ways that lead to imaginative engagement.

Blocker's quiet rebellion is a rebellion against an emotional expectation of a specific kind and a cathartic rebellion against fantasy that constitutes a pernicious tension between subjectivity and the world. Rather than formulate a new fantasy to impose upon the world, Blocker takes his scepticism to the logical conclusion of epoché – which is to say he moves *beyond* fantasy, *beyond* genre. This is why it's important, on a reflexive level, that Blocker *leaves* the west. Through reference to genre, performance, camera, costume, pattern, prominence and soundtrack, we can see that the aesthetic encounter of this moment corresponds to a rational ambition – it sensuously embodies an attainment of transcendental perspective in the central character, dramatises the way in which history and fantasy are inextricably and painfully bound, and offers an affecting emotional contour to our generic expectation. The final shot, in these ways, is expressive of what cannot easily be said, which is its accomplishment as a melodrama and the source of its merit. It is, in other words, an aesthetic reprieve from the antinomies endemic to the experience of the world.

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1 It should be said that all of this, unfortunately, leaves little room for the Cheyenne characters' interiority, who, much to the film's discredit, are underwritten and mostly passive in their function. However, the full implications of this sits outside the remit of this essay.

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