

1 *Beyond the movement-image*

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Against those who defined Italian neo-realism by its social content, Bazin put forward the fundamental requirement of formal aesthetic criteria. According to him, it was a matter of a new form of reality, said to be dispersive, elliptical, errant or wavering, working in blocs, with deliberately weak connections and floating events. The real was no longer represented or reproduced but 'aimed at'. Instead of representing an already deciphered real, neo-realism aimed at an always ambiguous, to be deciphered, real; this is why the sequence shot tended to replace the montage of representations. Neo-realism therefore invented a new type of image, which Bazin suggested calling 'fact-image'.¹ This thesis of Bazin's was infinitely richer than the one that he was challenging, and showed that neo-realism did not limit itself to the content of its earliest examples. But what the two theses had in common was the posing of the problem at the level of reality: neo-realism produced a formal or material 'additional reality'. However, we are not sure that the problem arises at the level of the real, whether in relation to form or content. Is it not rather at the level of the 'mental', in terms of thought? If all the movement-images, perceptions, actions and affects underwent such an upheaval, was this not first of all because a new element burst on to the scene which was to prevent perception being extended into action in order to put it in contact with thought, and, gradually, was to subordinate the image to the demands of new signs which would take it beyond movement?

When Zavattini defines neo-realism as an art of encounter – fragmentary, ephemeral, piecemeal, missed encounters – what does he mean? It is true of encounters in Rossellini's *Paisà*, or De Sica's *Bicycle Thief*. And in *Umberto D*, De Sica constructs the famous sequence quoted as an example by Bazin: the young maid going into the kitchen in the morning, making a series of mechanical, weary gestures, cleaning a bit, driving the ants away from a water fountain, picking up the coffee grinder, stretching out her foot to close the door with her toe. And her eyes meet her pregnant woman's belly, and it is as though all the misery in the

world were going to be born. This is how, in an ordinary or everyday situation, in the course of a series of gestures, which are insignificant but all the more obedient to simple sensory-motor schemata, what has suddenly been brought about is a *pure optical situation* to which the little maid has no response or reaction. The eyes, the belly, that is what an encounter is . . . Of course, encounters can take very different forms, even achieving the exceptional, but they follow the same formula. Take, for example, Rossellini's great quartet, which, far from marking an abandonment of neo-realism, on the contrary, perfects it. *Germany Year 0* presents a child who visits a foreign country (this is why the film was criticized for not maintaining the social mooring which was held to be a condition of neo-realism), and who dies from what he sees. *Stromboli* presents a foreign woman whose revelation of the island will be all the more profound because she cannot react in a way that softens or compensates for the violence of what she sees, the intensity and the enormity of the tunny-fishing ('It was awful . . .'), the panic-inducing power of the eruption ('I am finished, I am afraid, what mystery, what beauty, my God . . .'). *Europe 51* shows a bourgeoisie woman who, following the death of her child, crosses various spaces and experiences the tenement, the slum and the factory ('I thought I was seeing convicts'). Her glances relinquish the practical function of a mistress of a house who arranges things and beings, and pass through every state of an internal vision, affliction, compassion, love, happiness, acceptance, extending to the psychiatric hospital where she is locked up at the end of a new trial of Joan of Arc: she sees, she has learnt to see. *The Lonely Woman* [*Viaggio in Italia*] follows a female tourist struck to the core by the simple unfolding of images or visual clichés in which she discovers something unbearable, beyond the limit of what she can personally bear.² This is a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent [*de voyant, non plus d'actant*].

What defines neo-realism is this build-up of purely optical situations (and sound ones, although there was no synchronized sound at the start of neo-realism), which are fundamentally distinct from the sensory-motor situations of the action-image in the old realism. It is perhaps as important as the conquering of a purely optical space in painting, with impressionism. It may be objected that the viewer has always found himself in front of 'descriptions', in front of optical and sound-images, and nothing more. But this is not the point. For the characters themselves

reacted to situations; even when one of them found himself reduced to helplessness, bound and gagged, as a result of the ups and downs of the action. What the viewer perceived therefore was a sensory-motor image in which he took a greater or lesser part by identification with the characters. Hitchcock had begun the inversion of this point of view by including the viewer in the film. But it is now that the identification is actually inverted: the character has become a kind of viewer. He shifts, runs and becomes animated in vain, the situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides, and makes him see and hear what is no longer subject to the rules of a response or an action. He records rather than reacts. He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action. Visconti's *Obsession* rightly stands as the forerunner of neo-realism; and what first strikes the viewer is the way in which the black-clad heroine is possessed by an almost hallucinatory sensuality. She is closer to a visionary, a sleepwalker, than to a seductress or a lover (similarly, later, the Countess in *Senso*).

In Volume 1 the crisis of the action-image was defined by a number of characteristics: the form of the trip/ballad,^{3*} the multiplication of clichés, the events that hardly concern those they happen to, in short the slackening of the sensory-motor connections. All these characteristics were important but only in the sense of preliminary conditions. They made possible, but did not yet constitute, the new image. What constitutes this is the purely optical and sound situation which takes the place of the faltering sensory-motor situations. The role of the child in neo-realism has been pointed out, notably in De Sica (and later in France with Truffaut); this is because, in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing. Similarly, if everyday banality is so important, it is because, being subject to sensory-motor schemata which are automatic and pre-established, it is all the more liable, on the least disturbance of equilibrium between stimulus and response (as in the scene with the little maid in *Umberto D*), suddenly to free itself from the laws of this schema and reveal itself in a visual and sound nakedness, crudeness and brutality which make it unbearable, giving it the pace of a dream or a nightmare. There is, therefore, a necessary passage from the crisis of image-action to the pure optical-sound image. Sometimes it is an evolution from one aspect to the other: beginning with trip/ballad films [*films de bal(1)ade*] with the

sensory-motor connections slackened, and then reaching purely optical and sound situations. Sometimes the two coexist in the same film like two levels, the first of which serves merely as a melodic line for the second.

