

8.

CINEMA

[From L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma (1980) and Ça Cinéma #21 (1980)]

This chapter on cinema is a mixture of translations from two different but roughly contemporaneous sources: the book L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma (1980c), and a special issue of the journal Ça Cinéma, "L'Image, la mort, la mémoire" (1980d) which Schefer composed in collaboration with the filmmaker and artist, Raul Ruiz.¹ The selection of the excerpts from both these sources, as well as of the epigraphs that are interspersed here, was made by Schefer himself.

Writing on film--mostly on silent cinema--gives Schefer the opportunity to talk about moving figures and thus entails more detailed elaboration of his notions of the imbrication of space and time in the image. It will be recalled that, in general, Schefer conceives the function of perspectival and volumatic space in painting as that of setting up a doxical figuration and thence eliding the experience of the paradoxical body along with its relation to time and memory; and that, by showing the factitious nature of such spatial relations, he attempts to reintroduce the elements of time and memory and their attachment to the body that cannot be figured.

So Schefer here approaches this tension once more--this time through the cinema, a form whose concomitant aporias or absences he proposes as specifically engaged with memory. This is because in cinema the camera is effectively an eye, registering the experience of some reality; but an eye that lacks a crucial quality of the human eye, that is, memory (this is the force of the epigraph from Epstein with which these translations begin). Going to the cinema, then, involves experiencing a world projected without memory. And yet spectators, as subjects for this projection, bring their own experience and memory to bear, and thus experience the "astonishment of being able to live in two worlds at once," one with and one without a memory.

In this sense the cinema is a privileged instance of the division between the doxical and the paradoxical body, since the "knowledge" that it proffers and constructs has no subject. The experience of the spectator, then, is in effect that of supplying a memory to a spectacle which excludes memory. The paradox here is that the spectator's memory is both invoked and excluded, and this is the "opening" with which Schefer works in these texts.

It should come as no surprise at this point that Schefer's writing about film has little in common with most of generally available theoretical and critical work on cinema. Indeed, insofar as he feels that such work and its version of the subject "concerns no one," his own work constitutes an implicit critique of much film theory. Schefer rejects the constitutive role of the notion of identification authorised by theorists such as Metz and Baudry. For him the spectator's attachment to the image is of a different order altogether. He proposes that rather than furnishing some process of affective replay of subjective psycho-genesis through identification, the image in fact organizes a space both within and without itself with which the spectator struggles in a tension of two different orders of experience and memory. Thus the cinema is not a mirror (as even Godard has said), fixing identifications and producing cinema's dominatory effect on the subject. Rather, Schefer describes cinema as the unstable playing out of a variable relationship, something that has much more to do with cinema's motion (see the first epigraph again) than with any question of reflection or resemblance.²

In that regard, the cinema's movement, its instability and variability, becomes of crucial concern here, especially in the final section, "The Wheel," where Schefer's text explicitly tries to render in writing the effect of movement in Dreyer's film, Vampyr. He sees movement in the image as producing--and, equally, as being produced by--the collision of images, of frames. This continual series of collisions "puts the subject to death," as he says it, or invokes the trajectory of decay and deliquescence that we have seen his work deal with before. In the final sequence of Vampyr, with the death of the vampire in the mill and the escape of the young couple, Schefer depicts the film's movement as an oscillation that is a kind of superimposition upon the image, causing the death that haunts the divided body and that

produces the sense of guilt and anxiety that is always related to the decay and deliquescence in the image for Schefer. To hazard a generalization about a conceptually very complex passage, one might say that movement in the cinema is then in itself a sort of anamorphosis.

Elsewhere in the following excerpts, the guilt and anxiety produced in watching moving images are discussed in relation to two, by now familiar, elements of Schefer's writing: first, to animalistic or primitive forms of the body, and second to the memory of childhood. In the first instance, Schefer remarks the frequency with which film figures unformed, deformed, freakish and burlesque kinds of body. These are registrations of, or openings onto, the world of the paradoxical body--they are the body which proves the limits of figuration and anatomy, a whole range of avatars for the fear and dread that haunts the divided subject.³ In the second instance, the affective dimension of that fear and guilt is tied to the childhood experience of the cinema, and to Schefer's autobiography. More than any other of his texts, apart from the highly autobiographical, L'Origine du crime (1985), Schefer's work on cinema explains--and, indeed, demonstrates--his notion of the place of the autobiographical in what are essentially interpretative writings.

The first sections of the following translations go through some of these matters, stressing the production of a kind of knowledge, the childish knowledge that attends the recognition of the birth of the divided body and the demarcation between knowledge and experience. Schefer's sense of what he calls the discovery of "an internal history" should not be understood as the recovery of some fixed image or of some nostalgic memory. Rather, he suggests here more than anywhere that the aporias of memory and experience cannot be filled but only discovered or invented. Equally, even if their discovery is a matter for hope, it is also a matter of illusion and all that can be registered in our roles as spectators to the image is the oscillating passage of shifting and variable relations ourselves and the image, between our experience and our memory. The texts here attempt to write that passage and are thence given over to its sporadic and dehiscent syntax. In that sense they constitute in themselves a special kind of cinemato-graphy.

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Cinematic reproduction captures an astonishing descriptive geometry of gesture: gestures caught from every angle and projected onto any area of space (or several at once), situated on continually variable and unusual axes. You can make them appear however you want--elongated or diminished, multiplied or divided, deformed, expressive. For each of those angular interpretations of a gesture has its own profound meaning which is intrinsic to it, because the eye that reveals it is an inhuman eye, without memory, without thought. The medium can now use this profound meaning in cinematic geometry.

--Jean Epstein

*The Ordinary Man of the Cinema*⁴

The ordinary man of the cinema makes a preliminary and redundant announcement: the cinema isn't my profession. I go to the cinema for entertainment, but by chance I also learn something there apart from what a film will tell me (a film won't teach me that I'm mortal--it will, perhaps, teach me a trick of time, about the expansion of bodies in time, and about the improbability of it all. In fact, I'm always less the film's reader and more like its totally submissive servant and also its

judge). What I learn there is the astonishment of being able to live in two worlds at once.

So it's a being without qualities that's speaking now. I want to say just this: I don't have the necessary qualities to speak about cinema except insofar as I'm in the habit of going quite often. This habit should probably have taught me something?--naturally. But what?--about films, about myself, about our whole species, about memory.

So, what this "ordinary man" can say arises not from some fixed discourse (which would have to do with the transmission of a knowledge) but from a writing (a research whose object isn't a polished construction, but the enigma of an origin). The only origin I can speak of, publicly ask myself about, is primarily tied to an elucidation of the visible, an explanation not of its constitution but of the certainty that it only exists with such power because it opens up and names within us a whole world; and of the certainty that we're in some way the genesis and the momentary life of this world that's suspended from a collection of artifices.

So, I'm writing about a particular experience of time, movement, and images.

But this still has to satisfy certain ideational conditions. I don't intend to write a theoretical essay about film. It's more a matter of lending a voice, however briefly, to a memory, to the spectacle of its effects, and to render a certain threshold tangible. In the end, I'm calling upon a spectator's "knowledge." That's my knowledge, and so immediately some part of my own life is at stake.

A machine whirls, representing simultaneous actions to the immobility of our bodies; it produces monsters, even though it all seems delicious rather than terrible. In fact, however awful it really is, it's always undeniably pleasurable. But perhaps it's the unknown, uncertain, and always changing linkage of this pleasure, this

nocturnal kinship of the cinema, that asks a question of both memory and signification; the latter, in the memory of film, remains attached to the experience of this experimental night where something stirs, comes alive, and speaks in front of us.

