

**Art and Reflexivity in post-1960 European Cinema**

**Daniel Yacavone**

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This thesis explores the use and influence of painting in post-1960 European cinema as it relates to a host of reflexive practices which, through either their adoption or rejection, help to define 'modernist' film. The formal and thematic presence of painting in the films of key European *auteurs* (Jean-Luc Godard, Andrei Tarkovsky, Peter Greenaway, Raul Ruiz, Jacques Rivette, and Werner Herzog, among others) is analysed with reference to a number of theoretical perspectives, including, but not limited to, those provided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of art and perception, André Bazin's realist film theory, and Clement Greenberg's neo-formalist art theory.

Within a post-1960 context, a basic distinction is made between cinematically reflexive and *a-reflexive* (or 'transparent') films, as the products of what is defined as *seeing-with cinema* filmmaking and *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking. Among the films of each general type that substantially incorporate painting (in the form of the representation of individual works and/or as a subject matter), an analogy is drawn between their dominant reflexive or *a-reflexive* tendencies and, firstly, the choice of art works or styles cited, and secondly, the differing ways in which this art is presented on screen. This analogy is tested via an in-depth study of art as it appears in the prototypically reflexive films of Jean-Luc Godard -- as well as the multi-faceted relations between Godard's mid-to-late 1960s cinema and the American Pop art painting of Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist -- followed by an analysis of painting in Andrei Tarkovsky's cinema, as its *a-reflexive* stylistic counter-point.

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This thesis has been composed by myself and is entirely my own work.

Daniel Yacavone

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## Introduction

According to one widely held theory, the course of painting in the twentieth century was set in the nineteenth, with the invention of still photography.<sup>1</sup> Or, more precisely, the course was set with photography's transition from a scientific and artistic curiosity to *the* dominant form of visual representation. The inherent realism of photography forever freed painting from the burden of *mimesis*, paving the way for visual abstraction in its many manifestations. Yet rather than turning away from the newer medium, throughout the late nineteenth and most of the twentieth century (even up to the present day) painting is marked by a profound fascination with photography's formal and phenomenological properties. Such interest is apparent from the impressionists' radical innovations in composition, viewpoint, and the use of the frame, all clearly influenced by the 'instantaneous' photograph,<sup>2</sup> up to and including the photo-realist (or 'hyper-realist') painting of the 1960s and 70's. At the same time, photography as a fine art could not, and did not, ignore the revolutionary developments which swept modern painting one after another.

In the midst of this on-going dialectic between painting and photography, cinema was a third, ubiquitous presence: a photography based medium with the expressive potential of the traditional visual arts. The question may be asked, "To what extent was there a similarly fluid dynamic of influence and exchange between film and painting over the course of the last century, with artists in one medium formally and thematically engaging with the other in innovative and challenging ways?" Certainly expressionism and Surrealism, movements in the visual arts that overlapped with cinema for a brief but wondrously inventive period in the 1920s, offer ample evidence of this, as has long been recognized. Yet perhaps it is only recently, with the advantage of greater hindsight, and also at a time when technological developments have the

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<sup>1</sup> Along with many art historians and theorists, film theorist André Bazin subscribed to this view and used it to buttress his realist theory of cinema. See Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." In *What is Cinema? Vol. I*. Translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> See Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican (Penguin) Books, 1974, 172-176.

*potential*, at least, to fundamentally change filmmaking and film viewing (roughly one hundred years after photographic images began to move), that this question can be addressed with more confidence – particularly as pertains to relations between the visual arts and post avant-garde cinema. Such may well explain the increasing interest in recent years in historical and aesthetic relations between film and painting, still a relatively uncharted territory in film studies and art history/theory.

The subject of this thesis is, necessarily, more narrowly focused within this general problematic. It centers on the on-screen meeting between cinema and painting in a post-1960, predominantly European context. The formal and thematic incorporation of art into a film's represented world is explored in relation to reflexive, or self-reflexive, cinematic practices. As existing comparative studies of film and the visual arts, interdisciplinary by nature, are notably diverse and eclectic in aims and methodology, I will first briefly set out the subject and structure of the following study, as well as its inspirations and methodology.

Save for passing references, I confine myself to looking at narrative 'art cinema' rather than post-1960 abstract/neo-avant-garde/experimental film – that huge constellation of filmmaking practice where the use and influence of painting has often been more literal or direct, and hence more widely studied. Although in an experimental, non-narrative context, the cinematic incorporation of traditional art images and practices often has a reflexive dimension, as in Stan Brakhage's hand painted films, for example, my arguments concerning the reflexive role(s) of art in film are most applicable to either fictional narrative films, or to documentary films which incorporate fictional elements. As will be discussed, it is here that tensions between form and content, style and subject, allow for representational and expressive gaps, or dissonances, which painting and the traditional arts often fill. It is for this reason, for example, that I devote more attention to Jean-Luc Godard's narrative cinema from the 1960s (*Vivre sa vie*, *Pierrot le fou*) and the 1980s (*Passion*), within which the limits of narrative are tested partly through the representation of painting, than on his monumental *Histoire(s) du cinéma* series, which works, at least on its most fascinating

level, primarily along non-narrative or associational lines.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the role of painting in Godard's seminal work of film/video art, which I do discuss briefly, could be the subject of an extensive study in its own right.

Just as this thesis does not engage with all the ways in which art on film has or could be theorized, it is not intended as a survey of all the post-1960 European films which reference or incorporate painting in interesting ways. Instead, I have chosen to discuss certain films primarily on the basis of how they relate to the wider theoretical framework of the study, as centered on cinematic reflexivity. These films fall into two general, often overlapping categories: those within which paintings and drawings, either famous or 'unknown,' are significantly represented or referenced, and those within which painting is a main subject. My focus necessarily excludes many interesting examples of the use of art in film which takes more limited form, for example Alain Resnais's incorporation of actual Georges Braque paintings (as opposed to reproductions) on the stylized studio set of *Mélo*. Likewise, I do not discuss the role of painting as a function of art or set design as such, which includes painted backdrops utilized to great effect by a number of post-1960 European filmmakers, including, again, Resnais, in films like *Providence* and *Smoking/No Smoking*.<sup>4</sup>

The films that I examine range from those that have been frequently analysed, either in general, or in reference to their use of art specifically, such as Godard's *Pierrot le fou* and *Passion* and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*, to those that have received considerably less scholarly attention, such as Raul Ruiz's *The*

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<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth analysis of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* see Godard's and Youssef Ishaghpour's *Cinema: the Archeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*. Translated by John Howe. New York: Berg, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Also notable by its absence here is East Asian cinema and its multi-faceted interaction with the traditional visual arts. As a number of noted scholars on Asian cinema, including Donald Richie, have suggested, owing to how film developed out of the traditional arts in Japan, for example, cinema and painting/printmaking are densely interwoven in numerous historical and cultural ways. This closeness means that the imposition on Asian cinema of a theoretical framework concerning the relation between film and painting developed in the context of the Western art tradition would risk profound misunderstanding. This does not mean, however, that in a more tangential fashion the reflexive 'turn' in post-1960 European cinema that I discuss has not also had an influence on Asian cinema, both in general and as it bears on the representation of art in film. For an analysis of painting and East Asian cinema from a variety of perspectives see the essays (including Richie's "The Influence of Traditional Aesthetics on the Japanese Film") in *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts in the Cinema of China and Japan*, edited by Linda C. Erlich and David Desser. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000.

*Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*, Peter Greenaway's *A Walk Through H*, and Victor Erice's *The Quince Tree Sun*.

This thesis is a result of research in film studies, art history/theory, and philosophy. It has been inspired, or influenced, by various sources in each of these disciplines. One inspiration was an exhibition held in 1996 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, entitled "Art and Film since 1945," accompanied by a published collection of photographs, stills, and critical essays.<sup>5</sup> The exhibition's sometimes unexpected juxtaposition of film and modern art, its post-war perspective (which I move up further, to 1960), and its interdisciplinary sensibility, all indirectly inform my project, the subtitle of which could be "a phenomenology of art on film."

A number of the concepts and aspects of the methodology of this study are drawn from the phenomenological tradition of aesthetics and the philosophy of art, in particular from the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Mikel Dufrenne. From this tradition I take the belief that it is only through a full engagement with the work of art, be it a painting or a film, its detailed description, and attention to the audience's direct, thoroughly *conscious* experience of it, that one is led to 'theory.' As Jean-Luc Godard says with reference to film criticism, "you have to first see what the film says in order to see what you can then say about it."<sup>6</sup> Although this study is built upon a theoretical foundation and makes use of a number of general classifications, I have tried to guard against 'plugging' individual films and paintings into a pre-conceived schema on the basis of a few features or aspects, without due consideration of others which may well work against broad characterizations. I also adopt phenomenology's focus on the 'world' of the work of art, a concept most fully articulated by Dufrenne in his ambitious *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique (Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience)*.<sup>7</sup> This focus ensures that equal weight is given to aspects of both form and

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<sup>5</sup> See Kerry Brougher ed., *Art and Film Since 1945: Hall of Mirrors*. Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art and Monacelli Press, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Lotz, Constance ed. *Jean-Luc Godard: The Future(s) of Film, Three Interviews 2000/01*. Translated by John O'Toole. Bern: Verlag Gachnang and Springer, 2002, 16.

<sup>7</sup> See Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. Translated by Edward S Casey. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

content/representation in the analysis of art works, cognizant of the fact that in our direct experience of paintings or films the two are never divorced in the way that they can be upon later reflection (something particularly true of cinema as a photography based medium rooted in the 'iconic' sign.) As noted film theorist and historian Dudley Andrew suggests, as a general way of thinking about art, phenomenology offers a holistic, anti-reductionist approach, rooted in description and refusing to strongly divorce *how* something is represented in an art work from *what* is represented.<sup>8</sup> I share Andrew's belief that phenomenology - in its various and diverse manifestations - has much to contribute to contemporary film theory and criticism in its 'post-structuralist,' 'post-semiotic' mode. Merleau-Ponty's short published lecture on cinema, seen in the context of his theories of painting and the phenomenology of perception, which I discuss as it pertains to cinematic reflexivity, is highly suggestive in this respect and ripe for re-evaluation. Outside of phenomenology, my discussion of reflexivity in film and painting is also indebted to Clement Greenberg's neo-formalist art theory and Arthur Danto's neo-Hegelian "end of art" thesis, both of which, in very different ways, put issues of reflexivity at the heart of 20<sup>th</sup> century art practice and theory.

Within a film studies context, John Orr's monographs on modern and contemporary cinema, in which theoretical considerations are balanced with close visual analysis and attention to the intricacies of film technique, is influential both on the content of this study and its argumentation.<sup>9</sup> I have tried to strike a similar balance between detailed visual/stylistic analysis of individual films and more general theory. Orr's arguments concerning reflexivity in modern and contemporary cinema, and his characterizations of "neo-modern" film and the cold-war "cinema of wonder," serve as reference points throughout.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Dudley Andrew, "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory." In *Movies and Methods Volume II: An Anthology*, edited by Bill Nichols. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985, 625-632, and *The Major Film Theories*. London: Oxford University Press, 1976, 242-253.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, John Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, Edinburgh: EUP, 1998, and *The Art and Politics of Film*. Edinburgh: EUP, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 1; 53.

In an English-language context, the only sustained, wide-ranging study that addresses the use and influence of painting in modern narrative cinema is Angela Dalle Vache's *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film*. Dalle Vache, an art historian, argues that a film's incorporation of painting reveals the filmmaker's "attitude towards it" as an art form. Determining this implicit view of painting in the films she discusses is central to her project of understanding what cinema can "teach art history about itself."<sup>11</sup> Overall, I approach the subject from the reverse perspective, that is, one primarily interested in how the incorporation of painting in film can potentially shed light on the nature of *cinema* as an art form. By locating the formal and thematic representation of painting in film within the wider context of cinematic reflexivity, the present study is in a sense wider in scope and more synthetic in nature than Dalle Vache's. Acknowledging the importance of Dalle Vache's work in this still neglected corner of contemporary film theory, and the differences in scope and intention between it and my project, I take issue with some of her analysis of specific aspects of two films which we both discuss, Godard's *Pierrot le fou* and Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*. That said, I endorse the general contrast Dalle Vache draws between the films of Godard and Tarkovsky, with respect to their use of painting and their overall visual style. And it is these directors whose films I devote most space to analyzing, if not always for the same reasons as Dalle Vache.

It is necessary at the outset to make a brief point about reflexivity in film, and how it has been traditionally theorized. Most discussions of cinematic reflexivity draw heavily - sometimes almost exclusively - on concepts/models formulated in the context of literary theory and the study of discursive narrative, more broadly, for example Gérard Genette's classification of the different reflexive modes of a text ("intertextuality," "hypertextuality," etc.).<sup>12</sup> These have been widely absorbed into film theory, as have the theories of the Russian formalist critics. The latter are a substantial influence on David Bordwell's narratology of cinema, for example, and also colour his

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<sup>11</sup> Dalle Vache, Angela. *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996, 2.

<sup>12</sup> See Gérard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

treatment of reflexivity. Similarly, Robert Stam theorizes reflexivity in film against the wider backdrop of reflexive literary practices stretching back to Cervantes.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes these literary models are applied to cinema with a significant effort to adapt them to the visual art of film (as in the case of Bordwell and Stam), and sometimes not. No doubt these text/narrative based approaches have their merits and interest. But it is also true that they potentially leave out much concerning the nature and experience of a reflexive film. At any rate, there seems to be plenty of room for an exploration of the issues from a more *a-priori* visual, or imagistic, standpoint; one which may, for instance, involve comparisons between the reflexive dimension of a film image and a painting.<sup>14</sup> In following this path, I also conceive of reflexivity in a broader, less strictly ideological sense than that which has been adopted by some film theorists, for whom a reflexive aesthetic is necessarily identical with an ethico-political obligation to lay bare, in a Brechtian fashion, cinema's own illusion-making capacity in the cause of beating back the reactionary threat of realism and 'escapism' (where the two are often uncritically equated). Instead, I argue that reflexivity and a 'realist' aesthetic, in which aspects of the fictional world of a film are reinforced rather than undermined, while quite often at odds, are not *necessarily* incompatible.

Given the central place that it occupies in this thesis, my first chapter, "Art on Film," addresses the concept of reflexivity with respect to film and painting both separately and together. This lays the groundwork for a consideration of reflexivity as it pertains to the cinematic representation of art, from a number of different stylistic and theoretical perspectives. The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, "Reflexivity, Transparency and the Camera Eye," I propose a basic distinction between reflexive *seeing-with cinema* filmmaking and a-reflexive *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking. It should be stressed at the outset that this distinction, while more than provisional, is meant to inaugurate discussion and debate rather than resolve it. In this respect it is similar to Isaiah Berlin's famous division of writers and philosophers into "hedgehogs"

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<sup>13</sup> See Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: from Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> It is for these reasons that I largely refrain from the use of the term "inter-textuality" to describe the presence of paintings (or their images) within films.

and “foxes.” Berlin called this distinction a “starting point for genuine investigation,” offering “a point of view from which to look and compare.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* distinction articulated in this thesis, is intended above all as a means of shedding new light on familiar subjects and issues, allowing them to be considered from an alternative vantage point.

After introducing this distinction, I go on to suggest an analogy concerning films of each type and the ways in which they have incorporated painting as a function of visual style and thematic subject, as well as the choice of art works represented or referenced. Following this is a wider discussion of how reflexivity in film and painting have been differently theorized in the writings on art and film of Merleau-Ponty, Arthur Danto and, to a lesser extent, Clement Greenberg. I have chosen to focus on the relevant writings of these three theorists and philosophers on the basis of the historical situation of their critical or theoretical projects in relation to key developments in mid to late twentieth century art and cinema and, with respect to Merleau-Ponty and Danto, their willingness to discuss film in the wider context of twentieth century art.

Turning from theory to practice, the second part is comprised of three sections that compare and contrast the work of seven filmmakers - of both the reflexive *seeing-with cinema* and the a-reflexive *seeing-through cinema* type - which incorporate painting in significant ways. Each of these sections, which, with the exception of the last, focus on specific films, is organized thematically, around a different issue or subject of relevance to ‘modernist’ reflexive cinema broadly defined. These are, firstly, films within which the representation of painting is paired with documentary techniques or sensibilities, either within a generally fictional context or one in which the line between fiction film and documentary is deliberately blurred (Greenaway’s *A Walk*

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<sup>15</sup> Berlin, Sir Isaiah. *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1953, 4. Berlin’s distinction is based on fragments written by the Greek poet Archilochus, in which he cryptically suggests that that foxes “know many things” whereas hedgehogs “know one big thing.” According to Berlin, Montaigne, Goethe, Shakespeare, Joyce, and reluctantly, Tolstoy, are “foxes,” pluralistically pursuing many different, and often contradictory or seemingly mutually exclusive, visions of the world in their works. Plato, Dante, Hegel and Dostoyevsky are “hedgehogs,” monistic-ally expressing or exploring one “single central vision” or “system,” in philosophical or fictional form (Berlin, 4).

*Through H*, Ruiz's *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*); secondly, films which depict the life and work of painters, either actual artists or fictitious ones (Erice's *Quince Tree Sun*, Rivette's *La belle noiseuse*, and Maurice Pialat's *Van Gogh*); and, lastly, two cinematic bodies of work, Wim Wenders's and Werner Herzog's, which prompt intriguing questions concerning how and why the 'painterly,' or art historical influence on cinema, has been both openly embraced and problematised.

Many of the issues that this group of films raises are then taken up again in the second and third chapters of the thesis, which together test the general arguments put forward in the first, through in-depth visual and thematic analysis of the films of two seminal post-1960 filmmakers, Jean-Luc Godard and Andrei Tarkovsky. The first of these traces the multi-dimensional presence of art in Godard's cinema, within which many of the aspects of reflexive film, and the cinematically reflexive use of painting, as introduced in the first chapter, are embodied. Imbedded within this largely chronological exploration of the varied functions of painting in Godard's cinema (as subject matter, as one part of a general 'collage of materials,' and as a reflexive metaphor) is an in-depth comparative analysis of Godard's mid-to-late sixties cinema and American Pop art painting, principally the works of Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist.

Godard's films serve as a prime example of the reflexive *seeing-with cinema* use of art, and it is one which is sharply counter-pointed by painting's a-reflexive, *seeing-through cinema* incorporation in Andrei Tarkovsky's cinema. I discuss painting as it appears in three of Tarkovsky's films - *Andrei Rublev*, *Mirror*, and *The Sacrifice* - primarily in relation to the articulations of time and subjectivity that are key aspects of Tarkovsky's visionary filmmaking. In the course of this analysis, I challenge the common interpretation of Tarkovsky's cinema which sees it as visually indebted to Russian icon painting *in opposition to* Western painting. I find this view unconvincing both on the evidence of the films and with respect to the director's own writings and stated intentions. I hold that the strong "icon" based interpretation, as well as the attempt to identify essentially painterly elements of Tarkovsky's *mise-en-scène* (whether associated with Western or Eastern art), leaves much out of the equation with

respect to Tarkovsky's unique, *seeing-through cinema* style. Of course in comparing the works of Godard and Tarkovsky one should not ignore the very different artistic environments within which each worked, or the divergent political, cultural and philosophical influences that inform their films. Although in keeping with the approach of this study I have concentrated mainly on close description and analysis of the represented worlds of the films I examine, and the specific cinematic techniques used to create them, I have also attempted to engage with these influences where they seem particularly significant.

Finally, on the other end of this *auteur*-centered investigation, I conclude with some summary remarks addressing how the phenomenological approach of this study, and the *seeing-with/seeing-through* cinema distinction it employs, have usefully framed its appraisal of art in film, and what each may have to contribute to film studies in a broader sense.

## Part I

### Art on Film

#### Chapter 1: Reflexivity, Transparency and the Camera Eye

##### I.1.1 Reflexivity as a Feature of post-1960 Cinema

On most accounts one of the defining features of modern and contemporary 'art' cinema is a pronounced self-awareness or self-consciousness. Often this is referred to as its reflexive or self-reflexive tendency. As applied to cinema, reflexivity is a rather nebulous term. For the purposes of this study I define it broadly as a film's visible concern (in form or content) with either its own cinematic aesthetic, its relation to other films or film genres, the wider nature of the film medium and/or its history, or any combination of these.

Although cinematic reflexivity is by no means an exclusively modern or European phenomena, there was a pronounced shift towards the reflexive, in a particularly modern form (the characteristics of which will be discussed in this and later chapters of the present study), within late-1950s/early-1960s European art-cinema. This movement was spearheaded by the French New Wave and a slew of revolutionary films including *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *Les quatre cent coups* (*The 400 Blows*, 1959), and *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960). As a loose cinematic movement, the French New Wave, more than any previous one, forwarded the idea that film art [itself] both could, and *should*, be a cinematic subject in its own right. The emphasis, in both theory and practice, on the filmmaker as *auteur* - the most important creative force behind a film, whose artistic 'worldview' is directly visible within it - no doubt gave impetus to this significant re-focusing on the nature of the film medium's capacity to reflect on itself, as did the film criticism background of many of the most innovative French New Wave figures. Of course what could be seen as the reflexive 'turn' in post-1960 cinema

was not brought about by the French New Wave directors alone. Parallel developments seemed to occur more or less simultaneously in the context of other European 'New Waves,' American independent cinema, and in the work of older, established filmmakers, such as Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Ingmar Bergman, whose careers stretched back to the 1940s and 1950s, but whose films took on a decidedly more reflexive or self-conscious dimension in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> For film theorist Christian Metz, Fellini's *8 1/2* (1963), which, together with Godard's *Le mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963) and Bergman's *Persona* (1966), is one of the three seminal works of reflexive European cinema, marks a decisive turning point in cinematic reflexivity, owing to its innovative approach to the "film within the film" structure, which, in one form or another, had been a popular one in cinema since at least the 1920s.<sup>17</sup> Metz argues that congruent with its "mirroring" motif, *8 1/2*, born out of Fellini's own creative crisis reflected in that of the filmmaker Guido's (Marcello Mastroianni), not only presents a film within a film, but that the film within the film is directly equated with *8 1/2* itself.<sup>18</sup> The difference that Metz calls attention to between Fellini's masterpiece and earlier reflexive cinema is analogous to one between paintings that represent other paintings within their compositions and those drawings of M.C. Escher and Saul Steinberg, where the pencil "drawing" the line, and even the artist himself, is thrust into the composition.<sup>19</sup>

Although I will concentrate on how these developments in film parallel those in the visual arts, there are a number of possible explanations as to why reflexivity was 'in the air' at this particular historical moment, pertaining to a wide variety of social, cultural and artistic realities intersecting with cinema. To single out just one of these factors in the field of literature, the combined widespread dissemination of the work of

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<sup>16</sup> There were, of course, analogous developments in Eastern European, Asian and South American cinema. For a general summary of this period and the social, cultural and economic factors which made it possible, see Peter Cowie, *Revolution!: The Explosion of World Cinema in the Sixties*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> For instance Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) and Vertov's *Man with A Movie Camera* (1929), both highly sophisticated films about film frequently cited as pioneering works of reflexive cinema.

<sup>18</sup> See Christian Metz, "Mirror Construction in Fellini's *8 1/2*." In *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema*. Translated by Michael Taylor. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

<sup>19</sup> Along with "paintings that show a second painting within" Metz also compares this to "those novels written about a novel" (Metz, 228).

Jorge-Luis Borges and the emergence of the *Nouveau roman* (with which many of the so-called 'Left-bank' directors like Alain Resnais and Chris Marker were directly or indirectly associated) licensed certain radical approaches to narrative which, continuing the assault launched earlier in the century by the high modernists, challenged the transparent, psychology-driven realism informing both the traditional novel and much classical cinema.<sup>20</sup> Many hallmarks of this literature, including circular and fragmentary narration, the conflation of fiction, philosophy, and criticism, and the emphasis on the reader's constructive interaction with the text, all loosely correspond to prominent features of post-1960 reflexive cinema, just as they parallel, or in some cases anticipate, trends in post-existentialist continental philosophy and literary theory. The twentieth century "renaissance" in "self-conscious literature" noted by Stam (who singles out the works of Borges, André Gide, Raymond Queneau and Vladimir Nabokov, among others) thus both directly and indirectly inspired a similar renewal in European cinema.<sup>21</sup>

The influence of the French New Wave and films like *8 ½* and *Persona* was - and still is - so pervasive in the realm of art cinema that even those post-1960 directors that either side-step overtly reflexive cinematic subjects and practices, or reject them outright, do so *consciously*. In this sense reflexivity can be said to define post-1960 art cinema almost without exception. Furthermore, one could argue with respect to cinema, as Arthur Danto does in relation to post-Pop art painting<sup>22</sup>, that once the genie of self-consciousness is out of the bottle, it can not be put back; reflexivity is a permanent part of the background against which all subsequent creative practice in a given artistic medium, and the reception of works by audience and critics, alike, takes place.

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, a formal and phenomenological distinction can be drawn between a film's "self-reflexivity," that is, its making direct or implicit reference to its own status as a film or to aspects of its

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<sup>20</sup> Of course, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras, pioneers of the *Nouveau roman*, were themselves screenwriters, and later, filmmakers.

<sup>21</sup> Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, 127.

<sup>22</sup> See Arthur Danto, "Moving Pictures," in *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 and "The Artworld," in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*, revised edition, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

represented world, and a more general “reflexivity,” whereby a film in some way invokes cinematic practice, theory, history or viewing, calling on the audience to draw on something, strictly-speaking, outside of it.<sup>23</sup> Both types of reflexivity frequently turn on the creation of a temporarily external vantage point within a film, one that experientially distances the viewer from aspects of its fictional world, as well as providing for irony in many instances. A good example is the opening sequence of Godard’s *Le mépris*, when Raoul Coutard, the film’s cinematographer, is shown filming Giorgia Moll (playing Francesca Vanini, the producer Prokosch’s secretary in the film) as she walks towards the front of the screen, parallel to his tracking camera, before the camera then swivels around to point directly out at the viewer. Here, two cameras, in two different imaginary spaces, one on the screen, within the represented world of the film, and the invisible camera-eye constituting it, face each other. This reflexive stand-off cues the voice over addressed to the audience, in which Godard quotes from André Bazin to the rhetorical effect that ‘what you will now see is a film about the process of making a film, a process itself called into question.’<sup>24</sup> A reflexive feature of a film may also operate more internally, generated in the context of its diegetic world, as when, also in *Le mépris*, Fritz Lang, playing himself as a film director, refers to “B.B.,” and, after a dramatic pause, adds that he is referring to Bertholt Brecht (one of Godard’s defining influences) rather than, as pregnantly implied, Bardot standing beside him.

As *Le mépris* demonstrates, some films, as well as individual sequences, may be both reflexive and self-reflexive, drawing attention to that which exists apart from the film’s fictional world and that which only comes into being through and within it (as is the case with *Persona* and *8 ½*). In other films, one type of reflexivity and its imaginative directionality - either projecting out into the world of the viewer, or drawing that world into itself - predominates. Moreover, it could be that when a film

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<sup>23</sup> Although self-reflexive features sometimes also require such extra-work knowledge.

<sup>24</sup> The translation of the actual quote is “Andre Bazin has said that a film gives us a world in accordance with our desires... *Le mépris* is the story of that world.” The first part of this quotation is actually not from Bazin but the French film critic Michel Mourlet. (See Douglas Smith’s “‘A World that Accords with our Desires ?’: Realism, Desire and Death in Andre Bazin’s film criticism.” In *Studies in French Cinema*, 4.2 (2004): 93-102.) A list of reflexive/self-reflexive references in *Le mépris* would form a whole catalogue. They range from direct citations of specific films, Godard’s own and others, to dramatization of events drawn from Godard’s and Karina’s private life.

refers to itself as a film, it is always simultaneously addressing the cluster of works and experiences constituting “CINÉMA” - as the blinking neon sign reads in a famous insert shot in Godard’s typically reflexive *Pierrot le fou* (1965) - that is, filmmaking and film viewing in the broadest sense.

### I. 1.2 Painting on Film as a Reflexive Mode

Of course, as John Orr suggests, a reflexive film need not mirror or comment upon itself and Cinema directly.<sup>25</sup> Cinematic reflexivity can, and often does, operate at a figurative remove, as it were, through the presentation of other representational media, including more traditional (or non-mechanical) art forms, particularly those with a pronounced visual and spatial dimension, such as painting and architecture. Painting, especially, being a two-dimensional medium bound-up with the history of cinema in so many different ways, has been a very attractive subject and springboard for the reflexive filmmaker. In this sense, rather than a sub-genre, at the periphery of modern and contemporary film practice, films that substantially reference painting or take it as an ostensible subject, operate at the very center of dynamics which serve to differentiate modern and contemporary film from the so-called ‘classical’ cinema. A film may present an idea of cinema and of itself as a film work through the reflexive vehicle, or mirror, of another art form, an idea defined comparatively, or in a dialectical manner. Certainly on the face of it there is as much, if not more reason, to believe that every film implies an aesthetic ‘theory,’ or pre-theory of cinema, than to hold, as Angela Dalle Vache does, that a film which makes use of painting entails a theory of painting.<sup>26</sup> Of course theory, in this context, means an aesthetic embodiment of a point of view, rather than a fully formed conceptual model: that is, more a matter of showing than saying.

Film is clearly privileged with respect to its capacity for direct engagement with other art forms. The properties of the medium allow for the camera eye to scrutinize a painting, move through an architectural space, or record a theatre/dance performance, in

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<sup>25</sup> See Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> See Dalle Vache, 2-12.

ways which have no obvious analog in painting and literature, for example. And this is not to mention the editing which allows all of these to be brought together into one experiential whole. Yet there is an ontological paradox here, one which has echoes in the realism/formalism debate in classical film theory. A realist, following André Bazin or Siegfried Kracauer, stressing the capacity of the cinema to represent objects in their physical concreteness, can rightly point to the fact that only a film can fully incorporate other arts into its phenomenal world in such a direct fashion. A painting can be “about” cinema, a piece of music can be “cinematic,” but only in a cinematic context can a painting or piece of music appear more or less as itself – an obvious yet significant fact. (As will be discussed, Bazin does, in fact, view the representation of paintings in films through the lens of his realist conception of the medium.) Yet a formalist could rightly counter that even on the basic level of the medium (bracketing-off any additional narrative contextualization), when a painting is represented on film, or even when an artistic style is visually quoted within a film’s *mise-en-scène*, the art work or style is never wholly present “as itself,” or as it is in the world outside of the film in which it appears. The fact of the actual painting’s loss of scale and full surface texture when its image is mechanically reproduced as a film image, as well as its unique “aura,” following Walter Benjamin, shows this clearly. A painting, or even a recognizable artistic style appearing on the screen, is always a highly mediated cinematic translation of the original, a pale shadow within a shadowy image.<sup>27</sup>

Each of these views contains elements of truth, and their divergence suggests a tension, or duality, which itself has become a subject of reflexive exploration on the part of a number of directors who substantially incorporate art into their films. Orr discusses how painting contributes to the reflexive cinema of “double vision.”<sup>28</sup> The “double-register” of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s cinema of poetry, resting on the volatile identification

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<sup>27</sup> The relation between a painting and its cinematic representation is a special one in other ways. It is much easier to disentangle a work of art from the film in which it appears or is recreated than, for instance, a fictional character. Rembrandt’s *Night Watch* has an independent life and reality outside of the film in which its image or re-creation appears (Godard’s *Passion*, for instance) in a way that a character (Jerzy, the film director in *Passion*) does not; the ontological status of the artwork’s representation in this respect is thus similar to that of an historical person or place.

<sup>28</sup> Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 130.

between the filmmaker's cinematic vision and a character's perception of his/her life-world, has a corollary in the double register of film and another representing medium, such as painting, with which it may interact, showcasing "the perennial tension between the means of representing and the objects represented."<sup>29</sup> But, as Orr rightly points out, "the other form cannot be a simple mirror of filmmaking, since both forms contribute to the finished image. Each form must have its practical autonomy, its special world and its special way of representing the world, or failing to."<sup>30</sup>

If a film's integration of painting can forward a particular view of cinema as a visual art, however complex or coherent, ambiguous or contradictory this may appear, then it follows that there are two significant aspects of this borrowing. The first is *selection*, in terms of which works or styles, out of all the possibilities, have been included and why, and secondly, *presentation*, as the 'how,' 'where,' and 'when' this art appears within a film's world.

In anticipation of the parallels I will be exploring, and keeping these background considerations in mind, there appear to be two contrasting, sometimes competing, types of post-classical, *auteur*-ist film worlds: the highly reflexive and the critically non-reflexive. The latter type predominantly lacks the reflexive dimension I have noted. These are films significantly aware of the reflexive possibilities open to them, yet marked by a deliberate avoidance or subversion of these alternatives, a sense of which is somehow conveyed to the viewer. Critically non-reflexive films can be termed *transparent*, but in a way immediately distinguishable from the conventional style, or group of styles, variously referred to as 'illusionist' or 'classical Hollywood,' since the transparency of their represented worlds is not to be confused with an aesthetic of 'invisible' narrative or visual construction. A critically non-reflexive film may use techniques associated with, or originating from older, more conventional styles, in addition to its own original or unconventional ones - just as highly reflexive films may also employ conventionally illusionist techniques, if often only by way of critique or an undermining irony. Filmmakers as otherwise disparate from each other as Werner

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Herzog and Robert Bresson demonstrate that a primarily non-cinematically reflexive, or 'transparent' cinema, need not be a cinematically naïve or primitive, conventional or reactionary one.<sup>31</sup>

Not surprisingly, when art works or painterly styles are prominently represented in films of either general type, there are often strong parallels between a film's own dominant reflexive or non-reflexive tendencies and the reflexive or transparent nature of the art chosen. There are good reasons why filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard and Andrei Tarkovsky come back again and again in their films to the particular artists and works that they do. Peter Greenaway, for example, justifies his obsessive on-screen interest with the Baroque period as perfectly natural, this being art about art in his films about films.<sup>32</sup> In turn, the basis for these close parallels significantly inform both the way in which the art work is presented on-screen and a film's total narrative sense or expressive significance, in which case, the represented art may act as a kind of tunneling microcosm of a film as a whole. We can elaborate on this dualistic typology of film worlds by way of a helpful distinction.

### I. 1.3 Ways of Seeing

When through the water's thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of a pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflection there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without this flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it *as* it is and where it is – which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place. Merleau-Ponty, *L'oeil et l'esprit (Eye and Mind)*<sup>33</sup>

Looking at the huge field of post-1960 art cinema, a distinction can be ventured between filmmakers who conceive and construct their cinematic worlds *with cinema*

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<sup>31</sup> This is a view held by many ideologically committed theorists on the left who champion a Brechtian-inspired reflexivity. Some go as far as maintaining that only in conforming to such an aesthetic can film art be honest, valid or progressive. They often do so, however, by either ignoring the philosophical and aesthetic complexities of the question all together or more understandably, owing to the slippery nature of reflexivity, by using the term in so broad and undefined a sense that any artistically serious film is *ipso facto* a reflexive one.

<sup>32</sup> See Michel Ciment, "Interview with Peter Greenaway: A Zed and Two Noughts." In *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, edited by Vernon W. Gras. Jackson: University of Mississippi, Jackson, 2000, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and Mind." In *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Alden L. Fisher. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1969, 277.

and those that accomplish this *through cinema*. This is the *auteur*-ist formulation of a dichotomy that could also be made with reference to individual films looked at independently from the rest of their maker's body of work. This metaphorical formulation is similar in form to philosopher Richard Wollheim's influential "seeing-as"/ "seeing-in" distinction in the philosophy of art, one that refers to our capacity to perceive a representational image in two contrasting ways, switching back and forth between them.<sup>34</sup> A representational painting can be seen exclusively as a collection of depicted objects, perceived directly or immediately, in accordance with a realist view of representation ("seeing-as"), that is, in terms of *what* is represented. Alternatively, it may be simultaneously perceived as a collection of marks on the canvas arranged in a certain pattern ("seeing-in"), that is, *how* what is represented is represented. In the latter case, the beholder focuses not only on the 'ideal' objects represented, but the physical medium of representation that constitutes them, seen "through" and "because of" it, in Merleau-Ponty's phrase with reference to visual perception more generally, quoted above. This 'double vision' capacity is highly relevant to cinematic reflexivity, as I wish to characterize it. Like a painting, when viewing a film we may privilege aspects or effects of the medium as much, if not more than, the subject of its representation.

The original catalyst for this *seeing-with cinema* and *seeing-through cinema* distinction comes not from the philosophy of art or perception, but prose poetry, specifically the last lines of William Blake's *A Vision of the Last Judgment*. Here visual perception is couched in a metaphorical language similar to that which Merleau-Ponty employs, but in the service of a diametrically opposed philosophical view. In typically defiant, epigrammatic fashion, Blake - or the voice of the poet as prophet - provocatively asserts that "*I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative eye any more than I Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro'it and not with it.*"<sup>35</sup> In these lines, closely related to similar ones scattered throughout his poetic metaphysics, Blake suggests that in a world seen through a glass darkly, we must try to get beyond the

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<sup>34</sup> See Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Blake, William. *Blake: Complete Writings (w.variant readings)*, edited by Geoffrey Langdon Keynes. London: Oxford University Press, 1971, 617.

glass, that is, not let the medium of perception interfere or distract us from the desired object of sight (in this case one which reveals a higher order of reality). Briefly put, our habitually conditioned visual relation to the world is equated with the shackling constraints of logical Reason, which leads perception away from direct experience in its concrete particularity - the true subject of art - towards the abstraction of concepts. On Blake's view, Reason itself is the medium to be overcome by the liberating powers of imagination.<sup>36</sup> Genuine reality is only fleetingly glimpsed by those attuned to it, those who are capable of using their vision in the right way; it is wholly invisible to the eye which remains on the level of the purely "corporeal" or "vegetative," that is, functioning merely instrumentally, as the passive recorder of the material world, and made of the same stuff.

The contrast Blake wishes to draw then, and one at the heart of the visionary attitude of which he is in many ways representative, is between ordinary perception, as determined by our mental categories rather than the object of perception, and a truer form of observation which conjoins the object and beholder in an essential way. This is vision coupled with an imaginative, semi-mystical intuiting, disclosing things as they are 'in-themselves.' Plato's cave allegory, frequently evoked in discussions of cinema, is relevant here. Despite its being used in defense of Reason and its transcendence of the merely perceptual (and Plato, more than any other philosopher, was the subject of Blake's considerable ire), the famous description of the cave's captives also contains a visual metaphor for true knowledge, where the go-between prison house of the body is symbolized by physical constraints placed upon the act of seeing which cloud and mediate vision. That we see only fire-lit shadows and that the genuine light of day would blind us by its radiance, is a sentiment echoed in Blake's more famous companion epigram to the one quoted above, "*If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.*"<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For Blake, the means of this 'liberation' come not, however, in relying less on the brute evidence of our logically unencumbered senses, since for the poet true metaphysical reality consists in that Divinely formed spiritual life as it is concretely embedded in the visual fabric of nature.

<sup>37</sup> Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 14, in *Blake: Complete Writings (w. variant readings)*, 154.

For a moment, however, let us take Blake's pronouncement in a more down to earth way. Everyone is familiar with the phenomenon of looking through a window and seeing both what is behind it on the outside, and a reflection of the inside, which, in the case of standard glass, is caused by the greater illumination on one side than the other. As in the famous *Gestalt*-switch pictures of which philosophers, art historians, and psychologists alike are so fond --- where, in one famous case, both a vase and the outline of two faces in profile simultaneously exist in the same picture --- we have the ability to focus on either of these image-scenes, the 'real' or actual world beyond the pane and the depthless reflection of another virtual one upon it. (Often it is only by virtue of this superimposed image that objects situated within the environment of the perceiver are visible at all, truly brought into being as objects of perception by the reflective surface.)

Alternatively, the eye may dwell for as long as it can in that dreamlike, in-between world, and the reverie it inspires, where the inner and outer overlap and merge. This familiar visual experience of simultaneous reflection and transparence, where a physical medium separates observer and observed, has often found its way into both modernist art and literature. In Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, a thoroughly reflexive novel, replete with doubles, shadows, and mirror reflections (often telegraphed in the names of its characters), the titular magnum opus of the poet and more modest visionary, John Shade, begins with a detailed description of the aforementioned reflexive/transparent phenomena by both day and night. Standing in front of his window and looking out, Shade is "the shadow of the waxwing slain/by the false azure of the window pane.....," who "lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky."<sup>38</sup> Here this perceptual merging, where the glass reflection is taken for a continuation of the three dimensional world, is the cause of a violently fatal confusion for the bird in question - a reference, perhaps, to Xerxes' painted grapes, so realistic that birds were drawn to them in the classic fable of art as *mimesis*.

In these examples drawn from literary and philosophical sources, which have their corollaries in both cinema and painting, Blake's Romantic ideal of visionary

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<sup>38</sup> Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pale Fire*. New York: Vintage, 1962, 33.

transparency is set against Nabokov's modernist pre-occupation with reflexive opacity where, in the words of William Butler Yeats "mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show," or, in Merleau-Ponty's less skeptical view, perception is not only aided by material mediation which may seem to impede it, but is actually *made possible* by it.<sup>39</sup> Thus what it being opposed here is a situation of transparent seeing, on one hand, and a reflective/reflexive one on the other, where, in some cases, seer and seen are co-present. Robert Stam points out the spatial derivation of the term "reflexive" as applied to art and literature, in the Latin *reflexio/reflectere* ("bend back on") which in a linguistic context also denotes a verb containing both acting subject and object.<sup>40</sup> Semantically, as well as lexically, the "reflexive" is close cousin to the "reflective." As pertains to film in general, and to its representation of painting in particular, this derivation, with simultaneous connotations of identity and difference, presence and absence, is highly relevant.