It is in this sense that Visconti, Antonioni and Fellini are definitely part of neo-realism, in spite of all their differences. *Obsession*, the forerunner, is not merely one of the versions of a famous American thriller, or the transposition of this novel to the plain of the Po.⁴ In Visconti's film, we witness a very subtle change, the beginnings of a mutation of the general notion of situation. In the old realism or on the model of the action-image, objects and settings already had a reality of their own, but it was a functional reality, strictly determined by the demands of the situation, even if these demands were as much poetic as dramatic (for instance, the emotional value of objects in Kazan). The situation was, then, directly extended into action and passion. After *Obsession*, however, something appears that continues to develop in Visconti: objects and settings [*milieux*] take on an autonomous, material reality which gives them an importance in themselves. It is therefore essential that not only the viewer but the protagonists invest the settings and the objects with their gaze, that they see and hear the things and the people, in order for action or passion to be born, erupting in a pre-existing daily life. Hence the arrival of the hero of *Obsession*, who takes a kind of visual possession of the inn, or, in *Rocco and his Brothers*, the arrival of the family who, with all their eyes and ears, try to take in the huge station and the unknown city: this will be a constant theme in Visconti's work, this 'inventory' of a setting – its objects, furniture, tools, etc. So the situation is not extended directly into action: it is no longer sensory-motor, as in realism, but primarily optical and of sound, invested by the senses, before action takes shape in it, and uses or confronts its elements. Everything remains real in this neo-realism (whether it is film set or exteriors) but, between the reality of the setting and that of the action, it is no longer a motor extension which is established, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs.⁵ It is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it. This is the source of Visconti's visionary aestheticism. And *The Earth Trembles* confirms these new parameters in a singular way. Of course the fishermen's situation, the struggle they are engaged in, and the birth of a class consciousness are revealed in this first episode, the

only one that Visconti completed. But this embryonic 'communist consciousness' here depends less on a struggle with nature and between men than on a grand vision of man and nature, of their perceptible and sensual unity, from which the 'rich' are excluded and which constitutes the hope of the revolution, beyond the setbacks of the floating action: a Marxist romanticism.⁶

In Antonioni, from his first great work, *Story of a Love Affair*, the police investigation, instead of proceeding by flashback, transforms the actions into optical and sound descriptions, whilst the tale itself is transformed into actions which are dislocated in time (the episode where the maid talks while repeating her tired gestures, or the famous scene with the lifts).⁷ And Antonioni's art will continue to evolve in two directions: an astonishing development of the idle periods of everyday banality; then, starting with *The Eclipse*, a treatment of limit-situations which pushes them to the point of dehumanized landscapes, of emptied spaces that might be seen as having absorbed characters and actions, retaining only a geophysical description, an abstract inventory of them. As for Fellini, from his earliest films, it is not simply the spectacle which tends to overflow the real, it is the everyday which continually organizes itself into a travelling spectacle, and the sensory-motor linkages which give way to a succession of *varieties* subject to their own laws of passage. Barthélemy Amengual produces a formula which is true for the first half of this work: 'The real becomes spectacle or spectacular, and fascinates for being the real thing . . . The everyday is identified with the spectacular . . . Fellini achieves the deliberate confusion of the real and the spectacle' by denying the heterogeneity of the two worlds, by effacing not only distance, but the distinction between the spectator and the spectacle.⁸

The optical and sound situations of neo-realism contrast with the strong sensory-motor situations of traditional realism. The space of a sensory-motor situation is a setting which is already specified and presupposes an action which discloses it, or prompts a reaction which adapts to or modifies it. But a purely optical or sound situation becomes established in what we might call 'any-space-whatever', whether disconnected, or emptied (we find the passage from one to the other in *The Eclipse*, where the disconnected bits of space lived by the heroine – stock exchange, Africa, air terminal – are reunited at the end in an empty space which blends into the white surface). In neo-realism, the sensory-motor connections are now valid only by virtue of the upsets that

affect, loosen, unbalance, or uncouple them: the crisis of the action-image. No longer being induced by an action, any more than it is extended into one, the optical and sound situation is, therefore, neither an index nor a synsign. There is a new breed of signs, *opsigns* and *sonsigns*. And clearly these new signs refer to very varied images – sometimes everyday banality, sometimes exceptional or limit-circumstances – but, above all, subjective images, memories of childhood, sound and visual dreams or fantasies, where the character does not act without seeing himself acting, complicit viewer of the role he himself is playing, in the style of Fellini. Sometimes, as in Antonioni, they are objective images, in the manner of a *report*, even if this is a report of an accident, defined by a geometrical frame which now allows only the existence of relations of measurement and distance between its elements, persons and objects, this time transforming the action into displacement of figures in space (for instance, the search for the vanished woman in *The Adventure*).⁹ It is in this sense that the critical objectivism of Antonioni may be contrasted with the knowing subjectivism of Fellini. There would be, then, two kinds of opsigns, reports [*constats*] and ‘instats’,^{10*} the former giving a vision with depth, at a distance, tending towards abstraction, the other a close, flat-on vision inducing involvement. This opposition corresponds in some respects to the alternative as defined by Worringer: abstraction or *Einfühlung*. Antonioni’s aesthetic visions are inseparable from an objective critique (we are sick with Eros, because Eros is himself objectively sick: what has love become that a man or a woman should emerge from it so disabled, pitiful and suffering, and act and react as badly at the beginning as at the end, in a corrupt society?), whilst Fellini’s visions are inseparable from an ‘empathy’, a subjective sympathy (embrace even that decadence which means that one loves only in dreams or in recollection, sympathize with those kinds of love, be an accomplice of decadence, and even provoke it, in order to save something, perhaps, as far as is possible . . .).¹¹ On both sides these are higher, more important, problems than commonplaces about solitude and incommunicability.