So for this spectator the cinema is primarily something completely different than what most film criticism reflects. The meaning that comes to us (and reaches us by dint of our being a sounding board for the effects of images and their depth, and insofar as we organize the whole future of these images and sounds into affect and meaning) is a very special quality of signification made tangible. And it's irremediably linked to the conditions of our vision; or, more exactly, linked to our experience (to the quality of this nocturnal vision, appearing as the threshold of reception and the condition for the existence of those images--and, perhaps, to our very first experience of seeing them).

If the cinema, apart from its constant renewal in every film and each projection, can be defined by its peculiar power to produce effects of memory, then we know--and have known for several generations--that through such memory (in this case, through precise images) some part of our lives passes into our recollection of films that might be totally unrelated to the contents of our lives.

So there was (first of all, immediately, like a residual humus that retains images) a sentiment of persistent strangeness born in "my" cinema, and I wanted to account for it. I wanted to make it apparent. It's not likely that my experience of film is an entirely isolated one. Indeed, rather than the illusion of movement or mobility in filmic objects, the illusion proper to the cinema is that this experience and this memory are solitary, hidden, secretly individual, since they make an immediate pact (story, pictures, affective colours) with a part of ourselves that lives without expression; a part given over to silence and to a relative aphasia as if it were the ultimate secret of our lives--while perhaps it really constitutes our ultimate subjecthood. It seems that in this artificial solitude a part of us is porous to the effects of meaning without ever being able

to be born into signification through language. We even recognize there--and to my eyes this is the imprescriptible link between film and fear--an increase in the aphasia of feelings in our social being (the cinema acting upon every social being as if upon one solitary being). The fear that we live out at the cinema (the first knowledge a child takes from the cinema, or that "colours" his experience) isn't unmotivated, in fact--it's just disproportionate: I've thought for some time now that we fear this latent aphasia because it has already cut into us.

I'm far from denying the pleasure of cinema. But I need to make something about it more explicit (at very least, its ambiguity). Briefly, this pleasure isn't simple enjoyment; it is, I think, the visible basis for all the aesthetic pleasure we take in the image's definition--that's the basis for what's sometimes called our "imaginary projection" into filmic action. The pleasure is in the enjoyment of our moral being, which is why (for me) it's so close to its opposite--fear (which is the result of a simulated realization of affects which live deprived of an object). The reality of these sentiments is our subjection to a world that's actually their derision. I maintain that this can be called an experience, to be spoken of seriously.

Suddenly, within these forms, in these unities of sound and vision where I have no place and for which I remain just a spectator, I find myself trying to identify what might be their essential counterbalance...in the end, to discover to what absence any form relates.

Unpredictably, every human form (every imitation of a destiny) responds to the expression (the necessity or the abeyance of expression) of the feelings that define humanity.

So it's not that we're projecting our lives onto forms or beings, agents of a part of identity that's the missing link in every living being, or the secret that's not fixed in an image but that keeps it alive outside of images. It's rather that the

unexpressed increases within the living being as we live--that is, it never ceases to substitute actions for the possibility of contemplating nothingness.

But these feelings, relying on a notion of the lonely profundity proper to our species, can't be represented in the cinema except by way of bodies in action. To support them, those bodies have to be new to the point of indicating the reflexivity of actions--not their power of transition or their material resolution in the world. Such reflexivity can only augment the invisible world, and that's what an action is properly destined to do. (Which means that an action isn't an event. The strongest captivation of the image is finally that world; all causality in this universe of images is shut up inside a body of enigmas, as if by a suspicion of signification.)

Perhaps such a "being without qualities" can state a truth here, ask a question, make a proposition whose goal is not to endorse an image of man in terms of any of the usually elaborated theoretical notions. That would constitute an unreasonable alteration of the image by allowing contents to enter in (the relationships of contents to representations are always precisely experiments and not representations).

So, what we might try to grasp is this: there's probably nothing, in the name of any knowledge, that we could envisage about forms or that could be said about cinema which, by theoretical strategies, would accord with or verify the protocols of anthropological content. In the cinema we're dealing with a new experience of time and memory which alone can form an experimental being.

The cinema, in that we're a part of it, doesn't compose or organise any particular structure of alienation--it's more a matter of the structure of a realization and the appropriation of some real, not of some possible. The real we're talking about here is what's already and momentarily alive in the form of the spectator. Not a momentary, suspended life, but a memory mixed with images and experiential sensations: we should, then, question the function of the scenario not as the object of a

desire to exist but as the store of affects within this being whom I describe as being "without qualities." Similarly, the ironic structure of film is an anthropological lure. And what's more, the dream here is not the realization of a desire, but we should understand it rather--more essentially--as the legitimization of desire.

Of course, all this presupposes no knowledge, but at most a certain usage, the habit of a usage within the invisible part of our bodies. I'm alluding to that part of ourselves whose nativity is, as it were, put back into our hands for use at our own discretion. The part that, having no reflection, desperately dedicates itself to transforming its own obscurity into a visible world.

So the only knowledge presumed here is just that of the use of our own memory: in the end, memory teaches us nothing but the manipulation of time as an image, made possible by the purloining of our actual bodies. This doesn't respond to some theory or other, but only to a paradoxical experience--that is, to an aporistic duration (the relation of an object of thought to something that refuses itself to thought in its very activity). So it's experience itself that's the source of aporias. From then on things can't emerge from some hidden meaning, but rather from this difficult and vacillating relationship between things and their secret (and thus our secret, like a photo of our complete "body" that can't be developed in the realm of the visible).

So the duration of passions (what Kierkegaard used to call the character of an alternative man) can be measured only by the remnants of images--not by their cinematic duration, but by the power they have to remain, repeat, or recur. This is quite close to what defines the image's transformation into a mnesic double--that's to say, into that sort of trace or guarantee that's intrinsic to the movement of disappearance or effacement in phenomena.

The cinema and the filmic images don't mobilize for me any (technical or theoretical) knowledge: such a knowledge is inessential as far as I'm concerned. The cinema is perhaps the only domain of signification that I don't believe can have a subject for the operations of its science.

This art awakens a memory, mysteriously tied to the experience of a profundity of feeling (but also to the very particular life of isolated phenomena).

This is also echoed in Dreyer's words: "What I want to obtain is a penetration to my actors' profound thoughts by means of their most subtle expressions.... [Falconetti] had taken off her make-up...and I found...a rustic woman, very sincere, who was also a woman who had suffered."⁵

That memory doesn't evoke so much as write the experience of an entire life that it induces into separation from the world. As if we went to the cinema in order to annihilate the film bit by bit (with a few retained images) by way of the sentiments it makes us feel; and as if this mass of affects progressively summoned chains of images back to the light and to the colour of feelings.

I wanted to explain how the cinema stays within us as a final chamber where both the hope and the illusion of an interior history are caught: because this history doesn't unfold itself and yet can only--so feebly does it subsist--remain invisible, faceless, without character, but primarily without duration. Through the resilience of their images we acclimatize all these films to an absence of duration and to that absence of a scene where interior histories might become possible.

So, this chamber exists within us, where, in the absence of any object, we torture the human race, and from which the feeling or anticipated consciousness of the sublime mysteriously and incomprehensibly arises.

None of this locates the grip or anchoring of feeling within a film. Film is perhaps just a sort of mirrored surface that appears to us as such only at the

moment when we are thrown away from it by the feelings or affects that it gives birth to: it only gives birth to them by simulating them in characters, through "bits of men" who have to die in order to assure the perpetuity of what's outside them.

So the sight of all this makes me take leave of myself; that's to say, take leave of the most uncertain center of myself; it makes me find some semblances of identity that then hunt me down again like a center waiting to be encircled.

So, it's not quite a merchandise (a sort of sexual merchandise), nor is it quite a pole of projection that I find in the cinema. Rather, acting out a scene there, I find affects (not quite feelings, just the stirring of feeling, tied to impossible actions), affects without a destination--that is, without a world (there's no world that preconditions this colouring of affects); affects playing out a scene--by some unbreakable alliance, playing the visible interior of a species. So far as the spectacle of visible man is concerned (though he's not any particular structure of enjoyment--he's simply an unknown being), it would be necessary to know that affects constitute a world--possibilities of action somewhere else, and immediately an ineluctable destiny.