In his *Theory of Film Practice*, Noël Burch points to images of reflections on glass surfaces in films as evidence of how the perception of objects represented on the screen operates under different conditions, or parameters, than the perception of the same objects in the course of everyday life, owing to the fact the film camera is a far less sensitive optical instrument than the human eye. Burch notes that as represented by the camera, both the reflection and the 'other side' of an image reflected on a semi-reflective surface tend to be of equal intensity.<sup>41</sup> For this reason when seeing such double images on screen, as distinct from daily life, it is much more difficult for the eye to focus on one visual plane at the exclusion of the other, and often this results in a confused or "illegible" image.<sup>42</sup> What Burch does not mention, however, is that when

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<sup>39</sup> Yeats, William Butler. "The Statues," line 22. In *The Collected Writings of W.B. Yeats Vol. I*, edited by Richard J. Finneran. New York: Scribner, 1996.

<sup>40</sup> Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, xiii. Such similes, however, with their connotations bolstering a particular conception of film are often essentialist characterizations which, over time, rather than opening up new ways of conceiving the medium as they promise, end up as reductions of it in so far as they harden into rigid theoretical frameworks. In other words, such physical analogies are more useful as alternative starting points in film theory rather than final destinations.

<sup>41</sup> Burch, Noël. *Theory of Film Practice*. Translated by Helen R. Lane. New York: Praeger Publishing, 1963, 33.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

confronted with such a reflected image the filmmaker can switch from one of these focal planes to the other, i.e., from the transparent view to the reflected one, or vice versa, through focus changes and dissolves, thereby emulating the ability of the eye. Some filmmakers, however, deliberately preserve these mixed, or superimposed images, intact, and/or frame and light their shots so as to include them whenever possible. In collaboration with his regular cinematographers like Slawomir Idziak, Krzysztof Kieślowski's masterful use of reflections and partial transparencies takes the cinema of concrete perception to unprecedented expressive heights.<sup>43</sup> The consistent use of reflections and transparencies either within a film's *mise-en-scène* or peered through by the camera, filtering its vision, is a frequent and important visual element in the films of Wong Kar-Wai, Raul Ruiz, Edward Yang, and Wim Wenders, to cite just a few examples.

Remaining on this concrete level, one of the most accomplished and provocative examples of reflexivity as *reflectivity* achieved through literal, i.e. directly material means, in a way only possible in a filmic context, is found in two dramatic sequences near the end of Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984). They occur after Travis (Harry Dean Stanton) discovers his long lost wife Jane (Natasha Kinski) working as a stripper in an elaborate peep show. In Wenders's daring *mise-en-scène*, the booth within which men view the female performers is equipped with a one-way mirror, separating the couple on either side of it. Travis can see Jane through the glass, but she sees only her own mirrored image when facing him, in the sort of there-but-not-there situation Wenders specializes in, summed up in the English title of the sequel to *Wings of Desire*, "*Faraway, So Close.*" Communicating with Travis through a telephone intercom, Jane effectively speaks to her own reflection. This one-way conversation contrivance is in full keeping with the presence-in-absence that is the film's overriding motif. The

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<sup>43</sup> As Orr discusses, Robert Altman makes sustained use of this inner/outer effect in the *The Long Goodbye* (1973) in an extended sequence where the arguing couple at the center of Phillip Marlow's investigation is filmed from outside of their glass walled Malibu beach house. Here the moving camera simultaneously presents the couple, the reflection of breaking waves and Marlow walking along the beach. See Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 13.

couple's conversation is shot mainly from behind the shoulder angles with direct address of the camera, where the imaginary 'fourth wall' is simultaneously upheld and knocked down, since here the plane of the film screen literally functions as both a mirror and window within the film's fictional world.

Thus established, this filmic space becomes even more complex and psychologically revealing near the conclusion of the second sequence at the club, after Travis has returned to see Jane for the last time and relate the full story behind his disappearance.<sup>44</sup> As in the darkening of a theatre or cinema, Travis switches off the light on his side of the booth and the mirror's reflectivity is diminished, allowing Jane to partially see him for the first time. The camera then switches to a perspective behind Travis's back; he, and the viewer alike, is met with the mirror image of his side of the booth. The resulting effect is the kind of double, superimposed image Nabokov describes, and, in *Persona*-like fashion we see, via Wenders and cinematographer Robby Müller's brilliant use of a bi-focal lens set-up allowing them to shoot in deep focus through the mirror, Travis' own face reflected/projected onto Jane's body as she sits facing him.<sup>45</sup> This uncanny, totemic image emphasizes the couple's emotional reconciliation achieved by a frank discussion of their troubled past, but at the same time it reinforces their psychological and physical separation which, by the film's end, proves insurmountable.<sup>46</sup>

Some filmmakers have gone even farther in making the camera/screen a combination window and mirror behind which a character, or even the viewer, is placed. In a close-up shot in Abbas Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), the protagonist – a documentary filmmaker – faces the camera and begins to shave his face while apparently seeing and speaking to a woman behind his back, by way of the implied mirror reflection he is facing.<sup>47</sup> Of course, as Charles Altman points out,

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<sup>44</sup> In the earlier sequence Travis, emotionally unable to identify himself to Jane, remains an anonymous voice which she perhaps does not consciously recognize.

<sup>45</sup> See Wenders's account of the filming of this sequence on the DVD commentary accompanying the 2002 Anchor Bay edition of the film.

<sup>46</sup> The sequence anticipates the film's finale when Travis leaves Jane and his son.

<sup>47</sup> Here the relation between a character and the camera taking on the form of mirror/reflective surface is a passive one. Unsurprisingly it is Raul Ruiz who takes this motif a step further when, in *Ce-jour là*, after

metaphors centered on optical media have long been a mainstay of film theory: film is a window onto the “world viewed,” in Stanley Cavell’s phrase intended to sum up the classical realism of Bazin and Kracauer in competition with the formalist conception of the screen as a centripetal frame, and the screen as projected film space equated with the “mirror” of Lacan’s “mirror stage,” already a reflexive/reflective metaphor before being applied to film.<sup>48</sup> Before the proposed *seeing-with cinema* and *seeing-through cinema* distinction is fleshed out and applied to the use of painting on film, we can take a brief digression by way of the mimetic roots of reflexivity in visual reflections and transparencies, to which it is related.

#### I. 1.4 Mirrors and *mise-en-scène*

Just as painting can figuratively ‘mirror’ cinema, there are interesting analogies between images of mirrors and art works in films, the two often appearing together in surprising combinations. Of course, mirrors within a film’s *mise-en-scène* can serve a variety of representational and expressive roles. Most obviously, they are tied to self-identity and its affirmation or problematisation. But a character’s turning to their mirrored image can reveal not only aspects of their personality, but of a film’s own reflexive aesthetic. This is surely the case in Jean-Pierre Melville’s art-house thrillers, with their enigmatic anti-heroes who always pause to check themselves in the mirror before leaving a room, within films which self-consciously reflect and re-work Hollywood gangster film conventions down to the trench coats and fedoras. The presence of mirrors within the film image can also multiply or extend the visual space of a shot. In this capacity, they frequently make visible an off-screen space, otherwise invisible, or show something within the space of the frame which without its reflection would be hidden from the

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wiping the silverware before sitting down to dinner, a housewife nonchalantly walks up to the camera and polishes the lens!

<sup>48</sup> Altman, Charles F. “Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Discourse.” In *Movies and Methods, Vol.2*, edited by Bill Nichols. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985, 523. To this can be added the formalist notion of the screen as frame advocated by Jean Mitry. Altman sees both of these classical conceptions of cinema - as window and frame - as inadequate for addressing the reflexive aspects of film viewing which he views as better analogized by way of Lacan’s mirror. See Altman, 523.

eyes of the characters or audience. In one sense the visual space of the mirror image is wholly *virtual*, a purely two-dimensional surface, and as such, it can be contrasted with the film image containing it, the latter posited as a solid, three dimensional reality. Or, alternatively, the mirror image can be reflexively conceived as an extension of the film image's own virtual nature, its own visual illusion. In the latter case, mirror images often function as analogs or metonyms of the film image into which they are incorporated, part of a generalized *mise-en-abyme* of representation. As such, a visual ambiguity reflects a thematic one. Here Orson Welles's mirrored funhouse in the *Lady from Shanghai* (1947) or the endlessly mirrored reflection of an elderly Kane, at the end of *Citizen Kane* (1941), whose true nature and identity, by that point, the viewer, the characters, and even Kane himself, is less and less certain, stand out as brilliant examples. The filmmaker can use the mirror image in *tromp l'oeil* fashion, repelling the eye attempting to penetrate it, or, following Lewis Carroll it can serve as the transparent doorway onto another reality, a magical passage to other dimensions, like the magic mirrors in Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950).

In all of these respects, cinema's fascination with the mirror can be seen as an extension of its representational prominence in Western painting – from Jan Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait* (1434) to Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) and Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères* (1882). Equally, paintings in films have a way of substituting for mirrors, serving many of the same functions, either in a literal or symbolic fashion (as in Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*, to be discussed in detail). In some cases mirrors and paintings are both incorporated into a film's reflexive design, as in Alain Robbe-Grillet's films where this becomes something of a fetish – for every framed painting there is a framed mirror to reflect it back to the camera, and here two familiar reflexive tropes, that of the mirror and the frame, are invoked simultaneously. In Raul Ruiz's cinema the conjunction of mirrors and paintings, or painterly reference, is par for the reflexive course. Such visual dynamics in a cinematic context, variations of which I will return to in more detailed consideration of films which represent art works and/or art practices, can be aptly compared with Rene Magritte's famous depictions of the self-referential nature of both visual perception and representational

art. In three or four series of paintings which the artist returned to throughout his career – including *The Human Condition* (1933) and *The Key to the Fields* (1936, see Figure 1, Appendix) - objects reflected in mirrors, shattered window panes, and visual superimpositions are juxtaposed with paintings within paintings, blank canvases, and the tools of art making, in a kind of modernist updating (post-Saussure, pre-Foucault) of *Las Meninas*, with its conjoined art and mirror compositional motif. For Magritte this playing with outer/inner spaces, through the constellation of the concepts window/mirror/painting can be seen in Kantian terms as dramatizing the active or constitutive character of perception.<sup>49</sup> Predictably, Magritte's works have exerted a strong visual influence on reflexive filmmakers, including Robbe-Grillet, Sergio Leone, and perhaps most notably Bernardo Bertolucci (in collaboration with cinematographer Vittorio Storaro), in *The Conformist* (1970) and *The Spider's Stratagem* (1970).

#### I. 1.5 *Seeing-with/Seeing-through Cinema*: General Considerations

In many ways Jean-Luc Godard is the prime exponent of *seeing-with cinema*, as the reflexive pole of film art. Cinema is always significantly present within the represented world of Godard's films, a world acknowledged as a thoroughly constructed and mediated one. For most of the *nouvelle vague* critics turned directors, reflexivity is inescapable. (Indeed, after their first breakthrough films, it is one of the few features that convincingly ties together such formally and emotionally disparate bodies of work as François Truffaut's and Godard's, Claude Chabrol's and Jacques Rivette's.) Of

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<sup>49</sup> Magritte has many canvases based on window and mirror seeing, where the two are often conflated. *The Key to the Fields* (*La clef des Champs*, 1936), which playfully critiques the realist 'picture theory' of language, depicts, in a suspended moment of time, the inward shattering of a window pane seen from within an interior. Shards of glass fall onto the carpet below the sill. Visible on what were the external facing side of some of these pieces are bits of the landscape, a generic field with trees and a blue sky, simultaneously seen *through* the window via the hole which has been made. Here the outer world as object of sight is actually imprinted on the medium through which it is seen and accessed. The breaking of the glass is a sudden disruption of the visual medium which suggests that the seen object and the conditions of vision are more inextricably conjoined than is ordinarily assumed. In *The Human Condition* (*La condition humaine*, 1933) a canvas set on an easel sits centrally in front of a closed window, with the landscape seen through the window perfectly overlapping on to the canvas and making up the painting. *The Key to the Fields* and *The Human Condition*, along with many other Magritte compositions, painting on the level of depiction deals exclusively with the notion of perceptual reflexivity. (Magritte's prominent foregrounding of the medium as subject matter sets him apart from other Surrealist painters).

course, the New Wave's reflexive tendency was partly over-determined owing to the direct conflation of filmmaking and film criticism, according to which, as Godard has said, the best way to criticize one film is to make another.<sup>50</sup>

For *seeing-with cinema* directors, film is ultimately not a means to some other end, access to something outside of cinematic articulation, the unmediated, pre-cinematic beyond (like the unknowable Kantian thing-in-itself or the Wittgenstein-ian limit of language) but an end in itself. This does not equate to making films in which film itself is always the main or ostensible subject. Rather, it means that with respect to whatever subject these filmmakers engage with, and whatever aspect of reality they choose to represent, cinema is never far away; it is the constant shadow companion of the fictional reality presented, its grounding assumption.<sup>51</sup> David Bordwell writes of the "marked self-consciousness of art cinema narration," which creates a "coherent fabula world and an intermittently present but highly noticeable external authority through which we gain access to it."<sup>52</sup> Bordwell's characterization holds for both *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema*, since, defined in one way or another, such "self-consciousness" is what principally differentiates both types from classical or Hollywood-style film. In *seeing-through cinema*, however, a film's represented world and the "external authority" of the filmmaker's controlling presence are kept in a more or less equal balance; there are lines of visible, extra-diegetic intervention into the world of a film, as well as degrees of self-referential and/or cinematic allusion which are not crossed. For *seeing-with cinema* directors, in contrast, such intervention betrays nothing, since the represented world of the film is not self-posed as distinct from its highly subjective presentation. Of course, "self-consciousness" in cinema is an

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Tom Milne, ed. *Godard on Godard*. New York: Da Capo, 1972, 171.

<sup>51</sup> Even when they are not shown, one feels that in the worlds of *seeing-with cinema* film-makers, cinemas do exist right around the corner and that they are as important to the characters depicted as the characters are for us - that film, in other words, informs their lives in a profound way. Whereas in the films of Tarkovsky, Herzog and Tarr, for example, cinemas being used as locations, or characters discussing films, would stand-out as breaking some sort of unwritten contract.

<sup>52</sup> Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 209.

idiosyncratic property that has many different guises, just as the marks of the filmmaker's hands in their created worlds take many different forms.<sup>53</sup>

On the whole, *seeing-with cinema* filmmakers seem unable or unwilling to conceive the film medium transparently. Their cinematic image is always a 'double' one. Along with presenting a wholly 'other' reality, a created universe beholden only to itself, a fictional film, it is supposed, always retains the documentary capacity to constantly reflect on its own making, at a given time, in a given place, subject to all the acknowledged formal and existential constraints of film as a photographic medium and a collaborative art form. Here the filmmaker reaches something like what Roland Barthes calls "*le degré zero*," that point at which the writer becomes aware of the opacity of language. Along these lines, Orr contends that the modern/contemporary cinema of reflexivity is identified by its overriding concern with the "unexpected limits of vision."<sup>54</sup> This concern is evident in Godard's *mise-en-scène*, for instance, where the image's potentially infinite depth of field and its promise of transparent vision inaugurating a more democratic mode of seeing, as sanctified by Bazin, are, if not overturned, fundamentally questioned. As a result of specific framing, lighting and compositional choices, vision in Godard's films is often met with an apparently arbitrary boundary, a physical limit which reaffirms the camera's relative location and view on the world as a reflection of the filmmaker's fundamentally subjective choice to place it there and not elsewhere. Like the 'deconstructionists' of language, reflexive filmmakers tend to accentuate the negative, emphasizing the ways in which the visual circuits connecting the perceiving subject and the external world, the viewer and a film, and even the filmmaker and his or her cinematic subject, is disrupted, breaks down, or is overloaded.

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<sup>53</sup> One problem with Bordwell's formulation is his assumption that the visible "authority" of the filmmaker is a force coming into the represented world of a film from without: one, that is, which is imposed on a fictional reality which exists apart from its presentation. It may be better to think of this 'authorial' presence as immanent within the world of the film, akin to the way in which, on some theistic views, a Deity resides within the universe he (or she) has created rather than influencing it from the outside.

<sup>54</sup> Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 131.

Moreover, for reflexive directors, both the processes of filmmaking and the result on screen is always provisional, something to be endlessly questioned and qualified. Hence Godard speaks not of making films but of making “attempts at films.”<sup>55</sup> Within the image itself, the issue is not how the ‘outer’ appearances of objects and people reveals an ‘inner’ reality, but as philosophers like Merleau-Ponty suggest, how the ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ are inextricably conjoined. The cinematic world is never wholly autonomous, it is rooted in a wider cultural and historical context and the trans-subjective reality the director and audience share is explicitly acknowledged. As Colin MacCabe points out, the willing acceptance of the imposed constraints of genre was integral to the early formulation of the *politique des auteurs* and Godard’s early film criticism.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps MacCabe goes too far in seeing this as evidence of the full-blown “classicist” aesthetic of the *Cahiers* critics and future *nouvelle vague* filmmakers, in opposition to an avant-garde modernism. It is certainly true, however, that the *seeing-with cinema* director is never the Romantic artist conjuring from nothing, but is at the mercy of both “nature” - the physical world as the ultimate source of his or her art, with it all of the logistical practicalities of filmmaking and the limitations of a reality-based, if not reality-bound medium, to contend with - and “culture” - in the form of the full weight of the cinematic, and wider artistic traditions he or she has inherited. All filmmakers deal with these realities, to be sure, but for *seeing-with cinema* directors, awareness of them becomes a self-consciousness taking on a life of its own, as is compellingly captured in Truffaut’s *La nuit américaine* (*Day for Night*, 1974); one of the best films-within-a-film, Truffaut’s late masterpiece addresses the predicament on a number of levels. In creative terms, the *seeing-with cinema auteur* is a profoundly self-conscious figure, operating under what Harold Bloom has called (in relation to literature) the “anxiety of influence.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Milne ed., *Godard on Godard*, 223.

<sup>56</sup> See Colin MacCabe, *Godard, Portrait of the Artist at Seventy*. London: Bloomsbury, 2005, 79-81.

<sup>57</sup> See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Along with the aforementioned Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, Wenders, Rivette and Ruiz, a very partial list of prominent post-1960 European *seeing-with cinema* directors, whose films exhibit a more or less consistently high degree of reflexivity could also include Resnais, Antonioni, Bertolucci, Michael Haneke, and Greenaway. In terms of non-European filmmakers who have been dramatically influenced by these primarily European developments, Abbas Kiarostami, Martin Scorsese and Atom Egoyan stand out as exemplary. Lining up against them on this art cinema playing field, prominent *seeing-through cinema* directors, who rely substantially less on reflexive practices comprise an even more thematic and stylistically diverse group. They include Robert Bresson, Eric Rohmer (who stands apart from his New Wave colleagues in this respect), Werner Herzog, Andrei Tarkovsky, Theo Angelopoulos, Alexander Sokurov, Béla Tarr, Satyajit Ray and Luis Buñuel, among many others.

Of course, in what I take to be a sign of the distinction's working plausibility, rather than a weakness, other filmmakers much less happily fit into one or the other group alone. These directors inhabit a middle region, moving between the reflexive and anti-reflexive poles from one film to another or, like Fellini and David Lynch, even within a single film. The films of still other directors evidence both 'ways of seeing' simultaneously, where these two cinematic modes are held in a sort of fascinating balance – here Stanley Kubrick, Krzysztof Kieślowski and Miklós Jancsó, immediately spring to mind. In addition, the careers of certain filmmakers, like Bergman and Lars Von Trier, can be potentially divided in half, along dominant cinematically transparent/reflexive lines.

Many of the *a-reflexive* or *seeing-through cinema* directors I have listed here can also be described in other, in some cases, apparently contradictory terms: as both 'realists' and 'formalists' on many conventional definitions, as well as 'metaphysical' filmmakers, visionaries, and fantasists. As already alluded to, the fact that Godard's films, for all of their reflexive dimensions, can still be viewed within the general framework of Bazin's articulation of the film image as enjoying a privileged relation to the real, shows how a *seeing-with/seeing-through cinema* distinction with respect to the reflexive or non-reflexive status of the cinematic work cannot be broken down along

purely realist/formalist lines, as my subsequent analysis of Godard and Tarkovsky will show.<sup>58</sup> What all have in common, however, is a view of the film medium as a means to another end, as access to some other place onto which cinema is the door. For them, film is more of a window enabling vision than a mirror or lens reflecting or shaping perception, and their *mise-en-scène* instantiates this conception.

In its *seeing-through cinema* mode, the film medium is like a receiving device picking up a certain frequency – the film’s represented world - which cannot be heard without it. In this experiential sense the world produced does not exist apart from the reproducing mechanism, but it none-the-less seems to possess an independent life, as if had always been somewhere ‘out there,’ ready to be discovered. This does not mean, however, that the medium disappears entirely from view. A-reflexive, *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers are not naïve about cinema’s mediation of the real, its transformative nature and capacities, which they themselves often utilize and fully exploit, allowing for a myriad of different spatial-temporal narrative articulations and modes of visual expression. Cinema as directly represented or symbolically expressed, in ways that draws adamant attention to itself, may be absent from their films, often conspicuously so, but the medium is not simply ‘swept under the rug’ as in most conventional illusionist films.<sup>59</sup> The anti-reflexive, *seeing-through cinema* filmmaker’s acceptance of such mediation is a positive, rather than negative one, since it is a limitation that once recognized can be, as they themselves suggest, transcended. Indeed, if their own pronouncements are anything to go by, in different ways such transcendence is the goal that many of these filmmakers consciously set for themselves.

Bloom describes the “visionary” stance in literature as a “mode of perception in which objects and persons are seen with an augmented intensity that has spiritual

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<sup>58</sup> Equally, the fact that Bordwell can point to Bresson as paradigmatic of “parametric narration” in which story or plot is at the service of graphic style - a style which cannot be accounted for by the realities represented – does not mean that his films are necessarily highly “reflexive” in the phenomenological sense that I am concerned with. The view that I am advocating does not cleave story from style, form from content, in the explicit and implicit ways that Bordwell, in discussing cinematic narration, often appears to. See Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 274-311.

<sup>59</sup> Since it does not hinge on a simple form/content dichotomy a similar *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* distinction may be made in the realm of non-narrative abstract/experimental film (although it may be more difficult to draw the distinction in individual cases). Here to, as in the case of narrative film worlds, there are reflexive and non-reflexive poles.

overtones.”<sup>60</sup> For many visionary filmmakers working in a narrative mode, film is a way of achieving Bloom’s - and Blake’s - heightened perception of the real, as is evident in the terms many of them use to describe their own work and cinema’s capabilities: Herzog’s “estatic truth,” Bresson’s “ineffable” and visible “states of soul,” Tarkovsky’s “immediacy” of the “absolute.” What these filmmakers share is a belief that a film presents a unique vision of existence that is complete in-itself and self-defining. In many cases, this vision can certainly be termed a spiritual one. It encompasses that reduced, ascetic brand of cinema that Paul Schrader, from a Christian standpoint, calls the “transcendental style,” and which, in opposition to an aesthetic of immanence, seeks to “maximize the mystery of existence.”<sup>61</sup> Of course, this attempt is not only the provenance of films falling into Schrader’s rather restricted category; with a broader purview *seeing-through cinema* equally embraces more secular-minded films. Indeed, although conceived with a different emphasis, these *seeing-with cinema* and *seeing-through cinema* categories are also congruent/compatible with a number of similar distinctions put forward in relation to post-1960 cinema by other writers. These include Orr’s division between “neo-modern” cinema, represented by Godard and Antonioni, among others -- which corresponds in many cases to *seeing-with cinema* as I define it -- and the meta-modern “cinema of wonder” of Tarkovsky and Angelopoulos, one important strand of *seeing-through cinema* as a form of filmmaking which is “materially grounded in a vivid life-world, in the realm of the material image, yet seeks transcendental meaning beyond the official frameworks of materialism.”<sup>62</sup> Noël Carroll writes of a group of filmmakers, including Herzog, Brakhage, and Terrence Malick, who are “devoted to the primacy of experience” and a “feeling of strangeness or alienness,” that “instills a sense of inexplicable there-ness of the object of attention,” thus identifying other prominent characteristics of *seeing-through cinema*.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Bloom, Harold. *How to Read and Why*. New York: Scribner, 2000, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Schrader, Paul. *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. New York: Da Capo, 1988, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 52.

<sup>63</sup> Carroll, Noël, “Herzog, Presence, and Paradox.” In *Persistence of Vision*, 2 (1985): 30-40, 31.

In his *Notes to the Cinematographer* Bresson speaks of creating images which are “necessary” as opposed to “beautiful.”<sup>64</sup> Whatever their stylistic and philosophical differences, the best films of the great *seeing-through cinema auteurs* such as Bresson have, like many great works of art, a sense of necessity and timelessness about them. This stems not only from the inherently expressive qualities of their films, but their conscious exclusion of topical realities, or, the attempt to universalize them. In a medium whose products lend themselves to historical dating perhaps more than any other art form, *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers largely avoid representing spatially or temporally ‘local’ or regional realities in a documentary-like fashion, that is, unless they are synthesized with the fictional drama in a mythic or poetic way. Above all, *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers tend to place a premium on overriding expression and the creation of a uniform world atmosphere. Rather than formally fracturing the camera-given sense of three dimensional space through a Brechtian ‘separation of elements,’ visual and/or auditory, and simultaneously breaking up a film’s narrative and moods in the cinematic equivalent of cubist collage effects (in the manner of Resnais, Godard, Ruiz and Peter Greenaway, in his early films), *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers tend to sustain not only a baseline spatial-temporal continuity but also a unified expressive atmosphere across different types of picture planes, which live-action representation ‘naturally’ fuses together rather than dictates.<sup>65</sup>

Before moving on, it is important to note, however, that *seeing-with cinema* reflexivity, or its *seeing-through cinema* lack, is a holistic property that cannot be completely reduced to specific features of a film, whether of form or content conceived in isolation, although these features may indeed play large roles in constituting the category type. Certain techniques which one may automatically associate with a reflexive rather than transparent cinematic vision – even to the extent they risk becoming clichés - are in many cases in-themselves reflexively ‘neutral,’ as it were.

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<sup>64</sup> See Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*. New York: Green Integer, 1997, 24.

<sup>65</sup> In this sense *seeing-through cinema* does overlap with Bazinian realism. The specific contrast here is something akin to the difference between a heterogeneous musical piece that incorporates a number of styles and moods that play off one and another and a tone poem in which a certain feeling is maintained through an overriding motif that anchors a dominant expression.

*Seeing-through cinema* filmmakers, as well as their reflexive *seeing-with cinema* counterparts, often use frame-within-a-frame shots, for example. When used in an overtly reflexive fashion, such frames are, more often than not, broken or visually interrupted. Rather than as a way of containing the action in a layering that gives depth to the image, aesthetic-sizing it in a more traditional way, the presence of the frame provides an occasion for its transgression. Think, for instance, of the empty door frame in Paul (Michel Piccoli) and Camille's (Brigitte Bardot's) unfinished apartment in *Le mépris*, which, instead of opening the characters repeatedly step through, or Wenders's *The American Friend* (1977) when Jonathan (Bruno Ganz), resigned to being a pawn in a murderous game, sticks his head through one of his hand-made picture frames, as if it were a noose.

A more significant example, and one more relevant to this study, is provided by the prologue of Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975). What, on the surface, would appear to be a typically reflexive situation in both form and content is here turned inside-out, with its cinematically self-referential tropes suspended or bracketed. In this opening sequence, Ignat, the son of Aleksei, the film's central character, switches on a color television. There follows a straight cut to the scene presumably unfolding on the screen – a doctor attempting to cure a boy from stuttering by hypnosis – shot in black and white, and tellingly, minus the television's screen's frame or border. This single cut confirms Tarkovsky's *a-reflexive, seeing-through cinema* orientation: it is as if he could not bring himself to film a person (Ignat) in the act of watching events on a flat screen, as do so many characters, in so many reflexive films or sequences (those of Godard and Wenders), for example, without feeling obliged to *bring the viewer into* the reality occurring at the other end of the television transmission, that otherwise purely virtual space. Tarkovsky goes to great lengths here, as elsewhere, not just to convey a character's concrete acts of perception, but their imaginative *immersion* into the objects of vision taken as phenomenologically given. Even in so far as this sequence does have a self-reflexive dimension in relation to both Tarkovsky's life and Aleksei's, referring to the filmmaker as artist attempting to gain, or re-gain, the power of creative 'speech' in the midst of Soviet censorship, it is revealing that it falls *before* the opening titles,

outside of the film's main presentational frame. (Just as the epilogue of Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*, which uses painting in a highly reflexive manner, is separated off from the film's live-action.) On a related note, returning us to the use of mirrors and reflections, despite its title, in *Mirror* most of the numerous reflections of people and objects seen throughout the film are not to be found in actual, fully reflective, mirrors, but partial transparencies, like the surfaces of windows on which can also be seen the outer side, another reality.<sup>66</sup> In those cases where a wholly one-sided mirror image is present, the camera facing it almost always tracks forward into this image – just as it does with respect to paintings in Tarkovsky's films – thus erasing its borders. Like the poet in Cocteau's *Orphée*, Tarkovsky's camera 'enters' into the reflected world, thereby dissolving the separation between subject and object, the viewer and the viewed.<sup>67</sup>

To take another example, colour, in post-1960 art cinema, is used innovatively in many different reflexive and *a*-reflexive ways, and again sweeping generalizations often miss the mark. The questions of whether the colour coding in Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, Her Wife, & His Lover*, Kieslowski's *Three Colours* Trilogy and Zhang Yimou's *Hero* reinforces or undermines realities and themes unique to the fictional worlds these films create, are a commentary on cinema's conventional uses of color, or a purely expressive visual effect, can only be persuasively argued for within a wider consideration of these films as wholes. Colour, in this context, must be treated as a property of form and content equally. The salient point here is the intrinsic contextuality of all potentially reflexive features, including the representation of painting. In so far as it can be determined, the function and significance of art in a given film is found in the combination of its formal presentation and narrative situation within that film viewed as a temporal-spatial totality rather than an aggregate of discrete, self-defining parts (whether these are conceived as shots, sequences, perspectival narratives or points of view).

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<sup>66</sup> Le Fanu, Mark. *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*. British Film Institute, 1987, 73.

<sup>67</sup> Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie view Tarkovsky as rescuing the "image of the mirror from its pedestrian employment in most other films" and restoring its "ancient magic." (Johnson, Vida T. and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994, 225.

### I. 1.6 *Seeing-with/Seeing-through Cinema* and Painting

Returning now to our main focus, the representation of art need not be a feature of either reflexive *seeing-with cinema*, or a-reflexive *seeing-through cinema*. Yet in the context of post-1960 film, works that substantially incorporate painting represent a highly significant sub-group of each. And it is in many of these films that key features of the two differing conceptions of cinema that these stylistic modes embody are most apparent. The use of art in a film can focus, clarify or intensify an idea of cinema of which, on a meta-level, it is a representative sample.<sup>68</sup>

As is clear from films as stylistically diverse as Godard's *Les carabiniers* (1963), Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966), and Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), still photography can be used to reflect on a film's reflexive character and the significance of it in relation to other representational and expressive features. In the films of Antonioni, Greenaway and Fellini, architecture is a medium through which film explores itself as a spatial art. Just as reflexive, *seeing-with cinema* directors often see film in terms of other representational or symbolic forms, including, in the widest sense, language, it is equally natural that a-reflexive, *seeing-through cinema* directors, owing to the absence of cinematic markers as a means of introducing intersecting planes of aesthetic significance into a filmic narrative, frequently turn to painting. Often, as in the case of Tarkovsky, this appropriation goes hand in hand with an attempt at conscious artistic legitimization, trying to place film on the same plane as great pre-cinematic art by connecting it with a visual tradition of the highest order, and forging an alternative not only to the popularly and economically dominant cinema (and television), with its

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<sup>68</sup> I use the term "sample" because a film does not present a discursive argument, but rather, as philosopher Nelson Goodman suggests is the case with any successful work of art, puts itself forth as an example of how a cinematic world may be constructed. This is a world which, taken as a whole, can be compared and contrasted with others of a recognizable 'type.' See Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978, 63-70.

tendency towards the throw-away image, but also certain forms of reflexive cinematic practice.

In many reflexive contexts art is used to *extend* a film's represented world. That is, the representation of painting can universalize a film, in one sense, as a cultural product, and ground it firmly in place as belonging to, or rejecting, one or more aesthetic traditions. In this way bridges are built between a film and other artistic and cultural realities, multiplying its reserves of potential meaning. Within a more transparent framework, in contrast, art frequently serves another role, to expressively *deepen* the represented world of a film and re-emphasize or intensify its own unique, internal features.

### I. 1.7 Some Conclusions

To now try to pull these various strands together, painting in a reflexive, *seeing-with cinema* context, predominantly reflects back on the film of which it is a part, in terms of that film's nature as a constructed *object* or artifact, and the possibilities, but also the limitations, of the film medium or the cinematic 'apparatus' (as it is sometimes referred to), as something that is imposed between the film's represented world and the viewer. In an a-reflexive, *seeing-through cinema* context, painting reacts with the film of which it is a part in relation to that film as a singular *phenomenal reality*, a direct aesthetic experience. Mikel Dufrenne maintains that every work of art simultaneously possess both of these dimensions. An art work is a physical, and physically limited, object, contiguous with the spatial-temporal world of its beholder and other works; but it is also an "aesthetic object," and as such presents a self-enclosed world, with its own temporal and spatial categories, which the beholder both surrenders to and imaginatively participates in.<sup>69</sup>

Just as the existence of the aesthetic object is dependent on the physical object constituting it, while none-the-less distinct from it, and, in the experience of the work,

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<sup>69</sup> See Dufrenne, *Part I*, "Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Object," in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 3-222.

the two are mutually constitutive, so too are the reflexive and *a*-reflexive poles of modern and contemporary cinema two sides of the same coin, with each dependent on the presence, or at least, the *possibility* of the other, in both theory and practice. The slow drift of cinematic representation towards the reflexive in the context of wider developments in 20<sup>th</sup> century film and art practice can be abstractly theorized in a number of alternative ways. A brief consideration of two such theoretical perspectives will provide a larger context within which to situate the conjunction of painting and reflexivity in the works of specific directors and in individual films.

#### I. 1.8 Art, Film and Self-Awareness: Philosophical Perspectives

Conceived in terms of a three-way dynamic between art, film, and philosophy, the relation between painting and reflexivity in cinema can be characterized in two main ways. First, on a case by case basis, the relation may be expressed in terms of the meta-fictional dimension of a given film, rooted in tensions between its style and the 'reality' it presents. Secondly, reference may be made to more general patterns, trends, and counter-trends, marking the historical and aesthetic development of film art taken as a collective phenomenon, a body of inter-connected works sharing significant constellations of features in relation to parallel developments in the other arts. This is partly to say that there are two ways in which a film, like a painting, can be about itself and about itself as representative of its medium, one by virtue of inherent 'formal' properties that are fully apprehensible in the direct perception of the work, and the other, in terms of symbolic significance that transcends such properties and hinges on knowledge of art or film practice, theory, and history, found outside of the work.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides one formulation of this tri-partite relation, in the context of a theory of modernist painting and the ways in which both it and film broadly mirror the methods and goals of his brand of "existential phenomenology." Arthur Danto offers a differently oriented, although at points overlapping, theoretical account in the context of his neo-Hegelian historicism. In both cases, these philosophers' considerations of the fertile area where film, art and philosophy intersect

are thoroughly bound up with the notions of reflexivity here discussed. And it is owing, I would argue, to their trans-disciplinary location of cinema within the wider field of visual art, that Merleau-Ponty and Danto's general approaches to the question of cinematic reflexivity go deeper in a number of respects than many strictly semiotic or narratological definitions often proposed from within the confines of film studies.

#### I. 1.8.i Merleau-Ponty: Painting, Film and Existential Perception

In Merleau-Ponty's published lecture "Film and the New Psychology,"<sup>70</sup> cinema is viewed against the backdrop of his more extensive consideration of painting and his well known writings on Cézanne, in particular. Like many art theorists and critics, Merleau-Ponty considers Cézanne to be the founding father of modern art, and on his view modernity and reflexivity go hand in hand. Painting, Merleau-Ponty maintains, is, and has always been, implicitly "about" painting. This is not by virtue of intention or reference, but the fact that a painting is both the reflection and concrete result of an ordered visual world, just as it is one's direct, lived perception of the world which makes visual art both possible and meaningful.<sup>71</sup> In all painting, therefore, one can "seek a figured philosophy of vision."<sup>72</sup> Yet it was Cézanne, according to Merleau-Ponty, who was the first artist to set himself the conscious goal of making this existential condition of visibility, and the perceptual processes underpinning it, the main subject of his work.<sup>73</sup> Cézanne's best works reflect on the prior history of painting neither by making direct reference to it (although with a wide knowledge of earlier art to draw on he did sometimes quote other artists and works) nor offering up an "idea" of art and nature for which his canvases were an illustration. Rather, Cézanne internalized the history of painting and, filtered through an understanding of the ways in which the

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<sup>70</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Film and the New Psychology," in *Sense and Non-Sense*. Translated by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 48-63.

<sup>71</sup> "Painting awakes and carries to its highest pitch a delirium which is vision itself..." ("Eye and Mind," in *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty*, 259).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>73</sup> Perception, for Merleau-Ponty, is not simply the passive taking in and arranging of raw sense data but the full sensory orientation of a conscious body towards the world.

visual field is perceptually experienced, he projected it back into the canvas in the form of a new and highly original style.<sup>74</sup> On Merleau-Ponty's view, reflected in Cézanne's style itself is a kind of transcendental critique of painting as both an art form and an active orientation towards the world.

Painting thus becomes no longer about *what* is depicted on one hand, and *how* it is depicted on the other, but about how what is represented is seen by the artist as a critical seer.<sup>75</sup> In presenting the object of vision, Merleau-Ponty argues, Cézanne simultaneously gives us the act of vision that grasps it, as the two are no longer conceived of as separable. In turn, it is only through medium based reflexivity that the nature of Cézanne's represented objects, as features of the phenomenal life-world, are revealed, just as in Merleau-Ponty's brand of existential phenomenology the "essence" of things in the world is to be found in the ways in which they present themselves to consciousness as themselves, rather than as forms built up and constructed from raw "sense data."<sup>76</sup> In contrast to much subsequent modernist painting, Cézanne necessarily clings to representation, the object's concrete presence as the origin of its perception, because for him art can only speak about itself in simultaneously speaking about the world. That is, in order for modern art to reveal something significant about itself, an authentic, or rounded, represented reality must interpose itself between what the artist has seen and the properties of the medium the work foregrounds. All this entails that the reflexive aspect of Cézanne's art is latent in his paintings as an objective quality to be grasped, internal to the work rather than external. Crucially, Cézanne's work is about painting without ceasing to be about the 'real,' since viewed in this way there need be no trade-off between art and perception.

Turning to cinema, Merleau-Ponty argues that film is a "temporal *Gestalt*" which when achieving a level of aesthetic self-awareness is equally concerned with the

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<sup>74</sup> Cézanne wanted to "make *visible* how the world *touches* us" (Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Cézanne's Doubt." In *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Alden L. Fisher. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1969, 244).

<sup>75</sup> In this sense Cézanne's is a radically empiricist art. Unlike the Impressionists, however, the perception of the natural world his works hypostatize is a mediated, conceptualized one. This is meta-perception, not simply representing visual sensation but the means of sensation, not a picture of a world as much as a picture of how the world is made.

<sup>76</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology" in *Sense and Non-Sense*, 27-47.

nature of visual perception. Perception is here conceived holistically as the ways in which an individual interacts with his or her spatial environment as a consequence of vision -- something which the "new" art of film, even more than painting, is uniquely equipped to explore. In combination with editing, the camera turned onto the concrete objects of perception (including the human subject) can, like Cézanne's painterly eye, simultaneously reveal the mode of their apprehension in the fold of the life-world, i.e., recording both *what* is seen and *how* it is seen simultaneously. For Merleau-Ponty a film as a presentational whole does not signify, but is the prior ground of meaning, or rather meaning is "incorporated into its rhythm just as the meaning of a gesture may be immediately read into that gesture: the film does not mean anything but itself."<sup>77</sup> Whereas painting achieves its concentration and distillation of visual experience through "co-existence of its parts" in the simultaneity of space, film does so through its successive temporal structure from which an "idea" emerges.<sup>78</sup>

To add a more contemporary side-note here, in reference to temporal and spatial properties, it is interesting to recall that David Lynch was an art student whose involvement with film began by wanting to give a dimension of actual motion to a particular painting.<sup>79</sup> Conversely, Andy Warhol created 'movie paintings' which could be projected on walls and which are defined by an internal motion so slow and gradual (via minute real time intervals) that, for all intents and purposes, their duration is all but imperceptible in the present tense, thereby guaranteeing the kind of spatial permanence that films generally lack. In the first case a still image is set in motion, and many of Lynch's films are like hyper-accelerated paintings, with the vibrating simultaneity Francis Bacon tried to achieve in paint. In the other, film is slowed to a point approaching, but not reaching, stasis. Not surprisingly, exploring such stillness/motion dynamics, which encapsulate different forms of temporal perception, has in large measure defined the interaction between film and painting, especially in experimental contexts, since the 1920s. That is, the idea of locating the source of both painting and

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<sup>77</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Film and the New Psychology," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, 57.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> See Chris Rodley, ed., *Lynch on Lynch*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999, 37-38.

film in the palpable experience of time, the normal standard of which each creatively deviates from in its own way. Douglas Gordon's installation works, like *Twenty-four Hour Psycho* (1993), carry on in this tradition, not by actually stilling a film shot, which would mean turning it into a still photograph, but by extending the duration of Hitchcock's film over such a long period as to instill a certain kind of spatial presence. Gordon's treatment of it puts Hitchcock's film in a kind of temporal-spatial limbo, returning it half-way back to its physical object nature. Contextually, it enables filmic material to be taken out of a theatrical performance arena and placed in a gallery space along side other still works, blurring many of the lines between experimental film and "film/video art."