The distinctions, on one hand between the banal and the extreme, and on the other between the subjective and the objective, have some value, but only relatively. They are valid for an image or a sequence, but not for the whole. They are still valid in relation to the action-image, which they bring into question, but already they are no longer wholly valid in relation to the new

image that is coming into being. They mark poles between which there is continual passage. In fact, the most banal or everyday situations release accumulated 'dead forces' equal to the life force of a limit-situation (thus, in De Sica's *Umberto D*, the sequence where the old man examines himself and thinks he has fever). In addition, the idle periods in Antonioni do not merely show the banalities of daily life, they reap the consequences or the effect of a remarkable event which is reported only through itself without being explained (the break-up of a couple, the sudden disappearance of a woman . . .). The method of report in Antonioni always has this function of bringing idle periods and empty spaces together: drawing all the consequences from a decisive past experience, once it is done and everything has been said. 'When everything has been said, when the main scene seems over, there is what comes afterwards . . .'¹²

As for the distinction between subjective and objective, it also tends to lose its importance, to the extent that the optical situation or visual description replaces the motor action. We run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask. It is as if the real and the imaginary were running after each other, as if each was being reflected in the other, around a point of indiscernibility. We will return to this point, but, already, when Robbe-Grillet provides his great theory of descriptions, he begins by defining a traditional 'realist' description: it is that which presupposes the independence of its object, and hence proposes a discernibility of the real and the imaginary (they can become confused, but none the less by right they remain distinct). Neo-realist description in the *nouveau roman* is completely different: since it *replaces* its own object, on the one hand it erases or *destroys* its reality which passes into the imaginary, but on the other hand it powerfully brings out all the reality which the imaginary or the mental *create* through speech and vision.¹³ The imaginary and the real became indiscernible. Robbe-Grillet will become more and more conscious of this in his reflection on the *nouveau roman* and the cinema: the most objectivist determinants do not prevent their realizing a 'total subjectivity'. This is what was embryonic from the start of Italian neo-realism, and what makes Labarthe remark that *Last Year in Marienbad* is the last of the great neo-realist films.¹⁴

We can already see in Fellini that a particular image is clearly subjective, mental, a recollection or fantasy – but it is not organized into a spectacle without becoming objective, without going behind the scenes, into ‘the reality of the spectacle, of those who make it, who live from it, who are absorbed in it’: the mental world of a character is so filled up by other proliferating characters that it becomes inter-mental, and through flattening of perspectives ends ‘in a neutral, impersonal vision . . . all our world’ (hence the importance of the telepath in *8½*).¹⁵ Conversely, in Antonioni, it is as if the most objective images are not formed without becoming mental, and going into a strange, invisible subjectivity. It is not merely that the method of report has to be applied to feelings as they exist in a society, and to draw from them such consequences as are internally developed in characters: *Eros sick* is a story of feelings which go from the objective to the subjective, and are internalized in everyone. In this respect, Antonioni is much closer to Nietzsche than to Marx; he is the only contemporary author to have taken up the Nietzschean project of a real critique of morality, and this thanks to a ‘symptomatologist’ method. But, from yet another point of view, it is noticeable that Antonioni’s objective images, which impersonally follow a becoming, that is, a development of consequences in a story [*récit*], none the less are subject to rapid breaks, interpolations and ‘infinitesimal injections of a-temporality’: for example, the lift scene in *Story of a Love Affair*. We are returned once more to the first form of the any-space-whatever: disconnected space. The connection of the parts of space is not given, because it can come about only from the subjective point of view of a character who is, nevertheless, absent, or has even disappeared, not simply out of frame, but passed into the void. In *The Outcry*, Irma is not only the obsessive, subjective thought of the hero who runs away to forget, but the imaginary gaze under which this flight takes place and connects its own segments: a gaze which becomes real again at the moment of death. And above all in *The Adventure*, the vanished woman causes an indeterminable gaze to weigh on the couple – which gives them the continual feeling of being spied on, and which explains the lack of co-ordination of their objective movements, when they flee whilst pretending to look for her. Again in *Identification of a Woman*, the whole quest or investigation takes place under the presumed gaze of the departed woman, concerning whom we will not know, in the marvellous images at the end,

whether or not she has seen the hero curled up in the lift cage. The imaginary gaze makes the real something imaginary, at the same time as it in turn becomes real and gives us back some reality. It is like a circuit which exchanges, corrects, selects and sends us off again. From *The Eclipse* onwards, the any-space-whatever had achieved a second form: empty or deserted space. What happened is that, from one result to the next, the characters were objectively emptied: they are suffering less from the absence of another than from their absence from themselves (for example, *The Passenger*). Hence, this space refers back again to the lost gaze of the being who is absent from the world as much as from himself, and, as Ollier says in a phrase which is true for the whole of Antonioni's work, replaces 'traditional drama with a kind of *optical drama* lived by the character'.¹⁶

In short, pure optical and sound situations can have two poles – objective and subjective, real and imaginary, physical and mental. But they give rise to opsigns and sonsigns, which bring the poles into continual contact, and which, in one direction or the other, guarantee passages and conversions, tending towards a point of indiscernibility (and not of confusion). Such a system of exchange between the imaginary and the real appears fully in Visconti's *White Nights*.¹⁷

The French new wave cannot be defined unless we try to see how it has retraced the path of Italian neo-realism for its own purposes – even if it meant going in other directions as well. In fact, the new wave, on a first approximation, takes up the previous route again: from a loosening of the sensory-motor link (the stroll or wandering, the ballad, the events which concern no one, etc.), to the rise of optical and sound situations. Here again, a cinema of seeing replaces action. If Tati belongs to the new wave, it is because, after two ballad-films, he fully isolates what was taking shape in these – a burlesque whose impetus comes from purely optical and, in particular, sound, situations. Godard begins with some extraordinary ballads, from *Breathless* to *Pierrot le fou*, and tends to draw out of them a whole world of opsigns and sonsigns which already constitute the new image (in *Pierrot le fou*, the passage from the sensory-motor loosening, 'I dunno what to do', to the pure poem sung and danced, 'the line of your hips'). And these images, touching or terrible, take on an ever greater autonomy after *Made in USA*; which may be summed up as follows: 'A witness providing us with a series of reports with neither conclusion nor logical connection . . . without really