Could the techniques of cinema have a finality that, in all conscience or with a little clarity, I might reduce to the production of effects? Here, all the played-out simulations are basically imperfect (or simultaneously shown to be simulations), parallel to the production of effects. What attracts me to the perfection of this world isn't its illusion; it's the illusion of a center I will never be able to approach. This illusion has no center but is a mechanism for the elision of objects. All in all, its bodily movements aren't gratuitous--they constitute the spectacle itself, with its freedom removed. Furthermore, it's the affects themselves, and not signification (which here is the deferral of their liaison), that construct an anterior world, a world subsisting without proportions begged or borrowed from the real. By an elementary alchemy, objects are only as prestigious as they are here because they're so rare (selected) and dependent; they're not the components of the cinematic universe that we could

recognize by their resemblance to all the things we've ever touched, seen or coveted. They're woven from an altogether different material. We desire them because they constitute a fate. The dressing gown in Little Caesar, Fred Astaire's top hat and cane, Kitty's watch in They Live by Night (whose dial is never seen but that still tells us the wrong time of that nocturnal love and shows us the curse of adolescents shut in by a crime in the distant shadow of their lives); or Cary Grant's suit which is both his ignorance of danger and the deferral of his fear--here I project not a sovereign consciousness but a disguised body, dressed from the start in a prism of minor passions, sequences of gestures, words, and lighting.

In films the body (in any situation) is not desirable unless it's because of the hope that its clothes can be worn, but at the same time that it can carry away with it all the worldly light in which it has bathed. The initial hallucination in which we repeated gestures (for example, von Stroheim's little stereotypes in La Grande Illusion) managed to induce, in place of our bodies and like an airy chimera, the same stiffness we saw in the actor, the same pleasure in details; or it managed to teach us that the cinematic body is one which lives "in detail" (just as Bichat's old man dies "in detail").⁶ What we couldn't regain was the peculiarity of a world residing in the transitions between gestures. We'd been struck, for example, by the fact that all action is accomplished in a single, sketchy movement; that a man never gets to the end of the track, but that his action is nonetheless complete since the whole world (at any given moment) can be no more than the consciousness of his escape, and because nothing escapes signification (which might be the very peculiarity of this universe). Endowed with mobile proportions, affected by changing causes, this is still only an intended world.

And burlesque, wasn't that in its way simply the blow-up of a single detail of our own lives? Or perhaps the entire life of something we could get to know and that would then live alone in the world (as alone as the perpetual life of a

scar on the skin, a ridiculous hat on the same head, or a leg that was forever in plaster). This is a reflexivity and a perception of action that reaches a body and determines its spectacle. This is why burlesque is so frightening: those bodies are already more guilty than they are clumsy; they're just a brief, gesticulatory reprieve from our waiting for hell.

The world and its shadows rise up before our eyes, initiating in us the experience of those unrepeatable movements.

Two trees that the camera shoots from a distance, around which it begins to film, which it then shoots in an incomplete pan where the trees are successively the centre and the periphery: this grouping of trees, in Straub and Huillet's Fortini/Cani, isn't made from trees alone, because these particular ones could only be reflections, and also because the very distance from the world we can never approach subsists within them. And this bouquet of trees is not simply all that distance preserved. Those trees, caught in a slow and brusquely sublime movement, are unnamed and unknown affects; they're a sort of silent, rigid and delicate contouring of the most unknown emotion. And why--unless it's because all our own movement is suspended from that sight--can we do no more than register that this is sublime?

Poe, in Eureka, speaks of the genesis of matter in which attraction and repulsion separate atoms: there, the soul is the product of their repulsion.⁷ It's also by the unconsciousness, the ignorance of these systems of luminous dots sifting bodies and remaining encrusted on their faces, that the birth of feelings unrelated to our lives is accompanied. And blindly, across this bridge of trembling light, we enter this world. First of all, film isn't constituted in more or less perfect scenes, nor by obvious, admitted decors (such as those in A Streetcar Named Desire which are just theatre sets filmed in close-up), nor by the points and displacements of perspective that reveal them to me;

nor are any of them either credible or invraisemblable: this world, beyond its artificial sets and shots in front of which I might remain incredulous--and that can therefore get away with being badly done--doesn't install me within the truth of the story: it has already made me enter into the truth and strangeness of whole new affects--which, by dint of the fact that their qualities are unheard of, and because their relations to objects are unknown, easily dominate me.

I don't believe in the reality of film (and its vraisemblance is unimportant), and yet, because of that, I'm in its ultimate truth. The truth is verified in me alone, but not by final reference to reality; it's first of all only a change in the proportions of the visible whose final judge I will doubtless be, though I'll also be its body and its experimental consciousness.

No kind of assurance is ever added to the image, no finishing touches are given to a pluperfect image of solidity; indeed, what's added is the anxiety of the human voice (and perhaps only a hint that it can signify). From the voice I retain only certain qualities--smoothness or roughness--or its particular composition, astonishingly produced by Michel Simon in La Chienne; and I hear behind it, behind its memory, nothing but a feeble burbling, an incoherence, something like the bankrupt monologue of a lover's protestation. The voices in this film--those of Simon and Janie Marèze--are neither real nor copied; they're simply the truth of a given scene. The voice of Marèze is stereotyped (it's "stamped" as the historical representation of a social class, attached to the irony of the characters who choose it, to the irony of a "type"). Simon's voice is not of a particular class; it's an invention and a mixture that begins to constitute the sonorous volume of his character. This is all laid bare in the conversation scene, in the impossible confidences that precede the murder: the vocal tissue imports only the "culture" that precisely allows him to appear as an imbecile in the place where he lives. In this I can hear the beginnings of the joker's tone which is always a strain in this

actor's voice, the foundation he exploits--the strange bleating tone of an old woman through which some emotion is always transferred along with the proper distancing of the voice from the role itself, from its utterances, and from the actor's body: this is the whistle and the toothy sound that characterize the actor's place of origin, the "accent" of Genevan Protestants. The tissue and composition of this voice are played out in the character (Legrand) as the nostalgia for a place where he doesn't belong--the distance of the bleating voice and the raised accent suddenly lend him the air of a mental case. It's like listening to an opera--I can hear only the feeble strain of what the voice signifies, what protestation it makes through the totally instrumental singing that, at the height of its artifice, can't disguise the blinding truth of the body, of that sudden apparition of visible man, trembling like a wet dog.

Spectator (from Ca Cinéma)

Without a doubt, the only position we can conceive of for the spectator is a paradoxical one--it's not simply a matter of his being placed within the spectacle. This man invents a position; he makes an inventory upon himself of the material of unknown affects. These are, for example, the proportions of what he'll come to understand as a world, proportions living differently than in a picture or a figurative composition.

And this is called a world, its figure changing all the time; and yet it lacks a pole of reference, an invariable, or a scale. As if some primary degree of existence had been attached to a variation of proportions alone.

So this absence of proportions constitutes such a world. Not that it guarantees its new appearance or its changed face. An anxiety that's not about resemblance--nor is it simply its doubt--is added to its aspect for just a moment.

So it would be illusory to imagine that merely the enlargement of a frontal image (like an amputated detail, cut from the very life of the body of a sign, or of an object which remains invisible as an entirety) could invoke something of that order: if, firstly, this absence of proportions (that is, something that doesn't allow the reduction of a filmic sequence to a figurative sequence--which is necessarily defined by an order or a structure of proportions), if this world, this mutilated space, and this fragment of a scene are not entirely visible. So I can imagine that something is accomplished by their schematism, that a world is nonetheless (or because of that fact) sketched out in them and that some intention crosses them as signification.