According to Merleau-Ponty, modern painting and film share the concerns of phenomenology as a tool for revealing the conditions of a consciously embodied being acting with, and within, a concrete, spatially ordered environment.<sup>80</sup> The modern and pre-modern work of art is a picture of chosen aspects of this complex and irreducible interaction.<sup>81</sup> The fact that a film has a narrative dimension only adds, Merleau-Ponty implies, to its capacity for representing this interaction, in the form of an unfolding fictional world, more "exact" and "finer-grained" than the real one, but still recognizable and perceived directly.<sup>82</sup> In one sense the aim of phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty interprets the founder of this philosophical movement, Edmund Husserl, is to achieve a certain form of transparency to lived experience, but this can only be achieved through the mediation of a highly formalized way of thinking about thinking, an intellectualization of consciousness as self-consciousness. Existential

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<sup>80</sup> The 'self' as conceived in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodied perception is not one distinct from, or at odds with, a world external to it. Rather, the self 'carries' the world 'within it' as a potential to be actualized in the multi-faceted bodily engagement with persons and objects in a particular environment, the "life-world."

<sup>81</sup> Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology marks a break from Husserl's phenomenology which despite its revolutionary challenging of core post-Cartesian epistemological notions did not fully overcome the subject/object dualism at its heart (which Husserl's idea of the radical "intentionality" of consciousness seems to presuppose). Merleau-Ponty, like Heidegger, seeks to finally overturn the subject/object distinction - and a corollary one between self and world - through the concept of the "life-world," a notion seen to be present in Kant's writing but never given significant emphasis (see Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, 27-45).

<sup>82</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Film and the New Psychology," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, 58.

phenomenology's formal awareness of its own practices and its intense historical awareness of its relation to other philosophical traditions gives it the critical capacity to gain the requisite distance for reflecting on its own project.<sup>83</sup> From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, cinema, an art in its infancy, just beginning to hone its "exploratory" techniques, begins with the representation of the life world in its concreteness, only to reveal both *its* generative conditions and the underlying structures of the visual through the filmmaker's creative manipulation of spatio-temporal perception. Thus film is a new mirror in which both art and the "new psychology" promised by existential phenomenology are reflected.

In summary, then, for Merleau-Ponty, painting, film, and existential philosophy all reveal something significant about the situation of being in a visual world as this pertains to relations of the self to the self, to others, and to objects. In this sense their formal reflexivity is a given, i.e., it is both a conclusion and an *a-priori* point of departure. Writing in 1947, Merleau-Ponty is looking back on the history of painting leading to the cubist and post-cubist revolutions. But he is also anticipating the developments in cinematic form which, anticipated in its different faces by Soviet montage films and *Citizen Kane*, would very soon take off in a proliferation of techniques aided by new technologies. These developments would effectively open up cinematic time and space, the representation of a subject in relation to his or her life world, enabling whole new areas for the perceptual exploration of the mutually constitutive relation between the self and the lived environment - this coincides with a burgeoning reflexivity, where increasingly the film camera would turn on both itself and the viewer.

Arthur Danto's view, in contrast, is a wholly retrospective one. This 'revolution' in cinematic self-awareness having been realized, it can now be seen through the lens of Warhol's Brillo boxes and Ad Reinhardt's black paintings. In the case of Warhol's boxes, self-reflexivity is not a function of the art object, since it is

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<sup>83</sup> This is related to Merleau-Ponty's grander claim that it is only owing to the illuminations of existential phenomenology, the alliance of Husserl with Heidegger and Sartre, that the history of philosophy can be put into true context.

indistinguishable from its real counterpart. So suggests Danto in his highly influential essays on Warhol's work and the ever more extreme cases of perceptual confusion between art and non-art for which they pave the way.<sup>84</sup> Rather than perceptually embodied in the art work's formally objective properties, which for Merleau-Ponty constitute artistic style, this is painting about painting by virtue of a combination of the artist's (self-)reflexive act and the work being deemed "art" by the so-called "artworld."<sup>85</sup> Their reflexivity consists in the challenge they pose to the ontological status of art itself. Its not simply that such developments and the resulting cross-fertilization of the arts threaten to erase distinctions between forms – so that film and painting interact in ever closer ways, as in Warhol's or Brakhage's combinatory film/painting *oeuvre* - but that they blur the line between art and art theory, art and philosophy. It is, in fact, in large measure due to the work of filmmakers like Godard, as well as experimental artist-filmmakers such as Warhol and Michael Snow, that the kind of comparisons that Danto makes between post-1960 cinema and modernist/post-modernist painting become both viable and convincing.

#### I. 1.8.ii Danto: Film About Film

In his essay "Moving Pictures," Danto attempts to link-up film with post-1960 painting and mixed-media art, minimizing cinema's literary and dramatic dimensions. The large body of film theory devoted to comparing and contrasting cinema with other arts lends itself to certain expectations concerning arguments asserting film's close kinship to, or profound antipathy with, literature and drama, painting and dance. But Danto does not use cinema's movement-in-time dimension, something that a painting cannot physically emulate, as a basis for a strong distinction between it and cinema, as Merleau-Ponty does, and as would be expected. Rather, he argues that this aspect of film art actually brings film *closer* to painting and the visual arts in their reflexive, post-Pop art form.

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<sup>84</sup> See Danto, "The Artworld," in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*.

<sup>85</sup> On Danto's "institutional definition" of art, the judgment that a given object is an art work is ultimately made by the collective body of art museums, galleries, and critics. See "The Artworld," *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*.

Specifically, Danto points to the mobility of the camera, the “chief innovation” of which is to make “the mode of recording part of the record, which in turn thrusts the art of cinema into the image in a singularly intimate way.”<sup>86</sup> According to Danto, each time the camera moves there is a new perspective on the reality before it, representing a new intention-ality at work; the mere fact that the camera is directed towards something or someone becomes a prominent stylistic feature. In this respect, Danto focuses on objective rather than subjective point-of-view shots. The camera’s seemingly independent action from either the characters or, at a second remove, the viewer’s perception, through deviation from a previously established perspective, overturns any stable perceptual identification between the viewer and the represented events. Here the camera, more than just an “invisible” observing eye, can become a real physical presence involved in the actions it records. Danto points to crowd scenes, for example, where the camera itself is jostled around as if it were a person in the midst of the action.<sup>87</sup> This active participation within the world it captures on the part of the camera is often taken further, to the point where the camera itself behaves as a character, a limited subjectivity with incomplete information.<sup>88</sup> Such movements inscribed by a less than omniscient camera, which Danto identifies, and which, while certainly not being invented by post-1960 filmmakers do become increasingly prominent, seem to profoundly differ in kind from the famous crane shot down through the skylight of the nightclub in *Citizen Kane*, or from Fritz Lang’s elaborate tracking shots, where the viewer always has a sense, borne out at the other end of the movement, that the camera, as if held on a tight leash, always knows exactly where it is going in relation to its target object and why.

This new self-conscious camera presence pushes the “story” of a film away from the represented (fictional) events to the physical event of their filming, “as though the

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<sup>86</sup> Danto, Arthur. “Moving Pictures.” In *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, 229.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>88</sup> Here Danto cites Truffaut, but the camera’s movement in Kieslowski’s *Three Colours: Red* (1994) alternating from the action of an omniscient observer to a limited subjectivity, is another good example.

story itself were but the occasion for filming.”<sup>89</sup> In a different theoretical language, Serge Daney and J.P. Oudart suggest something very similar with respect to the “cinéphile” films of the French New Wave where the filmic fiction “consists of the exteriorized relation of a cineaste (lens plus consciousness) with the objects filmed” and cinema is “understood as fiction of filmic inscription.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Raul Ruiz speaks of a form of cinema epitomized by John Cassavetes’s partial improvisations, which develops “out of certain situations which are connected together according to the rules created by the situations themselves,” that is, rules born from the act of the camera capturing events as they unfold in real time.<sup>91</sup> Danto contends that “in this move to self-consciousness, cinema marches together with the other arts of the twentieth century in the respect that art itself becomes the ultimate subject of art.”<sup>92</sup> In a decisive break away from their former signatures of mediumistic singularity – that is, painting’s distance from the “real world” allowing for *mimesis* or its rejection through abstraction, and film’s innate ability to provide a convincing dramatic illusion of the world – paintings, with the advent of Pop art, threaten to turn into “real” things, like consumer goods or natural objects, while, inversely, films threaten to cease being “about,” or mainly about, the fictional stories they present.

If Merleau-Ponty wished to bring together film and philosophy, specifically phenomenology, with painting as the interface between them, so to does Danto, but from his own teleological perspective. Whereas for Merleau-Ponty this connection is made by way of a form-based exploration of both films’ and paintings’ capacity to convey a reflexive significance that is pre-conceptual, contained within the work, and directly apprehended, Danto sees such a synthesis as operable only within a larger cultural and intellectual framework external to the film or art work. That is, a

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<sup>89</sup> Danto, “Moving Pictures,” *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays*, 230.

<sup>90</sup> Daney and Oudart’s *Cahiers du cinéma* article “Le Nom-de-l’auteur” is quoted in Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 325.

<sup>91</sup> Ruiz, Raul. “This time, I want to talk about the affair of the Black Cat.” In *Projections 4 ½, Filmmakers on Filmmaking*, edited by David Boorman and Walter Donohue. London: Faber and Faber: 1995, 190.

<sup>92</sup> The quotation continues “...a movement of thought which parallels philosophy in the respect that philosophy in the end is what philosophy is about” (Danto, “Moving Pictures,” in *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays*, 230).

conceptual context which provides the only key for unlocking the import of the work's formal features. Despite this crucial difference, Danto turns to French existential phenomenology, not to Merleau-Ponty, but to Sartre, and his notion of "non-thetic consciousness of consciousness" to shed light on the higher order implications of reflexivity in art and cinema. Echoing Merleau-Ponty, Danto suggests that modern film "gives us not merely an object but a perception of that object, a world and a way of seeing a world at once, the artist's mode of vision being as important in the work as what it is a vision of."<sup>93</sup>

In spite of its generality as expressed here - and Danto offers little more in the way of specifics - this way of thinking promises a more holistic and nuanced theory of reflexivity than simply the Brechtian exposure of a work's constructed-ness. And rather than setting the two in exclusive opposition and antagonism, it allows for the possibility of both the reflexive and more transparent dimensions of a film world to be apprehended simultaneously. Returning to the metaphor of cinema as a partial transparency, simultaneously window and mirror, with which we began, Danto's perspective allows for the film viewer's ability to see both the view through the window and the reflection upon it.

As in the case of painting, Danto construes reflexivity in film as both a loss and a gain:

When, instead of transforming real objects into artworks, the transformation itself is what we are aware of, the film becomes a documentary with the special character of documenting the making of an artwork, and it is moot if the film itself will be an art work in its right, however absorbing it may be.<sup>94</sup>

Hegel recognized the danger of art's movement away from immediate perceptual presence and towards the mediation of concepts since the aesthetic, by definition, is rooted in the concrete perceptual object. Here the film work risks dissipating into theory: its phenomenal world, rooted in the representation of material reality - from which cinema derives a good deal of its expressive power - becoming no more than a

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<sup>93</sup> Danto, "Moving Pictures," in *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays*, 231.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

schematic prop. Many reflexive directors are aware of this fine line between representation and reflexivity, the differing demands of the fictional world and a critical exploration of it, although their success at walking this line varies from film to film. They must find ways of dealing with the problem of balancing fictional depth, some form of authentic engagement with the world of a film in its fictional ideality (which, in some cases is equivalent to 'realism' as a general plausibility of a film's world, its basic truth to experience), and a reflexive presentation which, to be fully effective, depends on the strength of the fiction it plays against. For once the represented world of a film collapses, so too does its reflexive impact. One could argue that Godard's later films, attempting to straddle the line between essay and fiction, lack the brilliance of his early to mid 60's masterpieces for this very reason: their reflexive dimension runs rampant over a much less committed, complex and fully realized fictional foundation.

## **Chapter 2 Art and Reflexivity: Seven Filmmakers**

In order to fully appreciate the variety of ways that painting and reflexivity, or its disavowal, simultaneously manifest themselves in post-1960 cinema, it is necessary to turn to the example of specific films and directors. In doing so we will discover a number of prominent couplings between the representation of art and some perennial concerns of reflexive filmmakers. These include the relation between fictional and documentary forms, the boundaries of narrative in film, how literary and theatrical themes and devices may be incorporated into a cinematic world, and the extent to which a filmmaker's attitude towards his or her artistic influences can or should be reflected within a film. Frequently overlapping with these, the portrayal of the lives of historical or fictional artists is also considered.

Reflexivity and transparency, and *seeing-with* and *seeing-through* cinema, respectively, are as much elements in an on-going dialectic, as they are opposing modes or practices, and to an extent must be defined relationally. Thus while focusing on the *seeing-with cinema* use of art in the films of Greenaway, Ruiz, Erice, Rivette, and

Wenders, I will also refer to its *seeing-through cinema* contrast in the work of Pialat and Herzog. However, as the first section of this sub-chapter will illustrate, although *seeing-through cinema* is in many ways a direct reaction to the emergence of a highly reflexive type of filmmaking (one which was profoundly influenced by modernist movements within the visual arts, as well as literature), given that it has its own art historical lineage pertaining to other legacies of late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century painting, it also transcends this two-term opposition.

### I. 2.1 Film and Painting: Trends and Counter Trends

Whether or not one finds their all-embracing aesthetic theories wholly persuasive for the purposes of this study, one of the chief values of Merleau-Ponty's and Danto's assessments of reflexive film and painting is that they book-end what can be described as a 'golden age' of cinematic reflexivity. This was a time when such self-conscious techniques and ways of making films were at their freshest and most vibrant, before, perhaps inevitably, themselves becoming codified clichés in the hands of many filmmakers, or in a contemporary context, offered up in recycled form under the banner of a 'post-modern' sensibility. Looking back, this blossoming comprises the early *nouvelle vague* films, Antonioni's reflexive modernism, Fellini's abandonment of neo-realism leading up to *8 ½*, Godard's reflexive masterpieces (*Vivre sa vie*, *Le mépris*, and *Pierrot le fou*), Cassavetes' iconoclastic cinema of improvisation, and, in later manifestations, the intense self-questioning reflexivity of New German Cinema, to which may be added, finally, the early works of the American "film school generation." Simultaneously, together with German Expressionist cinema, this was, on the whole, the most fertile period in narrative film's direct engagement with other forms of visual art.

Many films that reference art exhibit aspects of (self-) reflexivity, as it is characterized by Merleau-Ponty and Danto. Parallels can be made between key cinematic works/movements and the 'progress' of 20<sup>th</sup> century painting, beginning with modernist formal experimentation moving through minimalist expressionism and

ending with some type of post-modern 'intertextuality,' or art as art theory and history. In this respect there appears to be a kind of delay effect at work, where cinema tends to 'catch up' with developments in painting, and visual art more generally, a few decades later. Yet it would be wrong to think of the influence of 20<sup>th</sup> century painting as inexorably pushing film towards the reflexive and away from the transparent. Robert Hughes, among others, has shown there was – and still is – a clear counter-trend in painting, analogous in some respects to the transparent alternatives to reflexivity found in post-1960 European, and, to a lesser extent, North American art cinema.<sup>95</sup>

Again, the main point of contact here may be in the experimental arena, but as is often the case, elements from it have a way of filtering into more conventionally narrative films. To some extent this can be tied in with the continuing influence of Symbolism and surrealism, on one hand, and the Romantic tradition rooted in the primacy of subjective expression, on the other, which although on many accounts is subject to a strong critique in much modern art (and art theory), informs an important strand of it. In this connection, Clement Greenberg includes a revealing footnote in his seminal essay "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch," when, after claiming that Picasso, Mondrian, Matisse and Cézanne, "derive their main inspiration from the medium they work in," adds:

From the point of view of this formulation, Surrealism in plastic art is a reactionary tendency which is attempting to restore 'outside' subject matter. The chief concern of a painter like Dali is to represent the processes and concepts of his consciousness, not the processes of the medium.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the ideological gloss Greenberg puts on this "restoration" of subject, which for him carries a host of negative implications, this u-turn need not translate into conventionality or formal stagnation, but, as I have suggested, comes down to whether the art work is conceived as a mirror of visual representation or a window onto

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<sup>95</sup> See Robert Hughes, *Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.

<sup>96</sup> Greenberg, Clement, "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch." In *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965, 8.

something above or beyond it. In a modern cinematic context this counter-trend is most apparent in a post-1960 return to the sublime, the metaphysical and the grotesque – seen, for instance, in the films of Herzog, Stanley Kubrick, Werner Herzog, Jan Svankmajer and David Lynch.

Many of the pioneers of modern abstract art – Fratišek Kupka, Kandinsky, Mondrian – even Picasso – began in a Symbolist vein, rooted in “attempts to cloth the Idea in perceptual form,” where the “Idea” as an in-itself reality expressed in and through a represented subject, although not reducible to it.<sup>97</sup> Even after each of these painters had abandoned many of its outward trappings, something of Symbolism’s oneric atmospheres and metaphysical yearning remained in their works. Whether or not reflecting a conscious intention on Kubrick’s part, a film like *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is highly Symbolist in much of its imagery. The famous shot of the embryonic star-child floating in space is remarkable similar to a mystically influenced painting by Kupka entitled *The Beginning of Life, The Water lilies* (1900-03), where an embryo springing from a lotus blossom hovers above an alien-like landscape. Peter Wollen and Michel Chion see *2001*’s climactic “star-gate” sequence -- that still unheard of smuggling of avant-garde colour abstraction into a big-budget, Hollywood-financed film -- in the context of 60’s Op-art, a fundamentally reflexive movement in painting that plays with the idiosyncrasies of human vision and was the then high-art fashion of the moment.<sup>98</sup> Yet there is also a marked resemblance between Kubrick and Donald Trumbull’s visuals and Kupka’s non-representational vortices of color dating from 1910 onwards - with titles like *Cosmic Spring I* and *II* signaling their transcendent ambition – paintings which are considered by many art historians to be among the first fully-fledged abstract paintings. In theme as well as form, with its metaphysical probing in

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<sup>97</sup> Jean Moréas, quoted in Michael Gibson, *Symbolism*. Köln: Taschen, 1995, 31. As defined first in relation to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century work of the so-called “decadent” poets, for Moréas Symbolist writing serves to express “the Idea” to which the poem itself “remains subordinate...” (31).

<sup>98</sup> See Peter Wollen, “If you want to make films.” In “Art and Film,” *Sight and Sound* supplement, July, 1994, 22.

the context of pre-verbal dream and vision, *2001* is a prime example of a late flowering Symbolism in cinema.<sup>99</sup>

Although in some collective sense, from the 1960s on, visual art may have 'liberated' itself, entered into a 'post-aesthetic' or 'pre-philosophical' stage, and, in an age of irony, become increasingly self-conscious and self-critical, it is not required to be about itself alone. Nor is it barred from using innovative techniques and technology to address what could be viewed as more traditional or universal subject matter. This also holds in relation to cinema. Buñuel, for example, remained true to the spirit of surrealism's original tenants -- most notably, the desire to break down the boundaries between dream and waking life -- engaging with them all the way up to his death, while his film style evolved, remaining open to innovations in the cinematic treatment of space and time and novel forms of non-linear narrative construction. In his metaphysical parables, Béla Tarr draws on aspects of Antonioni's modernist style as much as on Jancsó, but adapts it to a much different, more transparent end. These are examples of compromises between a reflexive cinema in which style is on display as an in-itself good (even if this very ethos is in turn called into question), and the cinematic transparency to an expansive world-vision in which style shapes represented content but does not, as a point of principle, exhaust it.

At the same time, there is another sort of *a*-reflexive, and, from Greenberg's perspective, 'reactionary' movement in post-1960 film, that is in some sense more directly anti-modernist, or, at least, ambivalently anachronistic, in a way similar to the Pre-Raphaelite painters and artists, who, in looking back to an older painterly tradition, in the midst of modern industrialization on an unprecedented scale, found a whole alternative ethos in a less perspective-oriented style. Some of the most formally radical post-1960 narrative films have in some way been shaped by a filmmaker digging deep into the history of art, integrating pre-cinema painting directly or using it as a template

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<sup>99</sup> A number of films have consciously drawn on symbolist paintings. The art designer for Coppola's *Dracula*, for instance, is reported to have been inspired by Kupka's early paintings. In relation to *2001*, many of the early abstract painters including Kupka, Malevich (who spoke of constructing a Suprematist satellite) and Kandinsky were fascinated with outer space - associated with a vortex of speed and movement - as a mirror of inner space; the cosmic reached through the micro-cosmic. See Anna Moszynska, *Abstract Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1990, 55-62.

for overall visual design. The *mise-en-scène* of Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* (1974) with its flattened composition, heightened attention to small natural details, and the trance-like gestures of actors as "models," can be compared with both pre-Renaissance painting and its pre-Raphaelite revival. Whereas Pasolini's borrowing from medieval fresco painters and Byzantine icons -- as "the most frontal and hieratic pictorial and plastic representation which exists"<sup>100</sup> -- was a deliberate reflexive attempt to escape from the illusion of three dimensional depth he associated with the permeation of Renaissance perspective in conventional realist cinema (a sensibility shared, perhaps less intellectually, by Georgian filmmaker Sergei Parajanov), for Andrei Tarkovsky and Werner Herzog, it is this very quality of being windows onto other worlds that, they claim, links their cinema to the art of the Renaissance masters.

## II. 2.2. Documentary, Reflexivity and Painting

Danto sees reflexivity as pushing fictional film further and further into documentary territory. In so doing he upholds a distinction between fictional film and documentary on the basis of an internal/external model: the events represented in a documentary are external to the world of the film, meaning that they did, or could have occurred, whether or not the camera was there to record them, whereas "what a non-documentary film is about cannot be photographed."<sup>101</sup> To paraphrase Godard and Susan Sontag, both of whom discuss the ontological status of film and photography in their re-appraisals of classical film theory by way of comparison with the traditional arts, the cinematic image in-itself is never "false" -- that is, intrinsically fictional or subjective -- in the way that painting, as artistic depiction or interpretation, always is.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps this medium divergence, and the paradoxes it engenders, explains why a number of key post-1960

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 137.

<sup>101</sup> Danto, "Moving Pictures," in *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays*, 223.

<sup>102</sup> Richard Roud quotes Godard as saying that "...cinema is something *between* art and life...Literature and painting both exist as art from the very start; the cinema doesn't" and that filmmakers are "condemned to an analysis of the world; of the real" in a way in which painters are not. See Richard Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard*, 2nd edition. London: Thames and Hudson and BFI, 1970, 13, 46.

films which reflexively incorporate painting as a subject and a form, including Peter Greenaway's *A Walk through H* (1978) and *The Falls* (1980) and Raul Ruiz's *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* (*The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*, 1978), also test the boundaries and assumptions of the documentary genre. Here perennial questions concerning the truth or falsity of the film image, the uniqueness of documentary modes of narration, the possibility of cinematic objectivity, are paired with the innovative representation of art. Moreover, two of the more successful recent attempts to depict the creative process on screen, Rivette's *La belle noiseuse* (1991), and Victor Erice's *Quince Tree Sun* (1992) each of which addresses the difficulty of representing the act of painting on film, simultaneously concern themselves with the boundary between fiction and documentary, the real and the make-believe, in film and everyday life. Let us first look in more detail at Greenaway's *A Walk Through H* and Ruiz's *L'Hypothèse*, films by two of the most prolific reflexive, *seeing-with cinema* filmmakers.

#### II. 2.2.i Painting in Space: *A Walk Through H*

Painting has been the most consistent extra-cinematic presence in Peter Greenaway's films, beginning in earnest with *A Walk Through H*, subtitled *The Re-incarnation of an Ornithologist*. Laura Denham has half-jokingly described the film as a painter's "dream photo-op," as it consists almost entirely of a series of Greenaway's own paintings.<sup>103</sup> Filling the entire frame, the paintings are tracked by the camera generally from left to right, at varying speed, and edited seamlessly together. On these maze-like images, mostly abstract but some containing representational forms scattered throughout the designs, the film traces the route of ornithologist Tulse Luper's bizarre, Dante-esque trip through heaven or hell (which remains ambiguous to the end). As in Greenaway's *The Falls*, made two years later, spy-story intrigues, intellectual conspiracies and 'shaggy dog' stories abound in *H*. The authoritative-voiced Colin Cantile also narrates

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<sup>103</sup> Denham, Laura. *The Films of Peter Greenaway*. London: Minerva Press, 1993, 17. Along with David Lynch and Takashi Kitano, Greenaway is one of a number of post-1960 filmmakers who incorporate their own paintings into the worlds of their films. In the case of Stanley Kubrick it is his wife Christina's paintings that are seen decorating the walls of interiors in films like *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*.

this mock-documentary, although here, unlike in *The Falls*, he remains a conventionally off-screen presence. The only interruption of the painted or drawn surfaces in the film are periodic cutaways to stock nature footage of seagulls in flight. In these live-action images, unrelated to the narrative in any direct fashion, the natural momentarily breaks in on the highly artificial, suggesting a freedom or respite which the hounded ornithologist has either never had or, possibly, has finally attained in some other life. For the viewer, these cut-aways provide a breathing space amidst the otherwise unrelenting forward propulsion of the narrative, with its informational overload and near-delirium of visual expression. Like the *The Falls*, *H* includes a minimalist score by Michael Nyman, one equally suited to the hectic visual tempo of this film, and which imbues the paintings with an added dynamism. Most significantly, in *H*, internal or 'durational' cinematic movement, in the form of the live-action footage, is a counterpoint to the dominant duration-less image, in the form of the paintings, and *not* the more conventional reverse, as in *The Falls* (where paintings appear as insert shots within a largely live-action presentation).<sup>104</sup>

By filming his own art in the way that he does - using various degrees of close-up, not showing the frames of the paintings (that is not until the film's last shots, when it is made clear that they are framed at all), and jumping via cuts from one canvas to another without interruption - Greenaway, in *H*, ensures that as presented the paintings and drawings lack the experiential borders that frames conventionally provide, and for which the border of the film image can in some ways substitute. In this sense, Greenaway overturns Bazin's famous formulation of the perceptual and imaginative distinction between a painting and a film image based on the differing "frames" of each, found in the latter's brief but highly influential essay, "Painting and Cinema." Bazin's insightful but not un-problematic distinction, one which in some respects hinges on the acceptance of his wider realist conception of the film medium, has become something of a dogma in comparative studies of film and painting.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> In its distillation of space via deliberate tracking movements *A Walk Through H* is similar to key structuralist films of the 70's and 80's such as Michael Snow's one-room tracking shot film *Wavelength*.

<sup>105</sup> It is largely accepted by David Pascoe, for instance, in his study of Greenaway. See Pascoe, *Peter Greenaway: Museums and Moving Images*. London: Reaktion, 1997.

To briefly re-state the argument, Bazin holds that traditionally the frame of a painting separates its depicted world from the reality outside of it in an emphatic way.<sup>106</sup> Phenomenologically, as well as physically, the frame, which re-emphasizes painting's pronounced subjectivity (as Bazin conceives it) is a real boundary. In paintings which utilize traditional perspective techniques, not only is the image contained physically within the frame, but classical forms of composition tend to draw the eye away from the frame and into the center of the canvas - which Bazin associates with the heart of its depicted world - and only then back out to its borders. This establishes an enclosed imaginative field or "contemplative area."<sup>107</sup> The frame, therefore, together with the composition, in many cases, ensures that a painting functions as a "centripetal" image. The edges or borders of the film image, in contrast - equated with the edges of the camera's view finder, the frames of the film stock itself and the border of the screen - portion out a section of a reality-continuum that the filmmaker has selected for view at any one moment. The presence of such a continuum is confirmed when people and objects either pass in or out of the frame, or the viewer's attention is directed to the edges of the shot, as a permeable "mask" more than a frame (which is to say that the crucial off-screen space of cinema has no literal analog in painting). The film image, according to Bazin, is thus "centrifugal," as the viewer's perception is continually pushed to the edges of the shot and the intuited or imagined reality beyond it.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> In the case of modern painting this clearly becomes more problematic, given the increasing tendency of painters to 'crop' their images, and to de-centralize them in other ways, and the work of artists like Howard Hodgkin who makes a virtue out of painting on the frame itself. Hodgkin's practices can be seen as a challenge to the frame as a neutral buffer zone between a painting and the space within which it is displayed.

<sup>107</sup> Bazin, André. "Painting and Cinema." In *What is Cinema? Vol.1*. Translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, 166.

<sup>108</sup> While Bazin's argument is generally convincing, his characterization of the function of the frame in the case of a painting, as well as of the borders of the film shot, are rather wide generalizations. This is especially true given the number of ways in which both filmmakers and painters either use the edges of the frame to seal off their represented realities or, alternatively, open them out into an ambiguous imaginary space, as Pascal Bonitzer discusses in relation to his notion of "deframing." See Bonitzer, "Deframings." In *Cahiers du cinéma Volume Four: 1973-8: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, edited by David Wilson. London: Routledge, 2000.

Given this, what happens when a painting is represented on screen, particularly without its frame, and these two types of image-frames collide? Since painting as represented on film ultimately conforms to cinema's representational properties, Bazin writes that "if a section of a painting is shown on screen, the space of it loses its orientation and its limits and is presented to the imagination without any boundaries."<sup>109</sup> In theory such an effect works against the realist principles Bazin champions. Yet, after first casting it in a fairly negative light, in looking at the example of Alain Resnais documentary *Van Gogh* from 1948, Bazin comes to the important fact that this loss of orientation can actually invest a painting on film with a heightened or different order of expression. And this is exactly what happens in *A Walk Through H*. Greenaway's paintings are endowed with the unbounded, imaginative openness that Bazin associates with the film image, whereas, in a formal sense, at least, the live-action shots of the birds are framed off from the rest of film's abstract visual *Gestalt*.<sup>110</sup> This is the virtual opposite of paintings used as non-diegetic insert-shots in Godard's sixties cinema, for instance, as well as in *The Falls*, which stops the flow of live-action images and temporarily pulls the viewer out of the film's main represented world. This is but one of a number of aesthetic inversions, or reversals, in Greenaway's early cinema, where properties of one artistic or representational medium are transferred to another, within the general context of a blurring of fiction and documentary modes of cinematic representation.

The attempt to get up-close, and around, the surface of paintings by way of the moving camera, as well as the cuts and dissolves that link the different painted images together, was, as Bazin notes, pioneered by Resnais in *Van Gogh*. Given that Greenaway is fond of citing Resnais as his greatest filmmaking influence,<sup>111</sup> it is safe to assume that he is familiar with this film and that it likely informed the treatment of art in *H* and other early works. The fact that Resnais's stylistic innovations in this respect

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<sup>109</sup> Bazin, "Cinema and Painting" in *What is Cinema, Vol. 1*, 166.

<sup>110</sup> David Pascoe claims that when the "stillness" of painting and the "motion" of film are brought together, "they annul each other's illusory space and so stress their existence as *fabricated* images" (Pascoe, *Peter Greenaway: Museums and Moving Images*, 27).

<sup>111</sup> See Peter Greenaway, "Movie Memories." In *100 Years of Cinema*, supplement to *Sight and Sound*, February (1996): 15-16, 16.

come in the context of an 'educational' documentary on a famous painter, and that here in *H* similar techniques are used in an ostensible documentary, one featuring his own art, was probably also not lost on Greenaway.

Turning to the film's narrative structure, *A Walk Through H* features a pronounced disjunction between language (in the form of narrated text) and image. The verbose voice-over narration, the content of which is at such experiential odds with the art imagery, serves less an informational role than a kind of liturgical one, it is like an incantation that brings the painted surface to life. In *H*, just as in the sequences in *The Falls* which present painting in a similar manner, the viewer, like the Tulse Luper character, constantly risks straying off the narrated path and getting lost in a purely aesthetic contemplation of the individual paintings -- which are hypnotic in their undulating designs, vaguely recognizable forms, and semi-emergent patterns. Greenaway has often spoken of his paintings and drawings, heavily influenced by cartography, as well as the actual English countryside, as imaginary landscapes within which beholders are encouraged to "lose themselves."<sup>112</sup> The paintings in *H* are actually referred to in the voice-over as 92 maps which Luper follows on his adventures. They form a series of small visual puzzles or mysteries within a much larger narrated one, and after a time the viewer begins to suspect that if there are solutions to any, they are very probably unrelated, thereby reinforcing the suggested incompatibility between language and the painted image. Indeed, in *H* the very "maps" which ostensibly correspond to the events referred to, are the least literally significant and most abstractly expressive elements of the film. Since Greenaway's paintings, presented face-on and with no other visual compliment or contextualization, are all that we, as viewers, are provided with what we may normatively expect in this purported documentary account to be illustrations transparent to the voice-over, are, in fact, highly stylised and opaque. In contrast, the objective, visually transparent live-action images of the birds (footage most likely taken from a nature documentary), which, even in a semi-conventional

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<sup>112</sup> See Leo Steinmetz and Peter Greenaway, *The World of Peter Greenaway*. Boston and Tokyo: Journey Editions, 1995, 8.

continuity style film would be assigned some relation to an established space - and therefore viewed in a predominantly literal manner, even if they do have a symbolic resonance - are allowed to operate solely along metaphorical or associational lines.<sup>113</sup> Clearly a meta-aesthetic commentary concerning how narratives may be 'read' into painting runs throughout the film. This is an activity which both Greenaway's visual art and his cinema allow for, and, at the same time, discourage, in the cause of a more distanced appreciation of purely formal qualities.

*H's* unexpected ending makes this explicit, and it throws the film's presentational style into stark diegetic relief. The camera pulls back to reveal that through the course of the film the maps/paintings, which are actually framed and bounded, hang on the walls of a gallery, and that, most likely, they have all along been presented from the subjective point of view of some scrutinizing viewer. A further *Twilight Zone* like twist comes in the last shot of the film, where the camera slowly tracking away from the paintings alights on the desk of the gallery receptionist and an open, face down copy of a book - *Birds of the Northern Hemisphere*, with 92 maps, by none other than Tulse Luper. The suggestion here, is that the fantastic narrative accompanying the paintings occurred in the mind of the gallery receptionist during her "walk" through the exhibition space, as she imaginatively combined the images and what (improbably, perhaps) she has been reading. With this shot, the aesthetic encounter has been brought back to its experiential bedrock in the form of one person's unique, highly subjective interaction with the art work in a performative space. The film as a whole thus teasingly moves from being an investigative documentary on Tulse Luper and his fantastic adventures to a documentary record of an exhibition of paintings by Luper's creator, Greenaway, embellished by the receptionist as his highly imaginative surrogate. While both borrowing and parodying documentary techniques (and, with the images of the birds, using actual documentary footage), *A Walk Through*

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<sup>113</sup> An earlier Greenaway film, *Water Wrackets*, pushes the disjunction between image and language to mind-bending limits by again coupling a voice-over commentary with nature footage. The film's voice-over narration is a Tolkien-esque account of violent battles between civilizations in a distant past or future as played over meditative shots of tranquil woodland riverbanks, pools and small waterfalls.

*H* is also a kind of self-reflexive commentary on both Greenway's painterly and cinematic practices simultaneously.

Greenaway's interest in documentary form comes directly out of his time as an assistant, and then a documentary editor, in the British government's Central Office of Information (an obvious inspiration for the "VUE Commission" in *The Falls*). *The Falls* (1980) is a sprawling mock-documentary cum experimental film running well over three hours that chronicles the lives of the victims of a mysterious radioactive disaster. The film is also a continuation and development of *H*'s art on film experiment. Here however, within a much more heterogeneous and stylistically baroque live-action framework, the painted image plays a significant but much more limited role, primarily as expressive punctuation. Even more than *H*, *The Falls* is an obvious parody of the Anglo-American BBC style documentary and the Griersonian realist tradition it is heir to, within which documentary is conceived as a highly objective cinematic form capable of representing the 'real' with minimal mediation. This is a notion which Greenaway gleefully undermines at every opportunity through a whole arsenal of formalist devices (including rapid cutting, extreme long and close shots, painterly tableaux, fades, vertical and horizontal tracking shots, nearly abstract sequences featuring colour/form experiments on the order of Brakhage and other experimental filmmakers, image masking, frame-within-frame compositions, time-lapse photography, and direct address of the camera). Added to this mix, together with inserts of photographs, maps, diagrams, and written text, are paintings by Jacques Louis David, Piero Della Francesca, and, again, Peter Greenaway.

It is particularly appropriate that within *The Falls*' representational galaxy, Greenaway's own 'painting-in-cinema' style in *H* is appropriated and, together with the self-referential act this inclusion represents, parodied. In *The Falls*, *H* is referred to as one of the films that a playwright arranges, in association with the omnipresent Tulse Luper, *H*'s protagonist and Greenaway's long-running cinematic alter ego, to show at the BFI's National Film Theatre. Later, however, playing on the fact that *H* reflexively calls into question its *own* existence, the narrator remarks that the print of the film was purportedly lost before this screening could occur and that some "skeptics" suspect that

it may never have been made. (*A Walk Through H* is also listed among the prose works of the author Leasting Falvo, another of Greenaway's semi-disguised stand-ins in *The Falls*.) Even while many of *H*'s characters, events, and themes, together with a number of Greenaway's paintings that comprise the earlier film, are incorporated into *The Falls*, *H* is posited as just one among many ways in which art can be used within narrative film, as broadly envisioned.

With respect to Greenaway's career as a whole, as Denham rightly observes, films like *A Walk Through H* represent a first stage in his cinematic appropriation of painting.<sup>114</sup> In these 'private' films, as Greenaway describes them, actual paintings and drawings, shot frontally and filling the frame, often replace conventional *mise-en-scène*. This can be viewed as an alternative mode of semi-narrative filmmaking, Greenaway's all-out attempt to combat what he perceives as the realism dominating most film practice. The second stage, represented by Greenaway's 'public,' i.e. more conventionally narrative and commercial work, beginning with the *Draughtsman's Contract* (1982) is characterized by an internalisation of painting, its history and techniques, leading to the re-creation or re-staging of specific works and/or styles of painting often in the form of cinematic *tableaux*. In Greenaway's later films, the illusionist three-dimensional space of the cinematic image effectively becomes a canvas, in contrast with the earlier ones, in which the two-dimensional flatness of the cinematic picture plane is quite literally 'foregrounded' in the representation of the painted surface.

Greenaway's engagement not only with other arts, but with cultural history more broadly, by way of a Borgesian "encyclopedic" aesthetic of marked inclusiveness, prompts writers like Bridget Elliot and Anthony Purdy to see him as a prime exponent of the "museum film."<sup>115</sup> In essence, such a film brings together all manner of cultural bric-a-brac and self-reflexively arranges it via a conspicuously arbitrary classificatory

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<sup>114</sup> See Denham, *The Films of Peter Greenaway*, 15.

<sup>115</sup> Elliot, Bridget and Anthony Purdy. *Peter Greenaway : Architecture and Allegory*. Chichester: Academy Editions, 1997, 90. In discussing his films and art work Greenaway often references Borges's encyclopaedic synthesis of culture in literary works that have the "ability to put all the world together" (quoted in Marcia Pally, "Cinema as a Total Art Form: An interview with Peter Greenaway." In *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, edited by Vernon W. Gras. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2000, 107).

schema. The resulting visual display is a kind of cinematic “cabinet of marvels” functioning as an “a-temporal micro-cosm.”<sup>116</sup> The museum film concept represents one of a number of ways in which critics and theorists have sought to bridge Greenaway’s parallel film and art practices, but also his third career as a curator. Greenaway has organised numerous gallery and museum exhibitions throughout Europe. Most of these are predicated on the associational relation between collections of disparate objects, be they antique measuring devices, maps, or art works, emphasising the extent to which his films operate along similar lines. As many writers have suggested with respect to his films, paintings, and curatorial activities, Greenaway’s work reflects on the ways in which symbol systems impose order on what may be ‘naturally’ disordered, through objectification and repetition, among other means.<sup>117</sup> Just as important, however, is how Greenaway’s work is also concerned with the *relation between* existing classificatory or representational systems, pertaining to art, myth, language and science. His films, art, and exhibitions, all address the ways in which one “world-making” order, in philosopher Nelson Goodman’s terms, can or cannot be translated into another, and the gains and losses of such conceptual transactions.<sup>118</sup> This pre-occupation manifests itself at a micro-level in the dialectic between painting and cinema at work in almost all of his films, as well as that between film-video and literature (*Prospero’s Books* [1991], *A TV Dante* [1989], *The Pillow Book* [1996] ), cinema and architecture (*The Belly of an Architect* [1987] ), the theories of creation and evolution (*A Zed and Two Noughts* [1985] ), mathematics and the iconography of sex and death (*Drowning by Numbers* [1988]), etc.. In these respects Greenaway’s entire creative practice conforms to the *seeing-with cinema* tendency to stress cinematic creation – and, by extension, all artistic activity – as a process of ordering and re-ordering, translating images and

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<sup>116</sup> Elliot and Purdy, *Peter Greenaway : Architecture and Allegory*, 90. Elliot and Purdy link the museum film in theory and practice to Jean Baudrillard’s notion of collecting as a manifestation of the psychological need “to translate time into space” (Elliot and Purdy, 90). Whether or not Greenaway suffers from this compulsion, or if in formal terms it can be applied to the whole of his work, such a process can be read into the replacement of the time-bound live-action image in favor of duration-less two-dimensional imagery (be it painting or still photography) in his early films.