effective reactions.¹⁸ Claude Ollier says that, with *Made in USA*, the violently hallucinatory character of Godard's work is affirmed for itself, in an art of description which is always being renewed and always replacing its object.¹⁹ This descriptive objectivism is just as critical and even didactic, sustaining a series of films, from *Two or Three Things I Know about Her*, to *Slow Motion*, where reflection is not simply focused on the content of the image but on its form, its means and functions, its falsifications and creativities, on the relations within it between the sound dimension and the optical. Godard has little patience with or sympathy for fantasies: *Slow Motion* will show us the decomposition of a sexual fantasy into its separate, objective elements, visual, and then of sound. But this objectivism never loses its aesthetic force. Initially serving a politics of the image, the aesthetic force is powerfully brought out for its own sake in *Passion*: the free build-up of pictorial and musical images as *tableaux vivants*, whilst at the other end the sensory-motor linkages are beset by inhibitions (the stuttering of the female worker and the boss's cough). *Passion*, in this sense, brings to its greatest intensity what was already taking shape in *Le Mépris*, when we witnessed the sensory-motor failure of the couple in the traditional drama, at the same time as the optical representation of the drama of Ulysses and the gaze of the gods, with Fritz Lang as the intercessor, was soaring upwards. Throughout all these films, there is a creative evolution which is that of a visionary Godard.

For Rivette, *Le pont du Nord* has exactly the same perfection of provisional summary as *Passion* for Godard. It is the ballad of two strange women strollers to whom a grand vision of the stone lions of Paris will present pure optical and sound situations, in a kind of malicious snakes and ladders where they replay the hallucinatory drama of Don Quixote. But, from the same starting-point, Rivette and Godard seem to mark out the two contrasting sides. This is because, with Rivette, the break in the sensory-motor situations – to the benefit of optical and sound situations – is connected to a knowing subjectivism, an empathy, which most frequently works through fantasies, memories, or pseudo-memories, and finds in them a unique gaiety and lightness (*Celine and Julie Go Boating* is certainly one of the greatest French comic films, along with the work of Tati). Whilst Godard drew inspiration from the strip cartoon at its most cruel and cutting, Rivette clothes his unchanging theme of an international conspiracy in an atmosphere of fable and children's games. Already in *Paris*

Belongs to Us, the stroll culminates in a twilight fantasy where the cityscape has no reality or connections other than those given by our dream. And *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, after the stroll-pursuit of the girl with a double, has us witness the pure spectacle of her fantasy, a young girl whose life is threatened in a family novel. The double, or rather the woman double [*la double*], is herself present with the aid of magic sweets; then, thanks to the alchemical potion, she introduces herself into the spectacle which no longer has viewers, but only behind the scenes, and finally saves the child from her appointed fate as a little boat takes her off into the distance: there is no more cheerful a fairy-tale. *Twilight* does not even have to get us into the spectacle; the heroines of the spectacle, the solar woman and the lunar woman, who have already passed into the real, under the sign of the magic stone track down, make disappear or kill the surviving characters who would still be capable of being witnesses.

Rivette could be said to be the most French of the new wave authors. But 'French' here has nothing to do with what has been called the French quality. It is rather in the sense of the pre-war French school, when it discovers, following the painter Delaunay, that there is no struggle between light and darkness (expressionism), but an alternation and duel of the sun and the moon, which are both light, one constituting a circular, continuous movement of complementary colours, the other a faster and uneven movement of jarring, iridescent colours, the two together making up and projecting an eternal mirage on to the earth.²⁰ This is the case with *Twilight*. This is the case with *Merry-go-round*, where the description made of light and colours constantly begins again in order to obliterate its objects. Rivette takes this to the highest level in his art of light. All his heroines are daughters of fire, all his work is under this sign. In the end, if he is the most French of film-makers, it is in the sense that Gérard de Nerval could be called the supreme French poet, could even be called the 'Good Gerard', singer of the Ile de France, just like Rivette, singer of Paris and its rustic streets. When Proust asks himself what there is behind all these names that were applied to Nerval, he replies that in fact it is some of the greatest poetry that there has been in the world, and madness itself or the mirage to which Nerval succumbed. For, if Nerval needs to see, and to walk in the Valois, he needs this like some reality which has to 'verify' his hallucinatory vision, to the point where we no longer have any idea what is present or past, mental or physical. He needs the Ile de France as

the real that his speech and his vision create, as the objective in his pure subjectivity: a 'dream lightning', a 'bluish and purple atmosphere', solar and lunar.²¹ The same goes for Rivette and his need of Paris. Here again, we have to conclude that the difference between the objective and the subjective has only a provisional, relative value, from the point of view of the optical-sound image. The most subjective, the knowing subjectivism of Rivette, is utterly objective, because it creates the real through the force of visual description. And conversely what is most objective, Godard's critical objectivism, was already completely subjective, because in place of the real object it put visual description, and made it go 'inside' the person or object (*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*).²² On both sides, description tends towards a point of indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary.