However, I'm equally sure that there are no scenes around which I can construct my interpretation, no givens that need my freedom in order to complete

their figures as a destiny within myself, in the way that I might construct a destiny when looking at a painting. So there's nothing to demand the limit of the completion of my death or the recognition of another world through that immediately impossible death (no longer its mad demands, and the response anticipated by the difficulty of defining the visible outside of myself). Because of these different movements, or rather because of these different movements of contemplation, I never stop substituting myself (because of my knowledge, anxiety, or pleasure) for every other possible interpreter of the picture--I never lose the ability to become its sublime insistence.

So it is, inversely to all that, that I come to know (or know again) firstly this: watching the film in its details, angles, and frames, I'm not an instance of interpretation; so (unlike when I look at a framed picture where distance doesn't make the proportions of the figuration vary, and for which there even exists an ideal viewing point), I don't have to assure myself of the visible through some other mastery of the proportions of my body.

Indeed, in that sense, if the filmic world seems not to require the type of accommodation that would make its strangeness and its essential disproportion disappear, I can say that it's not, strictly speaking, the object of a rule-bound or consistent perception, and that perhaps it has as its object the unconscious thought that's within me in any perception.

But is this how, through what this world lacks as its secret proportion, I manage to recognize its aspects and signification, without needing to interpret it? Do I recognize this as a world because of its particular way of hiding the world, of trafficking, mutilating, and representing time (as if already the final reality of these images consisted in making us live time)?

Do I recognize this place I've never been, even in my dreams, by its way (this, for me, is still an uncertain notion) of concealing time--that is, by the hint of a constant flux of action, somewhere else, more banal, more tragic, less coloured,

unanswerable? Do I recognize it because of the way all the suspense and all the heavy tragedy of life (or life's absolute indifference) are imposed upon me? And so I watch a film as if it were going to end up making me see a man with no name, a man breathing without offering me a spectacle (and as if only the most exaggerated of filmic or realized acts--since they suffer a greater syncope in time--had managed to become transparent in this sort of absent proportion which nonetheless completes them for our eyes).

But what's missing isn't the sublime, nor even the guarantee of life: it's a pole of the image that, if it were there, would make the image invisible.

Is there, for example, an exchange of the visible between myself and the figures as I watch? Am I not what credits the image because I remain more visible than it does (because my interior life, still not opening onto any scene, remains instantly as the perfectly untranslatable secret of what I see)?

And is this the same as the effect by which the film's dialogue (more than roles in the theatre) renders me speechless--that is, speaks in my place and causes the hope of signification to abandon me without having taught me a language?

propositions (Ca Cinéma)

The image can be seen by way of what it lacks.

Something is missing that constitutes the image (permits it to conceal the world we live in, not by means of a screen with figures on it, but by means of time).

If what's missing were within the image (of which we are a part--the virtual pole, or the phantom), the image would be invisible.

So the spectacle of visible man does exist: it's the awareness of the darkness of our interior lives by which any spectacle is made possible.

...it's true that we--all of us--go to the cinema to see simulations that are terrible to one degree or other, and we don't go to partake of a dream. Rather for a share of terror, for a share of the unknown, things like that...Which is to say that, at bottom, the cinema is an abattoir. People go to the abattoir, not to see images coming one after the other. Something else happens inside them: a structure that is otherwise acquired, otherwise possible, painful in other ways, and which is perhaps tied inside us to the necessity of producing meaning and language.

--Schefer.⁸

The Gods

The Jealousy of Freaks

A frightening idea strikes me--that the most extreme pain is silent.

In Freaks we had to feel (and is this the film's intention, or is this film just a parade of monsters across an arbitrary scenario?), we had to register the existence of affects, emotions, pain, and anger in proportion to the size of their subjects, all reduced to the little tantrums (the very small movements) of dwarfs, reduced to tiny clenched fists and miniscule tears. But these emotions, because of the uniform reduction of proportions, pass beneath us, all invoking the same sense of repulsion: we don't inhabit bodies like that one there because its voice is too inaudible, too highly pitched to make us really blanch, and because we don't after all live in the same anguish that, even

in its pain of unrequited love, is for us nothing more than the fate of painfully small dolls.

That's frightening; it's the worst sort of butchery. But such is our truth that we inhabit bodies without a hint of sarcasm. How could this messenger of sublime anguish, this being in the process of discovering all the world's bitterness, how, without adding to the cruelty within us that kills off real anguish, and without bruising his own sadness by its very expression, how could he escape this tragic scene when he can't even reach the door handle?

The meaning of the scene comes later, only in the wake of the emotional instability of such tiny bodies. It arrives when we begin to ask, "Why is our hell so small?"

The Shroud

Something here isn't right: the linen, the light, the shadows, this passage along which we approach the light, the ancient filth (of poverty, or of humility?) that's like a destiny, pushing us towards this brilliance, this white cloth laundered before our eyes and that has already begun--as far away as we are--to place the film of a shroud against our chest. It's not quite a screen that this woman is offering, holding up an imageless innocence and a light as if calming some savage beast. That light, uncorrupted since it has no source or since the gesture of its elevation produces its own cause--an immaculate flash, a shining period, an entire world of snow--that light could, within us, evoke both a horizon and a cause. This is sublime because this soft cloth picked from the basket is, incomprehensibly, nothing other than the approach of a suffering from which I have to reconstruct, in the repetition of this arrested movement, a threshold in myself that's still uncrossable. Leaving us seated in the dark, what's proffered--this cloth without memory, without image and without shadow, lifting itself up and indefinitely rasping beneath our eyelids--repays us (since there's no body moving here, no fly to soil it) and repays us with this white shadow that arrives here, beyond the world.

The only scenario I could imagine would be the same scene filmed in a loop, finished in a single, infinite repetition lasting a lifetime; this woman bends over, chooses the sheet, and we--alone, and in her hands of charity and pity--can no longer exist except as this whiteness, this sheet, the wind that dries it and the incomprehensible flash that causes an altogether different darkness to remain within us.

Yet you yourself will never dance on this miraculous surface through the projection of your shadow, of your memory, of any past. We realize too late that the masses of shadow, still outlined, striated, and sliding over powder, never actually reach this flash of light. In these masses alone a story unfolds, an adventure, a commotion. And in the

end this shadow only repeats words within us; in every corner it whispers memories,
shadows.

A new man breathing within me? It's this handkerchief, this
shroud, bursting without trace, and no one dares touch it.

The Sausage

Is this still a man, or already a monster? Is it a man other than in the face, where he can seem indifferently sublime or horrible? I don't know why this character from Freaks, reduced or condensed to a single swaddled limb (a limb and not an organ), reduced to this crawling sleeve, evokes the Husserlian notion of that curious reduction of phenomena allowing us to get at essences.

This being, reduced to one limb and one action (which in the film is his facility in lighting a cigarette, assuring us of his humanity), because of his crawling and his sort of monstrous tail-wagging (this is, of course, the progressively watchable horror--simply because he can accomplish this action--of a rod coupled with a pirate's head), this creature threatens the last humanity within us. This fairground performance (an inessential demonstration carried out as a proof) can scarcely turn us from a more disquieting question: what does such a sausage do, not about his desires or about how he sleeps, but what does he do with his excrement? And this sweater, doesn't it hide from us for the whole length of the film the fact that his legs and arms are factitiously bent, squashed and provisionally miniaturized, and that this filibuster head will finally be able to emerge and have a yawn? And don't we also, as we watch, feel our own arms sticking to our bodies? What could be the destiny--that is, the duration--of such an animal?

And is this cigarette being stuffed in his mouth to prevent him from crying out, to deprive him of the time in his whole filmic life to speak to us, or to address a word to that part of ourselves that is exactly "it"?