<sup>117</sup> See Robert Brown, “Greenaway’s Contract.” In *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, edited by Vernon W. Gras. Jackson: University of Mississippi Pres, 2000, 7.

<sup>118</sup> See Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*.

representational forms into others images and forms, rather than an act of virgin creation.

I have chosen to concentrate on *A Walk Through H*, as it is in many ways representative of Greenaway's early cinema rooted in the combination of fiction and documentary. But his later films, in which Greenaway's fascination with documentary ebbs, if never totally disappears, further corroborates him as a *seeing-with cinema* filmmaker, in terms of both their use of art and overall reflexive designs (echoes of which we will find in the films of other *seeing-with cinema* filmmakers included in this study). In this context we can pursue a brief overview of *The Draughtsman's Contract* and a number of Greenaway's subsequent films, highlighting some of their relevant reflexive characteristics.

*The Draughtsman's Contract's* central character is Mr. Neville, "an English landscape artist torn between drawing what he sees or what he knows."<sup>119</sup> Neville's twelve drawings of a Manor house, models of rational symmetry and clarity, are seen against the backdrop of his business and sexual relations with the house's inhabitants (forming a web of dark, conspiratorial intrigues) as depicted in frontal, *tableaux*-like compositions. With only a few exceptions these are static, the camera's lack of movement being one of the film's, in Greenaway's words, "essential conceits."<sup>120</sup> One of the reasons Greenaway offers for why he chose this style was his wanting to further underscore the soundtrack and its relation to the image - particularly the arch, allusion-filled dialogue between the characters - without the 'distraction' of camera movement.<sup>121</sup> Although I have stressed the visual in relation to Greenaway's films, language (voice-over narration, dialogue, filmed text) plays a significant role in his cinema, and for some of the same reasons as other art forms - "...I have also made over twenty films, all of them concerned with questions of representation, which applies to language as it does to visual phenomena," Greenaway told an interviewer at the time of

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<sup>119</sup> Brown, "Greenaway's Contract," in *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Greenaway quoted in Karen Jahne, "*The Draughtsman's Contract: An Interview with Peter Greenaway*." In *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, edited by Vernon W. Gras. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000, 23.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Draughtsman's Contract's* release.<sup>122</sup> Despite their shared status as means of representing the world via symbolic mediation, the tension between words and images, noted in relation to *H*, takes a different but related form in Greenaway's later work. It is linked with what Robert Brown calls Greenaway's attempt to "maintain a balance between a rigid extra-frame consideration of filmmaking and a very English Romantic concern with visual imagery."<sup>123</sup> Language, first the spoken word and, more recently, written text, becomes one of these "extra-frame" elements that compete with the pictorial 'for its own sake.' True in the case of films like *H*, in Greenaway's later work this becomes a friction between baroque *tableaux* (either presented successively as in *The Draughtsman's Contract* or which the camera moves through, in later films), and their conceptual 'critique' or disruption via the imposed structures of narrative and the self-reflexive action/speech of the characters weaving in and out of their tightly framed confines. The dialogue in many cases, either forwarding the plot or halting it, functions as a counter-point to what the image shows, or purports to show. All of this serves to undermine the integrity of the images - many modeled on famous paintings - as bounded, self-defining realities possessing a transparent visual truth. Although it is perhaps a step too far, this characteristic of the later films has led David Pascoe to speak of Greenaway's "discarding" of the image.<sup>124</sup>

Greenaway has openly discussed the relation between art and reflexivity in the *The Draughtsman's Contract*, noting how the film's structure is designed to encourage comparison between the reality the camera captures (the landscape as it is presented to the viewer) and the draughtsman's interpretation of it: both in relation to clues pertaining to the film's murder-mystery plot and the many intellectual pre-occupations for which this is a vehicle.<sup>125</sup> This is the opposite of *H* where, until the conclusion, there is no recognizable cinematographic representation of the shared, 'objective,' visual world (outside of the paintings), save for the seagull footage to which the paintings bear no visual relation (and are in no strong sense an 'interpretation' of them). In fact,

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Brown, "Greenaway's Contract," in *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, 8.

<sup>124</sup> Pascoe, *Peter Greenaway: Museums and Moving Images*, 64.

<sup>125</sup> Brown, "Greenaway's Contract," in *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, 7-8.

beginning with the *Draughtsman's Contract*, Greenaway appears to encourage a different type of viewer interaction with, or co-creation of, the image, than was operable in relation to films like *H*. This is anchored in a less dense and cluttered, in some ways less complex, visual surface, with in which the three-dimensional photo-cinematic 'reality' provided by the camera is reaffirmed as the 'given,' rather than placed in *competition with* painting and drawing. In this sense rather than "discard" the cinematic image, Greenaway visually upholds it, paradoxically endowing it with a more stable perceptual presence, in order for it to be critiqued primarily via *non-visual* and external/structural means. It is actually this which allows for the frame to become, in Pascoe's words, "not the unique locus of objectivity in a world of subjects but a subject in itself."<sup>126</sup>

After *The Draughtsman's Contract*, Greenaway's camera begins to move once again, tracking in all four possible directions. However, the frontal orientation of the stylized compositions, part and parcel of their being self-consciously 'presented' to the eye as a spectacle for consideration, like much of the pre-modern painting that inspires them, remains constant. Greenaway's next film, *A Zed and Two Noughts*, playfully illustrates Darwin's evolutionary stages (perhaps as a parallel to the painterly theme of the 'ages of man') and incorporates footage from scientific documentaries. But its interest in the natural world is coupled, via the Amsterdam location of the zoo around which the story revolves, with an exploration of the relation between cinema and 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch painting, mainly the work of Jan Vermeer. Vermeer is brought into the film's world both through Greenaway's recreation of a number of his paintings, including *The Art of Painting* (1665-7), and the character of a Vermeer forger, "Van Megreen." Predictably, given his works' complex relation to the question of artistic authorship, including his own, Greenaway has stated a particular interest in the issue of forgery.<sup>127</sup> In *A Zed and Two Noughts*, Greenaway brings together painting and science

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>127</sup> Greenaway has said that "all filmmakers are forgers" (quoted in Michel Ciment, "Interview with Peter Greenaway: Zed and Two Noughts (Z.O.O.)," in *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, 32) and according to Robert Brown the "question of authorship" is at "...the heart of all Greenaway's films" (Brown, "Greenaway's Contract," in *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, 8).

through *mise-en-scène* located within, or inspired by, a recognizable physical location - the film was actually shot in Amsterdam - of the kind lacking in earlier films like *H*, as dominated by imaginary, and, in some cases, painted ones. (Although actual places, landscape and cityscapes are both referred to and shown in much of Greenaway's earlier work, given the lack of characters/actors to concretely inhabit them, they remain abstractions). In a number of his later films Greenaway uses location and architecture as both another means of shifting his work into a more 'public' sphere of familiarity, and as a way to frame his reflexive interests in both film and painting. In *The Belly of an Architect*, architecture actually eclipses painting as Greenaway's favored reflexive motif. The film is centered on a Rome exhibition of the work of Etienne-Louis Boullée, an architect whose buildings exist only on paper as they were never constructed. Greenaway sees Boullée's strange case as "symptomatic of filmmaking" and the difficulty of moving from a vision of a film to its realisation given, like architecture, the amount of capital and labor needed to produce it (which, of course, painting does not entail).<sup>128</sup> In this sense, Greenaway has said that is "possible to compare the work of a filmmaker with that of an architect," and that although it "...would be to close to the bone, obviously, to make a film about a filmmaker," prior to the *The Belly of an Architect* he had been "...searching for some time to find an appropriate parallel."<sup>129</sup> The main character of Stourley Kracklite (Brian Dennehy), organising the Boullée exhibition, continues Greenaway's tradition of using artist figures (but seldom filmmakers) as protagonists who are self-reflexively occupied with many of the activities and interests of their creator.

In *The Cook, the Thief, the Wife and her Lover* (1989), one of his most commercially successful films, Greenaway employs an elaborate coding system according to which the film's six locations are seeped in a different colour. Rather than being fixed as a result of a universal color symbolism rooted in innate expression, the symbolic value of these colours is either conventional, or reverses convention, in

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<sup>128</sup> Quoted in Don Ranvaud, "Belly of an Architect: Peter Greenaway Interviewed," in *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, edited by Vernon W. Gras. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000, 43.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

relation to the activities of the characters in each location. Such a contextual, anti-expressionistic use of color is typical of both *seeing-with cinema* and a number of movements in twentieth century painting (fauvism, Pop art, etc.), as I will suggest later in relation to the films of Jean-Luc Godard. Like Godard, Greenaway avoids an emotive/expressive use of colour (although of course it may still have expressive affects) in favor of a more intellectual approach to colour as an element of cinematic structure. As Greenaway told an interviewer, the colour-coding of *The Cook...* is designed to stress the artificiality of the filmic world as a “construct” that the viewer is perceiving, rather than provoking only “emotional reactions.”<sup>130</sup> Adapting the structure of Jacobean revenge tragedy, *The Cook...* addresses familiar extra-aesthetic political and social realities, with relevance to Margaret Thatcher’s Britain and beyond. But its distancing use of color and imaginative *mise-en-scène* (which is highly theatrical and thoroughly cinematic simultaneously), heightens the contemplation of these realities through formal abstraction/mediation in a Brechtian fashion.

In some respects *Prospero’s Books* begins what could be seen as a third, and currently on-going, stage in Greenaway’s filmmaking. While many of the formal features just described are intact in this adaptation of *The Tempest*, post-production effects were used to ‘create on screen,’ after the shooting. High-definition video technology allowed Greenaway to layer images, akin to an artist layering paint on a canvas but in three dimensions (or its illusion). The effects Greenaway achieves in the process, as even his harshest critics would likely admit, are frequently remarkable. At the time of its making, Greenaway regarded this technology as bringing together the best of film and television, allowing the filmmaker greater freedom, in both aesthetic and economic terms, than conventional filmmaking, and promising to move cinema closer to painting than hither-to possible.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Joel Siegel, “Greenaway by the Numbers,” in, 77.

77. Greenaway has explicitly pointed to the influence of 20<sup>th</sup> century painting, including the work of Klee and Picasso, on the approach to colour that structures the *The Cook...* . (See Siegel, 76.)

<sup>131</sup> Rodman, Howard A., “Anatomy of a Wizard.” In *Peter Greenaway Interviews, Peter Greenaway Interviews*, edited by Vernon W. Gras. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000, 123.

In terms of its production *Prospero's Books*, as Howard A. Rodman notes, moves from celluloid film to tape and back to film; it is a film 'about' technological translation and adaptation, as well as translating a play to the screen.<sup>132</sup> Of course *The Tempest* is not any play, but what Greenaway and others take to be Shakespeare's most self-referential.<sup>133</sup> And the character of Prospero allows Greenaway to once again self-reflexively depict an artist, or, at least, the magician-as-artist, struggling with his creations, the film all the time playing with its proposed Prospero-Shakespeare identification, strengthened by the added visual and structural motif of Prospero's 'living' library of 24 magical books. In these ways *Prospero's Books* has the reflexive dimensions and the compelling and multi-layered formal and thematic complexity - technologically updated - of earlier films like *H* and *The Falls*, and which are lacking in some of Greenaway's later works, such as *The Pillow Book*, *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993) and *8 1/2 Women* (1999).<sup>134</sup> In subsequent films, like *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (2003), part of a larger multi-media project which resurrects the Tulse Luper character from *H*, Greenaway has tried to build on the formal innovations of *Prospero's Books*, and since the mid-1990s has been evangelically promoting video and digital technology as the only way forward for film art.<sup>135</sup> Thus far the results of Greenaway's experimentation with new technology have been uneven in narrative terms but frequently visually arresting. Wherever these developments may lead, Greenaway's status as one of the chief formal innovators of post-1960 English-language cinema, as well as its most consistently (self-)reflexive practitioners, is assured. All in all, in the films he has made following *A Walk Through H* and *The Falls*, Greenaway has found means of continuing to explore the art-film-reflexivity triad present in his early work within the fictional context of slightly more conventional narratives and larger budgets. Despite this, one could argue that as interesting as some of his later films are, they,

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> With many formal similarities, *A TV Dante*, a collaboration between Greenaway and the artist Tom Phillips, is equally accomplished.

<sup>135</sup> See, for instance, Sabine Danek's interview with Greenaway on *The Tulse Luper's Suitcases*, where Greenaway says that "Cinema is already dead because it's a matter of an incurable antiquated technique" (Danek, "Luggage Stories," in *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, edited by Vernon W. Gras. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 192).

perhaps inevitably, lack the freshness, formal dialectics, and sheer playfulness of his earlier work, which merge fiction, documentary, and different art forms, in fascinating combinations.

#### I. 2.2ii The *Tableau* as Narrative and Anti-Narrative: *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé*

In a fact worthy of *A Walk Through H's* coincidence driven narrative, or, indeed, his own aleatory plotting, Raul Ruiz's *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* was made at roughly the same time as Greenaway's film, and the commonalities do not end there. Whereas *H* is a parody of BBC style documentary, one that makes ironic use of the conventions of voice-over narrative and dramatic re-construction, *L'Hypothèse*, a film made for, and funded by, French television, good naturedly lampoons fine arts documentaries and educational television in general. Like Greenaway, Ruiz plays with voice-over and dramatic re-enactment, but also that other mainstay of television arts documentary, the on-screen critic or expert. Both films have restricted spatial settings, with *L'Hypothèse* set entirely within the grounds of a Parisian townhouse. Ruiz's film also features cinematography by Sacha Vierney, Resnais' longtime cameraman, whom, shortly after *L'Hypothèse*, would go to work with Greenaway, in the second great directorial collaboration of his illustrious cinematographic career.<sup>136</sup> For our purposes, the most important similarity is the fact that, like *A Walk Through H* with respect to both the Tulse Luper character and its representation of painting, *L'Hypothèse*, in the guise of revealing the painter Tonnerre, as its 'documentary' subject, reveals a great deal about Ruiz as a reflexive filmmaker.

Beyond *L'Hypothèse* there are other relevant analogies to be drawn between Greenaway's early work and Ruiz's films from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Robert Brown speculates that Ruiz's television film *Le Jeu de l'oie* (*Snakes and Ladders*, 1980), which concerns cartography and features a character named H who travels

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<sup>136</sup> Another connection between Greenaway's early films, like *A Walk through H* and *The Falls*, and *L'Hypothèse*, is the strong vein of structuralist and post-structuralist thought – the dominant intellectual discourse of the period – running through them. This is reflected in a shared obsession with closed representational systems, the lack of the “transcendental signified” and the general testing of rational parameters governing interpretations of cultural artifacts.

through various landscapes may be an “answer” to *A Walk Through H*, while *De grands événements et des gens ordinaires* (*Of Great Events and Ordinary People*, 1979) “shares the same formal concerns as *The Falls*.”<sup>137</sup> As I will discuss, Ruiz’s *Colloque de chien*, made in 1977, shares features in common with *H*. More generally, for Ruiz, as for Greenaway, “the matter of the relationship between the author and his subjects, both documentary and fictional, provides a basic conceptual premise.”<sup>138</sup>

Returning to *L’Hypothèse* the film has a complex production history which significantly bears on its themes and structure. Pierre Klossowski, perhaps best known outside of France for his philosophical studies of Nietzsche and de Sade, was also a novelist, translator and brother of the painter Balthus.<sup>139</sup> In 1977 Ruiz adapted Klossowski’s autobiographical novel of political and ideological intrigue within the Catholic Church, *La Vocation suspendue*. As Ruiz has described, *L’Hypothèse* was originally commissioned as a documentary on Klossowski. Wishing to approach the assignment from an unconventional angle, he decided to bring Klossowski’s character ‘Tonnerre,’ a fictitious painter referred to in Klossowski’s novels, to the screen. In the process, Ruiz had to have a group of paintings created that would represent Tonnerre’s body of work.<sup>140</sup> In the film, Tonnerre is identified as an “obscure disciple of Gérôme” and the paintings seen in the film, despite their variation in style (and certainly, quality), bear out this influence. Klossowski himself was to offer a commentary on the paintings, but was unable to take part in the film, prompting Ruiz to invent the character of an art collector to perform this role, as well as that of a narrator to provide a voice-over.

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<sup>137</sup> Brown, “Greenaway’s Contract,” in *Peter Greenaway Interviews*, 9. “Le Jeu de l’oie” (Snakes and Ladders) was a short film made to promote a cartography exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, which Ruiz turned into a philosophical puzzle in which the characters move from place to place as pawns in a world-covering game.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> See Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1991 and *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, translated by Daniel W. Smith, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in *Afterimage*, no.10, edited by Simon Field and Guy L’éclair. London: Afterimage Publishing, 1981, 123.

According to Ruiz, settling on this structure allowed him to make a “truly fictional film which would nonetheless retain some documentary aspects.”<sup>141</sup>

Ian Christie rightly points out that the resulting film is three things simultaneously: a summary and extension of Klossowski’s conceptual “universe” (full of the spiritual, historical and sexual pre-occupations marking his work), a parody of television arts documentary, and an opportunity for Ruiz to explore “ideas about the cinema’s relation to narrative and non-narrative representation.”<sup>142</sup> In looking at *L’Hypothèse* with reference to some of Ruiz’s other films from the same period, I will concentrate on the second and, especially, third, of these three aspects of the film that Christie identifies, as it is here that the *seeing-with cinema* nature of both the film and Ruiz’s cinematic ‘project’ is fully apparent. In this connection, it is important to keep in mind that *L’Hypothèse*, like so many of Ruiz’s early films, was made for television, hence its running time of just over an hour. Rather than conform to television conventions in other ways, however, Ruiz openly defies them. As Christie notes, for Ruiz television is both something to be “subverted” and “...a grid, a codified set of genres, assumptions, rules, against which he can test his own observations and theories.”<sup>143</sup> One example of this “subversion” on Ruiz’s part, with wider implications, is his decision to shoot *L’Hypothèse*, both a *tableaux* film and a purported fine arts documentary, in low-contrast black and white, where the *tableaux* the Collector is attempting to analyze are often shrouded in mists and fogs. Typical of Ruiz this presentation results in a basic frustration of the viewer’s expectations (as well as the expectations of those commissioning the film, since, as Christie suggests, such a visual presentation is “unsuited to television”<sup>144</sup>) and is also a reflexive projection of the film’s core subjects: visual and conceptual mediation, the barriers to seeing what is ‘there’ or

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>142</sup> Christie, Ian. “Snakes and Ladders: Television Games.” In *Afterimage*, no.10, 80.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 78-80.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 80.

'not there,' and the "gap between our ideas about things and the things themselves" which systems of representation may either bridge or widen.<sup>145</sup>

Following on from its documentary premise, the film's narrative structure, at least, is simple. It is comprised of three distinct sections, marked by the physical and rhetorical movement of the "Collector" (played by Jean Rougel), a somewhat pedantic figure introduced by the anonymous voice-over narrator as a respected expert on the life and work of the mysterious 19<sup>th</sup> century painter Tonnerre. In the first, the voice-over narrator and then the Collector, addressing the camera, introduce Tonnerre and the mysterious 'scandal' involving both his paintings and his activities as a member of a secret society whose mysterious "Ceremony" the images reputedly depict, one which led to their censoring by the governmental authorities, cryptically referred to as the "Eight Powers," and Tonnerre's exile. (As it is variously described, the Ceremony is a kind of compendium of metaphysics, Occult lore and conspiracy theory). As this information is conveyed Vierny's camera slowly glides among the six framed works of Tonnerre on display. In the sort of circular inter-penetration of form and content, process and product, that Ruiz celebrates in his films and in his writings on cinema, these paintings were created for the film, which is, in turn, *made-up of them*. For the bulk of *L'Hypothèse* consists of the Collector's formal and thematic exegesis of the six paintings – and the missing seventh - brought to life in the form of *tableaux vivants* - filmed in long takes, each one staged in a separate part of the house and grounds. This circuit completed, the film returns to the drawing room where it started and to the actual paintings, where the Collector attempts to summarize his findings.

The Collector regards Tonnerre's reputed comment, made in his defense against the accusing authorities, that his works "*do not show but allude*" as a smoke screen. He offers the converse suggestion, namely, that the mysteries of the Ceremony are indeed revealed in the paintings, but only if they are viewed as an inter-related series, and three-dimensionally staged and interpreted in the correct manner. This interpretive

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<sup>145</sup> Ruiz quoted in *Afterimage*, no.10, 124. Ruiz has also said that colour was an "off-screen" or an implied absence in the film and that the grayness of it and "overall lack of definition," is an emulation of old "British detective film" (Ibid., 124).

“hypothesis” is put to the test in the Collector’s guided tour of the black and white *tableaux* in this special living museum, where an unnamed troop of actors enact the re-creations and, like Brechtian players, just as quickly slip out of their roles and walk off ‘stage’ at the Collector’s signal. Just as Tonnerre’s paintings are a mirror of the secret Ceremony, *L’Hypothèse* is a reflection of Ruiz’s abstract theories of cinema through the concrete mirror of painting in some obvious, and some not so obvious, ways. Not satisfied, however, with a purely formal analogy, Ruiz’s reflexive design is also manifested thematically, and this gives the film a depth of significance it might otherwise lack.

In *L’Hypothèse*, Ruiz uses painting to forward his perennial concern with the boundaries of both narrative and spatial-temporal continuity in film, as well as the actively participatory role of the viewer in the construction of cinematic meaning. A substantial theorist of cinema, as well as practitioner, Ruiz addresses these topics in his *Poetics of Cinema*, a book written, he says in its preface, for those who “use cinema as a mirror, that is, an instrument of speculation and reflection.”<sup>146</sup> Ruiz has a wide ranging knowledge of art history to draw on and *Poetics of Cinema* includes provocative analogies between cinema and the traditional arts, often in the form of parables and philosophical thought-experiments. An unapologetic formalist, in the tradition of Méliès and Cocteau, Ruiz’s reflexive conception of cinema is best summarized in his belief that a film with 250 shots is, owing to their multitude of potential logical and aesthetic connections, 250 different films.<sup>147</sup> Ruiz is a filmmaker above all concerned with “images generated by other images.”<sup>148</sup> The formal radicalism of the majority of the films which comprise his huge *oeuvre* lies in their privileging the discrete shot, conceived as the individual ‘take’ making its way into the final cut of the film, over the sequence, conceived in both its usual formal sense, as a collection of shots, and its standard dramatic one, as a free-standing and transparent unit of action/meaning.

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<sup>146</sup> Ruiz, Raul. *Poetics of Cinema*. Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1995, 7.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Ruiz on the 2002 Gemini DVD edition of *Trois vies et une seule mort*.

<sup>148</sup> Ehrenstein, David. “Ruiz at the Holiday Inn.” In *Film Quarterly*, Fall, 1986, 6. Christie also points to Ruiz’s interest, shared with both Klossowski and Baudrillard, in the “simulacrum,” that is, with images simulating images (see Christie, “Snakes and Ladders: Television Games,” in *Afterimage*, no.10, 84).

From a conventional standpoint, therefore, the emphasis in Ruiz's cinema is squarely on fragmentation and discontinuity. For Ruiz the largely arbitrary imposition onto a film of a strictly linear narrative pattern, with the directly perceivable cause/effect that normally accompanies it, has the stifling effect of restricting or closing down potential meanings. Making the individual shot do all the work of connecting what came before and what follows it, as conventional narrative film structure tends to do, reduces the potential symbolic import of the shot and its internal expressivity as a visual composition. And yet, as Ruiz, like Greenaway, is intensely aware, every film, no matter how unconventionally structured, is linear narrative in some sense, with the viewers – aided by the filmmaker to a lesser or greater extent - always making cause/effect, space/time connections for themselves in the course of a film's real-time unfolding (and thereby mentally building up one or more 'imaginary,' that is, subjectively unique, films). Ruiz's reflexive cinematic practice and theory, centered on film as a creative activity as much a final product, finds its analog in *L'Hypothèse's* emphasis on the creation, reception, and interpretation of Tonnerre's paintings. As the Collector constructs a hypothetical 'grand narrative' which links the discrete paintings, the film works as an extended metaphor for the creation and apprehension of any film, including itself.

The two specific art historical interests that Ruiz is on record as having brought to the film concern the *tableau vivant*, especially prominent in Klossowski's fiction, and "official" and academic French painting of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the "*peintres pompiers*," which he was studying during the time of the film's making.<sup>149</sup> Ruiz points out that Tonnerre, as invented by Klossowski, is "a highly conventional painter" and that "...discussing conventional painting in this way allowed me to deal both with general themes in Klossowski's work and with the nature of representation in the cinema."<sup>150</sup> The paintings being realist and conventional have the concrete literalness of the photo-cinematic image; but this is only on one, and perhaps the most superficial, level of their

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<sup>149</sup> Ruiz has said that he was particularly interested in how socio-political realities were symbolised in this art (see *Afterimage*, no.10, 110).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

apprehension - again like the photo-cinematic image as Ruiz conceives of it. The comparison between Tonnere and Jean-Louis Gérôme can be seen in this light. Gérôme, a prime exponent of 19<sup>th</sup> Academic realism, was also a high-profile teacher of a generation of French artists and a traditionalist famous for his stubborn opposition to Impressionism. The photographic-like realism (or even 'hyper-realism,') of Gérôme's painting, along with their dynamic compositions, allow his work to be seen as a precursor to cinema and it has certainly inspired numerous filmmakers, most recently Ridley Scott in *Gladiator* (2000). Although the paintings attributed to Tonnerre conspicuously lack the dynamism and remarkable compositional sense of Gérôme, there is, on the surface, an inherent tension in Ruiz, the arch-formalist filmmaker, engaging with painting in this realist style. Characteristically, however, Ruiz makes the most of this disjunction in undermining the surface realism of Tonnerre's paintings through the stylized mediation of the *tableaux* re-creations and the ways in which he films them, as well as the Collector's interpretation of them as, in essence, semi-abstract works.

The Collector's stated aim, and therefore the viewer's, as his more-or-less real-time companion, is as much to understand the proper sequence, the right order, which links Tonnerre's painted images, as it is to grasp the import of each alone. In fact, sometimes it is only by ignoring the ostensible subjects of the painting that the Collector is able to discover how they are connected to the previous and following ones. In so far as it is comprised almost solely of the *tableaux* as they are successively presented, this presentational chain is equivalent to *L'Hypothèse*, as the before and after of its temporal progress, and, clearly, the Collector is attempting to make a visual narrative, by extension, a film, out of the still paintings – or rather, the *tableaux* as their cinematic analog. This is a dramatization of what Ruiz had identified as his career long cinematic pursuit: to explore the inherent tensions between the discrete shot and the sequence within which it is placed, the ever present possibilities of rupture in the narrative chain, and the liberating formal possibilities this may create. In trying out a number of possible combinations, the Collector finds that, like the events in a fictional film, the meaning of each of Tonnerre's paintings changes in the light of what precedes and follows it in the series. In each case, it is different features of the compositions which come to light for

the first time, owing to their juxtaposition with others. Yet, conforming to Ruiz's filmmaking mantra that it is ultimately the individual shot and its contents which determine not only its place in the narrative sequence but the import of that sequence itself, each of Tonnerre's paintings repel any easy narrative assimilation. Moreover, like the film shot as Ruiz conceives it, each painting can only be 'understood' either retrospectively or in an anticipatory fashion. It must be viewed from the standpoint of its appearance in the series, by looking back to earlier images or projecting forward into the future.

The presumably stolen seventh painting (which gives the film its title) is a gap in the Collector's narrative. "*How can we hope to establish the order of the painting if this one is lost?*" the narrator rhetorically ponders. This painting cannot be directly shown or re-created, but must be inferred from the others. And yet it represents a fulcrum point, an interpretative key to the entire series. Thomas Elsaesser, picking up on the film's obvious nods to French post-structuralist literary theory, sees the missing painting as evidence of the "conspiracy" of the sign, which can "overturn one's hold on the real, simply by opening up a gap and positing a missing link."<sup>151</sup> But in a more concretely cinematic context, in its 'presence by absence' the stolen painting is analogous to what Ruiz calls the "missing fragment" of any film - that possible, and yet unseen image/event which *if* presented would radically alter the significance of the entire filmic narrative and, which by its very possibility, "makes fully visible the inherent incompleteness of cinema."<sup>152</sup> In every edited film there are narrative gaps, which translate into purely imaginative spaces for the viewer, suggesting other or alternative realities, existing alongside those shown, which, in turn, have the power to create different, 'imaginary' films. Ruiz holds that rather than a deficiency to be ironed out through a forced continuity, it is the presence of these gaps which allows for cinema

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<sup>151</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas. "The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting." In *Rouge*, [www.rouge.com.au](http://www.rouge.com.au), 2, 2004, consulted September 4, 2006. Expanded from a review in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December, 1984.

<sup>152</sup> Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema*, 117-18. Here Ruiz seems to be inspired by notions developed in the context of semiotics and literary theory - the indeterminacy of meaning and the 'open text' - but also 'possible worlds' theory in analytic philosophy.

to become a truly imaginative and “immersive” experience for the viewer, rather than a passive submission to a pre-determined “spectacle.”<sup>153</sup>

For the Collector, the *tableau vivant* is a heuristic device, a tool for interpreting the paintings. He suggests, however, that Tonnerre actually intended his works to be three-dimensionally staged, or ‘re-staged.’ That is, they were painted with an eye on bodily recreation from the start. This is an intriguing suggestion: a painting as a blueprint for subsequent action in the world. The art work thus become a kind of time-machine that connects the painter’s original studio modeling set-up – since, like Gérôme, the fictional Tonnerre evidently painted from life-models - with their future re-creation, whether this re-enactment is performed as part of an occult ritual, as the Collector suggests was the case with Tonnerre’s works, or in front of a camera by an experimenting filmmaker, be it Ruiz, Greenaway, or Jerzy, director of the aborted *tableaux* film in Godard’s *Passion* (1982). The *tableaux* style of *L’Hypothèse* highlights a painting/theatre dialectic also present in the film, centered on the models who ‘inhabit’ the *tableaux* and thereby bring the past back to life. This is but one manifestation of the circular pattern of ‘eternal return’ at work on both a formal and thematic level in the film.<sup>154</sup> More than once in *L’Hypothèse*, the repetition of historically removed events and the notion of the re-incarnation of the soul is associated with the paintings’ embodiment, as an instance of a transcendence of time rooted in its spatialisation. Although these ideas can be traced back to Klossowski, Ruiz manages to link them with his own (self-) reflexive *seeing-with cinema* concerns with film form and apprehension. This is especially apparent by the conclusion, as we shall see, but it is also manifest in the Collector’s interpretative activity throughout the film.

At one point, for instance, the Collector stands before the *tableau* of the third painting in the conjectured series (depicting a scene of execution in the context of the Inquisition), attempting to uncover some hidden feature within it, which will in turn point to the next painting in the sequence. In Ruiz’s brilliantly conceived reflexive

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>154</sup> This aspect of the film comes directly from Klossowski, author of a well-known interpretation of Nietzsche’s concept. See Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*.

effect, the Collector instantly dissolves Vierney's cinematic equivalent of Tonnerre's candlelit *chiaroscuro* effects in the original painting, which the Collector believes is Tonnerre's means of concealing something within the scene, by simply switching on a bright overhead light. Addressing the invisible narrator (and filmmaker?) in what sounds like a magical incantation, the Collector then calls for the lighting of the *tableau* to be "reversed" in order to "let what was plunged into shadow emerge into light, and what was clearly visible return to darkness," Ruiz accomplishing this switch by a quick cut. In this metaphorical reversal of the photographic process - yet another circular return to the image's origins, or generative conditions, in the film - a positive image is turned back into a negative one, and the desired clue is revealed (a white mask suspended above the figures which was also depicted in the stolen painting, thereby proved to be the next in the series). As his direct interventions in the film's *tableaux* and their progression suggests, the Collector is a kind of directorial consciousness within the film, and, like Tonnerre, he is engaged in his own 'ritualistic' proceedings: those of interpretation, if in the name of history and rationality versus myth and superstition. This directorial control is occasionally ironically off-set, however, by the film's voice-over commentary, and it is here that the parody of documentary is most obvious. A continuous editorial presence, the narrator's asides and qualifications describe the Collector's state of mind as he sits lost in contemplation of the paintings, summarizes his thoughts, and generally prods both him and the narrative forward. On a number of occasions the narrator jumps to conclusions which the Collector rejects or modifies in a perpetual off-screen/on-screen dialog (in one comic instance the Collector dozes off and the narrator reverts to an emphatic whisper). All of this serves to undermine both the objective reliability of the Collector and the authority of the narrator.

Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* dramatizes the interpretative dialectic of photographs and their semiotic inexhaustibility. The photographer Thomas's obsessive scrutiny of the photographs he has taken in a London park, which may or may not show evidence of a murder, and the search for their hidden meanings, gradually comes to emblemize the viewer's imaginative interaction with *Blow Up* itself, calling on the viewer to exercise his or her retrospective imagination and re-think what was earlier

shown, or not shown, in the film. Similarly, in *L'Hypothèse*, the Collector analyzes each of Tonnerre's paintings with reference to the *tableau vivant* compositions. He breaks them down into areas of light and shadow, noting the arrangement of objects and figures in space, and theorizes the relation of one painting/*tableau* to another, just as one would break down a film shot or sequence, in order to determine the combinatory role it plays in relation to others, and to a film as a whole. Yet owing to Ruiz's ingenious construction which moves one step beyond Antonioni's metaphorical or analogical pairing of the mediums of photography and film in *Blow Up*, the Collector's running commentary on Tonnerre's compositions simultaneously pertains, in a literal fashion, to the film's own *mise-en-scène* (and spatial transitions) which, rather than simply presenting the works, is itself wholly determined by them. Thus rather than seemingly imposed on the film's fictional content from without, as in the case of a number of Greenaway's later films, the painterly *tableaux* are doubly 'justified' from within the film's narrative framework; or rather, they provide this framework, in what amounts to both a formal celebration and an ironic critique of film/painting hybridization. Moreover, this again reflects on Ruiz's claim that in all cinema narrative ultimately derives out of the discrete image and its particular properties, and that a new mode of film practice can be built around the full realization of this fact. As an 'illustration' of his thesis, Ruiz in *L'Hypothèse* attempts to totally integrate painting into a film's *mise-en-scène*, in a formal, thematic, and phenomenological sense – this as an alternative to having painting and film run on parallel but separate representational tracks.

Still photography also bears on Ruiz's reflexive strategies in *L'Hypothèse* and in this respect a useful point of comparison is Ruiz's short *Colloque de chiens* (*Dog's Dialog*, 1977) made a year before it. Like Chris Marker's seminal *La Jetée*, the film is largely a *photo-roman*, a series of still photographs 'illustrating,' or in many ways deliberately *failing to* illustrate, a fragmented and repetitive mystery story.<sup>155</sup> Like *A Walk Through H, The Falls*, and also *La Jetée*, the story is told by a voice-over narrator

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<sup>155</sup> In a 1978 Cahiers interview Ruiz claims that he took the story from *Detective* magazine and "chopped it up," so that phrases repeat themselves in different contexts. See *Afterimage*, no.10, 122

adopting the measured and inflection-less tones usually associated with the reporting of factual truth rather than (its) improbable fiction. The *photo-roman* is interspersed with live-action footage of barking dogs and objective shots of some of the places mentioned in the narration. As the film progresses, the story being told grows increasingly repetitive and labyrinthine, and this combined with the vertiginous accumulation of still images and the sheer incongruity of the shots of the dogs (which are even more incongruous in relation to the narration than the birds in *H*) pushes the film further into both parody and the kind of structural abstraction that *H* achieves.<sup>156</sup>

Traditionally, the use of still photographs on any significant scale is the provenance of the non-fiction film. But in the case of either the fiction film or documentary, photographs, given their ontological and phenomenological properties, frequently signify the 'real' (even if, especially in a fictive situation, this reality is questioned). However, as Ruiz is surely aware, the *photo-roman* actually overturns the ontological certainty of the still photograph, since it entails the construction of the film image in the editing and/or development process, i.e., after the shooting stage, and therefore at a temporal remove from the capturing of the image as the effect of a lived material present occurring in front of the camera. The *photo-roman* as a series of still images projected on screen, of course, also reflects back on the dual nature of film as discrete frames externally animated to form a seamless moving image when projected. It metaphorically represents an arresting, or even a reversal, of the basic cinematic process. In these ways the *photo-roman* possess both the cinematically reflexive significance and the distancing effects that Ruiz favors, as is evidenced by *L'Hypothèse*. The *photo-roman* is also a kind of compliment to the cinematic *tableau*. The *tableau*, from within the *mise-en-scène*, and the *photo-roman*, substituting for it, both work against the perpetual change associated with the conventional film image as an evolving present, and impose a highly artificial stasis, a 'false' one, in some sense, within the normative context of change and motion. The use of the *photo-roman* form in *Colloque*

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<sup>156</sup> Christie rightly suggests that parody in Ruiz's television films functions as "an acute (and sympathetic) form of analysis and exposition" (Christie, "Snakes and Ladders: Television Games," in *Afterimage*, no.10, 80).

*de chiens* is another way in which Ruiz is able to explore the tensions between the discrete image and the narrative of which it is a part, fiction and documentary, and the contrasting temporal dimensions of film and still photography. In these respects the reflexive use of still photographs in *Colloque de chiens* parallels that of the paintings as *tableaux* in *L'Hypothèse*, as Ruiz suggests in claiming that in both films (as well as *Le Jeu de l'oie*), he was

exploring different kinds of space and the effects of separation between the components of cinematic representation: story, location, commentary, etc. Theory becomes another object to be made visible....the aim is to make you see the commentary in the same way as you see the film.<sup>157</sup>

Although, as a result of the film's commission and Ruiz's original conception of it, the Collector is in many ways a portrait of Klossowski, given Ruiz's facility for turning any subject into a self-reflexive meditation, it is not too great a leap to see something of his 'theoretical' nature reflected in the figure of the Collector, just as his 'creative' self is mirrored in the painter Tonnerre. Thus the intellectual dialogue taking place between the Collector and the absent Tonnerre, through the medium of the paintings, which parallels the actual dialogue between the Collector and the narrator, can be seen not only as one between Ruiz and Klossowski (as between either a documentary filmmaker and his subject, or a fiction director and the author being adapted), but between two prominent sides of Ruiz's *auteur*-ist 'personality': that is, the creating consciousness his films' reveal. To some degree the Collector and, especially, Tonnerre, are 'double image' reflections of 'Raul Ruiz,' whose directorial style simultaneously embodies both the creation of images and narratives, and their self-reflexive interpretation or critique. Like Greenaway and his cinematic alter-ego Tulse Luper, the erudite ornithologist, adventurer and amateur artist, who, at least until the recent *The Tulse Luper Suitcases*, was seldom directly represented in Greenaway's films but was a constant presence, Ruiz aligns himself mostly with the fictional painter Tonnerre as a poser of intricate visual puzzles lacking definitive solutions. Many of the

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<sup>157</sup> Ruiz quoted in *Afterimage*, no.10, 114.

characterizations of Tonnerre, such as the narrator's suggestion that "*One might see the painter's entire oeuvre as a reflection on the art of reproduction,*" re-emphasize this self-referential dimension. (Tonnerre is also described as a political exile whose work faced censorship in his native country, just like Ruiz.<sup>158</sup>)

The film's physical setting, a house of faded opulence full of mirrors, shadowy passages, secret doors and incongruous objects, in which pride of place is given over to painting and visual art, is surely a more compact, urban variation on *Last Year at Marienbad's* sprawling country estates. But this is also *Chez Ruiz*, an architectural embodiment of his inimitable cinema, marked by its frame within frame and split screen compositions, use of mirror and window reflections, in-camera and post-production *tromp l'oeil* effects, painted backdrops (which interact in unusual ways with the characters and objects set amongst them), and expressionistic lighting. The Tonnerre/Ruiz paintings/*tableaux*, are themselves full of optical reflexive tropes holding keys to their potential solutions: the first three paintings in the hypothetical series are linked together through the presence of a mirror within each composition, and the third to the fourth (the stolen painting) by a mask. On this level *L'Hypothèse* is as much an *auteur*-ist self-confession as Fellini's *8 1/2*, in which Jean Rougel, both an actor and Parisian intellectual, here playing the Collector, was cast as a quarrelsome film critic.

In the end, through a series of imaginative leaps, aided by the "hypothesis" of the title, involving the reconstruction of the stolen painting, the Collector arrives at a series of tentative conclusions: the Ceremony is symbolically depicted in the paintings through the gestures of the figures abstracted from the individual compositions (it is these gestures which ultimately provide the clue as to the proper series of images and how they are to be read). The Collector sees the final painting, and indeed the whole series viewed through the lens of it, as celebrating ambiguity or the "*principle of non-definition*" as the "*defiance of time.*" These comments, in metaphysically contrasting the objective 'arrow of time' with the spiral movement of the 'endless return,' reiterate many of the film's philosophical pre-occupations drawn from Klossowski's work. But they also, in singularly Ruizian fashion, cast a self-conscious glance back on the film's

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<sup>158</sup> Ruiz fled his native Chile in 1973 and since then has lived and worked mainly in France.