A final question: why does the collapse of traditional sensory-motor situations, in the form these had in the old realism or in the action-image, allow only pure optical and sound situations, opsigns and sonsigns, to emerge? It will be noted that Robbe-Grillet, at least at the beginning of his reflections, was even harsher: he renounced not merely the tactile, but even sounds and colours as inept for the report, too tied to emotions and reactions, and he kept only visual descriptions which operated through lines, surfaces and sizes.²³ The cinema was one of the causes of his evolution, because it made him discover the descriptive power of colour and sounds, as these replace, obliterate and re-create the object itself. But, even more, it is the tactile which can constitute a pure sensory image, on condition that the hand relinquishes its prehensile and motor functions to content itself with a pure touching. In Herzog, we witness an extraordinary effort to present to the view specifically tactile images which characterize the situation of 'defenceless' beings, and unite with the grand visions of those suffering from hallucinations.²⁴ But it is Bresson, in a quite different way, who makes touch an object of view in itself. Bresson's visual space is fragmented and disconnected, but its parts have, step by step, a manual continuity. The hand, then, takes on a role in the image which goes infinitely beyond the sensory-motor demands of the action, which takes the place of the face itself for the purpose of affects, and which, in the area of perception, becomes the mode of construction of a space which is adequate to the decisions of the spirit. Thus, in *Pickpocket*, it is the hands of the three accomplices which connect the parts of space in the Gare de Lyon, not exactly

through their seizing an object, but through brushing it, arresting it in its movement, giving it another direction, passing it on and making it circulate in this space. The hand doubles its prehensile function (of object) by a connective function (of space); but, from that moment, it is the whole eye which doubles its optical function by a specifically 'grabbing' [*haptique*] one, if we follow Riegl's formula for indicating a touching which is specific to the gaze. In Bresson, opsigns and sonsigns cannot be separated from genuine tactisigns which perhaps regulate their relations (this is the originality of Bresson's any-space-whatevers).

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Although he was subject, from the outset, to the influence of certain American authors, Ozu built up in a Japanese context a body of work which was the first to develop pure optical and sound situations (even so he came quite late to the talkie, in 1936). The Europeans did not imitate him, but came back to him later via their own methods. He none the less remains the inventor of opsigns and sonsigns. The work borrows a trip/ballad [*bal(l)ade*] form, train journey, taxi ride, bus trip, a journey by bicycle or on foot: the grandparents' return journey from the provinces to Tokyo, the girl's last holiday with her mother, an old man's jaunt . . . But the object is everyday banality taken as family life in the Japanese house. Camera movements take place less and less frequently: tracking shots are slow, low 'blocs of movement'; the always low camera is usually fixed, frontal or at an unchanging angle: dissolves are abandoned in favour of the simple *cut*.²⁵ What might appear to be a return to 'primitive cinema' is just as much the elaboration of an astonishingly temperate modern style: the montage-cut, which will dominate modern cinema, is a purely optical passage or punctuation between images, working directly, sacrificing all synthetic effects. The sound is also affected, since the montage-cut may culminate in the 'one shot, one line' procedure borrowed from American cinema. But there, for instance, in Lubitsch, it was a matter of an action-image functioning as an index, whereas Ozu modifies the meaning of the procedure, which now shows the absence of plot: the action-image disappears in favour of the purely visual image of what a character *is*, and the sound image of what he *says*, completely

banal nature and conservation constituting the essentials of the script (this is why the only things that count are the choice of actors according to their physical and moral appearance, and the establishment of any dialogue whatever, apparently without a precise subject-matter.²⁶

It is clear that this method immediately presents idle periods, and leads to their increase in the course of the film. Of course, as the film proceeds, it might be thought that the idle periods are no longer important simply for themselves but recoup the effect of something important: the shot or the line would, on this view, be extended by a quite long silence or emptiness. But it is definitely not the case, with Ozu, that we get the remarkable *and* the ordinary, limit-situations *and* banal ones, the former having an effect on, or purposely insinuating themselves into, the latter. We cannot follow Paul Schrader when he contrasts, like two phases, 'the everyday' on one hand, and, on the other, 'the moment of decision', 'the disparity', which introduce an inexplicable break or emotion into daily banality.²⁷ This distinction would seem strictly more valid for neo-realism. In Ozu, everything is ordinary or banal, even death and the dead who are the object of a natural forgetting. The famous scenes of sudden tears (that of the father in *An Autumn Afternoon* who starts to weep silently after his daughter's wedding, that of the daughter in *Late Spring* who half smiles as she looks at her sleeping father, then finds herself on the verge of tears, that of the daughter in *Dernier caprice* who makes a sharp comment about her dead father, then bursts into tears) do not mark out a strong period which might be contrasted with the weak periods in the flow of life, and there is no reason to suggest the emergence of a repressed emotion as 'decisive action'.

The philosopher Leibniz (who was not unaware of the existence of the Chinese philosophers) showed that the world is made up of series which are composed and which converge in a very regular way, according to ordinary laws. However, the series and sequences are apparent to us only in small sections, and in a disrupted or mixed-up order, so that we believe in breaks, disparities and discrepancies as in things that are out of the ordinary. Maurice Leblanc wrote a very good serial which comes close to a Zen kind of wisdom: the hero, Balthazar, 'professor of everyday philosophy', teaches that there is nothing remarkable or exceptional in life, that the oddest adventures are easily explained, and that everything is made up of ordinary things.²⁸ It is just that we have to admit that, because the linkages of the terms

in the series are naturally weak, they are constantly upset and do not appear in order. An ordinary term goes out of sequence, and emerges in the middle of another sequence of ordinary things in relation to which it takes on the appearance of a strong moment, a remarkable or complex point. It is men who upset the regularity of series, the continuity of the universe. There is a time for life, a time for death, a time for the mother, a time for the daughter, but men mix them up, make them appear in disorder, set them up in conflicts. This is Ozu's thinking: life is simple, and man never stops complicating it by 'disturbing still water' (as in the three companions in *Late Autumn*). And if, after the war, Ozu's work does not at all fall into the decline that has sometimes been suggested, it is because the post-war period helps confirm this thinking, but by renewing it, by reinforcing and going beyond the theme of conflicting generations: American ordinariness helps break down what is ordinary about Japan, a clash of two everyday realities which is even expressed in colour, when Coca-Cola red or plastic yellow violently interrupt the series of washed-out, unemphatic tones of Japanese life.²⁹ And, as the character says in *The Flavour of Green Tea over Rice*: what if the opposite had occurred, if saki, samisen and geisha wigs had suddenly been introduced into the everyday banality of Americans . . . ? On this point it seems to us that nature does not, as Schrader believes, intervene in a decisive moment or in a clear break with everyday man. The splendour of nature, of a snow-covered mountain, tells us one thing only: everything is ordinary and regular, everything is everyday! Nature is happy to renew what man has broken, she restores what man sees shattered. And, when a character emerges for a moment from a family conflict or a wake to contemplate the snow-covered mountain, it is as if he were seeking to restore to order the series upset in his house but reinstated by an unchanging, regular nature, as in an equation that provides us with the reason for apparent breaks, 'for the turns and returns, the highs and the lows', as Leibniz puts it.