And so we are "it." And in the life of this aged larva--a buccaneer whose boarding career has progressively deprived him of all his limbs, cut off by sabres, and who has been locked up in this inflated sailor's cap (and what mother would have knitted it for him?)--don't we tremble to imagine (or perhaps we already

know) that this tube, ingesting smoke before our very eyes, must have known the pangs of love? And isn't that exactly what a monster is--the perpetual torture of love, and its animal groans?

And I'm not sure why this little plinth in front of him, with its tiny objects, immediately makes him seem like a public scribe.

The ideal being can only be seen through the eyes of a criminal...

...because what he desires (and it's really only a whole epoch of psychology that has shown us this) is to perpetuate or photograph something that ought to remain instantaneous. This flash of lightning ought to live on only as a memory (and Renoir gives it to us as an image)--saintliness in abjection, gentleness in cruelty. We don't see the words spoken, nor their reality, but we feel the presence of this cloud around the chosen victim and we participate in the whispers of love that can neither face nor turn away from the light (like the blinding form of God revealed to Moses).

In Musil's novel, A Man Without Qualities, Moosbrugger killed prostitutes, but he never killed off his own horror or his desire, his guilt or his mother, but he reached eternity--that's to say, he mortally touched what was always missing from himself and from eternity: the most obscure reason why no god finally wanted him.

So it's by way of this stereotyped old man, with his old woman's voice, that the haloing light of youth appears and lasts on the scene. We understand that it's a whole generation that has repressed him, but that it's a certain innocence, an irresponsible pleasure, that originally killed him as a man. So it's into this extremely anterior death--that her own slaughter will not complete--that the prostitute has to enter in order to both lose and win her light.

This flash is not just a gaze (or a desire, the coexistence here of two superimposed images of the same body--a victim of murder and an untouchable body); it is, equally, all the unreality of the world that Legrand cannot enter; it's the heaven above this prostitute.

This flaw in our memory, grafted onto memory
for the sake of representation, what could it
consist in but childhood itself?
--Schefer.⁹

Criminal Life

Even silent cinema could never be silent: it's more exactly a cinema caught up in whispers (the sub-titles, for example, read softly to children during the show). And in the whispered silence of those first films, the first images, the dust, the light of the cinema's grey bodies returns within us: as if there were a child, seated within us, clinging to our hand.

In its most primordial and brutal condition cinema sustains a terror, or a vague fear, tying our whole childhood to one film or another. In the end: why did every film repeat the war? I saw my first films after being plunged into the scene of war (night shelters, bombardments, exodus, prayers kneeling in a dark room, exploding bombs outside, dusty coffee, the march of prisoners outside the window, lorry-journeys by night alone in the winter, four years old...). But, exclusively, scene after scene digging out a sort of childhood unconscious. A bewildered child for whom, in the midst of exodus, there was still a voice, a tone of voice, music, images, and objects that the whistling of bombs would shatter one by one--a reserved air, a being whom catastrophes and griefs never got down; the well, the abyss, or what still had no beyond...I imagine that in those bad old days of pain, of interrupted visits and random lodgings, a voice, a reserve and a guiding knowledge of being civilized were never destroyed. The earth didn't open up beneath the feet of this distracted child: nobody ever screamed in his hearing. And so music remained, even at night, around the

dimmed lights or above the alarms. Because of what was still the great youthfulness of the world. Catastrophe hadn't made its way through all the rubble, or even through grief, until the day he was taken to the cinema. De Sica's Sciuscia (Shoe-Shine): all the fear of the war, and four years of terror, broken objects, vanished faces, all fixed for an instant in that cinema, upon the image of that first film. Then began the first illness for which he was guilty and punished. The first nervous illness, that is, the first uncertain, criminal identity that a child discovers through fear (in his first real solitude): the ragged urchin in Italy shining shoes for American soldiers. So the world began, and became indescribable.

The fear of war chilled so many youngsters in the same way after the Liberation: they became aware not only of the fear of having escaped the massacre, but also of the sporadic consciousness of being nonetheless dead, because of these films that began without the very voice that the aeroplanes never drowned, without a sister, or some comfort, without the smell. So it was in this way that aphasia began, the family vanished, and the consciousness of a crime preceded any real crime. Or that the fearful chattering of teeth was only because of Charlot, Laurel and Hardy, Walt Disney. It's only in this way that the war never finished. Les Disparus de Saint-Agil, for example, made his father die, made the house collapse. Pinocchio killed and carried off people close to him. Adémaï Aviator, or some showing of Deux Nigauds, left just a dining room hanging among the ruins, a wooden horse in a livestock wagon, a Red Cross convoy, and mugs of chocolate in a Dutch train-station.

So the fear of Fatty, Charlot, Al Saint-John, began irreparably to unravel a whole world of music, voices, pictures. So it was in the cinema that the world began like the memory of a crime at once perpetrated on someone and yet constantly suspended. So it was at the cinema that the fidelity of a voice that was heard despite the thunder, and so many years, an inward breath, came to die alone for the first time.

So films have constituted a peculiar fear linked not only to a universe of whispering (of non-religious whispering and so it was something that the heavens didn't hear, like words stifled within a room), but also to the silence of those gray bodies and their gesticulatory granite.

But there's something other than all that in the cinema: in a burlesque persistence, that is, the pure invention of the movement associated with white faces: a shadow, as if the child's father had died in the war perhaps, and--since his hide, or his body, had remained lost--as if he had been angelically raised up by some force, by some being, towards an unknown deliverance--or towards, certainly, the effect of an abandonment that thus instituted the delay of the criminal act in the comic double of the world that we had to fish for in the cinema. And as if this other side of the world--the cohort of angels, the funeral ceremony, the mourners--could only come from there. And as if they all came, sporadically, at such a discount, through those gross rituals. More than that: they came in this momentary world of unbroken granite where the succession of images or shots, where the reason for all behaviour remained a disquieting enigma: that's to say, with a familiarity and a connivance peculiarly displaced.

But this is it: the grotesque world touches upon that sort of distress--as its reason and its enigma--because one's father, in a scene plucked from infancy, had one day been taken away from the world as the very reason for the war's taking place. And amidst bombarded cities and broken bridges one supreme portrait, a photographic gaze, still remained. And if these stony beings kept on gesticulating in hasty despair, it was because all the great men--one whole side of the world--hadn't exactly ceased to live, but had already stopped coming home with outstretched arms.

But it's a fear of what crime? An objectless distress that fixed itself there uncertainly, or could subsist through the removal, through the very difference on which it stood, fixed on anything at all.

And moreover, if this grotesque world, teetering and swaying, actually came loose, repeating within itself a whole series of catastrophes (that was its motor, simply the opposite of all reason), it was because the daily world too could be threatened by an anxiety and by a sort of laughter that had already lasted longer than all the images. Or had allowed no image to remain...

A quantity and a power of affects are linked, bit by bit, to an unknown object. They immediately have the strength of being unrepeatable, indivisible, non-renewable: they cannot be exported. Thus they don't situate their subject (who is the very site of their constant or always probable charge) in the world--that is, in a milieu where a series of events can survive, can be isolated, detached from all causality and not looked at. Thus the world too is caught in the freedom of insignificance, which is why, in any circumstance, it is liveable, bearable and detached.

These unknown affects (born in or solicited by this machine of simulations) come from a world that first of all has no exterior: defined by a constant level of signification which takes deep root only by means of those affects which, beyond their monstrous qualities, all have their own duration, a period--an internal tension--which also marks the place of their falling due, of their cancellation (the annulment of their virtual character), or the temporal contradiction inside of which this apparently floating world (this granite and its flakes of images) takes its support from the subject that it presupposes. Or this spectator who re-films that entire world and in whom a world of granite is displaced without memory, or is seized by feelings only because of the enigmas for which he becomes responsible, since he is always the guarantor or the creator of their reality.