*tableaux*, the multiple tensions between their enforced stillness and the progressive movement of the compositional series, and the Collector's theoretical narrative. Ruiz has spoken of the temporal "suspension" of the photograph as informing both *L'Hypothèse* and *Colloque de chiens*, by which he means the fact that a photograph always leaves itself open to the question of what may have happened to its subject immediately before or after its capturing.<sup>159</sup> (In Ruiz's example, likely referring to both *Blow Up* and the violent events alluded to in Tonnerre's work, one can "postulate that immediately after a photograph has been taken someone shoots one of the subjects with a gun."<sup>160</sup>) Again associating the *tableau vivants* with still photographs in opposition to the cinematic image, this reflects on the ambiguity of both the paintings and their *tableaux* recreation, situated in a similar temporal suspension of the events they depict, simultaneously denying and suggesting a 'before' and 'after' to what is seen.

In a wider sense, as pertaining to cinematic narrative, the "principle of ambiguity" the Collector identifies, is all that conventional dramatic construction in continuity style cinema, founded on "central conflict theory," systematically eliminates, through the strict adherence to linear chronology, and, crucially, the suppression of simultaneous action, as Ruiz elucidates in *Poetics of Cinema*.<sup>161</sup>

The Collector having pronounced his verdict that "the Ceremony" is a "*cult of ambiguity*," both the Ceremony and the film collapse back into the metaphysical conundrums the paintings celebrate, but which can only be represented through discrete, concretely limited metaphors. The "*limitless possibilities of interpretation*" the Collector speaks of, rooted in the work of art's multiplicity of meanings, the plurality of perceptions and experiential worlds they engender, is their reflexive secret and, barred from transcendent illumination, here language and reason come up against their limit in the voiceless still image. His analysis having been exhausted, and doubting that his results have been anything more than mere subjective "impressions," The Collector finally suggests that perhaps it is better that the paintings disappear from memory so

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<sup>159</sup> Ruiz, *Afterimage* no.10, 114

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> See Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema*, Chapter 1, 9-25.

that all that remains is the “isolated gestures” of the depicted personages. On cue, the Collector ceremonially leads the viewer to the door, the narrator confirming that he has nothing more to say. The low angled camera then tracks in circles around groups of figures from the six *tableaux*, their disparate costumes and poses spanning ages and cultures in a parade of humanity, to the accompaniment of swelling choral voices on the soundtrack. In the end, what remains of the paintings are indeed isolated, frozen gestures, the models unmoored from Tonnerre’s compositions still hold their poses, begging the interpretations they simultaneously deny. Is this, ultimately, all that cinema can make of painting? the film seems to ask as its *tableaux* are dissolved.

Ruiz has said that he wishes to make films in which the audience does not sympathize with one character any more or less than a landscape, or, ideally, with the film itself.<sup>162</sup> In *L’Hypothèse* one imagines however, that *he* is ultimately on the side of the absent Tonnerre, gently mocking the Collector’s will towards absolute, objective knowledge, the definitive or exhaustive interpretation of a work of art. It is fitting, then, that the self-negating end result of the Collector’s inquiry, the secret the paintings reveal, is the principle of their own symbolic ambiguity. As Ruiz says of the film, rather than the solving of the mystery, it is the process of “moving from one level of interpretation to another, which complicates what has previously seemed straightforward” which provides its “pleasure.”<sup>163</sup> And as is clear from the film’s conclusion, the Ceremony is nothing less than the drama and mystery of existence itself.

Seen from the perspective of Ruiz’s subsequent filmmaking, *L’Hypothèse* marks a turning point firstly, in terms of its reflexive use of documentary forms and secondly, the representation of painting. With regards to documentary, the film appears to have emboldened Ruiz to tackle his interests in the subject directly in his next film, *De grands événements et des gens ordinaires*. Commissioned as Ruiz’s “personal view of the 1978 [French] elections,” in his hands rather than a conventional factual or essayistic documentary, the film turns into an examination of the very possibility of

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>163</sup> Ruiz, in *Afterimage*, no.10, 124.

documentary.<sup>164</sup> The film moves from the elections to a round-table discussion between *Cahiers du cinéma* critics about *cinéma vérité*, before ending in an examination of poverty in New Guinea, and features self-conscious camera movements and a voice-over narrator who comments on the film's own stylistic choices while they are enacted. For Christie the film is one of the "rare reflexive works in the cinema which develops an authentic discourse of its own, while managing to encapsulate both the history of documentary as a form and its present-day ubiquity and effectivity."<sup>165</sup> Ruiz speaks of the film as an illustration of how the process of making a documentary, which involves gathering together "heterogeneous" documents, "pieces of speech and gestures," and transforming them into a coherent, meaningful whole, actually results in an inevitable "dispersion" of meaning.<sup>166</sup> The same principle can be seen at work in *The Falls* and it is yet another interesting synchronicity in the careers of the two filmmakers that Ruiz's painting-centered *L'Hypothèse*, featuring a more limited and implicit critique of documentary within its largely fictional framework, should be followed by *De grands événements et des gens ordinaires*, mirroring a similar transition on Greenaway's part from a comparative exploration of film and painting within a documentary structure that is accepted as a regulative principle (*A Walk Through H*) to a film largely 'about' documentary and its critique (*The Falls*).

Beyond the fascinating world of *L'Hypothèse* as a *sui-generis* reality, in reflexive terms, the *tableaux* style of the film, associated with the Collector's theoretical pursuit, is, despite its expressive power, ultimately cast as a *cinematic* dead end. Indeed, as if in a dialectical reaction against the *tableaux* format of *L'Hypothèse*, in later films Ruiz tends to avoid direct representation of paintings, real or 'imaginary,' instead fully integrating the influence of a wide variety of recognizable artistic styles within his *mise-en-scène*. In this respect the specific works and artists Ruiz gravitates towards are not surprising, as many of these naturally reflect, and in some cases serve as a visual precedent for, his own vision of a cinema as both dream and self-conscious illusionism.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 125.

More recently, the Symbolist influence, particularly of Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau, is clearly evident in the décor of *Trois vies et une seule mort* (*Three Lives and One Death*, 1996), especially with respect to its magic mirrors, more pictorially baroque than Cocteau's in *Orphée*. In *Ce jour-là* (*That Day*, 2003) there are a number of remarkable Magritte-like playings with windows as mirrors that both connect outer and inner space and obscure them. Yet so skillfully are these painterly allusions integrated into the *mise-en-scène* and action in Ruiz's later films, that there is little instantaneous recognition of one composition referring to a particular painting, artist, or movement. Rather, the connection is only made *after* the shot has gone by. Thus, in formal terms, Ruiz's later on-screen referencing of painting and its recognition as such adheres to the general a-linear, or retrospective, narrative pattern of the films themselves.

As we have now seen, in both Greenaway's *A Walk Through H* and Ruiz *L'Hypothèse*, as well as in other films by these directors to which they are related, painting is part and parcel of a larger (self-)reflexive strategy. Through their use of documentary techniques, the ostensible objectivity and 'transparency' to the real of which is over-turned, and their incorporation of painting, these films represent the *seeing-with cinema* filmmaker turning his camera, as a mirror, on to his or her own characteristic fictional film practices in a critical fashion.

### I. 2.3 Painters on Film

In the films that we have so far examined, painting as an art form is viewed mainly from the perspective of its audience. In different ways, both Greenaway and Ruiz focus on the art work's apprehension and interpretation. In so doing, they parody the forms and conventions of the art history/art appreciation documentary. Other narrative filmmakers like Victor Erice, Jacques Rivette and Maurice Pialat, have approached painting from the other side, as it were, focusing on the creative process from the artist's point of view. They bring a reflexive – or at least, in Pialat's case, self-referential - sensibility to bear on another non-fiction film genre, depicting artists at work, with Cluzot's *Le Mystère Picasso* (1956) and films of Salvador Dali and Jackson Pollock at work, being

among the most famous examples. Here fact and fiction, narrative and 'anti-narrative,' are mixed in a way that speaks to the processes of painting and filmmaking simultaneously, with the forms juxtaposed in dialectical fashion. Most notably, each of these filmmakers compare and contrast temporality in painting and film as it pertains to the duration of the creative act, on one hand, and the visible recording/representation of time on canvas or the film strip, on the other.

### I. 2.3i. Process and Reality: *Quince Tree Sun*

Erice's *Quince Tree Sun* (*El Sol del membrillo*) chronicles real-life Spanish painter Antonio Lopez as he minutely observes, paints and draws, a quince tree growing behind his Madrid studio, for a period of three months from October to December 1991. The process is filmed in fixed, one-shot camera set-ups, linked by dissolves and fades to suggest the passage of time in the course of each day, with the days themselves divided, in the style of the films of Eric Rohmer, by titles denoting the day and month. Lopez's actual painting and drawing is captured in medium or close shot. This said, Erice's camera does not linger on the canvas or paper as much as might be expected, often switching to the fruit-laden tree itself, or taking in, in great detail, the contraptions which Lopez has invented for his project. These include an elaborate canopy which allows him to paint the tree in *plein-air*, from the same angle and position in all weather. Rather than simply painting the tree as seen on a given day in a given light, Lopez attempts to map its growth on canvas, incorporating the changes the tree and ripening fruit undergo during the course of a three month period in a single image, in a kind of painting equivalent to time-lapse photography, or indeed, a continuous film or video image.

As Lopez makes clear to his many interlocutors throughout the film, he is not concerned with capturing the tree as an in-itself reality but with documenting his observational relationship to it. Indeed, he treats the tree with the attention a painter would normally devote to a living model, a fact played upon in the reversal at work in the film's surreal coda (after the quince tree has succumbed to the winter), with its

echoes of dream and mortality, where a prostrate Lopez himself becomes a model for his wife, also a painter. Interspersed with the scenes of Lopez at work in *Quince Tree Sun*, are encounters between the artist and his family and acquaintances. In the course of these conversations, presumably staged, or, at least, partly directed, Lopez discusses art and life, and his memories of the past. These episodes are in turn supplemented by a final category of shot/sequence in the film, those that represent events occurring in and around Lopez's studio and its neighborhood - workman eating lunch, sunsets, glowing televisions lighting up the night in the near-by apartments - all apparently unrelated to Lopez's project save by physical proximity.

As this description suggests, the passage of time, the visible transience of things, is the meditative focus for both Lopez and Erice, with the latter taking the representation of the creative process on film to a durational extreme. Significantly, Erice achieves this not through the uninterrupted sequence shot alone, but through the cumulative effect of the small episodes and minor events which fill each day in the life of Lopez and those around him, coupled with the camera's sharp observational eye for capturing physical changes in the weather as winter slowly approaches. All of these changes registered by the camera in a more or less objective fashion are also marked by Lopez on canvas, as his image of the tree is gradually realized. Yet with respect to both the film and Lopez's painting, this transience and a melancholic sense of loss, which, in Marsha Kinder's words, expresses "the structuring absence that lies at the core of visual representation,"<sup>167</sup> is underpinned by a constancy or permanence, suggested by Lopez's unchanging working routines and reemphasized by the film's presentational consistency rooted in the static camera. Although the *Quince Tree Sun* appears at times to be a kind of *verité* documentary account, given the film's basic events (which, to return to Danto, would or could have occurred even if the camera was not there to film them), the fact that the characters play themselves, and its sense of spontaneity, Erice's film is also highly staged and composed, with the action fully accommodating the presence of the

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<sup>167</sup> Kinder, Marsha. *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 445.

camera rather than simply being captured by it. (Lopez, in fact, is credited as the film's co-writer.)

Of course, whereas Erice has the movement and sequentiality of the film image, as well as a number of cinematic techniques at his disposal for capturing and condensing the time it takes Lopez to create the painting, Lopez himself is faced with the quixotic attempt of mirroring this process in one single, static image. In fact, he eventually abandons the painting that he started, owing to the inconsistency of the sunlight and changing weather, opting instead for drawing, which, as he suggests, better suits his precise draughtsmanship and symmetrical compositional sense, and allows him to better capture the tree's 'essence.' Lopez's artistic style is radically empiricist, born from almost scientific observation and measurement. He is less concerned with the finished image as much as visually charting the act of painting it, which is to say, the analog in paint of the cinema's basic recording capacity: the fact that, as theorists like Danto and filmmakers like Ruiz and Godard are fond of reminding us, every film is a documentary of its own making, the non-fiction record of its fictional reality. Lopez's painting is a kind of visual diary, a record of his life, of which the *Quince Tree Sun* is itself a record. While at first glance, Lopez is outwardly a traditional, almost academic representational painter, one who refuses to work from photographs as this prevents him from having a direct physical relationship with his subject (as he tells two young admirers), his project, with its privileging of process and intention over the finished artifact, and the self-imposed constraints placed on the time he has available to produce the work, has a strong conceptual/performance art dimension. Indeed, Lopez at work painting and drawing is an artistic event in-itself, well suited to be recorded on film, just as he is to some extent, at least, consciously performing for Erice's camera in a dramatic sense.

*Quince Tree Sun* has a great poignancy and a remarkable sense of the everyday, but it is perhaps not entirely successful in its over-arching reflexive aims for two reasons. First there is an unresolved tension between the restrained classicism of Erice's style, his framing and editing, where moderately long takes are utilized but not in the highly self-conscious way of Antonioni or Kiarostami. Both of the later make the frame

the scene of a dynamic bodily or spatial interaction which substantially draws on what is off-screen at any one moment, in a way in which Erice does not. Additionally, some of the film's reflexive tropes, particularly the image of the shadow of Erice's camera filming the tree, near its conclusion, appear slightly forced and redundant in comparison with similar reflexive 'reveal' shots in *Le mépris*, *Persona*, and *A Taste of Cherry* (1997). (In Kiarostami's film, unlike *Quince Tree Sun*, the final revelation of the 'cinematic apparatus' which has captured all of the previous action, in place of a conventional dramatic resolution, is more in keeping with the alternating reflexive/transparent style of the film as a whole.) Secondly, because *Quince Tree Sun* is so rooted in the 'real,' so successful in conveying a palpable sense of Lopez's life and work, as well as the life of his Madrid neighborhood, it lacks the strong metaphorical remove of fiction (at least, that is, until its coda). This prevents the film from fully speaking beyond its own form and nature to cinema more generally, which, given the presence of the reflexive aspects described, one can surmise was Erice's intention, at least in part. This said, the film does illuminate the challenges and rewards of painting a given object over an extended period, as well as those of any lengthy creative project, in a way that few films – certainly few wholly fictional films – can match. And it does, in the process, reflect on its own capacity to both record the objective time of an art work's creation and express a sense of the lived, subjective time that informs it.

Whereas *Quince Tree Sun* appears to be a documentary which incorporates fictional elements, Rivette's *La belle noiseuse* is clearly a fictional film which, in its depiction of painting, in particular, incorporates elements usually associated with documentary. Yet this is only one of a number of contributions that Rivette's film makes to the reflexive cinema of painting.

### II. 2.3ii. Portrait of the Filmmaker as Artist: *La belle noiseuse*

*La belle noiseuse* is partly a 'deconstruction' of the life-of-the-artist film, a genre within which it is never the less self-consciously entrenched. For the purposes of broad generic classification, such films can be divided into two groups, biographical representations

of the lives of actual artists that range from the more-or-less fact based to the largely speculative or imaginary, and portrayals of fictional ones. *La belle noiseuse* is of the latter type, with Michel Piccoli playing the fictitious Frenhofer. Although Rivette's contemporary painter lacks an historical precedent, he does have a literary one in Balzac's *Le Chef d'oeuvre Inconnu* (1845) one of the main inspirations for the film and the source of its title.<sup>168</sup> Yet shadowing Piccoli's Frenhofer throughout the film is an actual artist, Bernard Dufour, who executes the paintings and drawings the viewer sees and who is given prominent billing in the film's opening credits, immediately after its main leads, as "*la main du peintre.*" A large portion of *La belle noiseuse's* four hour running time is taken up with the execution, often in real-time, of well over a dozen sketches and painted studies, with Dufour's hands replacing Piccoli's in close shot. In one remarkable instance, the camera in a single long-take holds on the paper for as long as it takes Frenhofer/Dufour to complete an entire drawing, from the first mark to the last.

A number of conceits and conventions have arisen around the challenge of actors portraying virtuoso artists and musicians and "faking" their performance, particularly in Hollywood productions (although by no means limited to them). Where a fictional realism of some sort is the goal, this inevitably results in a visual cat and mouse game a film plays with the viewer. This is usually signaled by cut-aways from establishing long shots of an actor before a canvas or piano, to close-ups of the hands of the 'real' artists brought into produce the marks or the sounds. (Of course sometimes actors mime the artist's or musician's motions, or actually do produce the work, having been cast owing to an artistic talent or learning it especially for the film.) Regardless of the particular way in which a filmmaker tackles this problem, such situations, fundamentally predicated on a suspension of disbelief, are always a point of ontological uncertainty and interest in a film, as Rivette is well aware. Reflexive by default, they are

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<sup>168</sup> In Balzac's story, "la belle noiseuse" is the name Frenhofer gives to his portrait of the courtesan Catherine Lescault. Just like in Ruiz's film, where the fictional Tonnere is historically and stylistically contextualised as a disciple of Gerôme, in Balzac's story fact and fiction are also merged. But in this case it is the reverse, with a young Poussin serving as a disciple to the fictitious Frenhofer.

a clear instance of the process of a film's making entering into, or being superimposed over, a film's fictional world-reality.

Along with inventing a number of novel ways to depict a painter at work in terms of framing, composition and editing, Rivette adopts many of the customary shot patterns and editing tricks designed to disguise the fact that Michel Piccoli is not creating the art that the viewer sees. Combined with his drawing such unusual attention to the identity of the actual painter at the beginning of the film, however, and, in effect, giving Dufour so much screen time, the incorporation of such devices in *La belle noiseuse* is a highly self-conscious gesture. Both the filmmaker and viewer acknowledge that what is transpiring on the screen is a highly theatrical game of make-believe (of the kind which Rivette's cinema is famously full), but the pretense is maintained, and out of this tacit admission, like the magician performing a trick and simultaneously telling the audience how it is done, the film's fictional representation, is only strengthened, rather than undermined. This much is born of Rivette's Bazinian faith in the basic 'reality' conferring properties of the cinematic image. The film's unwavering, almost defiant attention to the artistic process, at the expense of a finished product, is dramatically re-emphasized by the fact that the viewer never sees the most significant painting in the film, the second version of Frenhofer's "La belle noiseuse." Further evidence of the documentary sensibility informing the film's representation of art is Rivette's decision to use a 1:33 aspect ratio for the film, as opposed to his customary wide-screen shooting format of 1:85. This ratio, with its longer vertical axis, allows Rivette to fit the whole of Dufour's/Frenhofer's large canvases in the frame without being cropped. Here, as one would expect of a documentary, versus a fictional film, the cinematic image accommodates the painted one, and not the reverse.<sup>169</sup>

It is worth briefly considering the production background of *La belle noiseuse* and some of its diverse inspirations, as these clearly show just how multi-dimensional the film's reflexive design is. Filmmaker Claire Denis made a fascinating documentary film on Rivette, *Jacques Rivette: le veilleur* (1990), for French television. Broadcast in 1990, a year before the release of *La belle noiseuse*, the film consists of a series of

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<sup>169</sup> See interview with Pascale Bonitzer on the 2003 Artificial Eye DVD edition of *La belle noiseuse*.

extended conversations between Rivette and Serge Daney, the great *Cahiers du cinéma* critic and editor. During one of these informal exchanges Rivette discusses his desire to make a film depicting the interaction between a painter and his model. After throwing out the idea, Rivette then proceeds to highlight what he views as the central theoretical and practical difficulties of such a project, in the form of a series of largely rhetorical questions: “Should the painter be seen in the story?” “Should he be played by a painter or an actor?” “Do we see his paintings or do we concentrate on his eyes, with the paintings off-screen?” Rivette also suggests, somewhat enigmatically, that for him, at least, treating this subject at all requires finding some dimension of “modesty” in both the story and its presentation, one which would prevent the film from being mere “pornography”.<sup>170</sup> In retrospect all of these uncertainties and qualms which, as Denis’s presentation of them before *La belle noiseuse* was made suggests, go to the very heart of Rivette’s filmmaking: to that space where the aesthetic and the ethical, like fact and fiction, become inextricably tangled. Moreover, they are visibly worked out or re-problematised in the finished film both formally and thematically.<sup>171</sup>

The screenplay of *La belle noiseuse* is a collaboration between Rivette, Christine Laurent, and Pascal Bonitzer. Bonitzer’s presence is especially notable. Along with being a director himself and a script collaborator with Raul Ruiz, among other filmmakers, Bonitzer was co-editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the early 1970s and is the author of a collection of theoretical essays on film and painting, *Decadrages*.<sup>172</sup> Yet Bonitzer’s involvement with *La belle noiseuse* is actually just as interesting for the ways in which the film *does not* correspond to the major stylistic tendencies he identifies in his theoretical writings as for those in which it does.

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<sup>170</sup> In the same conversation Daney says that if the painter is not seen than “he is a voyeur.” Daney’s comment here encapsulates the “new” post-1968 policy of *Cahiers du cinéma*, one which Rivette partly anticipated during his brief editorship in the late 1960s, where aesthetics and ideological/political considerations were viewed as inseparable in both film practice and criticism. This is a position which both Daney and Bonitzer would test and reflect on throughout the 1970s.

<sup>171</sup> Rivette has subsequently said that it was Denis, more than anyone else, who encouraged him to pursue *La belle noiseuse* and that she also convinced him that Frenhofer needed to be played by an accomplished actor. See interview with Rivette on 2003 DVD edition of *La belle noiseuse*.

<sup>172</sup> Bonitzer, Pacale. *Decadrages*. Paris: Cahiers du Cinema Livres, 1985.

Bonitzer picks up the subject of the 'frame' in film and painting inaugurated by Bazin, but in relation to a number of stylistic developments whose widespread and in many cases, bravura, use in the hands of a number of filmmakers, Bazin did not live to see. Bonitzer identifies what he calls the "deframing" tendency of both modernist painting and much post-"classical style" cinema. In relation to film this means the use of off-screen space, oblique angles and off-center compositions, all of which establish the film frame as a "cutting edge," one which fragments space and/or the body.<sup>173</sup> Epitomized in the films of Bresson and Antonioni, deframing works against the sequential movement of images and narrative unique to cinema, and for this reason Bonitzer labels Bresson and Antonioni "painters" of the cinema.<sup>174</sup> For Bonitzer, from the standpoint of classical continuity style filmmaking deframing is a "perversion," one that "adds an ironic truth to the function of cinema, painting, and even photography, all of them forms of exercising the right to look."<sup>175</sup> Bonitzer points out that despite general similarities, deframing takes on a different significance in the hands of every filmmaker and -- on his definition -- it can be one important technique of *seeing-with cinema* as I have described it.

Rivette, however, largely uses the borders of the film image as a frame in the more classical sense (almost to a radically reflexive degree), that is, as a containing and displaying space. It is a cinematic space more along the lines of a theatrical proscenium arch, or the frame of pre-modern painting, than Bazin's permeable "mask" or the deframers' "cutting edge." Additionally, Rivette's retention of a classical spatial-temporal continuity of action, as marked by an avoidance of close-ups, a limited use of off-screen space (certainly in comparison with Antonioni or Godard), few odd camera angles, and a general "centrifugal" balance in the shot, all safeguard the "right to look," as Bonitzer calls it, rather than deny it. In one ingeniously layered deep-focus shot, for

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<sup>173</sup>Bonitzer, Pascale. "Deframings." In *Cahiers du Cinéma Volume Four: 1973-8: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, edited by David Wilson. London: Routledge, 2000, 199. According to Bonitzer, this is a case in which painting has been informed by cinematic techniques, rather than filmmakers following the lead of painters. He argues that modern and contemporary painters have been consciously or unconsciously influenced by the fragmentation of space and the body by close-ups, oblique angles and other cinematic techniques.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

example, Rivette fits the model -- Béart in foreground close-up view facing the camera - as well as the painter and canvas -- Piccoli, seen over Béart's left arm in the background of the shot, standing in front of his easel and painting her from behind, but also facing in the direction of the camera -- within the same frame. Here, we, as viewers, have access to Marianne's face (showing a mix of discomfort, boredom and apprehension, in this early modeling session) as well as Frenhofer's, while he, however, sees only her backside. This framing, comprising the totality of the dramatic situation, is absolved from what could be taken as a 'voyeuristic,' or, at least, perceptually limiting, identification with Frenhofer's observation of Marianne. This shot is emblematic of Rivette's characteristic visual style, in which the camera sympathetically views his characters and their interaction with others in a shared space, sometimes presenting their direct points of view, but always falling back upon wide and/or deep focus shots emphasizing shifting spatial relationships. Rivette's style could be called "theatrical" in the sense that the wide/deep focus shot is like the spectators ideal view of the stage, allowing the totality of the action to be *potentially* perceivable at any moment.

Rivette's visual style in *La belle noiseuse* is thus in many detailed respects the antithesis of that of Bonitzer's deframers. However, the larger experiential effects of these practices, as described by Bonitzer – such as the creation of a “transnarrative tension” or “non-narrative suspense,” which “the story does not eliminate” and “wherein the practice of cinema is intensified and concentrated on silent recognition of its own function”<sup>176</sup> – are achieved by Rivette through different means. Bonitzer confirms this much in interviews, where he describes the film's studio-set sequences of painting as instances of “anti-narrative” or “counter-narrative,” blocks of time that give the film an unusual “weight” and “presence” which simultaneously evokes both documentary and reflexive fictional film and drama.<sup>177</sup>

Returning to the film's origin, Rivette speaks of how Balzac's short story *Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu* served as a rich basis of ideas for the film, but adds that *La belle*

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> See interview with Bonitzer, *La belle noiseuse* DVD.

*noiseuse* was in no way an attempt to “adapt” it.<sup>178</sup> Many of Balzac’s characters, their names intact, as well as the name of the titular painting, and the basic triangular situation which sets the narrative in motion, were carried over into the film from *Le chef d’oeuvre inconnu*. As Bonitzer notes, however, the screenplay also draws on other works of nineteenth century fiction dealing with painters and models, including James’ *The Liar* and Poe’s *Oval Portrait* (which Godard had incorporated into *Vivre sa vie* [1962] some thirty years earlier), both of which are variations of the primordial Pygmalion myth, as is so much of the fictional literature of painting. With respect to the core dramatic situation that the film does adopt from Balzac, there is one key modification. In Balzac’s story the young Nicholas Poussin’s ‘sacrifice’ of his lover Gillete to Frenhofer for the sake of art, by convincing her to pose for the old painter, is slowly built up but then curiously stymied: as it turns out, rather than demanding that Gillete pose for him in a prostitution-al exchange for his showing Poussin his great masterpiece, “*La belle noiseuse*,” Balzac’s Frenhofer simply compares Gillette’s naked beauty with that of the courtesan Catherine Lescault, in his preternaturally “perfect” portrait. Thus whereas Balzac’s focus is on the tragic figure of the old painter and his ultimately unrealizable work - with Gillete and Poussin’s relationship something of a side-plot - Rivette substantially shifts the attention to the Gillete character, in the form of Marianne (Emmanuelle Béart). The latter is involved in an extensive, if initially unequal, creative partnership with Frenhofer, that is often depicted from her point of view. *La belle noiseuse*, in fact, begins and ends with Marianne’s voice-over, implying that she is the subjective narrator of its events. Given the film’s literary, cinematic, and theoretical pedigree, its source material and the people involved, one would expect *La belle noiseuse* to be an erudite exploration of the ways in which painting as a subject and activity may be represented on film, and indeed it is. However, the fictional world Rivette creates, owing in large measure owing to his unique coupling of ‘Bazinian’ realism with a trademark reflexive theatricality (*La belle noiseuse* demonstrating that the two are not incompatible) is in no way sacrificed or compromised by its critical probing and theoretical subtexts.

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<sup>178</sup> See interview with Rivette, *La belle noiseuse* DVD.

On paper, all of the (over)familiar elements of the painter/model relationship as it has been commonly represented on the screen are in place in *La belle noiseuse*: the painter's chance discovery of his perfect model/muse, the sexual/asexual dynamic of alternating closeness and distance between the two, the dramatic rupture of the relationship owing in part to the ghost of a previous model haunting the artist's past (Liz, played by Jane Birkin), and, finally, the model confronted with her true self/life in the 'mirror' of the finished painting. Yet, as Orr notes, owing to the extended length format of the film and its detailed concentration on the actual painting/modeling process, these stock situations are in Rivette's hands invested with a representational and expressive depth rare in narrative cinema.<sup>179</sup>

In *La belle noiseuse* Rivette draws attention to two stages of the creative process, equally relevant to painting and film: inspiration, as what happens before the brush touches the canvas, and, by metaphorical extension, before the camera starts rolling, and hands-on physical creation. Anyone who has seen the four hour film realizes how much detailed attention Rivette pays not only to Frenhofer's/Dufour's drawing and painting, but to the concrete representation of the *milieu* of the artist's studio, through his characteristic extended takes which call attention to film's capacity for capturing lived time as duration. Just as each work Dufour executes for the camera represents a different artistic medium or technique: ink, ink wash, pencil, charcoal, paint, on grounds of different sizes and types, each studio sequence is filmed or edited in a different manner, with Frenhofer, Marianne, and the paper or canvas seen from a different angle, focal/camera distance, or within a differently constructed shot sequence. It is as if Rivette, like Godard with respect to filming a conversation between two people in *Vivre sa vie*, is here presenting a catalog, a series of 'sketches,' of the ways in which art-making may be represented on screen and inviting the viewer to draw their own conclusions as to their contrasting effects and implications. Sometimes only a small section, a detail of the canvas Dufour is working on, is picked out by the camera,

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<sup>179</sup> See Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 159-161. Orr also notes the apparent ordinariness of Dufour's drawings, which do little to confirm Frenhofer's reputation as an artistic genius. This is one of a number of ways that the film can be viewed as de-mythologizing both the Romantic conception of the artist and, relatedly, the artist as commonly portrayed in film.

and sometimes the whole of it fills the entire frame. But, by always returning to wide master shots, Rivette insures that the paper or canvas and its depiction, is never cut-off from the physical space Frenhofer and Marianne occupy. As rooted in the discrete shot-image the art work in-progress never resides in that abstract, purely “cinematic” space, so easily constructed through editing; this epitomizes Rivette’s commitment to Bazinian principles and the long-take as maximizing dynamic spatio-temporal relations within a stable perceptual continuum.

This section could equally be entitled “*A Portrait of the Artist as Filmmaker*,” as there are a whole series of reflexive role-reversals at work in the film, involving the two artists in front of the camera -- Frenhofer and a disembodied or “deframed” Dufour -- and the creative consciousness behind it, whether one wishes to see this as Rivette or the “*auteur*” in the abstract.<sup>180</sup> This is not to say that in the film painting directly “symbolizes” filmmaking, or that Frenhofer “represents” Rivette in an unambiguous fashion, which would be both simplistic and very likely uninteresting. Rather, given both Rivette’s highly self-aware film practice and *La belle noiseuse*’s historical situation as an art-film chamber piece in the era of the blockbuster, painting and film counter-point and reciprocally illuminate each other, on a meta-cinematic level.<sup>181</sup> And yet, versus Godard’s films, for instance, with their fragmented, ‘extroverted’ reflexivity, this happens internally, so to speak, within the diegetic confines of the film’s fictional events, the presentation of which Rivette never allows to be externally disrupted.

The sequences set in the studio are most revealing in this light. As Frenhofer is depicting Marianne from every conceivable angle and position, often restlessly moving around her body, looking at her from varying distances, like a filmmaker sizing up a shot in order to capture a surface appearance that reveals something deeper beneath it, Rivette is subtly changing the presentation of these scenes with the same goal in mind. And as Frenhofer is constantly revising his perspective on Marianne’s body, the film is

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<sup>180</sup> In relation to ‘role-reversal,’ Rivette’s films throughout his career have been concerned with theatricality, the roles one steps in and out of, in the context of social interaction, in games of self-conscious “make-believe” and in actors playing roles before the camera. With respect to the latter, Rivette’s films operate on that very fine line between shooting a fictional film and a documentary about the process of creating filmic fiction.

<sup>181</sup> See Thomas Elsaesser. “Rivette and the End of Cinema.” In *Sight and Sound*, April (1992): 20-23, 21.

constantly revising its perspective on the characters and their actions. Rivette's camera often shows just enough of Dufour's work in progress for the viewer to mentally compare his drawings of Marianne/Béart with the reality before Frenhofer and the camera, in that pose which he, *alias* Rivette, has placed her. In this sense, Dufour is literally sketching the film's *mise-en-scène*, often in real-time, as an analog to the frequently uninterrupted recording of the actors' performances. Rather than a "frame within a frame" composition through which two spatially removed realities are brought together within the same image (a brilliant deep-focus example of which occurs early on in *La belle noiseuse*, where the action of the characters sitting at Frenhofer's kitchen table is paired with the movement of Frenhofer's god-daughter as she dances in and out of the frame of a window behind it), here there is "an image within an image" dynamic at work. Despite their perceptual stability, Frenhofer's/Dufour's paintings and drawings *and* the film image that contains them are acknowledged as potentially revisable, self-questioning visual representations. This represents a novel, complex interaction between the traditional arts and film, wrapped as it is in a dialectic between cinematic fiction, filmed theatre and art documentary.

Rivette and other *Cahiers* critics spoke and wrote of Resnais's 'cubist' film style as one which offers multiple visual perspectives on the same represented reality more-or-less simultaneously, by way of the fragmenting combination of tracking and cutting.<sup>182</sup> In *La belle noiseuse*, Rivette is able to achieve a similar imagistic plurality and multiplicity of perspectives, but while remaining within the confines of the frame, through presenting Frenhofer/Dufour at work in deep-focus, long-take sequences and counter-pointing the film image with Dufour's traditional art depictions. In this way one of the traditional functions of complex montage is transferred to the long-take image which, at the same time, denies it. Or, in other words, montage becomes a spatial, rather than temporal property, absorbed into the film image. Such visual simultaneity and multiplicity is common in painting, whether it be the picture-within-picture compositions of Magritte, or Velázquez's and Manet's playing with ambiguous 'off-

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<sup>182</sup> See "Hiroshima Notre Amour," in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, Jim Hillier ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, 65-66.

screen' spaces brought into the composition as mirror reflections. Of course the possibility of this imagistic plurality in both film and painting is provided by the frame (an actual physical one or its depicted substitute), as a visible boundary however permeable or rigid, which separates the spaces of one image, one represented reality, from another.

*La belle noiseuse* is a film full of doubles and couplings, mirror reflections: Nicholas and Marianne, the couple at the center of this tale, are involved in a contest between love and art, as in the Balzac story which inspires the film. Nicholas and Frenhofer are two painters of different generations with different styles of working who air very different views on the nature and goals of art. Marianne, in the role of both model and muse, is both a victim of Frenhofer's creative drive and ultimately a guiding, controlling force behind it. Then there is the duality of Marianne and Béart playing her. Much of the film is taken up with the studio modeling sessions and Frenhofer's physical contortion of Marianne, unclothed for more than half of the film. Revealing the place from which she approached playing these sequences, Béart has said that in making *La belle noiseuse* she "not only bared her body for Rivette" but "her soul" – thus echoing Frenhofer, who repeatedly tells Marianne that he is trying to reveal her "inner soul" through her outer postures.

Frenhofer's studio is represented as a kind of stage complete with movable lights, props and even a balcony.<sup>183</sup> Within this combination film set and theater, Frenhofer and Marianne not only attempt to create the long delayed masterpiece but, literally, eat, sleep, and dream; it is a place of transformations, role-play, and a hoped for transcendence. If *La belle noiseuse* is partly a film about film through the metaphorical inter-face of painting, Frenhofer's studio is the equivalent of the "film-within-the-film," a crucible of experience and a microcosm, where, just as in a film, lived time is radically condensed. (In the crucible of the studio Marianne and Frenhofer pass through all the stages of a three year relationship in just three days.) The studio is

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<sup>183</sup> This is likely not coincidental as, according to Bonitzer and Christine Laurent, the set of the studio, adjacent to Frenhofer's villa, was specially constructed for the film on-location in the confines of an old barn. See *La belle noiseuse* DVD interview with Bonitzer and Laurent.

also a liminal space, the 'otherness' of which it repeatedly stressed. With its largely autumnal colors and its even, artificial lighting turning to *chiaroscuro* on the edge of the image, the studio sharply contrasts with the film's Montpellier exteriors, suffused with intense summer sunlight. On first entering Frenhofer's studio Nicholas remarks on its silence and seeming total remove from the outside world. Marianne compares it to a church and later says that it reminds her of her boarding school chapel; as the film progresses the studio does, in fact, become a place for confession, psychological as much as spiritual (there is a couch on which Marianne lies while describing a dream to Frenhofer), and of received revelation. All in all, the studio is depicted, partly ironically, as a temple of art where Marianne's former life – and ultimately Frenhofer's – are figuratively sacrificed. It is the place where the characters 'find' or 'lose' themselves, make irrevocable decisions; they are party to secret plots and agreements, to those conspiracies for which Rivette's cinema is renowned (i.e., Nicholas' initial bargain with Frenhofer, wherein he offers Marianne as his model, and Frenhofer and his goddaughter's secret pact to hide the finished painting). If the townhouse in Ruiz's *L'Hypothèse* is a double for Ruiz's cinema, Rivette's is physically embodied in Frenhofer's studio as much as in the labyrinthine Parisian streets and backstage rehearsal rooms of *Paris nous appartient* (1960) his first feature film. In this sense, the studio space, like the strip club in *Paris, Texas* discussed earlier, is a prime example of what could be called 'environmental reflexivity' in film.

Perhaps the most significant doubling or duality in the film pertains to "*La belle noiseuse*," itself, that is, Frenhofer's unfinished masterpiece, for which Marianne is modeling – and which, in a game of hide-and-seek for both the characters and the audience, the viewer never is permitted to see. There are two versions of "*La belle noiseuse*," in two different senses. The painting was begun long before the events the film narrates with Frenhofer's current partner (Jane Birkin) acting as model. Its second incarnation is prompted by Marianne's sudden appearance, causing Frenhofer to rework and finally abandon that first painting and start another version from scratch. From this point on, we no longer see the painting. The former frontal depiction of the canvas is

replaced with shots of the back of it; it is now Frenhofer, and not the painting, that faces the camera/viewer.

Rivette thus draws painting back from the realm of documentary or quasi-documentary presentation into the wholly fictional world of the drama; from this point on it is the effect of Frenhofer's art on the lives of the various characters, and not the art work itself, that is the focus. We, as viewers, must now guess as to the nature of Frenhofer's masterpiece and imagine what it must be like, through observing the character's behavior and reading into their subtle or dramatic reactions upon seeing the painting. This means that we are effectively put in the place of Rivette, drawn deeper into the film's world not simply as voyeuristic spectators (what Rivette feared with this project) but, like the director behind the camera, creative interpreters of the characters' actions, driven by an empathetic curiosity. When Frenhofer finally finishes the painting, he hides it away, having decided that the 'truth' it captures about Marianne as a person – and, by extension, their shared creative experience - is too intimate, and too honestly revealing for public display. He then paints another to take its place, a more decorative, impersonal and certainly unremarkable painting, which the viewer *does* see. Yet, in a characteristic perceptual reversal, the 'fake' painting depicts a woman from the back, whereas the genuine one is a frontal portrait – thus Marianne, who cannot be recognized in it, is ironically absent from the second work.

What is so fascinating about these dynamics in a reflexive, extra-filmic sense is that, in a case with few precedents (apart that is, from his own *Out 1* [1971] and the condensed *Out 1, Spectre* [1972]) Rivette released another "version" of *La belle noiseuse* shortly after, entitled *Le belle noiseuse: Divertimento* (1991). *Divertimento* is two-hours shorter and made up almost entirely of alternative takes of sequences used in the final cut of *La belle noiseuse*. Visually, *Divertimento* is thus a completely different film, but one which describes the identical fictional events, seen literally and figuratively from another 'angle.' In part owing to its highly unusual genesis, *Divertimento* is on the whole a more conventionally streamlined film than *La belle noiseuse*. It features a more linear narrative and a brisker rhythm. Significantly, given the fact that the film was composed entirely of outtakes, and that for *La belle noiseuse*

Rivette shot Dufour painting in mostly one-take set ups (almost all of which were subsequently used), *Divertimento* has far fewer scenes set in Frenhofer's studio. With the exception of one lengthy extended sequence of Frenhofer at work, *Divertimento* otherwise lacks the real-time presentation of painting so prominent in *La belle noiseuse* and, related to it, the earlier film's documentary sensibility and sense of durational presence. With more cross-cutting between Frenhofer's studio and the world outside of it, space and time are more traditionally compressed in *Divertimento*, the drama molded to neatly fit a two hour running time. What is lost, in the process, is not plot but tone, atmosphere and reflexive resonance, these more nebulous qualities, which as well as frequently making the difference between a good film and a great one, distinguish Rivette as a filmmaker.

In relation to our main focus, much of *La belle noiseuse*'s self-reflexive engagement with painting is muted in *Divertimento*. The studio footage that was available for *Divertimento* translates into a more conventional presentation of painting, with Piccoli making a few brush strokes here and there, and two or three substantial modeling/painting sequences, as opposed to *La belle noiseuse*'s six or seven. The majority of the art-making as well as much of the dynamic relationship between Frenhofer and Marianne attendant on it, remains a largely off-screen phenomenon. Not surprisingly, the dramatic visual reversal discussed earlier, where the viewer at a certain point no longer sees Frenhofer's work, although it is intact in *Divertimento*, loses much of its impact.