Daily life allows only weak sensory-motor connections to survive, and replaces the action-image by pure optical and sound images, opsigns and sonsigns. In Ozu, there is no universal line which connects moments of decision, and links the dead to the living, as in Mizoguchi; nor is there any breathing space or encompasser to contain a profound question, as in Kurosawa. Ozu's spaces are raised to the state of any-space-whatevers, whether by disconnection, or vacuity (here again Ozu may be

considered one of the first inventors). The false continuity of gaze, of direction and even of the position of objects are constant and systematic. One case of camera movement gives a good example of disconnection: in *Early Summer*, the heroine goes forward on tiptoe to surprise someone in a restaurant, the camera drawing back in order to keep her in the centre of the frame; then the camera goes forward to a corridor, but this corridor is no longer in the restaurant, it is in the house of the heroine who has already returned home. As for the empty spaces, without characters or movement, they are interiors emptied of their occupants, deserted exteriors or landscapes in nature. In Ozu they take on an autonomy which they do not immediately possess even in neo-realism, which accords them an apparent value which is relative (in relation to a story) or consequential (once the action is done with). They reach the absolute, as instances of pure contemplation, and immediately bring about the identity of the mental and the physical, the real and the imaginary, the subject and the object, the world and the I. They correspond in part to what Schrader calls 'cases of stasis', Noël Burch 'pillow-shots', Richie 'still lifes'. The question is to know whether there is not all the same a distinction to be made at the centre of this category itself.³⁰

Between an empty space or landscape and a still life properly so called there are certainly many similarities, shared functions and imperceptible transitions. But it is not the same thing; a still life cannot be confused with a landscape. An empty space owes its importance above all to the absence of a possible content, whilst the still life is defined by the presence and composition of objects which are wrapped up in themselves or become their own container: as in the long shot of the vase almost at the end of *Late Spring*. Such objects are not necessarily surrounded by a void, but may allow characters to live and speak in a certain soft focus, like the still life with vase and fruit in *The Woman of Tokyo*, or the one with fruit and golf-clubs in *What Did the Lady Forget?* It is like Cézanne, the landscapes – empty or with gaps – do not have the same principles of composition as the full still lifes. There comes a point when one hesitates between the two, so completely can their functions overlap each other and so subtle are the transitions that can be made: for instance, in Ozu, the marvellous composition with the bottle and the lighthouse, at the beginning of *A Story of Floating Weeds*. The distinction is none the less that of the empty and the full, which brings into play all the nuances or relations in

Chinese and Japanese thought, as two aspects of contemplation. If empty spaces, interiors or exteriors, constitute purely optical (and sound) situations, still lifes are the reverse, the correlate.

The vase in *Late Spring* is interposed between the daughter's half smile and the beginning of her tears. There is becoming, change, passage. But the form of what changes does not itself change, does not pass on. This is time, time itself, 'a little time in its pure state': a direct time-image, which gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced. The night that changes into day, or the reverse, recalls a still life on which light falls, either fading or getting stronger (*That Night's Wife*, *Passing Fancy*). The still life is time, for everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change, it could itself change only in another time, indefinitely. At the point where the cinematographic image most directly confronts the photo, it also becomes most radically distinct from it. Ozu's still lifes endure, have a duration, over ten seconds of the vase: this duration of the vase is precisely the representation of that which endures, through the succession of changing states. A bicycle may also endure; that is, represent the unchanging form of that which moves, so long as it is at rest, motionless, stood against the wall (*A Story of Floating Weeds*). The bicycle, the vase and the still lifes are the pure and direct images of time. Each is time, on each occasion, under various conditions of that which changes in time. Time is the full, that is, the unalterable form filled by change. Time is 'the visual reserve of events in their appropriateness'.³¹ Antonioni spoke of 'the horizon of events', but noted that in the West the word has a double meaning, man's banal horizon and an inaccessible and always receding cosmological horizon. Hence the division of western cinema into European humanism and American science fiction.³² He suggested that it is not the same for the Japanese, who are hardly interested in science fiction: one and the same horizon links the cosmic to the everyday, the durable to the changing, one single and identical time as the unchanging form of that which changes. It is in this way that nature or stasis was defined, according to Schrader, as the form that links the everyday in 'something unified and permanent'. There is no need at all to call on a transcendence. In everyday banality, the action-image and even the movement-image tend to disappear in favour of pure optical situations, but these reveal connections of a new type, which are no longer sensory-motor and which bring the emancipated senses into direct relation with time and thought.

This is the very special extension of the opsign: to make time and thought perceptible, to make them visible and of sound.

3

A purely optical and sound situation does not extend into action, any more than it is induced by an action. It makes us grasp, it is supposed to make us grasp, something intolerable and unbearable. Not a brutality as nervous aggression, an exaggerated violence that can always be extracted from the sensory-motor relations in the action-image. Nor is it a matter of scenes of terror, although there are sometimes corpses and blood. It is a matter of something too powerful, or too unjust, but sometimes also too beautiful, and which henceforth outstrips our sensory-motor capacities. *Stromboli*: a beauty which is too great for us, like too strong a pain. It can be a limit-situation, the eruption of the volcano, but also the most banal, a plain factory, a wasteland. In Godard's *Les carabiniers* the girl militant recites a few revolutionary slogans, so many clichés; but she is so beautiful, of a beauty which is unbearable for her torturers who have to cover up her face with a handkerchief. And this handkerchief, lifted again by breath and whisper ('Brothers, brothers, brothers . . .'), itself becomes unbearable for us the viewers. In any event something has become too strong in the image. Romanticism had already set out this aim for itself: grasping the intolerable or the unbearable, the empire of poverty, and thereby becoming visionary, to produce a means of knowledge and action out of pure vision.³³