And so it is that, beyond this complex piece of machinery, what it disperses is what actually sees the film: the isolated, solitary or silent instance of a return to a worldly morality, enigmatically returning to those qualities in a weave which is at once closed (as scenario or image) and yet entirely destined (devoted and addressed) to the reality of affects which is the whole expectation of the image. That's to say, then, devoted to crime itself.

The cinema's monsters are, perhaps, the cinema's interior being: finally, like any of its fictions, being delegated as anamorphoses of this world that's predestined to morality or to the signification continually addressed to an unknown moral subject, to a being who doesn't synthesize them but in whom their strangeness can live as a morality, or can last without being effected by time or memory.

But who, having been lifted (maybe thrown) into the heavens, wouldn't then fall like all those bombs, or like the descent of a body suddenly slowed down by a parachute, suspended in mid-air; who could emerge from a load of images, emerging from whiteness itself, touching, holding out his hands and saying "Come!".

And this subsists, this unknown species, in whoever watches a film, in whoever sees on film a new species, this anybody, this opening, these frozen entrails, or the laugh that makes a slaughter or a war begin all over again. That's to say, the suppression of a being as the very reason for all the upheavals on our earth. Like a suppression of the humanity in ourselves which is no longer represented in the white image's face. As if this mosaic face, made up of flakes, dust and dots, quite simply and with no possible correction, had invaded the seated being with the immense extension of a being that has no present but is still exclusively tied to the mystery and horror of Time.

Something, first of all, is linked to the mystery of the meaning we add to the image in our uncertainty of being able to seize its totality, in our suspicion that such an addition would be no more than an incomplete levy of the anxieties of signification within it--uncertain, still, that what we're adding to is not primarily something we should call ourselves: beyond the seductiveness of its images the film will keep that mystery intact (and will keep it as a part of ourselves): before any apprehension of new meanings, we learn that signification is, here, a body.

This body can't be synthesized. It's not the sum of the parts of the face (gestures, mimes, accent), but at the same time it's a leakage of all those things, a spinning perspective, a new amputation of this incontestable unity. Such a body is, nonetheless, and quite strangely, a signification above all (or in a simultaneity we had no idea of until now, until the world into which we enter arrives with us, borne by this magic lantern), a signification rather than an anatomical reflection. These two things strike us: there is--and I don't know in what time--some meaning without signification, that is, without an operation of parts; what's projected and animated is not ourselves and yet we recognize ourselves in it (as if a strange desire for the extension of the human body as signification could act here, or begin to extinguish itself on simulations of objects felt as a supreme simulation of ourselves: what wasn't born in us can live here). Finally, without shame, we see men, that is, men who for the first time appear as the spectacle of our blank shamelessness. A species, for the first time, dedicated to the possible, unlimited and infinitely repeatable spectacle that breathes within us (and that even becomes our inextinguishable need and thirst). Thus, for the first time, and for a final moment, we see what remains of the vanished world: we see complete men and yet remain entirely innocent of the spectacle.

These men are infinite; they're constrained by the destiny represented by a history they will never cross; they are, all the same, repeatable; they cannot live easily in this universe except through its mobile objects--as if their light

could be our definition and as if, within us, in a new consciousness, their very scales and proportions could change as dimensions of our visible world. These men are there because of our own obstinacy and in order to repeat that which so improbably attaches us to everything else, the phantom link that we experience in the cinema: "I would never have imagined that a meaning could be an entire body, that is, the instantaneous disappearance of what attaches me to it."

But why do we find the words "guilty," "criminal," or "sin" attached to this spectacle? Crime isn't the act of perpetrating extortions in the world. It designates a man tied by signs to the limits of his universe, and this man, guilty even before infringing any laws, is guilty because he reveals himself as a subject in this universe, and because within him there is the consciousness of this world without freedom to which he himself is the link.

And yet this world has already been seen by, and perhaps captured by, what we can imagine in hindsight to be a body infinitely larger than our own (and not just because the eye that momentarily projects images of it is like a lighthouse); a bigger body, unvaryingly situated behind our own, behind our heads, there where a plate of photosensitive cells, such as prehistoric animals had, is covered by bone. Thus--and I can hardly imagine it--it's when this giant leans across a white screen that we can see these microscopic beings stirring, even though their dimensions exceed our own bodies. And so we immediately arrive at this giant anatomy, at this body that we can't inhabit with our own.

Nevertheless, this is what being at the cinema is: perhaps less a question of forgetting a body in whose image we no longer walk, and as if, because of the retreat of the clear images that it can't fix, its own weight had disappeared. We're caught between this giant we sometimes have to imagine or assume, and what his eye is continually filming from behind; the first man (the first meaning: it would be an illusion

to try to separate them--sense cannot be classified; it belongs to states of the body that are successive, hinged and incomplete), this first man is only inchoate to the extent that the world doesn't happen within him and he becomes the transition of a unity of forms and sequences against his will and that he didn't dream up; the body that moves on the screen remains the necessary passage of the only world from which he can never be turned away.

I don't think that we're seated in Plato's cave; we are, for an unthinkable eternity, suspended between a giant body and the object of its gaze. So I am, not seated, but suspended beneath a sheaf of light. This sheaf is animated. The easy anteriority of its movement in the animation of the film's objects is visible as a scissor effect, or as if the rays hit upon legs, and from time to time crossed them, uncrossed them.

I can't imagine how Kafka managed to write down (January 9th, 1920), nor what incomplete machine--essentially incomplete but all the more active in filling the part of the visible of which it has been deprived--could finally describe that impalpable relation, that strange accomplishment of the visible world whose perception is nonetheless forbidden it, and for which it is continually an open wound, or a blind spot: "A segment has been cut out of the back of his head. The sun, and the whole world with it, peep in. It makes him nervous, it distracts him from his work, and moreover it irritates him that just he should be the one debarred from the spectacle."¹⁰

I don't know either, in the confrontation of gaze and body which constitutes a spectacle, how the spectator sees in its movement, its distance, its disappearance, this body from which he is separated, any body that is destined only for action, and allows nonetheless, not so much its image but its former centre of gravity to stay with the spectator, the centre that was needed for his immobility prior to the action and for his solitude prior to the confrontation. By means of this lost centre of gravity,

this body acting at a distance from us, this same being animated by light leaves the spectator with a nostalgia for a past existence. It doesn't leave its image; it allows the floating or sprouting inside of ourselves of this vague point by which we can always resemble a silent man, an immobile man. And so infects us with all its sleep, occurring within us.

"Film adds the anxiety of movement to objects..." And so, does it actually invent movement? These men, women, beasts and monsters walk in vain across the whiteness of the screen: they can't quite compose the movements that we repeat and by which we imitate nature--that is, essential weightlessness. Just as the street-scenes filmed in the world's cities around 1914 would expose the strangeness or the successive positions of someone walking (and that recomposed movement, the image's deceleration in bodies, the strange formal agitation of phantom limbs, helped in the construction of artificial limbs for those disabled in the war); in the same way it's necessary for these bodies to have sensations as whole bodies. Sensations, grief and fear, are like desires manufactured in a bundling up of the world just as we experience in the cinema a sort of indifference in the material of a shot: that operation isn't a selection of details--it makes man's fragments belong to the world of objects and it's primarily the world of objects caught in detail which must generate emotions. That world, given over to complex perceptions, can thus never be caught purely in contemplation. So these affects, born of the new and incessant disproportions of images of the world, must be what supports the trick of cinematic motion.

Some of Faulkner's novels invent the cinema in the same way--not its movement, but a sort of mobility of frame that breaks up narrative time or defines people within moving frames; we don't see everything there because the imaginary world is the one that least allows images to rest, and it dictates that they should be trapped not in their articulations but in their definition as a series of ruptures. Such

images simply reveal that they come from a world that's initially invisible. They attach themselves to no past or nor to any possible perception; they replace it, that is, they begin to substitute for the world this improbable witness to an invisible world.