One sequence that is present in both films gives an idea of the phenomenological difference entailed in the two contrasting approaches to representing painting on-screen that the films exemplify. At one point in *La belle noiseuse*, Frenhofer, sitting up alone at night, leafs through a sketch book, filmed in close-up, of all of the drawings he has made of Marianne up to that point, each of which we, as viewers, have witnessed being made, either partially or, in some cases, from start to finish. This draws us further into the fictional world of the film at that moment, since we, like Frenhofer, recall both the sketches and the context in which many were produced, and are thus enmeshed in a similar web of memories and associations

prompted by the art. By inviting us to imaginatively revisit earlier moments in the film in this way, this sequence prompts a renewed recognition of the total time that we have spent with *La belle noiseuse*'s characters in such intimate and restricted settings. The film's durational presentation of Frenhofer's painting, which the sketch book represents, is thus imaginatively linked with the duration of the film's apprehension. The same sequence occurs in *Divertimento*. In this case, however, it has far less expressive and imaginative resonance, since we have not seen most of the drawings before, their creation occurring off-screen in that perceptual vacuum of pure 'story' time and space. Here, also, instead of self-reflexively highlighting the film's emphasis on duration, the book of images functions wholly denotatively: the sketches primarily serve, as they would in many other films, as a continuity marker or so-called 'plot-point,' simply communicating the fact that Frenhofer has spent a good deal of time in the studio with Marianne, producing much more art than has been seen in the film.

As this one example suggests, watching *Divertimento*, on the whole a lesser film than *La belle noiseuse*, if still an accomplished and interesting one, helps to better understand and appreciate, by contrast, the creative decisions shaping the later. In particular, *La belle noiseuse*'s emphasis on what Deleuze refers to as the "time-image" (in one form rooted in bodily presence within the frame), its preservation of spatial-temporal continuity, the camera's devotion to the concrete representation of drawing and painting, its reflexive playing with theatrical and literary conceits, and, most obviously, Rivette's commitment to, and exploration of, long-length film formats (which reached a peak earlier in his career in the seldom seen eleven hour long *Out 1*).<sup>184</sup>

These characteristics are noted by Elsaesser, who argues that *La belle noiseuse* operates as a commentary on three aspects of contemporary cinema: the threat that digital/video technology (and the special effects it makes possible) will completely supplant celluloid film, the crisis of the auteur in theory and practice, and the European

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<sup>184</sup> See Gilles Deleuze. *Cinema 2: the time-image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 189-204.

art-film struggling to re-invigorate itself.<sup>185</sup> For Elsaesser, *La belle noiseuse* is an example of film as “*le septième art*,” roughly one hundred years old, throwing its lot in with painting in order to counter the newer technologies threatening it. Re-asserting the artistic territory of cinema, and of the European art film in particular, amidst the theoretical clamor to absorb cinema into the larger category of “visual media,” *La belle noiseuse* thus weighs in on a debate particularly heated in French cultural circles and epitomized by the direction of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1980s and early 90’s.<sup>186</sup> Although Elsaesser perhaps pushes these points a bit too far in trying to link the film up with fashionable critical issues at the time of its release, his basic thesis bears interesting relations to the interaction between film and painting in a contemporary or ‘post-modern’ context.<sup>187</sup> Elsaesser maintains that with its long-take deliberateness and classical spatial-temporal continuity, *La belle noiseuse* can be read in allegorical fashion as a “plea” for the unique fictional-world reality only celluloid cinema as photo-based representation, with its solid bedrock of realism, can create. This realism, rooted in a belief in the represented fiction on a basic perceptual level, or rather, the suspension of disbelief that film engenders, is set against the virtual reality of television and contemporary special effects dominated Hollywood cinema, where the reality/fiction dialectic, fundamental to narrative film, and from which it derives much of its magical power, is dissolved in the two-dimensional play of sheer spectacle feeding on itself. *La belle noiseuse*, according to Elsaesser, is an artistic statement in favor of a cinema “where the virtual realities and parallel worlds are created by the fact that you can believe in what you do not see” (here Elsaesser seems to be referring to Frenhofer’s ‘unseen’ masterpiece taken by the viewer on faith). This is contrasted with contemporary Hollywood cinema “where you can see what you cannot possibly believe (thanks to special effects) or a television which can do neither, and only asserts.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Elsaesser, “Rivette and the End of Cinema,” 21.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>187</sup> In the early 90’s many critics and theorists were apocalyptically predicting that digital media would all but replace celluloid by the turn of the century.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

One of the implications of Elsaesser's argument is that representational painting, as inherently and unambiguously 'unreal' or fictional, in his use of the term, can come to the aid of cinema in its current ontological crisis, by reinstating the phenomenological character of aesthetic experience. It can uphold a barrier between what Mikel Dufrenne calls the "world" of the work of art and the quotidian one surrounding it, in order for the work to be imaginatively accepted as 'real' by its audience in a self-aware fashion. One has to look to a work like Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1997-98), achieved through video technology, in order to find a substantial and successful fusion of film and painting on the level of the image's generation, where their differing effects combined are more than the sum of their parts. But perhaps it is in films which directly represent traditional artistic processes, rather than formally embodying them, that painting can add most to cinema in this respect. The phenomenological or critical 'reality' illusion of cinema (rather than a naïve one), reinforcing a film's fictional representation and the craft of achieving it that Elsaesser posits, is epitomized by Rivette's insistence on conveying a sense of the actual duration of the creation of manually produced images as an analogy of a particular style of filmmaking. Although the camera records mechanically, the making of a feature-length (or longer) film is, above all, a physical undertaking which in *La belle noiseuse* is reflected in the painstaking labor of Marianne in the studio - a process which Nicholas, working from photographs, does not have to engage in. True of any film, it is particularly the case with elaborately choreographed, long-take shooting. In *La belle noiseuse* not only does Frenhofer's posing of Marianne, blocking out her movements and controlling her gestures, invoke the filmmaker's pre-shooting activity, but there is also a painterly 'double' for editing as well, with Frenhofer incessant revision, going back and altering and re-arranging his previous work -- an analogy heightened, as we have seen, by the reflexive existence of *Divertimento*.

As Elsaesser notes, the four hour clock-time of *La belle noiseuse*, and even more, its long-take studio sequences of painting and modeling demand a patience waning in an era of post-modern quick cutting. Conveying something of the actual duration of the painting's production, and simultaneously, through the presence of

Dufour, the film's own making, rather than concealing it, as in classical continuity style (or accelerating it through editing), the film is able to establish its reflexive parallel with painting and the traditional arts through images which persist in time with something of the durational solidity of a painting. At the same time, these same presentational features also deepen its fictional reality with the viewer as co-creating the film world through active engagement with the image of the kind Bazin suggests is at work in deep-focus, long-take sequences, in contrast with the attitude of passive reception which, Bazin argues, montage in some forms didactically assumes. As Serge Daney notes in Denis' documentary, and Rivette confirms, the creation and maintenance of intense curiosity on the part of the viewer towards his narrative, towards the lives of his characters, and amongst the characters themselves, is an integral aspect of Rivette's cinema from *Paris nous appartient* on. The root of this surface curiosity is a deeper double ambiguity in Rivette's cinema, springing from the coupling of a 'productive' Bazinian ambiguity of the film image in its visual transparency, that grants the viewer a freedom to selectively participate in the film, deciding for themselves what to focus on within the image (in the manner which Bazin describes in relation to the films of William Wyler and Orson Welles), with a narrative or plot ambiguity, an open-endedness often extreme enough to cast doubt on the literal reality of much of what is seen - that is, presented with - such crystalline clarity, creating a kind of ontological unease.<sup>189</sup>

Instead of arguing for the reflexive choices which inform *La belle noiseuse* in print or conversation alone, Rivette effectively made another film, one which allows the viewer to compare a more conventional cinematic presentation of the same story with a more radical one (even if its innovation, as Elsaesser maintains, comes within a specific and recognizable art film mode). Indeed, the parallels between Frenhofer's revisions of his painting and the creation and release of *Divertimento* as an alternative version of *La belle noiseuse* gives rise to many intriguing questions concerning the revise-ability of a

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<sup>189</sup>This open ended-ness is reinforced by his film's long-running times and attention to the physical/bodily moment at the expense of both a linear story arc and conventional dramatic development/resolution. It is also reinforced by the actors' performances. Although Rivette reportedly allowed less improvisation than usual in *La belle noisesue*, there is some. This coupled with the freedom Rivette granted his actors in creating and interpreting their characters prior to shooting, gives their performances an unusual spontaneity and immediacy. See interviews with Rivette and Bonitzer on *La belle noiseuse* DVD.

painting versus a film. Although space does not permit us to engage with all of these questions here, they in turn touch on the broader subjects of the causal relations between the rehearsal, shooting, and editing stages of film production, the arbitrary nature of cinematic conventions concerning film length, and the idea of definitive versions of films. Today, with the proliferation of DVD technology and other technical innovations in filmmaking, such issues are only more relevant now than when *Divertimento* was released.

#### I. 2.3iii. The Life is the Art: A Note on *Van Gogh*

Maurice Pialat's *Van Gogh*, released in the same year as *La belle noiseuse* and *Divertimento*, makes an interesting comparison to Rivette's films. Another lengthy film about a painter, in this case a real one, *Van Gogh* solves the problem of how to depict an artist at work on film, so pressing for Rivette, with the radical decision to by and large avoid it. From a conventional standpoint, there is remarkably little footage of Van Gogh painting in the film, especially given its 160 minute running time. Certainly it is not that Pialat, an accomplished painter himself, is not interested in Van Gogh's art. Something deeper therefore, seems to have informed this choice. What we do see, throughout the film, are well known and more or less complete Van Gogh paintings sitting on the easel amidst their depicted settings - the wheat fields of Auvers, Dr. Gachet's house, etc.. What Pialat gives the viewer in these sequences is the concrete life-world within which these works were created, and which, Pialat's presentation suggests, directly informs them. This re-emphasizes the film's primary theme that, in Van Gogh's case, at least, 'life' and 'art' were wholly indivisible (with all of the self-destructive consequences this likely entailed). Any attempt to divorce the two would drain each of its vitality and poignancy, as the film seeks to convey. This focus on the life of the artist as much as the work fits with Pialat's second unconventional decision in the film, which is to devote a good deal of screen time to the lives of Van Gogh's family and acquaintances, in sequences from which Van Gogh himself (Jacques Dutronc) is absent. Both of these directorial decisions square with Pialat's particular brand of

cinematic realism. He is not overly preoccupied with showing the formal translation of scenes from life onto canvas, nor is he interested, as Rivette, in the challenge of inventing new ways of framing and editing a painter at work in order to picture this translation. Instead, Pialat is above all concerned with the essentially cinematic representation of the events themselves. Versus Rivette's stylized, highly reflexive, sequence shots, Pialat's long takes and his preservation of spatial/temporal continuity are not used to capture the creative process at work, nor equate it with the process of filmmaking by way of the time-image, as much as to round out and deepen the film's represented world, as an in-itself reality.

It is true, as a number of critics have pointed out, that Pialat transfers much of the film's visual interest in Van Gogh's art, and Impressionist and post-impressionist painting, more generally, from the canvases within the *mise-en-scène* to the *mise-en-scène* itself. A number of shots in the film echo particular Van Gogh's paintings to one degree or another. Ultimately more interesting, however, is Pialat's depiction of aspects of daily Parisian and rural French life of the late 1800s which we now associate with the subject matter of individual painters of the time – Toulouse Lautrec's dance halls and brothels, Degas' domestic interiors, Renoir's outdoor *fêtes* – in expressive compositions which evoke these artist's works in an associational way, without directly recreating their paintings. In this way, Pialat adopts an approach to referencing painting in many ways more characteristic of *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers like Herzog, Tarkovsky, and Sokurov, than their *seeing-with cinema* counterparts. As mentioned earlier, the former tend to focus less on the cinematic *recreation* or *translation* of a given painter's work, and more on picturing the physical or emotional wellspring of his or her art. Pialat, like Herzog and Tarkovsky, is in search of the landscapes, the events and the people that inspired the painters he references, attempting to capture on film the spark of that inspiration. This represents a conscious move away from the finished work of art as a physical object towards the representation of its concrete 'existential' origins. In his much discussed late essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger puts aside considerations of artistic style in-itself and, focusing on the work's depiction, tries to discover in Van Gogh's painting of "peasant" shoes (which, unbeknownst to Heidegger,

were most likely Van Gogh's own), the way of "being-in-the-world" which these shoes as a token of their absent wearer represents, a life which he proceeds to poetically elegize.<sup>190</sup> Here Heidegger, like a number of *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers, views the work of art as a means of accessing the life-world from which it was born. In *Van Gogh* Pialat, in his own cinematic way, attempts to achieve something similar.

#### I. 2.4 Anxieties of Influence

Pialat's *Van Gogh* raises the large question of painterly influence and inspiration, and how filmmakers respond to its call in different ways. The "anxiety of influence" mentioned earlier with respect to cinematic tradition, which *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers tend to deal with in different ways, equally extends to the influence that the history of painting casts over film, where its legacy is often viewed as both a burden and an opportunity. The opposed theories and practices of two outspoken pioneers of New German Cinema, Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog, provide a striking example of this divergence and an examination of them will serve to close this chapter.

##### I. 2.4i Wenders : Tribute and Theft

Wim Wenders, who by his own account began his creative life as a painter before turning to film, and who first used a film camera in order to make "landscape portraits,"<sup>191</sup> has shown little hesitation in directly bringing together cinema and other arts (often in a less than subtle fashion). Like Godard, Wenders speaks unashamedly of "stealing" from painters as well as photographers and other filmmakers.<sup>192</sup> And, again like Godard, Wenders's often compelling blending of these disparate visual influences

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<sup>190</sup> See Martin, Heidegger, "On the Origins of the Work of Art." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper, 2001, 33-34.

<sup>191</sup> Wenders, Wim. *The Logic of Images: Essays and Conversations*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991, 51.

<sup>192</sup> See *Ibid.*, 33.

(analogous to his eclectic use of pop and rock music) is as much a part of his cinematic signature as long takes, narrative laxity and a deliberate, meditative pacing. Wenders's incorporation of painting, in particular, has prominent reflexive dimensions, which openly acknowledge, and sometimes conflate, his painterly and cinematic influences. In *The American Friend* (1977), an homage to the thriller genre, with its punning 'framing' motif, a picture framer (Bruno Ganz) gets mixed up in a murder plot in which a painter of forgeries, forced to live in seclusion, is played by director Nicholas Ray. Ray, a seminal influence on Wenders's cinema, would three years later, near the end of his life, become the subject of an unconventional and often troublingly intimate Wenders's documentary, *Lightning Over Water, Nick's film* (1980). In the role of the unacknowledged artist, hiding behind other painters' styles - just as he had often been forced to hide the radical aspects of his cinematic vision behind Hollywood conventions - Ray's gaunt form presides over *The American Friend* as a ghostly authorial presence and he has the film's last word. It is difficult not to see his tragic predicament here, as a painter unable to make a living from his art, as reflecting the wayward fortunes of his stalled filmmaking career. In *Beyond the Clouds* (1995), which Wenders co-directed with Michelangelo Antonioni (as the Italian director suffered from the effects of an earlier stroke) a similar painting/film role reversal, equally bound to questions of influence and imitation, takes place. In one of the portmanteau films' linking segments set in Provence and directed by Wenders, Marcello Mastroianni is cast as a painter trying to recreate Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* -- an actual reproduction of which introduces the film's subsequent episode. Mastroianni engages in a dialogue with Jeanne Moreau in which the two discuss the desire to imitate in modern society and Mastroianni defends the act of copying great artists. Jonathan Rosenbaum calls this not so veiled homage to Antonioni, one of Wenders's defining influences, a "little pirouette on the auteur theory."<sup>193</sup> With Moreau and Mastroianni, Wenders, who has a long

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<sup>193</sup> Rosenbaum goes on to speculate "...Wenders may be directing here in a pastiche of Antonioni's style, but is this scene simply Wenders imitating Antonioni, or Antonioni imitating Wenders imitating Antonioni, or some combination thereof?...If Antonioni is being equated with Cézanne, is this his own immodesty or is it the flattery of Wenders and Guerra [the film's co-writer]?" (Jonathan Rosenbaum,

standing fascination with great filmmakers and actors in the later stages of their careers (and lives), also brings together major representatives of the two seminal reflexive movements in modern film, the *nouvelle vague* and the Italian modernism of Antonioni and Fellini, in obviously self-reflexive circumstances.<sup>194</sup>

More substantially, in *Paris, Texas*, the starkly saturated colors and neon-lit atmosphere of the film's small town America exteriors, as well as the interiors of the strip club, together with the film's use of reflections and physical frames, echo Edward Hopper, a strong painterly influence not only on Wenders's films, but also on his published still photography (primarily of the American West). In particular, they recall Hopper's fondness for presenting his isolated American dreamers, especially those in urban environments, in mirror reflections, partially glimpsed through windows, or, as in his ubiquitous *Nighthawks* (1942), seen through street front glass. In fact, Wenders dazzlingly re-creates Hopper's most famous painting in his visually inventive, but narratively still-born *The End of Violence* (1997). Characteristically, cinematically reflexive elements are present here as well: the re-creation of *Nighthawks* is part of a film set presided over by an auto-biographical stand-in, and well known archetype, the European director "exiled" in Hollywood (Udo Kier). The director within the film attempts to bring to bear a European "art" film seriousness - and a related desire to reference painting - on an apparently mainstream studio production, of the kind that the *End of Violence* itself gestures towards.

Wenders's assimilation of Hopper is itself cinematically loaded, as perhaps no other twentieth-century painter has exerted so direct and pervasive an influence on filmmakers and cinematographers. Most conspicuously, the Bates house in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) is famously modeled on Hopper's *House by the Railroad* (1925) and the painter's characteristic matter-of-factly presented depictions of everyday life, shot through with a metaphysical sense of presence, can be seen reflected in the films of Malick and Lynch, the later also picking up on the more ominous, claustrophobic

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*Chicago Reader* review of *Beyond the Clouds* on [www.chicagoreader.com/movies/archives/2000/](http://www.chicagoreader.com/movies/archives/2000/), consulted September 8, 2006).

<sup>194</sup> Mastroianni and Moreau also appeared together in Antonioni's *La Notte* (1961).

undercurrent permeating many of Hopper's interiors.<sup>195</sup> A Hopper-ish sensibility is evident in Wenders's films as far back as *Kings of the Road* (1976) where it is manifested in the East German landscape taking on the desolate, haunted solitude of Hopper's adopted back-roads New England and merged with Walker Evans' depression-era photography. And yet, just as Orr notes with respect to Francis Bacon, a painter whose cinema-inflected works went on to inspire many filmmakers,<sup>196</sup> Hopper's connection to cinema is a circular one. In *New York Movie 1939* (see Figure 2), which pictures the interior of a movie theatre as a film is being projected, Hopper directly acknowledges the influence of film on his painting. At the same time, however, since the usherette standing to the side of the screen depicted in the painting is not watching the projected film but, head turned down, is lost in her *own* private, imaginary world, the composition slyly puts this filmic inspiration into perspective in relation to Hopper's completely singular, 'high art' project. Despite this painting's note of ambivalence, Hopper's love for American genre cinema and his absorption of the patterned shadows and multiple-sourced lighting of studio-based film noir cinematography is visible in many of his works, particularly the nighttime scenes (where the depicted artificial light is as tangible as the objects it illuminates). Many filmmakers, however, have been equally inspired by the heightened optical realism of Hopper's day-lit scenes with their single source natural light, as well as his use of 'found' frames in doors, windows and mirrors. Peter Wollen sees an implicit voyeuristic element built into Hopper's paintings of interiors, often looked into from the outside and conceived at angles suggesting not an omniscient painterly eye but some imbedded observer, equivalent to a subjective cinematic point-of-view.<sup>197</sup> It is not surprising that one of the most significant representational painters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century should be engaged in this two way conversation with film, particularly since for all their concern with achieving the kind of tactile light effects unique to painting, Hopper's canvases have a visual facticity, solidity and directness often associated with photographs.

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<sup>195</sup> See Peter Wollen, "Two or three things I know about Edward Hopper," in *Edward Hopper*, edited by Sheena Wagstaff, London: Tate Publishing, 2004, 78-79, and Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 27.

<sup>196</sup> See Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 28.

<sup>197</sup> See Peter Wollen, "Two or three things I know about Edward Hopper," 78.

In his essayistic documentary *Tokyo-Ga* (1985), Wenders stages a remarkable on-screen meeting with Werner Herzog at the top of a Paris skyscraper. In a typically grandiose pronouncement Herzog, speaking to the camera, argues that the earth is barren of “pure and clear and transparent images” and that the only place left for the authentic filmmaker to turn to is outer space, where he soon hopes to go.<sup>198</sup> Here, within a film which is concerned more with Tokyo as a virtual city, a generator of images, and with cinema (the film is an explicit tribute to both Ozu’s cinema and Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* [1983]) - as much as a concrete reality, Wenders contrasts his own reflexive, *seeing-with cinema* vision with Herzog’s a-reflexive, *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking, which he treats with a gently mocking admiration.

#### I. 2.4.ii Herzog and Painting: Framing the Original Image

Herzog’s marked ambivalence towards the influence of painting on his cinema is inescapably bound-up with his anti-reflexive conception of the film medium. Herzog’s cinematic vision both *is*, and, just as significantly, *claims to be* a radically original one. The German filmmaker’s self-professed calling in a world of “second-hand” visual clichés and “recycled” images, proliferated through television and advertising, is to seek out “new” and “original” images, those yet to be culturally mediated and interpreted (‘pre-semiotic,’ in this sense) which, on rare occasions, contains film art’s highest achievement, what he calls in his writings and interviews the quality of “ecstatic truth.”<sup>199</sup> Herzog consciously pits his cinema against both reflexive and conventional or mainstream film practice, each of which he views as turning away from the visible world ‘out there’ to be discovered. In the case of the latter, film practice is constrained by pre-fabricated stories and techniques, and in the former, a conceptual bind of endless

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<sup>198</sup> See Nora M. Alter, “Documentary as Simulcra: *Tokyo Ga*.” In *The Cinema of Wim Wenders: Image, Narrative, and the Postmodern Condition*, edited by Roger F Cook and Gerd Gemünden. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997, 137.

<sup>199</sup> See Paul Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002, 239-243, 301. Herzog’s views “ecstatic truth” as a “mysterious and elusive” property that can “only be reached through fabrication, and imagination and stylization” (Cronin, 301).

self-reference. Revealingly, in expressing his dislike for reflexive cinema and its 'navel gazing' tendency, Herzog singles out Godard, together with some unnamed New German cinema colleagues.<sup>200</sup> The same second-hand visual landscape of advertising, popular culture (including Hollywood cinema), and Pop art, as its aesthetic shadow, which so fascinates Godard and Wenders as reflexive subject-matter, repels Herzog. And it is this antipathy which spurs him on in the self-proclaimed quest for "new," "unprocessed" and "transparent" images, with which human beings can "authentically" live.<sup>201</sup>

Let us try to look in more detail at Herzog's claims in relation to his films. Timothy Corrigan, in attempting to identify the source of Herzog's uniqueness in the context of modern cinema, sees the director's "visionary encounter with the real" as closely aligned with his ambivalent attitude to cinematic history and convention -- a problematic inheritance that is embodied in both the style and content of his films.<sup>202</sup> Corrigan notes Herzog's boast that only the films of D.W. Griffith and, perhaps, F.W. Murnau, have exercised a substantial influence on his work. Otherwise, his cinema operates as if "there was no film history," and thus "...the tradition and context out of which Herzog works, in other words, is one of pristine originality, where the source wellspring of tradition is the only acceptable influence on creation."<sup>203</sup>

As Corrigan highlights, Herzog, perhaps more than any other *seeing-through cinema* filmmaker, elevates a notion of cinematic innocence corresponding to an unmediated purity of vision. At the same time, however, he is far from a realist filmmaker and does not deny the formal manipulation of visual reality at all stages of

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<sup>200</sup> Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 138.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67. As these comments suggest, there is a Heideggerian ring to many of Herzog's statements concerning the role of the artist as showing the way towards other forms of being-in-the-world, art and poetry as a repudiation of the inter-personal reality of social and business transactions, and the experience of an art work as a an imaginative "dwelling" within its depicted world.

<sup>202</sup> Corrigan, Timothy. *New German Cinema: The Displaced Image*, revised edition. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994, 129.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 128. Herzog has, however, cited a number of other directors whom he admires including Dreyer, Brakhage, Pudovkin, Kurwosawa, Buñuel and Tarkovsky – all filmmakers with whom he feels a "kinship" (138). Note the *seeing-through cinema* tendencies and visionary leanings that all of these directors share.

the filmmaking process.<sup>204</sup> As a corollary to his deliberate avoidance of reflexive motifs, when Herzog brings painting into the cinematic fold, it is not a question of bringing together two forms of *media* into the same experiential frame. Instead, by virtue of his visual style, this interaction functions on a 'trans-aesthetic' level that suppresses (or attempts to suppress) medium differences, rather than, as in the case of Godard, Wenders and Greenaway, consciously emphasizing them. In Herzog's nominalist view of art there is no painting or cinema in the abstract, but only works of individual creators with their own highly unique ways of viewing and reconstituting the world. Despite Herzog's stated rejection of Romantic art theory and his dismissal of the notion of the artist as "genius," his view fits with the Romantic notion of all art as poetry, with the "poetic" identified with an individual's heightened sensory orientation towards a physical environment.<sup>205</sup>

Accordingly, Herzog sees the kinship between himself and the painters he admires, like that with other filmmakers, as instinctive rather than "intellectual," a question of "brotherhood" stemming from a "common view of life."<sup>206</sup> Accordingly he is more dismissive of general labels and stylistic classifications, and their implicit theoretical legitimizations – speaking of being "tainted"<sup>207</sup> by the tag of German Romanticism and expressionism - than the work of individual artists viewed as a *sui generis* phenomenon, outside the context of specific social and historical lineage. For Herzog, in so far as film engages with the history of art, the task is not to create cinematic interpretations of paintings but to discover the natural inspiration for them, to arrive at the perceptual ground which has engaged the artist's subjective vision. This

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<sup>204</sup> Herzog, in fact, repeatedly calls attention to the fact that he has no desire to merely capture reality "as it is;" offering this as a reply to the question of why many of his documentaries either stage events or include wholly fictional elements. He also famously attacks the *cinéma vérité* tradition as offering a false verisimilitude which masquerades as (for him an impossible) cinematic objectivity (see Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 238-243, 301).

<sup>205</sup> Herzog argues that the "concept behind the notion of genius as applied to art is something that heralds from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and just does not fit comfortably today," (Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 139). Of course there is a deeply Romantic ring to Herzog's pronouncements as well as his own image, one partly self-generated, of the globe-trotting artists and adventurer with the ability to artistically 'see' what others cannot.

<sup>206</sup> Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 136.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

may amount to a certain attitude towards the natural world, a combination of reverence, awe and dread, in which there is a constant shift between a oneness with the natural landscape and an intense alienation from it, as in the painting of Caspar David Friedrich.

Herzog's borrowing from past art occurs within a form of cinema conceived as related to painting not by virtue of historical development or shared representational conventions (e.g., the rules of perspective or particular ways of framing the image), but by their shared availability as tools at the service of an original artistic vision. This is evident in Herzog's suggestion that "ecstatic truth" is not the private property of cinema alone, and that there is a sort of equivalent phenomena in painting, photography, and imagistic literature.<sup>208</sup> If the nature of a painter and/or filmmaker's creative vision happens to overlap, this can be productive, but Herzog, like Tarkovsky (and for a similar mix of egoistic and philosophical reasons) expresses a fear that the forms and methods of painting, when consciously incorporated in a film, can easily come between the camera and the world, especially as part of an arid, over-determined formalism that robs the image of its spontaneous life and mystery.<sup>209</sup>

Although Herzog maintains that he has never deliberately set out to recreate specific paintings in his films, he admits that he has, at times, looked at a particular painter's work before embarking on a particular project, as when he studied Georges de la Tour with his cinematographer Jurgen Schmidt-Reitwein before the shooting of *Heart of Glass* (1976), a film which he describes as more deliberately 'aestheticized' than others.<sup>210</sup> De la Tour, in whose paintings light almost always comes from a candle or other source placed within the midst of the scene, thus anticipating single source illumination in naturally-lit cinematography, has long been a favorite painter among filmmakers, particularly those emphasizing a visual realism. In Herzog's hands,

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<sup>208</sup> "I often think about what an extraordinary cultural upheaval would have taken place if cinema had been discovered 100 years earlier... and if the writers and artists I draw on had had cinema to express themselves" (Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 137).

<sup>209</sup> See Herzog's commentary on the 2001 Anchor Bay DVD edition to *Heart of Glass*. Herzog praises Tarkovsky's early films but bemoans the later films made after he had become "the darling of the French intellectuals" (Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 158).

<sup>210</sup> See commentary on *Heart of Glass* DVD.

however, this is taken to an unnatural extreme, as is visible in the film's expressionistic tavern scenes and the ghastly goings on in the "Master's" house as he sinks deeper into madness, with the sort of Gothic atmosphere to be found in his version of *Nosferatu*.<sup>211</sup> In fact, despite his general reluctance to speculate in detail on how certain artists have informed the visual design of his films, Herzog, like Peter Greenaway, is more wont to cite painterly influences on his work than cinematic ones: "if I had to give you the names of the painters who have influenced me, I would name Grunwald, and above all Bosch and Bruegel."<sup>212</sup> He also refers to Leonardo da Vinci, citing, in particular, Da Vinci's fantastic and "ideal" background landscapes. For Herzog, landscapes do not serve as backdrops for a film's action but reflect "an inner state of mind, literally inner landscapes and it is the human soul that is visible through the landscapes presented in my films...this is my real connection to Friedrich, a man who never wanted to paint landscapes *per se*, but wanted to explore and show inner landscapes."<sup>213</sup>

Indeed, the much written of influence of German Romantic painting, especially the work of Caspar David Friedrich, on Herzog's cinema, often framed in relation to the 'sublime' as articulated by Burke and Kant, should be re-contextualized in these terms. The Friedrich-like elements of Herzog's cinematic images appear to be less a matter of self-conscious quotation and direct allusion than a filmmaker finding a natural affinity with a painter's way of looking at the natural world and the individual subject's relation to it.<sup>214</sup> Perhaps this is also a case of a remarkable artist 'creating' their own precedents, as Borges says of Kafka, that Herzog's films provide a new and different interpretative lens with which to view Romantic painting as much as Romantic painting

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<sup>211</sup> One can point to specific shots or sequences in Herzog's films and find other echoes of paintings. In *Heart of Glass*, the village scenes are peopled with grotesque inhabitants of taverns and barns who recall Bosch's peasants and Bruegel's drunken dancers. The long glass blowing scene in which Herzog films actual Bavarian glass blowers at work in low light *chiaroscuro*, their shadows dramatically heightened by the open fires, brings to mind von Menzel's paintings, as well as Joseph Wright of Derby's scenes of industrial and scientific drama.

<sup>212</sup> Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 136.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>214</sup> Although there are a few instances of self-aware referencing of Friedrich's paintings in Herzog's *mise-en-scene*, these are exceptions. For his part, Herzog, in the DVD commentaries accompanying his films, only grudgingly acknowledges such borrowings. See DVD commentaries to Anchor Bay editions of *The Enigma of Kasper Hauser* and *Heart of Glass*.

illuminates Herzog's imagery.<sup>215</sup> The transparency of vision, the sense of scale and proportion, and what Noël Carroll identifies as a sense of inviolable "presence" and the "inexplicable" immediacy of the "object"<sup>216</sup> that characterizes Herzog's cinematic vision, can be identified to one degree or another in Friedrich's paintings. Yet it is also fair to say that the Friedrich connection has become a kind of critical short-hand in studies of Herzog, which often misses more than it accounts for. It frequently overlooks, for instance, a number of significant differences between Herzog's and Friedrich's visual aesthetic and the 'metaphysic' it may embody, as Carroll also suggests.<sup>217</sup> Among these differences are a much more dynamic foreground/background dynamic in Herzog's compositions than in the majority of Friedrich's paintings (as Herzog rarely places the main object of the shot as far out into the distance as Friedrich), and a lack of Friedrich's characteristic open vistas and low horizon lines in Herzog's shots.<sup>218</sup>

For these reasons, beyond the meta-stylistic question of artistic influence, the most significant connection between Herzog's cinema and the works of the pre-modernist painters that he admires – principally Leonardo and Friedrich – is their shared providing of an access to a world-reality that is fundamentally "other" in relation to that of the viewer, one which is brought into being through the self-professed visionary powers of the artist as one who sees the world in a unique and novel way. This is clearly reflected in the manner in which Herzog speaks of the least well known artist whom he cites, the Dutch painter and engraver Hercules Segers. Segers, a contemporary and associate of Rembrandt was, like Herzog an innovator and iconoclast, and a true 'one-off' figure in his chosen mediums. Although Segers produced some oil paintings, he was primarily a printmaker and is considered to have pioneered many techniques of that

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<sup>215</sup> See Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New York: New Directions, 1962, 199-202.

<sup>216</sup> Carroll, Noël, "Herzog, Presence, and Paradox." In *Persistence of Vision 2* (1985): 30-40, 30.

<sup>217</sup> Carroll writes that in Herzog's *mise-en-scène* "the secondary qualities of scenes, rather than their primary qualities, are stressed" and that this "underscores a 'subjective' dimension rather than an 'objective' dimension of the image." He adds that whereas "the work of Friedrich implies that the vista is spiritually charged, in Herzog's hands this symbolism suggests that the image is subjectively charged, thereby proposing a correlative to the prized experiential fusion of subject and object" (Carroll, 38).

<sup>218</sup> As in Leonardo's paintings, landscapes in Herzog's shots usually extend half way up the frame. The camera is usually placed either in a low position, looking up at looming forms, or from a high vantage point, looking down at the landscape at steep angles.

art.<sup>219</sup> In his imaginary landscapes, Segers obsessively depicts similar barren mountain valleys and wastelands, dotted with disproportionately small human dwellings and occasionally a few solitary figures dwarfed by the gnarled natural forms. Most of his prints are sepia tinged and in contrast to Friedrich's sharply lit, crystalline landscapes, Segers's art, like Herzog's cinema in a number of respects, is decidedly more Symbolist than Romantic. Segers's mournful prints have a kind of vibrating indistinctness like grainy black and white film, and a close cinematic approximation of them is the mesmerizing footage of Angkor Wat shot by Herzog's brother, which Herzog fittingly used to represent one of Kaspar's enigmatic visions in the *Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974). Herzog speaks of his discovery of Segers as a "revelation," claiming that he felt an immediate bond with the artist in the shared desire to infuse landscape with expressive feeling: "his landscapes are not landscapes at all; they are states of mind, full of angst, desolation, solitude, a state of dreamlike vision."<sup>220</sup>

In sum then, Herzog's *a-reflexive, seeing-through cinema* films exhibit the desire to bring the transformative capacity of painting into cinema. That is, not the formal techniques and history of traditional visual art, but its inherently personal vision, in which subjective expression - the route to "ecstatic truth" - is an ingrained property of representation. Like the films of Andrei Tarkovsky, which we will turn to later, Herzog's body of work is a foil to Godard's *seeing-with cinema* filmmaking with respect to the use and influence of painting, as well as its overall tone, content and style.

In the second half of this chapter, I have shown how the representation of art and artists overlaps, or is congruent with, the reflexive dimension of a number of films by directors who may be classified as both *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* directors. Apart from the more general discussion of Wenders and Herzog, while not ignoring questions of influence and factors relating to production, in so doing I have largely focused on the represented and expressed worlds of these films apart from the larger artistic and historical realities in relation to which they may be situated. In a sense

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<sup>219</sup> See John Rowlands, *Hercules Segers*. London: Scolar Press, 1979.

<sup>220</sup> See Cronin, *Herzog on Herzog*, 137.

I have moved 'horizontally,' from one filmic world to another in order to compare and contrast the alternative ways in which filmmakers can incorporate art into the reflexive design of their films. What is now needed is a more in-depth 'vertical' exploration of the changing roles of art within a filmmaker's body of work seen from a broader, more distanced perspective; one which pursues in greater detail the *seeing-with* and *seeing-through* cinema aspect of their films. To this end, the next two chapters will examine the presence of painting in Jean-Luc Godard's and Andrei Tarkovsky's films, respectively. While still moving from description and analysis of the filmic world to that of the art referenced within it, rather than the reverse, these chapters will pursue in greater depth the currents and cross-currents of art historical influence informing both Godard and Tarkovsky's cinematic vision, and also justify my locating their films at the two extreme poles of *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking. Appropriately, I will begin with Godard, whose referencing of painting and the visual arts is so wide-ranging that his films are the logical point of comparison for all other post-1960 cinema in this respect.

## Part II

### Godard and Tarkovsky

#### Chapter 3: Jean-Luc Godard and Film at the End of Art

...the young painter says 'Art is not the reflection of reality. It's the reality of a reflection.' To me it means something. Art is not only a mirror. There is not only the reality and then the mirror-camera. I mean, I thought it was like that when I made *Breathless*, but later discovered you can't separate the mirror from reality. You can't distinguish them so clearly. I think the movie is a thing which is taken by the camera; the movie is the reality of the movie moving from reality to camera. It's between them.<sup>221</sup>

Jean-Luc Godard's body of work can be divided into a number of distinct periods. These are synonymous with a certain film style, or styles, his political (or *a*-political) stance of the time, and a current conception of cinema and its relation to other media, particularly television and the fine arts. Godard's filmic incorporation of other visual arts has itself gone through periodic phases: from his early *nouvelle vague* films, through the mid-to-late 60's 'collage' works, on to his partial reconciliation with European art cinema in the 80's with *Passion*, and the more recent present with film/video hybrids like *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. The representation or referencing of painting in Godard's cinema shifts from film to film not only in terms of formal presentation, but of favored *genre* and an engagement with art on this level. Portraiture is formally and thematically foregrounded in *Vivre sa vie*, as is modernist/Pop art collage in *Pierrot le fou*. In *Passion*, painting is present as a number of pre-twentieth century masterpieces, re-created as *tableaux*, which depict historical or allegorical subjects. With its overlapping and combining images, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* returns to collage, this time in the context of mixing painting, film and video, not just on a representational level, but on a material one. Although his films from the 1980s onwards show an increasing interest in landscape, overall this is the least referenced

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<sup>221</sup> Godard quoted in Gene Youngblood, "Jean-Luc Godard: No difference between Life and Cinema, Interview with Gene Youngblood." In *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*, edited by David Sterritt. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998, 29.

genre of painting in Godard's cinema, mirroring the relative absence of the natural world in his sixties films.

As mentioned, when viewed in the context of both his evolving film style(s) and his published writings and interviews, the choice of the artists and artistic movements to which Godard repeatedly refers – Renoir, Velázquez, Goya, Picasso, Pop art - reflects on more than his famously eclectic taste. As we shall see, in some of their works these artists, like Godard, explore the representational properties of their medium(s) and, to this end, employ reflexive strategies that are in many cases comparable to Godard's *seeing-with cinema* practices. Moving chronologically through Godard's career and examining the above-mentioned films in detail will allow us to appreciate the intricacies of the combination of art reference and reflexivity in his work, as well as the historical and aesthetic 'dialogue' these films establish with the art and artists presented on screen.

### II. 3.1 *Vivre sa vie*

Although reproductions of paintings decorate the walls of Patricia's (Jean Seberg's) hotel room in *À bout de souffle*, most of these are fleetingly glimpsed and not singled out for particular focus by Godard's camera. There are two exceptions, however. The first is a quick-cut shot of a post-card reproduction of a Picasso couple in *Les amoureux* (*The Lovers*, 1923) immediately after Patricia tells Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo) that she wishes they were "like *Romeo and Juliet*." Later, in the same scene, when Patricia is hanging a poster of Renoir's *Portrait de Mademoiselle Irène Cahen d'Anvers* (1880), she puts her face against it and teasingly asks Michel if she is prettier than the girl in the painting, to whom Seberg bears a resemblance. Similar shots and situations will re-occur, in more elaborated form, in Godard's subsequent films, most notably *Pierrot le fou* (1965), in which the same Picasso painting re-appears. Like so many other aspects of his first feature film - its characters, situations and themes – Godard self-reflexively references and re-works *À bout de souffle*'s incorporation of art throughout his career. In his next film, *Une femme est une femme* (*A Woman is a Woman*, 1961), although

painting is evoked indirectly by way of an intriguing anti-naturalistic use of colour, there is little direct referencing of art. Instead, in both *À bout de souffle* and *Une femme est une femme*, Godard's two most cinephile features, pride of place is given over to filmic quotation, so that the camera is apt to dwell on a photograph of Humphrey Bogart in a cinema lobby for significantly longer than a Picasso or Modigliani print hanging on a wall.

Despite the fact that its interiors are curiously blank, devoid of the art and pop culture imagery that is otherwise a standard fixture of Godard's sixties interiors, *Vivre sa vie* marks Godard's first truly substantial integration of painting into film: here it is both a subject and formal reference point, linked with the film's visual and thematic motif of imperfect or distorted reflection. Film and art mirroring life, and each other, is concretized in the *mise-en-scène* and *découpage* of *Vivre sa vie*, centered on the figure of Nana (Anna Karina). Nana is an aspiring actress and reluctant prostitute, a character with a literary precedent in Zola, and a partial reflection of Karina herself. Indeed, throughout the film, which Godard has claimed was "sixty-percent" Karina's mainly being herself,<sup>222</sup> there is a Brechtian slippage between actress and role, emphasized at certain points by Karina's apparent dramatically unmotivated address of the camera, an action which, re-occurring in later films, has become emblematic of Karina's 1960s collaboration with Godard.