Nevertheless, are there not equal amounts of fantasy and dreaming in what we claim to see as there are of objective apprehending? Moreover, do we not have a subjective sympathy for the unbearable, an empathy which permeates what we see? But this means that the unbearable itself is inseparable from a revelation or an illumination, as from a third eye. Fellini has strong sympathies with decadence, only in so far as he prolongs it, extends its range, 'to the intolerable', and reveals beneath the movements, faces and gestures a subterranean or extra-terrestrial world, 'the tracking shot becoming a means of peeling away, proof of the unreality of movement', and the cinema becoming, no longer an undertaking of recognition [*reconnaissance*], but of knowledge [*connaissance*], 'a science of visual impressions, forcing us to forget

our own logic and retinal habits'.³⁴ Ozu himself is not the guardian of traditional or reactionary values, he is the greatest critic of daily life. He picks out the intolerable from the insignificant itself, provided that he can extend the force of a contemplation that is full of sympathy or pity across daily life. The important thing is always that the character or the viewer, and the two together, become visionaries. The purely optical and sound situation gives rise to a seeing function, at once fantasy and report, criticism and compassion, whilst sensory-motor situations, no matter how violent, are directed to a pragmatic visual function which 'tolerates' or 'puts up with' practically anything, from the moment it becomes involved in a system of actions and reactions.

In Japan and Europe, Marxist critics have attacked these films and their characters for being too passive and negative, in turn bourgeois, neurotic or marginal, and for having replaced modifying action with a 'confused' vision.³⁵ And it is true that, in cinema, characters of the trip/ballad are unconcerned, even by what happens to them: whether in the style of Rossellini, the foreign woman who discovers the island, the bourgeoisie woman who discovers the factory; or in the style of Godard, the Pierrot-le-fou generation. But it is precisely the weakness of the motor-linkages, the weak connections, that are capable of releasing huge forces of disintegration. These are the characters with a strange vibrance in Rossellini, strangely well-informed in Godard and Rivette. In the west as in Japan, they are in the grip of a mutation, they are themselves mutants. On the subject of *Two or Three Things* . . . , Godard says that *to describe* is to observe mutations.³⁶ Mutation of Europe after the war, mutation of an Americanized Japan, mutation of France in '68: it is not the cinema that turns away from politics, it becomes completely political, but in another way. One of the two women strollers in Rivette's *Pont du Nord* has all the characteristics of an unforeseeable mutant: she has at first the capacity of detecting the Maxes, the members of the organization for enslaving the world, before going through a metamorphosis inside a cocoon, then being drafted into their ranks. Similarly with the ambiguity of the *Petit soldat*. A new type of character for a new cinema. It is because what happens to them does not belong to them and only half concerns them, because they know how to extract from the event the part that cannot be reduced to what happens: that part of inexhaustible possibility that constitutes the unbearable, the

intolerable, the visionary's part. A new type of actor was needed: not simply the non-professional actors that neo-realism had revived at the beginning, but what might be called professional non-actors, or, better, 'actor-mediums', capable of seeing and showing rather than acting, and either remaining dumb or undertaking some never-ending conversation, rather than of replying or following a dialogue (such as, in France, Bulle Ogier or Jean-Pierre Léaud).³⁷

Neither everyday nor limit-situations are marked by anything rare or extraordinary. It is just a volcanic island of poor fishermen. It is just a factory, a school . . . We mix with all that, even death, even accidents, in our normal life or on holidays. We see, and we more or less experience, a powerful organization of poverty and oppression. And we are precisely not without sensory-motor schemata for recognizing such things, for putting up with and approving of them and for behaving ourselves subsequently, taking into account our situation, our capabilities and our tastes. We have schemata for turning away when it is too unpleasant, for prompting resignation when it is terrible and for assimilating when it is too beautiful. It should be pointed out here that even metaphors are sensory-motor evasions, and furnish us with something to say when we no longer know what to do: they are specific schemata of an affective nature. Now this is what a cliché is. A cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. As Bergson says, we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés. But, if our sensory-motor schemata jam or break, then a different type of image can appear: a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character, because it no longer has to be 'justified', for better or for worse . . . The factory creature gets up, and we can no longer say 'Well, people have to work . . .' *I thought I was seeing convicts*: the factory is a prison, school is a prison, literally, not metaphorically. You do not have the image of a prison following one of a school: that would simply be pointing out a resemblance, a confused relation between two clear images. On the contrary, it is necessary to discover the separate elements and relations that elude us at the heart of an unclear image: to show

how and in what sense school is a prison, housing estates are examples of prostitution, bankers killers, photographs tricks – literally, without metaphor.³⁸ This is the method of Godard's *Comment ça va*: not being content to enquire if 'things are OK' or if 'things are not OK' between two photos, but 'how are things' [*comment ça va*] for each one and for the two together. This was the problem with which Volume 1 ended: tearing a real image from clichés,

On the one hand, the image constantly sinks to the state of cliché: because it is introduced into sensory-motor linkages, because it itself organizes or induces these linkages, because we never perceive everything that is in the image, because it is made for that purpose (so that we do not perceive everything, so that the cliché hides the image from us . . .). Civilization of the image? In fact, it is a civilization of the cliché where all the powers have an interest in hiding images from us, not necessarily in hiding the same thing from us, but in hiding something in the image. On the other hand, at the same time, the image constantly attempts to break through the cliché, to get out of the cliché. There is no knowing how far a real image may lead: the importance of becoming visionary or seer. A change of conscience or of heart is not enough (although there is some of this, as in the heroine's heart in *Europe 51*, but, if there were nothing more, everything would quickly return to the state of cliché, other clichés would simply have been added on). Sometimes it is necessary to restore the lost parts, to rediscover everything that cannot be seen in the image, everything that has been removed to make it 'interesting'. But sometimes, on the contrary, it is necessary to make holes, to introduce voids and white spaces, to rarify the image, by suppressing many things that have been added to make us believe that we were seeing everything. It is necessary to make a division or make emptiness in order to find the whole again.