Isn't it the same as the way the tattooed body of the potter Genjuro, in Mizoguchi's Ugetsu Monogatari, is thrown before your eyes? It's an astonishing image, but at the same time it doesn't really surprise us any longer; we've been expecting it for a while--not as an effect, not as an image, but as a truth. Perhaps we'd been expecting to see our own body, thrown to the ground, impossibly covered with ideograms and becoming for us (for me) totally written, indefinite in its anatomy, offered up to its own dermal reading, to its own closed and unfathomable eyes: devoted, then, to another hell, and making every other phantom of our desires retreat across this ink-burn.

Singly, [our thoughts] are every one a Representation or Apparence, of some quality, or other Accident of a body without us; which is commonly called an Object...And this seeming or fancy, is that which men call Sense; and consisteth, as to the Eye, in a Light, or Colour figured (Et quantum ad Oculum, Lumen dicitur vel Color)...

We still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. And this is it, the Latines call Imagination, from the image made in seeing....But the Greeks call it Fancy, which signifies apparence, and is as proper to one sense, as to another.

IMAGINATION therefore is nothing but decaying sense; and is found in men, and many other living Creatures, as well sleeping, as waking (Sensio deficiens, sive Phantasma dilutum et evanidum: a sensation in the process of being effaced--that is, an impoverished imagination, without consistence).

--Hobbes, Leviathan

The Wheel

In Dreyer's film, Vampyr, a mill wheel, flour, the vampire pressed against a wall, this powder falling over him: that--and the hope that he will be swallowed up--constitutes our anticipation of time, a paradoxical suspension which is already an end in this film, the fine powder which paints this man in black and white inside a barred cage (and why can't the flour flow through the bars?--it's as if this were also an aquarium or as if the bars let only air pass through). The mill's cogs and pulleys here are like a machinery of time whose movements produce the disappearance of a body beneath the dust.

But there is, like the cut and floating meat in a Bunuel film, a slowness that is not in the film itself, not in us. Which is not provoked, either, by the brusque animation of a disturbed tableau vivant--and the latter appears as such in a slight movement of disturbance because its immobility might have been the fragility of its recall already caught beneath our eyes: so it was, too, an immobile consciousness. A quality of time, then, remained over all of this like a slight suspicion. And indeed this is where suspicion first arose, reaching these universes by indices, or by marks fallen like alien bodies within those same universes. So they don't begin by figuring something. And it's exactly this that worries us: we never know if they're going to finally die off, or

whether they're caught here as a figure of eternity--because, as opposed to the bodies that appear on screen, these bodies are primarily unrepeatable. Thus the wheels and the flour in Vampyr: we can see the shadow of the machinery at work. (And I didn't know, being so young and not even knowing my way around a town, that we could already cross continents--what were these languages, these landscapes and all these people?)

There are races shut up inside of images (fixed as the movement and passage of the images), as if the rotation of the reel's very pivot achieved linear representation for a moment through the establishment of the time of an action: at least, it's almost a linear representation--as if forever escaping from his cage, a squirrel was unravelling beneath his nibbling and galloping paws the very speed that keeps his silhouette almost still, arrested in the phases of its movement in order to show us the same animated image of pulsating rays added to and superimposed upon the squirrel's image; almost as if the frenetic race against time in this imprisonment (in which the animal's image occasionally seems to be sketched inside the wheel) were finally able to produce its own mad and immobile race, along with the invisible motor that makes the cage turn the wrong way--like the illusion of a stroboscopic disc; nothing more than the image of this cage as it turns or describes the phases (immediately imagined as successive spasms) of an animal tiring itself out against time.

Thus we have, before our very eyes, in a fatal deceleration, the death of Dreyer's vampire; he dies as the motor effect of several images of time, of time's mechanisms and matter--its imagination.

Just like the filmed image of a Roman chariot, or a carriage, driven full-tilt, the driver glued to the reins, the foaming horses stamping and hammering at the ground, the arena's sand, the pavements of Rome and their broad paving; just as these show us, at the height of the race's thunder, the impossible image of a wheel, its spokes, the slow oscillation or swaying of its shining segments which, as on a polished disc, sweep to and fro across the circumference of the wheel, followed by the striking,

the movement, almost the collapse of the spikes which suddenly begin to turn in a direction opposite to the movement which carries the wheel, making the chariot disappear before us, while, up ahead, the horses keep on foaming, galloping in the wind, kicking up dust. For a fraction of a second the image of movement, as if it were still to be added to the speed, is no more than an oscillation, a sort of hesitation superimposed upon the image of this pendular motion (as if, then, the weights were upsetting the movement but not the speed attached to some fixed point between our eyes). And by this slight bloating of the stroboscopic effect, movement is detached from speed--because images can perhaps retain no more than the analysis of the horse's slowest movements, or the charioteer's, since they have no center and cannot annul themselves in an acceleration around an immobile axle as it tries to describe some sort of circumference. Through this movement, before our eyes, like the crossing of the threshold beyond which movements simply record the phases and positions of a body, speed comes away from movement (like a wheel coming off behind) and in slow motion cradles this lightly striated spherical body of light. A little as if this round mirror appeared to be immobilized in the midst of its motion (doubtless because that motion doesn't destroy its own image, but in fact stabilizes it) because in this single instant it could be regulated by the rotation of a sun, just as flat, turning opposite it.

In the same way as this image of a body that has escaped from movement and which can be perceived only at high speed, producing another illusion of the registration of speed, in almost the same way Dreyer's vampire expires before our eyes, caught simultaneously in the machinery's movement, in a shower of white powder (like the body of an insect falling within the sand of an hourglass), and in the silhouette of a squirrel running madly inside its cage. He dies right in the midst of this machinery, like a hand falling off a clock-face. He dies because time suddenly begins to count him and makes him die in slow motion.

So it is enough (is this the same illusion as that of the wheel representing speed of movement only as the immobility or hesitation of rotation reversing its registration, like a halting of planetary motion, pointing out, amongst all those harassed bodies running to their deaths, the only geometric figure that can resist the illusion of movement which is also like an eye--the eye of a hurricane or a sandstorm--watching us in a primordial silence?), enough, then, that time should count a single body which immediately becomes unable to represent time; time encloses it in the machinery so that it can die.

It's almost as if the body of the vampire were sticking to the guts of time and its markings. His body becomes shining oil in a clockwork (as the wheel suddenly turns in the opposite direction to the movement it carries).

(The same wheel on which movement became tired and fixed, the same wheel it deserted, appearing to us as a genuinely mysterious object that only the cinema could show, because it's here that we find this enigma: that speed should be held immobile in front of us, that we should understand time, certain as we were that in a scene such as this the stroboscopic disc was the only thing to be looked at.)

Here, then, is a mill with its wheel turning inside. I can't see the whole house, half of which is planted in the water; but on one wall there is an arrangement of paddles splashing into the water, diverting it, as if it were there that the machine's real secret lay; lifting up the watercourse into the building--and I can't see the splashing, the foam beneath the wooden planks, or the transparent cream that swims and twists along the stones (this boat of cemented stone, wet and still, allowing all the water to flow through in a sort of helix and filter into it as it changes into light, into grains, into a dust that's like the gathering of thousands of seconds into a swarm of buzzing insects, or like the deposit of the white powder in a series of breaths and jolts which release the successive layers).