Divided into twelve "*tableaux*," as its titles announce, *Vivre sa vie* is, together with *Le mépris*, arguably Godard's most tightly structured and formally accomplished film. Unlike *À bout de souffle* which, despite its highly mobile camera, is a film made of cuts and intersections between movements, *Vivre sa vie*, eschewing elaborate tracking shots, is a progression of discrete scenes, or in Godard's words "a collection of shots placed side by side, each one of which should be self-sufficient."<sup>223</sup> Godard's further description of *Vivre sa vie*'s structure as a series of "blocks" placed in a row emphasizes the intended spatial and narrative simultaneity of the film's twelve scenes.<sup>224</sup> Like

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<sup>222</sup> Milne, ed. *Godard on Godard*, 186.

<sup>223</sup> Milne, Tom, "Jean-Luc Godard and *Vivre sa Vie*, Interview with Tom Milne." In *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*, edited by David Sterritt. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998, 5.

<sup>224</sup> Milne, *Godard on Godard*, 185.

William Hogarth's vignette paintings, which follow a character's moral and societal progress (or decline) through defining episodes, each of *Vivre sa vie*'s twelve scenes from the life of Nana (introduced in 18<sup>th</sup> century literary fashion by summary inter-titles) stand on their own. Framed off from the rest they are, at the same time, dependent for a fuller meaning (one that changes in a narrative context) on what comes before and after.<sup>225</sup> Despite this narrative linkage and some dramatic development, marked gaps of continuity between each segment ensure that the film retains a largely non-linear quality. As a number of writers have pointed out, each of *Vivre sa vie*'s "tableaux" appear to showcase a different cinematic style or technique, especially as regards to the different possibilities for filming two people in conversation.<sup>226</sup>

According to Godard, aside from its narrative structure, painting also had a strong influence on the film's presentation of actors: "I was thinking, in a way, more as a painter, of confronting my characters head-on as in the paintings of Matisse or Braque, so the camera is always upright."<sup>227</sup> Further confirming the filmmaker's 'portraitist' bent at the time of *Vivre sa vie*, Godard largely avoids long shots and

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<sup>225</sup> I am thinking, in particular, of *The Harlot's Progress* (1732) and *The Rake's Progress* (1735) two of Hogarth's most famous satirical painting series, each of which trace the destructive decline of a female and male character, respectively, at the mercy of their own ambition and the vices of upper class British society.

<sup>226</sup> This feature of the film is noted by V.F. Perkins, Richard Roud, and David Bordwell. Bordwell uses *Vivre sa vie* as an example of "parametric" narration in arguing that its style can *not* be accounted for by appeals to reflexivity – that is, it being a film "about cinema" – a common critical refrain of which he is highly sceptical. For Bordwell a reflexive interpretation of *Vivre sa vie* suggesting, for example, that "the filmmaker's ambivalent relation to his medium is represented through a varied camera handling" (Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 282) is unhelpful for the purpose of narrational and stylistic classification and results from a misguided attempt to try and fit the film into the mould of [what he terms] "art cinema" thereby making it amenable to "symbolic readings" (Bordwell, 282). As is quite clear, Bordwell's argument presupposes an acceptance of his rather restrictive classificatory schema and its distinction between "art cinema" narration and "parametric" narration, in particular. This distinction, while certainly of some merit, is one which rests on a cleavage of form from content in stylistic analysis and is open – as Bordwell himself anticipates – to a number of objections. (As many philosophers and art theorists point out, in representational art – which live-action narrative film no matter how "formalized" is – the recognition of style, as "how" a given subject is treated, often depends on reference to inherent features of that subject, i.e. the "what" of its "content.") Yet interpretations of film style based upon reflexive considerations need not be as formally reductive as Bordwell fears. He is right to rally against the clichéd, one-to-one coupling of particular symbolic "meanings" with specific cinematic techniques (something which is endemic in much film criticism and analysis). But it does not follow that even in films like *Vivre sa vie*, where plot is somewhat "subordinate" to formal or "stylistic structures" (Bordwell, 289), that there are no significant links between the "content" of the story and its presentation – as I hope my analysis shows.

<sup>227</sup> Milne, "Jean-Luc Godard and *Vivre Sa Vie*," in *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*, 6.

oblique camera angles in the film, instead favoring frontal, “upright,” compositions in a medium to close shot dynamic.<sup>228</sup> The opening titles of *Vivre sa vie* consist of alternating frontal, profile and three-quarters close-ups of Karina, as if she were modeling for a painter or sculptor from a number of different angles. Her face, lying in partial shadow and set against a bright white light, is more expressively lit than is customary for Godard, as if to strengthen this fine art connection. Yet such an association is, at the same time, ironically undercut or de-romanticized by a similarity to police ‘mug shots’ – thus anticipating the film’s sequence at the police station where Nana is photographed. The titles none the less inaugurate a reflexive parallel, one more fully developed later in the film, between the filmmaker as ‘painter’ and the actress as model and muse.

The credits lead into a well known opening sequence consisting of a one-set up shot in which Nana and her lover Paul (André Labarthe), yet to be introduced as characters, sit in a bistro with their backs to the camera. The large mirror behind the counter, which they face, provides the viewer’s sole visual access to them, with Nana seen in the extreme left hand corner of the frame, in the manner of Manet’s play with reflections and ambiguous space in his *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères* (1882). Whereas Manet’s barmaid addresses the viewer directly, and it is the reflection of her mysterious interlocutor that is located in the upper right corner of the painting, Nana’s face in this shot is only partly visible in the mirror, in the form of angled, out-of-focus glimpses. As she tells Paul that she wishes to leave him, Nana/Karina’s direct facial visibility in the credits (even if she was cast in partial shadow) -- outside of the film’s fictional frame -- here becomes invisibility or partial sight, at best, within it. Godard has said that in *Vivre sa vie* “one should feel that the characters are constantly avoiding the camera.”<sup>229</sup> The emphasis on visual mediation/obstruction in this sequence-shot, through both the apparently willful avoidance of the camera, on the part of the actors, and Godard’s oblique placement of it, in relation to the represented events, is part of a wider self-conscious deviation from realist cinematic convention prominent throughout the film.

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<sup>228</sup> As Milne notes in one of his questions to Godard (Milne, “Jean-Luc Godard and *Vivre Sa Vie*,” 7).

<sup>229</sup> Milne, *Godard on Godard*, 182.

Whereas in the opening credits she faced the camera and the viewer, in this first “*tableau*” Nana confronts her own reflection in the mirror and yet we, as viewers, are even prevented from directly seeing her looking at herself. Later in the film, Nana faces her life as a prostitute, at the mercy of men’s judgment, visual and otherwise; but the ‘mirror’ in this case is the face of Maria Falconetti on the screen, tormented by her accusers, in *Jeanne d’arc* (1928). The sequence in *Vivre sa vie* in which Nana is brought to tears while watching Carl Theodore Dreyer’s film is one of the many instances in Godard’s films where a character seeks refuge or escape in a cinema.<sup>230</sup> In this case film provides an occasion for self-revelation, not only for Nana but for *Vivre sa vie*’s own reflexive aesthetic, in terms of its staging a ‘film-within-a-film’ situation which, if not without precedent, was more daring and original in 1962 than it appears today. Cinema, it is suggested in *Vivre sa vie*, has the capacity not only to create “a world that corresponds to our desires,” as Godard says in the prologue of his next film, *Le mépris*, but to picture the gap between a desired life and an existential situation.

Formal and thematic elements of these earlier sequences are woven together near the film’s conclusion, when Nana’s infatuated client (Peter Kassowitz, identified only as the “*le jeune homme*”) reads from Poe’s short story *The Oval Portrait*. Although it is clear that the young man is reading aloud to Nana throughout this sequence, we do not see his lips move – instead, it is Godard himself who reads portions of the text on the voice-over. When he reaches the story’s words “*it was the portrait of a young girl...*”, the film cuts from the young man to Nana in medium-close shot, focusing all the visual attention on her face and reactions. Together with what follows, this shift from direct-sound rooted in the image to the voice-over narration, as well as the substitution of the young man’s voice by Godard’s, encourages the viewer to see the character of Nana, like the young man, through the distanced lens of Poe’s narrative, while at the same time viewing Karina, the actress, more intimately.

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<sup>230</sup> Bordwell notes that the cuts from Falconetti’s face to Anna Karina’s in this sequence represent one of only two instances in the film where a conventional shot/reverse-shot dynamic is employed – reinforcing the notion that this sequence is the film’s “cinematic” interlude from the “real” for both Nana and the viewer, but also its metaphorical distillation. See *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 282.

Once Nana as the visual focus of the sequence is established, the reading continues. Poe's story-within-a-story contains not one but *two* self-purported 'doubles' of the young man (and Godard): the *beholder*, Poe's unnamed narrator, enthralled by the portrait of a beautiful young woman he sees at an inn, and the *artist*, the painter painting his beloved in the account of the oval portrait the narrator subsequently reads. In the first shot of Nana accompanying the spoken text, Karina's face in silhouette is carefully framed by the apartment's window. This is followed by a cut to a frontal shot of Karina, with her head backed against the 'canvas' of a white wall. For the rest of the sequence the camera holds on Nana's/Karina's pensive face as she simultaneously listens to the young man, puts on lipstick, and smokes a cigarette. While Poe's narrator describes with amazement the life-likeness of the woman's expression in the portrait and the young man – now in his own voice – tells Nana that this is "*our story: a painter portraying his love*," Karina's cinematic portrait in being taken by Godard, whom she had recently married (in 1961).

Following in the footsteps of Godard, underground filmmaker Phillip Garrel would later devote much of his career to this kind of cinematic portraiture of the women in his life (amongst them Nico, with whom he lived, and *À bout de souffle's* star, Jean Seberg). Although shot through with harrowing scenes of emotional breakdown, the emphasis in Garrel's 'home' movies is squarely placed, as in this sequence in *Vivre sa vie*, on the duration of everyday activities conveyed through the up-close presentation of the subject's face and body, and a blurring of the line between fiction and document (features that also mark Andy Warhol's experimental 'portrait films' also begun in the early sixties).

Fitting with the *nouvelle vague's* founding metaphor of the *auteur*, in this sequence literature provides the interface between film and painting. Yet in spite of his immersion in the history of literature, as well as his fascination with juxtaposing images and text, Godard, unlike other New Wave directors such as Truffaut and Rivette was – and still is – more frequently inclined to compare the camera eye to the painter's brush, rather than a pen, and himself to a visual artist, rather than a novelist. Godard has repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that cinema is a medium which arrives at its

twenty-four frames per second truth only by first achieving a level of artistic *depiction* - the inherently subjective translation of the visual event before the camera in its concrete facticity – prior to poetic *description* on the model of literature.<sup>231</sup> Discussing the “*tableaux*” style of *Vivre sa vie* Godard rhetorically asks,

How can one render the inside? Precisely by staying prudently outside. The greatest tableaux are portraits. Velázquez, for instance. A painter who tries to render a face only renders the outside of people; and yet something else is revealed. It’s very mysterious.<sup>232</sup>

This notion of “staying outside,” of wishing to capture the externally visible signs of consciousness rather than trying to describe internal mental or emotional states informs Godard’s ‘surface’ aesthetic and separates his use of facial close-ups – which although they appear quite frequently in his films, are usually relatively short in duration - from Ingmar Bergman’s, for instance. Never superficial, Godard’s close-ups of his actors, like Velázquez’s or Renoir’s portraits, reflect on character and situation, but never attempt to psychologically penetrate to “the soul” (as Bergman is fond of saying) in the manner of Rembrandt’s portraits or Dreyer’s close-ups of Falconetti in *Jean d’arc*. Godard’s comments here also illuminate why, when representing paintings in his 1960s films, it is, with a few exceptions, portraits or character studies shown or referred to, rather than landscapes, still lives or, perhaps most significantly, abstracts. At first glance, it is indeed quite surprising how little fully fledged non-representational art figures in Godard’s proto-typically ‘modernist’ films. Yet one could draw parallels between Godard’s retention of the human form and recognizable representation in the images of other artists that he re-presents on screen, and his predilection for using the bare-bones structure of existing novels and stories (often artistically negligible ones), as well as his continual championing of documentary forms and his avoidance of period

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<sup>231</sup> In many published writings and interviews Godard expresses reservations concerning comparisons between filmmakers and novelists, and literature and cinema more generally. This extends to criticism of attempts to understand film as a visual art on the basis of linguistic paradigms (those of structuralist theory, for instance). Speaking in a 2000 interview about the current state of cinema, in relation to contemporary visual culture, Godard says “...today’s cinema is script-oriented cinema. Since Gutenberg, the text has triumphed. There was a long struggle, marriage or liaison between painting and text...Film is the last art in the pictorial tradition. People talk a lot about images but there is only text these days” (Lotz ed., *Jean-Luc Godard The Future(s) of Film Three interviews 2000/01*, 19).

<sup>232</sup> Milne, *Godard on Godard*, 187.

films. What all these point to is a decisive need for a solid representational foundation, a bedrock of pre-existing, recognizable 'reality' as a jumping off point for formal deviations (in this respect, there is a strong affinity between Godard's sixties cinema and Pop art, as will be discussed.)<sup>233</sup> As in cubism, which in formal terms retains the figure in order to explore its relation to the ground of the canvas, for Godard it is a documentary-like grounding in 'here and now' reality that pushes the physical and psychological interaction of his characters with their given environments into revealing itself. Godard has spoken of *Vivre sa vie*, which he calls a more "concrete" and "realist" film than *À bout de souffle*, as a kind of documentary on the life of a Parisian prostitute.<sup>234</sup> In this sense, rather than being at odds with it, Godard's incorporation of documentary-like techniques is congruent with the reflexive foregrounding of his film's action in relation to previous cinema, the films of others that he admires not only for their imaginary transports but as valid reportage on the human condition, above and beyond their fictional representation.

In the section of *The Oval Portrait* read aloud in *Vivre sa vie*, Poe's narrator suggests that it is not the painter's skill which creates its magical realism but his all-consuming love – one which leads to a fetishistic obsession not with the woman herself but her fixed, impermeable image. Upon the painter finishing the woman's portrait, and his declaration that he has achieved the likeness of "*life itself*," she drops dead. Her life has been traded for his art. *Vivre sa vie's* prostitution theme comes into focus here through Poe's text, and the sequence anticipates Nana's fatal shooting at the end of the film. (Hitchcock's *Vertigo* [1958], a story of doomed love in which a painted portrait as the focal point for a man's tragic romantic obsessions figures prominently, may also inform this sequence.) But the sequence also engages in a wider commentary on the parasitic nature of art; representation as not simply using its object, often a living

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<sup>233</sup> Godard says that *Vivre sa vie* is "a very realistic film and at the same time extremely unrealistic. It is very schematic; a few bold lines, a few fundamental principles." When asked to distinguish between realism and artifice in film, specifically in relation to *Vivre sa vie*, he comments that "through documentary realism, one arrives at the structure of theatre, and through theatrical imagination and fiction one arrives at the reality of life," and he goes on to cite the films of Renoir as a confirmation of this (quoted in Milne, "Jean-Luc Godard and *Vivre sa Vie*," in *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*, 4).

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. *Vivre sa vie* was, in fact, partly inspired by a journalistic account of the daily life of prostitutes in Paris that Godard had read.

subject, but draining away its life. This is particularly apropos of cinema, of course, which as a reality-based art form subsumes, often ruthlessly, the people appearing before the camera to its own purposes. As his collaborators attest, Godard could be unbelievably demanding in expecting others to keep their private lives as open a subject for filmmaking as he kept his own. In *Vivre sa vie*, as in many of Godard's films, both the emotional conflict and experiential disjunction which occurs in the space between the reality of a film's making and the fiction presented on screen are pointedly acknowledged. In this sense it is not only portraiture but *self-portraiture* which is at the self-reflexive heart of *Vivre sa vie*, not just a question of how the art image reflects (or warps) Nana's self-image, but of the film as a mirror of Godard's own filmmaking practices, themselves put under scrutiny in order to determine if their end result in the form of the image redeems the personal sacrifice necessary for creating it. In this sequence, the cinematic 'objectification' of the actress, mirroring Poe's painter's capturing of his model, is cleverly brought together with the film's prostitution theme and, ultimately, mortality, on a number of levels - Nana's figurative 'death' as a prostitute giving up her body, her actual killing at the end of the film and the camera's documentation of moments in the lives of Karina (and Godard) irretrievably lost (save for their celluloid preservation).

The ironic climax of *The Oval Portrait* - "*she was dead...*" - is accompanied by a funereal fade to black. But rather than this marking the transition to another time/place as convention would dictate, Godard fades back into the scene and the theme of art is taken up again, this time not metaphorically, in relation to a work of fiction, but the present actuality of Nana's life and, one could say, the film's "docu-drama" aspect. Presumably inspired by his reading, the young man tries to persuade Nana to go with him to the Louvre, telling her that "*art and beauty are life,*" to which Nana responds that that she does not like to look at pictures. Perhaps her discomfort stems from the fact that they remind her of herself: for Nana, it is repeatedly suggested, lacks the capacity to view visual representations, whether films (e.g. *Jeanne d'arc*) or paintings, with objective detachment, that is, with the external, documentary-like perspective Godard, on one level, desired to achieve in *Vivre sa vie*. Instead, she always relates them back to

her own life, seeing herself reflected in them (a tendency which the men around her encourage), just as *Vivre sa vie*, despite its “realist,” documentary-like aspects, takes every opportunity to view itself as pre-figured and over-determined in prior literature, art and cinema.

To sum up, painting in *Vivre sa vie* is cast as a reflection of cinema, and for Godard to talk about film is always to talk in the shadow of the traditional arts. Significantly, although reference is made to individual works of literature (Poe, Zola)<sup>235</sup> and film (*Jeanne d'Arc*, his own *À bout de souffle*), painting, projected as an alternately life-affirming and life-destroying medium and practice, is only invoked generically. With reference to *Vivre sa vie*, Richard Roud draws a parallel between Godard and Vermeer as artists, both fascinated with the fleeting moment captured, the depiction of female figures performing commonplace actions (reading, looking in a mirror) and the frequent use of a single light source, always itself included in the image's composition.<sup>236</sup> Although such general similarities can certainly be found in the *mise-en-scène* of *Vivre sa vie*, with Karina posed before a window, isolated against a day lit wall, etc., there are, however, no specific art works or styles directly represented or strongly alluded to in *Vivre sa vie*. This would change dramatically in *Pierrot le fou*, when, as anticipated by *À bout de souffle*, Godard would engage with the history of art more directly, combining the latter film's concrete representation of paintings with *Vivre sa vie's* more abstract self-reflexive meditation on film and art.

## II. 3.2 The Collage Films: *Pierrot le fou* and *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*

Released three years later, *Pierrot le fou* revisits many of the art related issues introduced in *Vivre sa vie*. But now that any attempt at documentary-type realism - or Godard's unique brand of it - is abandoned in this boldly coloured, Brechtian comic-

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<sup>235</sup> Colin MacCabe quotes an anecdote concerning a Harvard professor who “located forty-five literary references” in *Vivre sa vie*. (MacCabe, *Godard: A portrait of the artist at 70*, 123).

<sup>236</sup> Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard*, 82.

book, they are amplified and incorporated into a much looser collage-type structure. Along with discussion of artists and paintings in the character's dialogue and voice-over, here a significant number of paintings appear directly before the camera, worked into the narrative in distinct and original ways. *Pierrot* also marks the full flowering of a reflexive use of colour introduced more restrictedly in *Une femme est une femme* and *Le mépris*, as yet another way of engaging with the formal concerns and history of painting. Colour in cinema can work as an expressive element in-itself, as in Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964), a film which Godard praised, where it is frequently detached from a naturalistic correspondence to objects. But whereas Antonioni's colour scheme was applied more totally, in order to create an enveloping atmosphere, to the extent of actually painting the Ravenna landscape, Godard often 'sketches' with colour in his *mise-en-scène* – for instance, putting a few marks on a wall, highlighting the colour of a single piece of clothing or the letters of a sign. (Agnes Varda, contrasting Godard's use of colour with wall-to-wall Hollywood set design, commented that "the question is not how well his stage-hands can paint, but to have blue here and red there...Godard uses color as a painter."<sup>237</sup>) In Antonioni's film, colour is predominantly expressive of psychology, an external embodiment of Giuliana's (Monica Vitti's) neurotic perception of her surroundings. Although there are a few instances in *Pierrot* where colour appears to reflect on Ferdinand's (Jean-Paul Belmondo's) state of mind, in Godard's hands it becomes a more objective, impersonal aspect of an aesthetic drawing heavily on a Brechtian 'separation of elements,' one which equally applies to the unconventional/anti-naturalistic use of music, as well as Godard's trademark jarring silences. Editing and colour applied in these 'painterly' ways are also juxtaposed with text in *Pierrot*, sending colour, figure and word into a dialectical interplay. As part of a highly episodic, largely non-linear narrative, montage in *Pierrot* is pulled out of a purely constructive duty, forwarding plot and spatial-temporal continuity, and instead used to reflexively punctuate the live-action with stock film footage and two-

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<sup>237</sup> Youngblood, "Jean-Luc Godard: No difference between Life and Cinema," in *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*, 24.

dimensional images, as part of what Burch calls the film's "dialectic of materials."<sup>238</sup> At the same time, the representational content of the live-action shot-image is challenged both by the image's purely graphic expressivity and the intrusion of language as voice-over and filmed text.

All of these features – visual or verbal reference to artists and paintings, a reflexive, anti-naturalistic use of colour, and image-sound-text collage and disjunction – are present in *Pierrot's* first ten minutes. As noted, in *Vivre sa vie* the manner in which we are immediately introduced to Nana's face reveals portraiture as the film's main formal and thematic link with painting; the camera-eye then moves into the fictional world via a *mise-en-scène* of mirrored reflection and obstructed vision, the portrait as both mirror of the self and mask. In *Pierrot*, instead of starting with a similar live-action shot, perhaps of Ferdinand/Belmondo as the subject of a very different kind of cinematic portrait, only the titles appear, in the form of a series of red and blue letters appearing alphabetically, slowly filling the black screen, spelling out the names of Karina and Belmondo, as the two leads, Godard and the film's title. (Variations on this format would be used for the titles of many of Godard's subsequent films.) In *Pierrot* the viewer, at first, is neither plunged directly into the fictional world of the film, by way of titles laid over an establishing image, nor imaginatively cut-off from it completely, via generic type or title cards – these being the two most common filmic conventions for framing-off and grounding the world of the film as a fictional reality (just as the "once upon a time" brackets off a fairy tale, engaging the listener in a suspension of disbelief via a conventional code). Instead, Godard teasingly holds the viewer back from the live-action opening and, in what Bordwell would call "parametric"<sup>239</sup> fashion, the titles immediately introduce us not to the central character of the film (as in *Vivre sa vie*) or the settings, but to a number of the film's formal properties: bold primary colours, the breaking down of representational wholes into constitutive parts and a playing with the *image* of words and text. The titles are followed by quick, strangely 'un-establishing' establishing shots of two women playing

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<sup>238</sup> Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, 115.

<sup>239</sup> See note 224.

tennis in the Luxembourg Gardens, followed by Ferdinand, a.k.a, Pierrot (Belmondo) browsing through a street vendor's books, accompanied by his reading a passage on Diego Velázquez from Elie Faure's *Histoire de l'art (L'art Moderne I)*. In the next shot, Ferdinand lies in the bathtub, reading aloud from Faure's study, first to himself and then to his young daughter, before being interrupted by his wife.

What are we to make of the inclusion of the Velázquez passage and of the fact that it is the first words spoken in the film? For one, it highlights the fact that unlike other directors who incorporate art works into their films (either as insert shots or within the larger *mise-en-scène*) and who let these images 'speak for themselves,' Godard's presentation of paintings is frequently glossed by contextual material pertaining to the works. This commonly takes the form of the characters relating anecdotes concerning the lives of the artists in question, along with their quoting critical appraisals of the works and/or offering their own aesthetic judgments (however informed they may be). This running commentary included in the dialogue and voice-over reinforces the represented art work's grounding in historical actuality and, by extension, the intensely historical (i.e., temporal) nature of both the camera's filming of these works and the character's/audience's apprehension of them, thereby stressing the importance of context in any criticism or interpretation of created images, be they paintings or film images. Yet why Velázquez, specifically, and why is this section of Faure's text included in *Pierrot*?

In an often re-printed *Cahiers* interview on *Pierrot*, Godard said that Faure's passage encapsulates the "theme" of the film: "Velázquez at the end of his life no longer painted precise forms; and this is restated by Belmondo when he imitates Michel Simon: one should not describe people, but what lies between them."<sup>240</sup> Like Orson Welles, for whom the Spanish painter was a life-long creative reference point, Godard frequently invokes Velázquez in discussions of cinema. In *Pierrot*, as in *Vivre sa vie*, there is a clear reflexive parallel at work between the figure of the painter and the filmmaker, one which is born out in the passage Ferdinand quotes. Velázquez is described by Faure as a courtier enmeshed in the political and social vagaries of 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Milne, *Godard on Godard*, 224.

century Spanish Royal society, a stagnant, tradition-bound world, attempting to wall itself off from the tumult of the Inquisition, the visual idiosyncrasies of which appealed to the painter. As Velázquez grew older, however, his works shows signs of moving away from anything concrete and “*precise*”: while still rooted in the social spectacle around him, by dwelling on pure forms and colours of objects, he none the less escaped from it. His later painting, according to Faure, enters into a more abstract and “*spiritual*” realm, equated with the “*dusk of evenings*,” where things become subtly other than they are, and where “*what holds the forms of things together*” is revealed. As Belmondo pronounces these lines, the film cuts to a non-diegetic insert shot of Paris at night-fall, the city lights forming an abstract pattern against the dark sky, in a momentary escape from the film’s own concrete representation of Ferdinand and his bourgeois surroundings. Velázquez’s art is concerned, often explicitly, with acts of concrete *vision*, the painter posited first as observer of the life around him and, only then, as a creative interpreter of it, as Michel Foucault suggests in his well known interpretation of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656, see Figure 3) and its creation of “spectacle-as-observation” through visual doublings, mirror reflections and frames within frames.<sup>241</sup> (Foucault’s analysis appeared in *The Order of Things*, first published as *Les mots et le choses* in 1966, shortly after *Pierrot*’s release). For Foucault, however, in accordance with the paradigms of “classical” representation, Velázquez’s painting can only “represent itself” as painting through the “disappearance” or “invisibility” of its ostensible subject, King Phillip IV and his wife standing for their portrait. This fact, although Foucault does not mention it explicitly here, distinguishes Velázquez’s ‘painting about painting’ from a modernist reflexivity.<sup>242</sup> None-the-less, in Velázquez’s hands the official, state occasion the painting depicts provides the opportunity for a reflexive self-portrait of the artist as observer, literally depicting himself as both a part of the world he is in the act of representing and at a critical remove from it. Faure’s characterization of Velázquez’s art inching towards abstraction, made from his early

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<sup>241</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Translated by the author. London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1970, 14.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

twentieth century vantage point (against the backdrop of modernism), as well as Foucault's later, post-structuralist interpretation of *Las Meninas*, telescopes the inherent tension in much reflexive cinema and in Godard's films, in particular. They reflect on its attempt to reveal the relations between 'seeing' and 'being' in an environment shaped by visual representation, a project continually frustrated by the opacity of the of signs and mediated appearances as a barrier to things-in-themselves (a condition often concretely reflected in Godard's *mise-en-scène*). Sometimes this abstract tension is couched in the form of a conflict between cinema as reportage, an art of the transient and concrete, and its striving for a more timeless symbolic expression of universal human concerns.

Godard addresses this perennial problem squarely, claiming that *Pierrot* was a film in which he tried to juggle the presentation of the contemporary life around him – that of mass market advertising, television, the Vietnam war, civil unrest anticipating the late 1960s social and political upheavals to follow - while retaining a distance from it, by abstracting the represented events to the level of archetypes. In contrast to *Vivre sa vie*'s surface "realism," Godard talks of *Pierrot*'s intended fictional otherness from life, one which would allow it to speak beyond itself and claim a kind of universal relevance.<sup>243</sup>

This cinematically self-reflexive dimension of the Velázquez passage, as it is presented in *Pierrot*, is reinforced by Belmondo's reference to film immediately following his reading of it. To the consternation of his wife, he has just sent their maid to the cinema to see *Johnny Guitar* [1954], claiming that it is "good for her education." The film by Nicolas Ray - whom Godard as a critic for *Cahiers du cinéma* described as having the ability to virtually "re-invent cinema"<sup>244</sup> - is, like *Pierrot*, a defiantly non-conformist work, full unnaturally exaggerated actions and shocking primary colours which were, no doubt, strong dramatic and visual inspirations for *Pierrot*. Typical of the *nouvelle vague*'s eclecticism, always at its most extreme in Godard, their juxtaposition

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<sup>243</sup> See Milne ed., *Godard on Godard*, 215-234; 213-215.

<sup>244</sup> See Jean-Luc Godard, "Nothing but Cinema" in *Cahiers du cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, edited by Jim Hillier, 116-18.

in this sequence puts Hollywood Westerns (however subversive and idiosyncratic) and Velázquez on the same referential plane, in a refusal to differentiate between conventionally 'high' and 'low' art, both of which contribute to the *Gestalt* of Western visual culture and which are put side by side in Godard's sixties cinema. Later in *Pierrot*, Faure's *History of Art* re-appears, again in a filmic context: having separated from Marianne, Ferdinand sits in a cinema with one eye in the book and the other on the screen. (Behind him sits Jean-Pierre Leaud, in a cameo role, personifying the New Wave, as represented by Truffaut.) Vietnam newsreels are projected, standing in for *actualité* (their awful reality is here set against Ferdinand and Marianne's play-acted Vietnam 'scene' for the American tourists in an earlier sequence). These are followed by, and contrasted with, *cinéma*, in the form of a sequence from Godard's own short *Le grand escroc* (1963), in which Jean Seberg, playing a reporter, points a movie camera out at the viewer.

Many of the themes succinctly introduced in *Pierrot* by way of Velázquez's art, Faure's interpretation and the reflexive context surrounding it – concerning the artist/filmmaker as both true chronicler of his times and at odds with them, the tensions between style and content, representation and abstraction, fiction and documentary - are visually instantiated in the first half of *Pierrot*, prior to Marianne and Ferdinand's arrival in Côte d'Azur. They are foregrounded in the use of colour in the film's famous party and driving sequences, as well as the counter-pointing of live-action images with those of well-known paintings and drawings. The later is a re-occurring visual motif in *Pierrot* that begins with an insert shot of a Renoir painting.

A notable feature of the representation of paintings and drawings in *Pierrot*, is that, following a pattern set in his early shorts and *À bout de souffle*, many of these images are initially established 'diegetically,' as objects the camera reveals within the physical environment of the characters.<sup>245</sup> They are found on the walls of the film's interior locations, alongside photographs and other everyday objects, before being

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<sup>245</sup> Two exceptions to this are the close-up of the Renoir painting that is paired with a close-up of Marianne and Van Gogh's *Café Terrace*, the image of which is triggered by Ferdinand's reference to having a vision of the café where Van Gogh's cut off his ear, seeing it like "a shadow in the mirror."

picked up on by the camera and magnified in whole or part in the form of full-screen close-ups. The film thereby calls the viewer's attention to images of art works that are actually lived with, as part of a visual life-world extending outside of the museum context with which painting is associated in *Vivre sa vie* (the Louvre). Like the viewer, the characters' main access to these paintings is through paper reproductions – prints, post-cards, pictures in books. In *Pierrot* these include post-card reproductions of Renoir, Picasso and Modigliani paintings on Marianne's wall, and the two Picasso prints on the walls of the Marseilles interior where Marianne and Ferdinand are successively held hostage.

Of course when well-known paintings are represented in fictional films (save for a rare museum based narrative film like *Russian Ark*), the images on the screen derive from stock film footage, photographs or print reproductions of the art works, as distinct from a filming of the original canvases. In *Pierrot* this 'second-hand' nature of its art imagery (and those of most other films), is acknowledged as such, the art works seen alongside other mass produced visual material in the form of advertisements, newspaper clippings, pin-ups, etc., documenting the aesthetic de-contextualization of most people's contemporary relationship with art characterized, in different ways, by Walter Benjamin (the loss of the artwork's "aura" through mechanical reproduction) and André Malraux (the "museum without walls"). Crucially, however, Godard's filmic presentation of art works as reproduced images goes a step beyond such critical, cultural diagnosis, in that it also highlights the possibility of the subsequent novel *re-contextualization* of these works/images, on the model of artistic collage, by way of the construction of a unique cinematic reality through editing.

To now look more closely at some of the specific works and, by extension, artists that are represented in *Pierrot*: when Marianne's surname "Renoir" is introduced by Ferdinand on the voice-over, it accompanies a close-up shot of Karina's face, followed by a close-up shot of the face of the girl in Renoir's *Little Girl with a Spray of Flowers* (1888). Here, even more explicitly than in *Vivre sa vie*, Karina's likeness and the character she plays are conjoined with painting, in an echo of Jean Seberg's pairing with an older Renoir girl in *À bout de souffle*. In this case, however, the painting is

completely removed from the predominant live-action setting and presented in a largely abstract, filmic space, created solely through editing. According to Godard, in *Pierrot Marianne* represents the “active life” – impulsive, emotional – and Ferdinand, the “contemplative.”<sup>246</sup> Although the analogy could be pushed too far, this dichotomy symbolically extends to encompass the marked “split personality” of both the film and Godard’s cinematic vision, as well as the real-life personalities of Karina and Godard (with Ferdinand/Belmondo as his double). In this light, Godard’s choice of Renoir and Picasso to reflect this thinking-acting and, to an extent, male-female polarity, and the particular forms and places in which the work of each artist appears, is revealing. In the context of the film as a whole, it is particularly fitting that throughout *Pierrot Marianne* is represented by the soft lyrical impressionism of Renoir, whereas Ferdinand is visually linked to Picasso paintings, at one point even being figuratively replaced by one.

The presence of the art of Pierre-Auguste Renoir in *Pierrot* is a double one. For it also inescapably invokes the films of his son Jean Renoir, yet another way in which cinema and painting are connoted simultaneously in Godard’s cinema. As late as a 2000 interview, Godard speaks of his life-long taste for impressionism in its various modulations, and for Renoir, especially.<sup>247</sup> Although by no means entirely of a piece, as both Gilberto Perez and David Thomson have noted, the works of both Pierre-August and Jean Renoir exercised considerable influence on the early *nouvelle vague*, in their airy, lyrical qualities and the prominence of the figure and the face.<sup>248</sup> Especially pronounced in Truffaut’s early films, the “Renoir influence” is also present in Godard’s cinema, up to and including *Pierrot*, visible, in particular, in all of those exterior sequences revolving around a female figure followed by a hand-held camera, through streets, café’s, and, on rarer occasions, out into the countryside. It is embodied in a concern with subtle yet dramatic natural light effects (of the kind often lacking in the interiors of Godard’s and Truffaut’s films, with their intentionally diffused or reflected

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<sup>246</sup> Milne ed, *Godard on Godard*, 219.

<sup>247</sup> See Lotz ed., *Jean-Luc Godard The Future(s) of Film Three interviews 2000/01*, 57.

<sup>248</sup> See David Thompson ed., *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, London: Little Brown, 2003, entry on “Jean Renoir,” and Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 202-204.

light) and an attunement to the momentary and gestural - the fleeting expressions of Jean Seberg, Jeanne Moreau, and Karina - often at the expense of a conventional forwarding of narrative. (Hitchcock once asked Truffaut why Jean Renoir “can’t tell a story” and, for many of the same reasons, he would have surely asked the same of Godard.<sup>249</sup>) In this respect, Henri Cartier-Bresson, renowned still-photographer and candid chronicler of the ‘decisive moment,’ who was also the cinematographer of *Une partie de campagne* (1936), Jean Renoir’s most deliberate attempt to translate something of the impressionism of his father into cinematic terms, was another New Wave point of reference. In *Pierrot* the ‘lyrical’ aesthetic of both Pierre-Auguste and Jean Renoir is evident in the opening Luxembourg Garden shot and the later outdoor interludes, with Karina’s song and dance number staged against the Riviera light filtering through the trees. These sequences deftly combine the physical immediacy and spontaneity of Pierre-Auguste’s open air leisure scenes with the self-conscious theatricality of Jean Renoir’s later films. Godard himself provides another connection between Pierre-Auguste Renoir and *Pierrot*, when he speaks, in his *Cahiers* interview on the film, of the painter’s creativity being perennially re-kindled by escaping urban Paris for the countryside, as do Marianne and Ferdinand.<sup>250</sup>

Along these general metaphorical and associational lines, the inclusion of Picasso’s art in *Pierrot* -- in contrast to Renoir’s -- reflects the structural and conceptual experimentation of the New Wave. This is its more cerebral side, so to speak, of which Godard (along with Rivette), following the lead of Alain Resnais, was at the forefront, in his concerns with the architectonics of film form, the plastic manipulation of time and space and, especially, the collage-like mixing of visual media which by the time of *Pierrot* had revealed itself as a dominant force in his work. As noted, there are a number of art prints on the walls of Marianne’s apartment, with one Picasso image in particular, appropriately *Pierrot au Masque* (1925), figuring prominently. It is first seen as a post-card next to Blemondo’s reclining head and then as a full-screen close-up, in what is also the setting for the film’s most formally radical sequence. This sequence, the killing

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<sup>249</sup> See unpublished audio recording of Truffaut’s interviews with Hitchcock.

<sup>250</sup> Milne ed., *Godard on Godard*, 219.

of Marianne's lover Frank, and the couple's subsequent escape, is analysed in precise but somewhat reductive fashion by Bordwell, as an example of Godard's "spatialization of narrative," in which the "temporal directionality" of the main plot is countered by the proliferation of "paradigmatic materials" (i.e. images and fragments of images independent of the immediate or main representational context, which together form stylistic patterns unrelated to the dramatic action the film represents). Bordwell views this as bearing some analogy to the "collage" practices of the surrealists and cubists.<sup>251</sup>

The murder/escape sequence in *Pierrot* is, in fact, the closest that Godard had ventured to that point into the formal territory of Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Last Year at Marienbad* and, coming two years before *Pierrot*, *Muriel*, a film to which Godard frequently pays tribute. Like Resnais in these films, Godard, in this sequence, employs a kind of 'cubist' structure emphasizing temporal discontinuity and spatial simultaneity, and suggesting the passage of time through ellipses. In a roundtable discussion held in 1959, a number of *Cahiers* critics, Godard included, suggested parallels between cubism and aspects of *Hiroshima's* radical style, particularly its rhythm rooted in the collision, or juxtaposition, of static and tracking shots, fragments of time which are 'cut' into each other as if at angles. (Whereas Godard points to Picasso, in this respect, Rivette sees a closer analogy to Braque, as both he and Resnais seek a simultaneous "effect of opposition" and a "profound unity.")<sup>252</sup> The actual duration of the events represented in this sequence, however, is at first suggested not by the fragmented editing that follows, but through disruptive spatial changes in the one-take *plan-séquence*, in the form of a 'flash-forward' - when the camera tracks back to discover the murdered body of Frank on the floor, which was not there when the room was shown seconds before. Here, in *Marienbad*-like fashion, the possible future (and/or past) spatially encroaches on the present, breaking the plane of linear time *within* the single image through the camera's movement. Next comes a complex visual and

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<sup>251</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 137. Bordwell's analysis of this sequence in *Pierrot* is problematic in that there is no substantial reference to its narrative content (see note 6).

<sup>252</sup> See "Hiroshima, Notre Amour," in *Cahiers du cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, 66. Rivette also casts Resnais' style in musical terms, suggesting analogies between it and both Stravinsky and serialist music.

auditory montage representing the couple's escape, the style of which is foreshadowed a few minutes earlier by a brief quick-cut montage of close-up shots of the art prints on the walls, including the Picasso, which provides the first significant disruption of the live-action continuity in the film. Ferdinand and Marianne narrate their seemingly contradictory accounts of their escape on the voice-over, referring to themselves in the third person, and, by extension, comment on the film's 'neo-cubist' deconstruction of the action seen simultaneously from multiple perspectives, almost in a parody of Resnais's cinema of possible/alternative realities and contradictory points of view.

Two later sequences, both fractured takes on standard thriller climaxes set in the gangster's hideout, are the end result of the chain of events set in motion in Marianne's apartment and also that sequence's formal companions. Here the parallel between the paintings Godard represents in *Pierrot* and the film's own visual style is explicit to the point of being tongue-in-cheek. In the first of these sequences, two Picasso prints, *Jacqueline aux fleurs* and *Portrait de Sylvette au fauteuil vert* (both from 1954) hang on the wall, appearing behind Marianne's back when she and the viewer alike are threatened by a midget pointing a gun at both her (off-screen) and the camera, in one of the oldest reflexive tropes of cinema, going back to Edwin S. Porter's bandit "shooting" the camera/viewer in the *The Great Train Robbery*'s [1903] famous emblematic shot. This is followed by a startling shot in which Marianne brandishes a pair of scissors before the camera, while standing framed to the right and left by the Picassos. The spatial distortion of the wide-angle lens gives a 3-D effect to the shot's composition, pushing the scissors and Karina's hand into the extreme foreground, heading towards the viewer. At the same time, the rest of her body is pushed unnaturally backwards, so as to appear on the same plane as the paintings floating on the white wall, creating a kind of surreal triptych. Like Marianne's distorted body, the film here is being thrown into relief against painting: the scissors can obviously be 'read' as signifying the cutting-up of linear narrative in the sequence, and the 'cut and paste' aesthetic of the film as a whole.