What is difficult is to know in what respect an optical and sound image is not itself a cliché, at best a photo. We are not thinking simply of the way in which these images provide more cliché as soon as they are repeated by authors who use them as formulas. But is it not the case that the creators themselves sometimes have the idea that the new image has to stand up against the cliché on its own ground, make a higher bid than the postcard, add to it and parody it, as a better way of getting over the problem (Robbe-Grillet, Daniel Schmid)? The creators invent obsessive framings, empty or disconnected spaces, even still lifes: in a certain sense

they stop movement and rediscover the power of the fixed shot, but is this not to resuscitate the cliché that they aim to challenge? Enough, for victory, to parody the cliché, not to make holes in it and empty it. It is not enough to disturb the sensory-motor connections. It is necessary to *combine* the optical-sound image with the enormous forces that are not those of a simply intellectual consciousness, nor of the social one, but of a profound, vital intuition.³⁹

Pure optical and sound images, the fixed shot and the montage-cut, do define and imply a beyond of movement. But they do not strictly stop it, neither in the characters nor even in the camera. They mean that movement should not be perceived in a sensory-motor image, but grasped and thought in another type of image. The movement-image has not disappeared, but now exists only as the first dimension of an image that never stops growing in dimensions. We are not talking about dimensions of space, since the image may be flat, without depth, and through this very fact assumes all the more dimensions or powers which go beyond space. Three of these growing powers can be briefly summarized. First, while the movement-image and its sensory-motor signs were in a relationship only with an indirect image of time (dependent on montage), the pure optical and sound image, its opsigns and sonsigns, are directly connected to a time-image which has subordinated movement. It is this reversal which means that time is no longer the measure of movement but movement is the perspective of time: it constitutes a whole cinema of time, with a new conception and new forms of montage (Welles, Resnais). In the second place, at the same time as the eye takes up a clairvoyant function, the sound as well as visual elements of the image enter into internal relations which means that the whole image has to be 'read', no less than seen, readable as well as visible. For the eye of the seer as of the soothsayer, it is the 'literalness' of the perceptible world which constitutes it like a book. Here again all reference of the image of description to an object assumed to be independent does not disappear, but is now subordinated to the internal elements and relations which tend to replace the object and to delete it where it does appear, continually displacing it. Godard's formula, 'it isn't blood, it's some red', stops being only pictural and takes on a sense specific to the cinema. The cinema is going to become an analytic of the image, implying a new conception of cutting, a whole 'pedagogy' which will operate in different ways; for instance, in Ozu's work,

in Rossellini's late period, in Godard's middle period, or in the Straubs. Finally, the fixity of the camera does not represent the only alternative to movement. Even when it is mobile, the camera is no longer content sometimes to follow the characters' movement, sometimes itself to undertake movements of which they are merely the object, but in every case it subordinates description of a space to the functions of thought. This is not the simple distinction between the subjective and the objective, the real and the imaginary, it is on the contrary their indiscernibility which will endow the camera with a rich array of functions, and entail a new conception of the frame and reframings. Hitchcock's premonition will come true: a camera-consciousness which would no longer be defined by the movements it is able to follow or make, but by the mental connections it is able to enter into. And it becomes questioning, responding, objecting, provoking, theorematizing, hypothesizing, experimenting, in accordance with the open list of logical conjunctions ('or', 'therefore', 'if', 'because', 'actually', 'although . . .'), or in accordance with the functions of thought in a *cinéma-vérité*, which, as Rouch says, means rather truth of cinema [*vérité du cinéma*].

This is the triple reversal which defines a beyond of movement. The image had to free itself from sensory-motor links; it had to stop being action-image in order to become a pure optical, sound (and tactile) image. But the latter was not enough: it had to enter into relations with yet other forces, so that it could itself escape from a world of clichés. It had to open up to powerful and direct revelations, those of the time-image, of the readable image and the thinking image. It is in this way that opsigns and sonsigns refer back to 'chronosigns', 'lectosigns' and 'noosigns'.⁴⁰

Antonioni, considering the evolution of neo-realism in relation to *Outcry*, said that he was tending to do without a bicycle – De Sica's bicycle, naturally. Bicycle-less neo-realism replaces the last quest involving movement (the trip) with a specific weight of time operating inside characters and excavating them from within (the chronicle).⁴¹ Antonioni's art is like the intertwining of consequences, of temporal sequences and effects which flow from events out-of-field. Already in *Story of a Love Affair* the investigation has the result, of itself, of provoking the outcome of a first love affair, and the effect of making two oaths of murder ring out in the future and in the past. It is a whole world of chronosigns, which would be enough to cast doubt on the false evidence according to which the cinematographic image is necessarily in

the present. If we are sick with Eros, Antonioni said, it is because Eros is himself sick; and he is sick not just because he is old and worn out in his content, but because he is caught in the pure form of a time which is torn between an already determined past and a dead-end future. For Antonioni, there is no other sickness than the chronic. Chronos is sickness itself. This is why chronosigns are inseparable from lectosigns, which force us to read so many symptoms in the image, that is, to treat the optical and sound image like something that is also readable. Not only the optical and the sound, but the present and the past, and the here and the elsewhere, constitute internal elements and relations which must be deciphered, and can be understood only in a progression analogous to that of a reading: from *Story of a Love Affair*, indeterminate spaces are given a scale only later on, in which Burch calls a 'continuity grasped through discrepancy' [*raccord à appréhension décalée*], closer to a reading than to a perception.⁴² And later, Antonioni the colourist would be able to treat variations of colours as symptoms, and monochrome as the chronic sign which wins a world, thanks to a whole play of deliberate modifications. But *Story of a Love Affair* already exhibits a 'camera autonomy' when it stops following the movement of the characters or directing its own movement at them, to carry out constant reframings as functions of thought, noosigns expressing the logical conjunctions of sequel, consequence, or even intention.