As if the rays of light, from along which tons of very light dust arose (dust that they could touch, engender, or set spinning at incalculable speed, both slow and precipitous--the mass heavy. the individual grains madly propelled), as if these grains had been given their head and turned one by one, indefinitely, in their peculiar disorder, this descent of a powdery sheaf, thin as a leaf or thick as a column, in a sort of capricious motion, a change in the geometric destination of the grains that compose it, changing brusquely from a superficial ghost to a deep hallucination--passing across huge trees and piles of leaves, the sun's rays light up a forest and the silhouettes of the two young people run silently through the leaves; as they run the young man leads the girl, who is dressed in a white gown They've just been running through half-shadow on a lawn, moving away from the front of a chateau before coming to the forest edge. At first we could see only the vampire's shadow running towards the mill; as soon as he entered we saw the motionless wheels, the shadow of the spokes, a chain and the indented wheels. The two young people were running across the grass, away from the house. Someone else enters the mill and sets the wheels in motion. The vampire enters the cage and the door shuts (he's behind a grid, shot through panels that suddenly become the image of a cage). Then the wheels turn and white powder falls and flows, at first unidentifiable (it's perhaps the simple product, like a talcum powder, of the use of this clockwork motion that we are watching). The two young people are on a boat for a moment, escaping by water; the fleeing motion begins, footsteps, running, are slowed down in the movement of the paddles as their arms have to move the oars in the same manner as the gears sift out a flow of powder, as the paddles pull upon the water while the black shadow draws in flour, as here and there all those fleeing movements begin to pull upon the same matter--time--and the end of the flight becomes already and everywhere the same thickening of every second of time. The gears crash on, like rounded teeth; the flour begins to mount the vampire's silhouette (he waves his arms as if to protect himself from a million white flies). The

boat reaches the bank; the couple walk in the forest as the rays of sunlight fall with their dancing dust--so they move in an atmosphere that is both somber and light. The flour falls thicker and thicker, its continual descent pursued by a closing in of the frame which seems to want to follow up on the final perception of disappearing detail. The man is swallowed up. For the first time the image of the cage is complete, a hand sticking out of the flour. Two characters walk among the trees, crossing planes of light; the light continues to range and vibrate in the forest with no object; bodies pass across it, walking, reaching the slow winking of the light. There's nothing behind them now; they evacuate (after the halting of the machine with the tumble of the last grain, the stilling of the hand), they evacuate or set in motion the remnants of time that cause them to advance through this forest without producing any action, despite the wheels that are now still. (Or because a remnant of time that no action can cover remains there, exhausted, among the trees, in a chiaroscuro, in a cloud of leaves.)

Gigantic motion grinds the vampire down and in a backward movement reduces his eternity to a powder and deposits this powder over the action, this powder and its musical accompaniment, eternalizing the youngsters lost in a wood; the movement of the inordinate effect that has to begin this sort of reversal of time is first of all photographed through the immobility of the huge clockwork. So it's not an action that sets it in motion and pushes those relentless teeth against one another--less than that, it's a cause, the smallest cause; it's the scale of movement, represented by a tiny wheel--a childish wheel and the only piece for which we could have the key without knowing, before it dragged in these gigantic footsteps treading upon whiteness, without knowing that such a key opened up an orifice in time: this white flow, quite simply. For a moment the white head of the aged Liszt is superimposed upon it: one of the vampires comes searching for a young girl who had fled from the house and now sits in the dark on a stone bench in the park. For a moment he stands behind her, and then he is bounding away like an animal, leaving her collapsed upon

the bench. He flees, jumping like a kangaroo with the powdered wig of Liszt in his old age.

As if all these races, progressively piling up before our eyes, could produce nothing but dust, even managing to lift it up into this white abattoir, this whitewashed ward, inhabited only by wheels, a slight noise and a growing old.

As if all the action had already been relieved by a movement, running in all directions, using up waiting-time, and allowing only a little pile of powder to build up in the midst of these geared-down movements.

And that assault, projected as a white coating, by such a wearing down of marble, causes the falling away of all the years to the moment when the world was hidden beneath a crust of snow. And the silhouette slowly stifling in the flour arouses in us (like the image of a cooked insect found in a loaf of bread) an inexplicable relief at seeing this body simply disappear without the shadow of an actual murder. This body, or this alien role, and like the shadow which, without emerging from our insides, reveals in this swallowing up of the flour, that it's separate from us and was attached only to a sort of exteriority of time--since, precisely, the role dies here as a body and the the body disappears (in the slow motion of all the mill wheels), not from the movement which crushes it, but from that which, through these gears and chains, simply accompanies its disappearance--as if this death, due only to an excess of whiteness and the consumption of light, were a simultaneous moment in the action of the machine, or the clock in a theatre, which like the punishment of the wheel can represent time in a single death.

Because this role dies as a body in the slow blanching of the image, and because this falling pallor (as the return of the Roman god Palor was the only colour of an affect) also constitutes our whole relief at being present at this drawn-out burial and our relief at the disappearance of the very body of fear.

So a child is seated within us watching the wheels all go round, quicker and quicker, and watching the movements begin, the smallest first--because that's what he understands and this empty rotation concerns just a body caught in the gears across a jet of flour. It seemed that this rain, this arc, and the body tortured at a distance by the gnashing of wheels--the smallest of them already grinding the flour--it seemed that all of that was building upon these images a whole universe of causes, because at first nothing told him that this white rain was flour, chalk, or snow, rather than the natural corrosion, a sort of leukemia, of the vampire imprisoned in the cage with the noise of the wheels. As if this death had been carried off and relieved from the unity of isolated enigmatic effects representing only the powdering of death.

So it's not death here, nor quite the end of its deferral, but the incredible disappearance of a body within the image. As this child, judge and jury to the world, had sat down again, at first not understanding the flour, the accident or the cause, all figured as a race.

Yet every death in the cinema relieves something within of us (and indifferently, whatever is at stake) by the way the image mounts up and reaches this sublime completion. An act we never committed is added to our consciousness of a cause that we could have retained without ever admitting it, without ever making it act. This might be of the same order as when a stone is rolled away, as when a window opens upon the image: the act doesn't simply relieve us, and so it doesn't literally liberate the uncertainty of death that roves within us; nor does it assure our survival (as if by means of this murder we could still remain in the images from which a body has been detached without our help). Perhaps it just gives a figure to a period of waiting that had previously had no object?

NOTES

¹ Raul Ruiz is a Chilean filmmaker, exiled in France in since 1974. His most notable films are perhaps Dialogues of Exile (1974), The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting (1978), The Three Crowns of the Sailor (1982), and City of Pirates (1983). He has also exhibited a museum installation, Expulsion of the Moors (1989), in Europe and the United States. His stage and film productions of Life is a Dream (1986) used Schefer's originals translation from Calderon.

² Bit in Ca Cinema against Godard. Schefer's account is often reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze's influential work, published in English as Cineeam 1 and Cinema 2 (U. Minnesota Press, 198 and 198 respectively). See my Clint Eastwood.

³ See Tom Conley's thoughtful review of L'Homme ordinaire..., "Reading Ordinary Viewing," in Diacritics 15 (Spring 1985), 4-14. Conley discusses particularly the role of the freaks and monsters of the cinema.

⁴ note on gender of the pronouns.

⁵ From "Carl Dreyer," in Interviews with Film Directors (ed. A. Sarris). New York: Bobbs-Merrill (1967), 112-113. Falconetti is the stage actress whom Dreyer cast as the heroine of his Passion of Joan of Arc (1928).

⁶ Bichat is a 19th century medical scientist and author of, Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort; among other things the book minutely records the experience of death. Schefer has written an article on Bichat: "Remarques sur un usage du corps," L'Ecrit du temps, 8/9 (19), 67-83

⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, Eureka: A Prose Poem, ed. R. Benton. Hartford: Transcendental Books (1973): "attraction and repulsion. The former is the body; the latter the soul: the one is material; the other spiritual, principle of the Universe.....attraction and repulsion are the sole properties through which we perceive the Universe" (37).

⁸ JLS Cahiers du Cinema (1979b),

⁹ L'Invention du corps chrétien,

¹⁰ The Diaries of Franz Kafka (ed. M.Brod). New York: Schocken (1949),192-3.