Here we may briefly add that Angela Dalle Vache's interpretation of 'symbolic' shots like this one, coupled with the fact that Godard uses paintings as insert shots

throughout *Pierrot*, as proof of Godard's "iconophobic vocation," one which entails destroying the illusory holism of "painting" through a championing of fragmentary "collage," as its opposite, is not wholly persuasive.<sup>253</sup> This is not least because, following the formal analogy, it is the represented content of the shot which is the medium, or underlying 'ground' for the cinematic collage, and many of the paintings forming a part of it are themselves left relatively intact.<sup>254</sup>

When the film returns to this same location in a doubling of the action, with Ferdinand now being held hostage by the gangsters, there is a visual match of the earlier shots of the midget and Marianne. One of the gangsters facing Ferdinand (off-screen) threatens the camera with a cocked fist. Rather than conventionally front-facing, however, the reverse shot of Ferdinand is a profile, and now it is *his* head which, like Marianne's before, is wedged between the same two Picassos. As violent action is heard on the soundtrack, the cut-away is to a close-up of the head of Picasso's *Jacqueline*, also in profile, the live action yet again disrupted by a picture. This is followed by a return to Ferdinand, further matching his face and the painted one, anticipating the end of the film when Ferdinand paints his own face, as if in a piece of carnival-esque performance art which turns tragically ironic. When Ferdinand falls to the ground as a result of the gangster's blow, the action is depicted indirectly by the quick-cut rotation of the Picasso picture so that its head now faces upward, as if laid out on the floor. Although this technique is frequently used in experimental films that couple stop-motion animation with live-action, pioneered by Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Svankmajer, among others, this is a relatively rare instance in narrative cinema where a still two-dimensional image, in this case a painted one, fully substitutes for an implied live-action event. Here painting humorously stands in for, and literally falls down for

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<sup>253</sup> Dalle Vache, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is used in Film*, 131.

<sup>254</sup> Nor does Godard in either his writings or interviews seem to hold the assumption, which Dalle Vache's argument directly attributes to him, that mainstream cinema's uncritical inheritance of the conventions of perspective painting, as such, is entirely responsible for the features that he is intent on overturning, relating to viewer identification, point of view, etc.. Although Godard's own *mise-en-scène* certainly does diverge from that of conventionally 'realist' cinema, and by extension, realist perspective painting, I am not convinced that his multi-faceted embrace of a "collage" style can be reduced to its critique.

the sake of, cinema.<sup>255</sup> These sequences are typical of Godard's appropriation of painting, both reverent and irreverent, where art works are simultaneously décor and protagonists in their own right, at some points mirroring the live-action and at others offering an editorial commentary on it. *Pierrot le fou*'s 'neo-cubist' film style is here literally composed of cubist paintings, taking a painting/film analog to almost self-parodic extremes and, true to form for Godard, bringing a formal aspect of film practice (or its analogy) directly into the represented world of the film, as one more feature of its content.

Made two years after *Pierrot, 2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* [1967] synthesizes the former's audio-visual collage style with that of essayistic documentary, while still retaining fictional elements. Godard described *2 ou 3 choses...*, as an "attempt" at a film ("I watch myself filming and you hear me thinking out loud") in which he is concerned with "images and sounds" as categories abstracted from "cinema and television."<sup>256</sup> Here the representation of art images is largely supplanted by anonymous commercial imagery, a switch reflecting the growing awareness at the time of the 'society of the spectacle,' where wall to wall visual advertising is taken for granted as part of the virtual landscape of the urban life-world, so that it takes on the facticity of the natural. This is Godard's acknowledgement of Roland Barthes and his theory of "mythology" turning culture into nature ("*all these signs which make me doubt language by drowning reality rather than detaching it from the imaginary...*" as Godard's voice-over states). On one hand, Godard turns his camera on this landscape of signs as an anthropologist, finding within it the psychic patterns of the individual in interaction with others and the collective consciousness, against the backdrop of current events, principally the urban re-planning of parts of Paris and the Vietnam War. On the other, he views this environment with the eye of a painter, dwelling on the abstract, formal properties of

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<sup>255</sup> This does, however, have a precedent in Godard's own cinema: in his short *Charlotte et Véronique ou tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (1957) a Picasso print hangs in the bedroom of the film's young students and at one point censoriously substitutes for an anticipated shot of one of the girl's behinds. In one of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*'s (1971) more infamous sequences, a Pop art style painting of an open mouth is the last second substitute for the face of the "Catlady" (Miriam Karlin) crushed by the phallus sculpture wielded by Alex (Malcom McDowell).

<sup>256</sup> Milne ed., *Godard on Godard*, 239.

both the steel and concrete spaces of the Parisian *banlieu* and the virtual ones of advertising, fashion and television. Twice in the film, Juliette (Marina Vlady) relates a momentary epiphany, which she describes in terms of a feeling of ‘one-ness’ with the world. But characteristic of Godard’s cinematic worldview at the time, such genuine spiritual yearning finds no outlet in modern urban life. Accordingly, the film dwells on these mystical descriptions to the accompaniment of rare nature imagery (close-up shots of sunlight trees and leaves trembling in the wind) only briefly, before plunging back into the film’s topical satire on consumerism, politics and youth culture. Cast in Heidegger’s existentialist terms – admittedly not as deep an influence on Godard as the French brand of ‘existential phenomenology’ represented by the writings of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty – true Being’s “call” to Juliette’s authentic self is consistently drowned out by the noise of the collective “they-self” [*das mann*] and the general state of “fallenness” around her.

The film’s repeated mantra is that a “*new language*” reflecting a new mentality is needed to fully respond to the totalizing audio-visual environment of modern Paris. A city which, despite the uniqueness of the urban development projects Godard discusses, is in *2 ou 3 choses...* a microcosm of developed capitalist society in the mid to late twentieth-century. This revolutionary theme is directly articulated in one of the most audacious and visionary sequences in all of Godard’s cinema, when Juliette sits in a café, staring down into a cup of coffee. Via a series of successive extreme close-ups, a swirl of cream in the coffee becomes a milky way of spiraling galaxies ending in a liquid blackness filling the entire screen, marked only by the formation and successive bursting of small bubbles. These images are supplemented by Godard’s voice-over, a wide ranging metaphysical speculation moving, in his signature aphoristic style, from the creation of the universe to Wittgenstein on the world’s limit in language, and concluding that “*things must come into focus again*” (note the visual/filmic metaphor) through a “*re-birth of consciousness.*”

Formally, this sequence calls to mind the visual minimalism of Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993) as a cinematic cousin of the ‘metaphysically’ expressive color field painting of Mark Rothko, where the emotionally overpowering, life-transcending nature

of the art work's intended content necessitates bypassing the factual specificity of figurative representation, to which it is deemed inadequate. In the decade of the space race and moon landing, this sequence is also an attempt, like Kubrick's *2001* (1968) and Andrei Tarkovsky's slightly later *Solaris* (1972) to hypothesize on the modern existential condition through the lens of space, expanding the formal and representational vocabulary of cinema to encompass it. Characteristically, while Kubrick's vision captured the history of the species and the journey towards potential cosmic enlightenment through the large scale studio construction of space and an entire minutely detailed future reality, Godard finds his symbolic universe in a Parisian café, the "Stargate" micro-cosmically represented in a cup of coffee. As in *Pierrot*, in *2 ou 3 choses...*, Godard transforms quotidian, even banal objects/events into all-encompassing, if highly contingent, symbols. At the same time, while 'use objects' become signs too rich for one-to-one signification, conventional signs - whether clothing advertisements, consumer packaging or traffic signals - are de-symbolized by being viewed as objects-in-themselves, isolated by the camera and/or editing and stripped of the context of praxis in which they are normally apprehended.

The formal and thematic "collage aesthetic" of both *Pierrot* and *2 ou 3 choses...*, and their incorporation of paintings, comic strip images and print advertisements, in particular, prompts a number of intriguing questions concerning the re-presentation and re-contextualization of pre-existing (in this case, mechanically reproduced) images. This is just one respect in which significant analogies can be drawn between Godard's sixties cinema and the contemporaneous work of the first generation of American Pop art painters, principally Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist. Whereas the relation between Warhol's and Godard's work has been discussed,<sup>257</sup> much less attention has been devoted to exploring parallels between Godard's cinema and the art of Lichtenstein and Rosenquist, painters who, each in their own way, share Godard's fascination with the creative representation of pre-existing imagery, drawn from advertising, popular imagery and 'high art' sources. In the case of all three artists, such

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<sup>257</sup> See, for instance, the *Godard/Warhol* section of Kerry Brougher's "Hall of Mirrors," in *Art and Film Since 1945: Hall of Mirrors*, 65-75.

visual quotation occurs within the context of a wider self-reflexive engagement with the potentials and limitations of their respective media, across which Godard's films, and Lichtenstein and Rosenquist's art, share a number of specific features, including an anti-realist use of colour and the partial rejection of illusionist depth. Many of these connections are sharpened both by the early critical reception of Lichtenstein and Rosenquist's painting, in the mid-to-late 1960s, as well as their own comments concerning it. Among the Pop painters it was Lichtenstein who in his comic-strip inspired art turned the use of recycled images into a rigorous and consistent aesthetic, as part of a self-reflexive exploration/critique of artistic originality, the creative authorship of representational images and the notion of art as personal expression – all issues of equal and perennial concern in Godard's cinema.

## II. 3.2i Godard and Pop Art: Lichtenstein

In *Pierrot le fou*, an arresting comic image appears in the context of a complex montage sequence juxtaposing text, 'low' popular-art and painting. Having witnessed the slapstick parody of Marianne (Anna Karina) and Ferdinand (Jean-Paul Belmondo) knocking out a petrol station attendant and then driving off without paying, to continue their flight from Paris towards the south of France, the camera tilts up to the station's large road sign - "TOTAL" – spelled out, like the names of Godard and his two leads in the film's opening titles, in red capital letters. This image cues the combined voice-over of Marianne and Ferdinand on the soundtrack who reflexively refer to the events they are living through as "*an adventure film...*", their words paired with a frame-filling shot of an arresting comic image in which the be-muscled torso of a superhero, straining in the midst of some heroic action, is juxtaposed with a woman's face in close-up (echoing the film's many extended frontal close-ups of Karina's face). When, immediately after, they proclaim that is also "*a love story...*" there is a cut to a close-up to the hands of a man and woman in *Les amoureux*, the same post-cubist Picasso painting that appeared, in a similar context, in *À bout de souffle*. Here, as throughout the film, insert shots of

visual art serve as an associational counterpoint to both the live-action images and the voice-over/dialogue, which, as much as linking the space and time of the film's disjointed events, serves to fragment them even further. Another cropped comic image, this time one that includes text, also appears in the *Pierrot* and, like the previous one, serves as a non-diegetic pause and unconventional transition. Following a *noir*-ish night-time shot of Marianne and Ferdinand's stolen car pulled to the side of a motorway, this comic book style image, possibly taken from the cover of a paperback thriller, depicts a frightened girl pointing a gun and an ominous black-hooded face. The camera tracks down the image to pick out the word "*rendez-vous*" in its caption – implying that Marianne and Ferdinand's 'date with destiny' is fast approaching.

The selection and framing or re-framing of comic book style images in these sequences, and of another, equally enigmatic one in *2 ou 3 choses...*<sup>258</sup> suggests that either Godard was directly inspired by Lichtenstein's example, or perhaps more interestingly, that the two independently shared the same pictorial instincts in choosing and re-presenting comics as popular art.<sup>259</sup> Whereas images of well-known paintings had been a fixture of Godard's cinema since his earliest pre-*À bout de souffle* shorts,<sup>260</sup> by the mid-sixties they increasingly shared the screen with anonymous comic images and commercial art. Why this turn to popular imagery, and to comics, in particular? A partial explanation is provided in the voice-over of *2 ou 3 choses...*, where Godard

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<sup>258</sup> In *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* a close-up shot of the face of Juliette is followed by an enigmatic comic strip image depicting a night scene with a woman's mournful face in close-up view and a Rolls Royce car behind her.

<sup>259</sup> Of course it is quite possible that Godard's incorporation of *bande dessinée* art in films like *Pierrot le fou* was received in different ways by its original French audience than its subsequent Anglo-American one. This would have been the result of both the comic image's greater artistic respectability in France, than in Britain or America, and also the established French avant-garde tradition of collage, as a turning to popular imagery and 'folk' art as a source of both inspiration and material (a tradition with which Godard's practices could be associated). Yet it is American style comic book images, and ones with echoes of American cinema, that Godard chooses to represent (just as it is American cinema to which he pays most direct homage to in his sixties films). And it also must be noted that Godard's brand of "collage" film, while having some general precedents in European experimental avant-garde film practice, as well as early 20<sup>th</sup> century painting, was a radical departure from these. Although it would be wrong to conflate Godard's and Lichtenstein's practices in relation to their use of popular imagery and how this imagery may have been received, there are strong similarities -- and, as I suggest, the differences that do exist are themselves interesting and revealing.

<sup>260</sup> Picasso prints appear as full frame shots in Godard's 1957 short *Charlotte et Véronique, ou tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick*.

speaks of “*an increasing interaction between language and image*” and suggests that “*living in society today is like living in a vast comic strip.*”

### Images of Images

Lichtenstein’s art operates at the intersection of language and image, form and content, and indirectly through the vehicle of the comic/cartoon image format, cinema and painting. Frequently described as the most formally concerned of the post-Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg American Pop painters, Lichtenstein’s work is often seen as a stylistic (if not strictly chronological) bridge between Abstract Expressionism, with its colour fields and overlapping forms providing textural and represented depths, and the extreme two-dimensionality of Warhol’s silk-screen paintings (with which it shares pronounced black outlines, a lucid mechanical sheen and an overriding fascination with the iconic image).

In a 1968 review of Lichtenstein’s paintings Albert Boime traces the evolution of the modern sequential comic strip, one separated into individual panels, discovering that it appeared only in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, roughly coincident to the birth of cinema.<sup>261</sup> Although the main point of interaction between comics and cinema is the animation film, live-action film storyboards are often done in a comic strip-type form. The sequential comic strip or book is, in fact, the closest still, paper art equivalent to live-action cinema, owing to the images’ dynamic interaction with a fixed and uniform frame, and the presence of a sequential narrative complete with its own ‘montage’ effects that are spatial as well as temporal (linear). As a critic for *Cahiers du cinéma*, Godard recognized this, arguing that

the decoupage of comic strips is aesthetically years ahead of film decoupage. Within each strip, the change of shot is done with an inventive boldness that is missing now from French cinema.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Boime, Albert, “Roy Lichtenstein and the Comic Strip.” In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 203.

<sup>262</sup> Quoted in Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard*, 67.

The three ways in which text is conventionally presented in modern comic strips also have cinematic analogs. Occurring outside of the diegetic space of the image's represented content and frequently establishing locations and events, the boxed text that often appears in the corner of the comic strip frame functions like a film's voice-over narration, bridging gaps in space and time and maintaining a level of story continuity. The comic's 'thought bubbles' or 'balloons,' on the other hand, work as interior voice-overs expressing subjective perspectives on the action, with 'speech bubbles' providing dialogue.

Lichtenstein's typical artistic procedure is well-documented. He would first select a comic strip image - scenes of love and war being the most common owing, according to the artist, to their immediate drama - and hand 'copy' it.<sup>263</sup> In the process the original model is modified in two ways: the image is removed from its linear sequence and its size is magnified. Significantly, although many viewers assume his work to be a case of simple one to one reproduction - as, no doubt, Lichtenstein partly intended - he would alter the original composition for dramatic effect and formal unity, allowing the isolated image to function more powerfully on its own. In the footsteps of Piet Mondrian, Lichtenstein often simplified the comic image through the addition of more pronounced black outlines and solid blocks of primary colour: invariably red, blue, and yellow. Like a film still, in Lichtenstein's paintings the comic image retains visual traces of its original narrative import, often supplemented by Lichtenstein's preservation of the original comic's text. At the same time, however, thus isolated and abstracted, its full discursive sense is denied or suspended, and like Jasper John's paintings of targets and flags and Warhol's soup cans, Lichtenstein's image paintings function as wholly presentational symbols.

In comparison with Lichtenstein's method, the representation of pre-existing, two-dimensional images in Godard's 1960s films is the result of a wholly *inverse* process. The first-order non-cinematic image - whether a painting, comic image or

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<sup>263</sup> Coplans, John. "Talking with Roy Lichtenstein." In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 200.

advertisement - is inserted into the film's linear sequence and rendered discursive in so far as it is provided with a particular narrative and expressive context, a before and after. Of course, since what the camera actually films in many of these cases is not the original painting or even paper image, but a photograph or print reproduction of it, by the time the image appears on the screen it is a copy of a copy (of a copy). Godard does not represent any work of Pop art directly in his 1960s films. Yet, viewed in relation to the roughly simultaneous upheaval Pop or "common image" art, as it was for a short time branded, was causing in the art world at the time – and also the movement's filtering back into popular culture through the very means of mass re-production that the Pop painters sought to emulate - the mimetic *mise-en-abyme* of Godard's cinematic appropriation of comics and advertisements cannot help but be seen, at least in retrospect, as both an ironic critique of Pop and a statement of artistic solidarity.

By doing opposite things with image and narrative, Godard's and Lichtenstein's practices shed light on the aesthetic and conceptual tensions inherent in the work of each. Godard's re-contextualization of pre-existing, two-dimensional images on film and Lichtenstein's radical de-contextualization and abstraction of them on canvas, both implicitly reject a Romantic notion of artistic originality as creation *ex nihilo*. The notion of the artistic image as a result of the direct perceptual experience of the visual world, mediated only by the creative imagination of the artist is replaced by the selective re-use of widely accessible, second-hand imagery as 'found' material to be creatively manipulated or arranged.

### Surface and Subject

As pertains to the discrete film and painted image, apart from its juxtaposition with others, there are a number of formal affinities between Godard's 1960s film style and Lichtenstein's art. Godard favors full-frontal compositions in medium or close shot. When filming dialogue in close-up, for instance, he frequently avoids the traditional three-quarters profile shot common in classical continuity-style filmmaking - as well as traditional portraiture - which both cues represented depth and prevents the actor from

looking directly at the camera, there-by preserving the imaginary 'fourth wall' of the screen. Instead, Godard's actors often face each other and/or the camera/viewer directly (often without an accompanying reverse angle perspective as part of a shot/reverse-shot sequence) or, less frequently, at a complete right angle to the camera, in full-profile. In his portraits, Warhol, undoubtedly under the spell of trends in glamour photography, avoids partial profiles, favoring full-frontal depictions. Similarly, most of Lichtenstein's stock heroes and heroines face the viewer squarely, while others are captured in full-profile and, as in Godard's cinema, the effect, in both cases, is a flattening of the image. Although Godard has explained his preference for this sort of framing in terms of an affinity for the frontal, perpendicular orientation of early modernist painting,<sup>264</sup> in his case, like that of Lichtenstein and Warhol, this choice must also reflect the burgeoning influence of television aesthetics and the confrontational 'talking head' - detached from a body, facing the camera/viewer (or an interlocutor) directly, and pushed flat against a studio background - from which no representational art in the 1950s and 60's was immune.

As numerous commentators have noted, one of the stylistic hallmarks of Godard's collaborations with his regular cinematographer Raoul Coutard is the generalized two-dimensional or graphic appearance of the film image, often achieved through a combination of the camera's horizontal tracking movement, the perpendicular framing of the shot, and an overall flat lighting that minimizes any expressively sculpting shadows.<sup>265</sup> This last is a reaction against what Godard and the other New Wave directors regarded as the clichéd adoption of German expressionist lighting techniques in both the French "cinema of quality" and many Hollywood studio productions.<sup>266</sup> In what can be viewed as a reflexive, anti-realist gesture, Godard and

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<sup>264</sup> Godard has said that the frontal framing of *Vivre sa vie* was influenced by the perpendicular, frontally centered compositions of Matisse and Braque. See Milne, "Jean-Luc Godard and *Vivre sa vie*," in *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*.

<sup>265</sup> See, for instance, David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 262.

<sup>266</sup> Accomplished cinematographer Nestor Almendros sees this "flat" image and a lack of stylized shadows in the *mise-en-scène* as a defining characteristic of *Novelle vague* cinematography as pioneered by Coutard, in particular, achieved by reflecting natural, available light off walls and ceilings. See Almendros, *A Man with A Camera*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984, 56.

Coutard tend to leave the viewer's eye on the screen's surface, rather than allowing it to penetrate into an illusionist depth. Focus is shifted to the relation between the 'actual' horizontal and vertical axis of the frame, which often supercedes the 'imagined' phenomenological axis of the image as that hypothetically infinite line that advances out towards the viewer and recedes into the background. Godard's 'graphic' use of interior windows and doorways as frames artificially containing action occurring in previously established spaces - as opposed to providing views onto new ones - reinforces this. In these respects Godard's cinematic vision can be set against the visually transparent, depth-oriented style not only of deep-focus Hollywood and Italian neo-realist films, as is often suggested, but the spatially layered *mise-en-scène* of *seeing-through cinema* directors like Jancsó and Tarkovsky.

The most immediately apparent stylistic feature tying together the otherwise quite disparate works of the first generation of American Pop painters was a similarly reflexive attempt to alleviate any semblance of illusionist depth associated with an aesthetic of immersion, that is, with a notion of a painting as a window into some imagined world. This is achieved not only through frontal framing and treating figure, the human body when it appears, as a two dimensional abstraction, but by eliminating most natural shading in favor of unnatural outline and avoiding the 'realistic' integration of depicted forms with their visual ground, upon which all traditional perspective techniques are founded.<sup>267</sup> Of course, in Lichtenstein's case, many of these graphic features are already present in the original comic image, but his modifications push them further, almost to the point of abstraction.

Pop art's rejection of represented depth finds a corollary in its choice of subject matter, and it is reflected, in particular, in the denial of landscape as a subject for painting in a traditional sense. Like Godard's cinema up until the 1980s, Pop art is very much a product of the urban-life world and when natural forms are depicted they appear

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<sup>267</sup> See Coplans, "Talking with Roy Lichtenstein," in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff, 200.

as if man-made.<sup>268</sup> Landscape in Godard's sixties films occupies a similarly marginal position, and yet he questions his own disavowal of it by ultimately dissolving the fictional reality of both *Le mépris* and *Pierrot le fou* into highly Romantic natural imagery. In both of these films it is only when the camera is turned onto the ocean and sky at their conclusions that the viewer has any sense of unlimited horizon and its accompanying freedom – a vision, as Marianne's posthumous voice-over in *Pierrot* says, of "eternity" as the "sun running away with the sea." But in a pessimistic reversal which brings him closer to the central motifs of Pop painting (even if it is couched in a direct satire at odds with Pop's seemingly earnest embrace of the ostensibly banal), in the last images of *2 ou 3 choses...*, rather than the camera panning away from the characters and their finite worlds out into infinite space and light, a fade out from Juliette, the film's main protagonist, is followed by a downward angled shot of a patch of scrubby grass on which garishly packaged household products are artificially arranged in neat rows – a shot recalling Warhol's infamous *Brillo Box* installations from 1963. In this near parody of Pop art's turning to mass-produced, mass-marketed goods as a source of artistic inspiration, Godard casts them as the modern visual landscape.

#### Colour, Commerce and Textuality

In *Pierrot le fou* and *2 ou 3 choses...* Godard shares Lichtenstein's colour palette, emphasizing strong, to the point of unnatural, primary colours, chiefly heavily saturated reds, yellows, and blues, used for stylistic and meta-critical effect most notably in the famous party and night-driving sequences in *Pierrot* and, more cartoon-ishly, in the film's final scenes. The colours of Mondrian, they are also those favored in advertising. Although Matisse, in his fauvist period and beyond, as well as Picasso, played with the anti-realist use of colour in a figurative context, and both Lichtenstein and Godard cite these painters' works as influencing their own approach to colour, Lichtenstein has said

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<sup>268</sup> This is certainly the case with Lichtenstein's cartoon-ish depictions of clouds, sunsets and rural scenes as well as his schematic "paint by numbers" landscapes.

that advertising was a main inspiration in this respect.<sup>269</sup> Like all of the major Pop painters, Lichtenstein was intrigued by the idea that in an art work not only could a naturally green object become yellow or red, but that, in a modern context, such an obvious departure from the real is paradoxically less perceptible, almost invisible, owing to the habitual conditioning of advertising.<sup>270</sup>

Godard's own anti-realist experimentation with colour in *Pierrot*, also explicitly linked to advertising and popular imagery, is an amplification of that begun in *Une femme et une femme*, which contains a remarkable sequence in which a succession of differently coloured lights are projected onto Anna's (Anna Karina's) face, giving it a neon-lit appearance as she performs her strip-tease/musical number. These stylized visuals transform Karina, in true Pop fashion, from a flesh and blood person to a kind of graphic icon. This is elaborated on two years later in *Le mépris*' famous post-titles sequence-shot, where wall-to-wall yellow and blue light bathes, and partly obscures, Brigitte Bardot's nude body. By way of this apparently arbitrary and fictionally unaccounted for – but quite beautiful – visual abstraction, Godard famously thumbed his nose at the film's actual producers who wanted clear, transparent shots of Bardot's body in order to sell the film on that basis.<sup>271</sup> (Warhol also projected coloured light on to his actors, arguably to lesser effect, in *The Chelsea Girls* [1966].)

Thus alongside, or in place of, its potential for original creative expression, colour in both Godard and Lichtenstein's works functions as a commentary on its more conventional/clichéd uses, be it in mass market advertising, Hollywood film, or where the two converge. In Godard's case this is part of an implicit critique of cinema's early quixotic desire to better approximate 'reality' through color processes which, like Technicolor, often had the opposite effect, with a tendency toward garish contrasts resulting in the visual surrealism of films like Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (actually shot in "Trucolor"). Godard, in his 1960s films, draws the distinction between color and black

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<sup>269</sup> Coplans, "Talking with Roy Lichtenstein," in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 198-9.

<sup>270</sup> Warhol brought a similar notion to bear on his serial portraits in which the face and body of his celebrity subjects (and sometimes himself) are de-personalized by being cast in highly unnatural colour(s), something which also alludes to the commonplace airbrushing of fashion photographs to cover up 'undesirable' bodily flaws.

<sup>271</sup> MacCabe, *Godard: A portrait of the artist at 70*, 153-54.

and white in cinema along fiction versus documentary lines, as is traditional in still-photography: thus colour was appropriate for *Le mépris* and *Pierrot le fou*, both “fantasies” of different kinds, and explicitly films about film, as much as anything else, whereas black and white suited more Parisian and “reality” based films like *Vivre sa vie* and even *Bande à part*, in which Godard pokes fun at his own adoption of Technicolor (to beautiful effect, it must be added) in *Le mépris*, associated as it was with big-budget Hollywood epics. Colour in *Pierrot* and *Le mépris* is often used in such a way as to break from both visual continuity and symbolic colour-coding conventions, just as the jump cuts in *À bout de souffle* marked a break with conventional seamless editing. Although it is partly parodied in *Pierrot*’s final sequence, Godard is not completely set against the expressive use of colour in cinema. A number of his later films, such as *Éloge de l’amour* and *Histoire(s) du cinéma* utilise video technology which allows Godard to ‘paint’ over landscapes and faces in a way not unlike the very early filmmaker’s hand tinting of black and white frames to enhance mood or atmosphere. Yet Godard’s colour films from the sixties certainly appear to be in accord with Lichtenstein and Warhol’s rejection of colour used in a manipulative or uncritical fashion “to convey specific emotional content.”<sup>272</sup>

Colour is explicitly linked with advertising and consumerism in the party sequence at Ferdinand’s house in *Pierrot*, where the guests pressed tightly against the wall in unnaturally shallow, graphic tableaux converse in banal advertising slogans to the accompaniment of total color switches. Red neon, stark yellow, inky blue, and over exposed white and purple in turn wash over the figures as a desperately alienated Ferdinand walks wearily from one group to another, and it is almost as if it is his unreflective, automaton like movement which triggers the changes. In the voice-over Ferdinand speaks of his senses as separate “machines” - calling to mind Warhol’s ironic ideal of wanting to paint like one - with no unified self to tie together the myriad perceptual impressions. The discontinuity of self in modern consumer culture is here

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<sup>272</sup> Waldman, Diane, “Roy Lichtenstein.” In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 212.

embodied in the schizophrenic color. When Ferdinand “goes mad,” throwing the cake at the guests, all of the previous colors come together in a psychedelic mix, followed by a non-diegetic shot of fireworks exploding in a night sky, a shot looking forward to the end of the film and the climatic explosion of Ferdinand’s actual self at the end, where he is presented as ‘divided’ through the half red, half blue mask he makes by smearing paint on his face, while strapped with bright yellow sticks of dynamite -- in a sequence which incorporates all three of Lichtenstein’s stock colors. Earlier, the death of Marianne plays out in both form and content like a Lichtenstein painting come to life, a faux-heroic live-action comic strip. With her figure thrown into stark, two-dimensional relief by the Riviera sun, Marianne, dressed in black and white stripes, lies dying, her face streaked with intentionally artificial-looking blood – or rather “red,” as Godard famously corrected his interviewer, when asked about the prominent violence and large amount of blood in *Pierrot* in a famous *Cahiers* exchange.<sup>273</sup> (When Marianne asks Belmondo’s forgiveness, he answers only that “It’s too late” - the tough, laconic reply of one Lichtenstein’s stock male hero’s, ready-made for bold black type.)

In the first night-driving sequence in *Pierrot*, Marianne and Ferdinand are filmed through the car’s windshield, as alternating red, blue and yellow lights bounce off it, playing against one and another in an abstract flux. This is another example of an imperfect, distorting transparency in Godard’s cinema, and it is not coincidental that Marianne speaks of the opacity of photography to the accompaniment of these images. In David Bowman’s star voyage in *2001*, reflected color lights up the screen via the visor of his space helmet, and Kelvin’s trip to the rocket launch site is warped by the neon lit highway tunnels of *Solaris*’ futuristic looking Tokyo, as viewed through a glass windshield. In both cases the soundtrack is deadened or muffled, allowing the purely visual content of the image to dominate. As in much experimental cinema and more recently in Wong Kar-Wai’s and Chris Doyle’s neon-lit Hong Kong and its futuristic projection in *2046* [2004], abstract color patterns correspond to liminal states, a moving away from the real as here and now reality normally perceived (and represented) to a wholly

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<sup>273</sup> Milne ed., *Godard on Godard*, 217.

other, often intensely subjective space. (David Lynch's semi-abstract use of color in *Blue Velvet* [1986] and *Lost Highway* [1997] are other notable examples.) In all of these cases, as in one prominent strand of post-Malevich abstract painting, isolated, heightened, or unusually emphasized color is one path to the noumenal sublime, if not directly spiritual, as typified by the paintings of Rothko and Barnett Newman. As characteristic of Pop art, however, in the driving sequence in *Pierrot*, the image's movement in this transcendent direction is simultaneously under-cut by being paired with the sensuously disjointed, fragmented reality of the all too recognizable present. In this case it comes via the sound-track, in the form of the latest reports from Vietnam on the car radio that Marianne and Ferdinand are listening to. Like in the painting of Warhol and Lichtenstein, rather than an expression of metaphysical ineffability, the abstraction of color in this sequence is a reflexive end-in-itself, a purely surface phenomenon with no apparent deeper signification.

When asked about this sequence Godard maintained that he was simply trying to show what anyone normally sees when driving through Paris at night, but as reconstituted in memory rather than "in reality."<sup>274</sup> As opposed to leading the viewer into an alternate, predominantly subjective, reality, Godard here wished to first 'deconstruct' the shared perceptual experience of an ordinary event represented on screen, and then recreate its "sensation through the elements that constitute it."<sup>275</sup> This is a practice that has much more in common with the analytic or empirical atomization of common imagery in Pop art -- or of visual perception itself in 1960s "Op art" -- than the visual union of opposites in Abstract Expressionist/colour-field painting. The prominence of the soundtrack in this sequence, mixing the radio and the on-screen dialogue, as a counterpoint to the visuals, also points to the crucial importance of sound and text in Godard's cinema as effecting how the image is perceived, another feature it shares with Pop painting.

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

Whereas American Abstract Expressionist paintings were frequently untitled, numbered, or simply descriptive of a mood (with the exception of some of Jackson Pollock's works where there is an occasional cryptic word/image inter-play), Lichtenstein's art, like Godard's cinema, often turns on dialectical image/text (language) relations. Diane Waldman discusses the importance of titles in apprehending Lichtenstein's paintings. Rather than "using the title as an appendage or accessory to the visual, as a label or clue or as a play on illusion, it forces a direct confrontation between the visual and the verbal".<sup>276</sup> The "hot" titles evoke sympathy and "press emotional buttons," but this is counter-pointed by the cool distance of the subject's presentation.<sup>277</sup> For Marshall McLuhan television is the proto-typical 'cool' medium and Waldman also compares Lichtenstein's blown-up faces to television close-ups cued at moments of high drama.

Boim also points to the importance of text in Lichtenstein's work, arguing that, when included, the comic strip's thought bubble or balloon is the key entry point into Lichtenstein's paintings, the text and the image forming a combined *Gestalt*, with its own, often quite abstract, dynamic.<sup>278</sup> Similarly, in Godard's 1960s films, although language as dialogue/voice-over and filmed text may help to define the image, it does not literally explain and/or denigrate it, as is often the case in Hollywood cinema as wedded to the discursive, nor does it dominate it, as in Barbara Kreuger's photo-collage images, formally indebted to advertising. (In the voice-over of *2 ou 3 choses...*, Godard says that "*language in-itself cannot accurately define an image.*") Godard often pairs the interior monologues of his characters with facial close-ups as if they were thinking in thought bubbles. And just as Godard's or Peter Greenaway's scanning of written text with the camera, frequently referred to as their using the screen as a "palimpsest," language in Lichtenstein's art serves a formal, presentational function as much as a conventionally communicative or narrative one. Thus we note the prevalence of exclamations without a literal referent - "wow," "pop," "zap" - that tie a gestural

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<sup>276</sup> Waldman, "Roy Lichtenstein," in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 210.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Boime, "Roy Lichtenstein and the Comic Strip," in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 204.

utterance together with the action of which it is partly constitutive. Word and image in Lichtenstein's paintings, despite their frequently ambiguous meanings, owing to the de-contextualisation of the original comic image, form one dynamic unit of action, like the rapid montage inserts of text in *Pierrot* and *2 ou 3 choses...*

### Art and Reflexivity

In terms of a wider self-reflexivity, Lichtenstein's paintings are always, on one level, about the act of their production; often this takes the form of ironic, tongue-in-cheek visual comment. Alluding to the Ben Day dots that make up the printed comics he borrows from (the Ben Day process being a standard technique for mass printing comic strips and photographs in newspapers and magazines), Lichtenstein often paints in red and blue dots 'over' his recycled images. Thus an originally constitutive property becomes a detached symbolic one, rather than creating the image they are added in, as if a rhetorical afterthought. Here a reflexive gesture works as a signature of style. But, as is often the case in Godard's films, in a number of Lichtenstein's paintings, self-reflexivity is not just a function of form but also subject or content. *Image Duplicator* (1963, see Figure 4), a close-up view of the helmeted face of a mad scientist/comic-book villain who threateningly boasts of his "image duplicator" machine, works on two levels. It is Lichtenstein's humorous self-portrait, with the artist's identity pictured not traditionally through his physical appearance, but by linguistic reference to the stylistic practice for which he was the time already famous. Not merely self-parody, however, it is also an allusion to Pop art's practice of aesthetic self-effacement through use of the common image - be it the labels of soup cans, flags, or comics - a practice which provided the less-than-secret 'weapon' most frequently turned against it by hostile critics who branded the Pop painters, Lichtenstein in particular, as makers of 'non-art.'

Both Godard and Lichtenstein engage with the history and current state of their mediums via the inclusion of, and reference to, well-known art images/works. If text, advertisements and print images can form part of what Burch calls a film's "dialectic of materials" why not other art works? In a long series of paintings beginning in 1962,

Lichtenstein moved away from comic book models and instead recast iconic Picasso and Cézanne paintings in the same color block style. As in *Pierrot*, with its inclusion of paintings by Renoir, Picasso, Modigliani and Van Gogh, as insert shots and within the larger *mise-en-scène*, such replication is a reflection on the cultural availability of these works through mechanical reproduction. At the same time, the specific choice of these artists and not others, mirrors more individual concerns intimately bound to Godard's and Lichtenstein's unique creative practices and personalities. Lichtenstein, for instance, said that he reproduced Cézanne's works owing to the post-impressionist's famous rejection of outline, Mondrian's for re-instating it, and Picasso's for their pure iconic value.<sup>279</sup> In interviews, Godard elaborates on his fondness for the impressionist and post-impressionist painting that so frequently appears in his films, by drawing parallels between the anti-illusionist aspect of these artistic movements and his own cinematic ideals. Impressionist painting, in particular, in which depicted objects are often presented "out of focus" is, for Godard, an admirable model of an art which combines narrative interest, Romantic expression and a (self-) reflexive interest in the conditions of its medium and processes of visual perception.<sup>280</sup> It is fitting, then, that Godard actually fuses together a number of film images, including his own, with Impressionist paintings, via video technology, in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. In their wholesale appropriation, and often ironic re-contextualisation, of other art works both Lichtenstein and Godard display an ambivalence towards the visual art tradition they have inherited. As part of a perceived conflict between originality and its impossibility, tradition is something to both flee from and embrace, and the issue is argued out in an aesthetic dialogue built-in to the films and paintings themselves, thereby inviting the viewer into the debate.

Lichtenstein's engagement with earlier art often goes beyond direct replication, and is more oblique to those not 'in the know,' so to speak. In this respect it recalls Godard's more exclusive *cinéphile* references in *À bout de souffle* and other films, whose recognition depends on knowledge of the Parisian film-culture of the time. From

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<sup>279</sup> Coplans, "Talking with Roy Lichtenstein," *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 200-1.

<sup>280</sup> See Gavin Smith, "Jean-Luc Godard," in *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*, 189.

1965 on, Lichtenstein produced paintings, sculptures and mixed-media works that exclusively depict swirling, dripping brush strokes. Implicitly, Lichtenstein's cartoonish swirls of colour refer to the drippy action painting of Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists -- that older movement which, like rebellious sons, the Pop painters set themselves in complete opposition to -- while in the same breath acknowledging their influence and, damning with faint praise, their aesthetic significance. (Indeed, the relation between Pop and Abstract Expressionism in this respect recalls the *nouvelle vague*'s response to the French "cinema of quality," with the younger movement, in each case, referring to its predecessor in polemics drawing on the negative connotations of such received values as "quality," "craftsmanship," and "expressiveness.")<sup>281</sup>

Making up, so to speak, for the conventional painterly attribute his art most conspicuously lacks, Lichtenstein's brush-stroke works instead offers it as a subject. Like the Ben Day dots mentioned earlier, these art works represent that which normally does the representing. A rough cinematic analog might be Godard filming the camera at beginning of *Le mépris* or speaking directly to the viewer in his own voice in *2 ou 3 choses...*. Turning an authorial and stylistic 'signifier' into the 'signified,' to invoke the semiotic terminology of the day according to which both Godard's and Lichtenstein's work was originally received by theorists and critics, Lichtenstein's brush-stroke works, with all of their art-referential connotations, overturn traditional notions of artistic originality, intentionality, and expressiveness.

Both Godard and Lichtenstein's 1960s works (self-) critically respond to the challenges of producing representational images in a then already image-saturated culture. Of course this shared impulse took on widely divergent concrete forms. Whereas Godard's filmmaking was, and still is, marked by ceaseless stylistic experiment, evolution and revision over more than forty years, Lichtenstein's work is remarkable in that it adheres, for most of this same period up until his death in 1997, to the same basic presentational formula of the early-60's paintings. Although, as we have

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<sup>281</sup> Like the period between the first appearance of Pop art works and the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, the actual chronological gap between the post-war films that the future *Cahiers* directors attacked and the first New Wave productions was fairly short.

seen, Godard's discontinuous editing, playing with credits and titles, use of non-diegetic text and sound, and aspects of his *mise-en-scène* exhibit many of these same self-reflexive concerns, this points to a crucial difference between his work and Lichtenstein's, one rooted, predictably enough, in basic formal and phenomenological differences between their media. In his paintings, Lichtenstein attempts to cover-up the traces of his creative hand, striving to make the art object as free as possible from a directly apprehended subjectivity of the artist and anything that could be taken for 'personal expression.' This is an attempt to ensure that his style becomes a generic aesthetic, where individual works are all cast in the same mold into which a different content is poured, furthering a sense that the artist's choice of subject is apparently arbitrary. In the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century painting, leading to the purported dead end of modernism in the form of Abstract Expressionism and minimalism, this effacement of creative self in Pop art, as critique of subjective expression and an aesthetic of "art-for-art's sake" is posited as a necessary corrective. In point of fact, however, it is also the indication of a highly self-conscious, intention laden aesthetic practice that puts the attitude of the artist, not to mention their recognized status as cultural brand-names, right at its center.

Film, including even its recent digital hybrids, begins with the objectively given, the physically "real" in some sense of the term. At a basic mediumistic level, the cinematic image is *a priori* effaced of subjective intervention to one degree or another by the chemical and mechanical work of the camera independent of its operator. Thus it cannot be through self-effacement that Godard draws attention to these same problematics concerning originality and expression, but rather the opposite, by emphasizing or re-emphasizing his direct subjective intervention into the creation and apprehension of the cinematic image, all the time retaining faith in the working principle of the filmmaker as *auteur*, a concept he helped to create and promote as a critic. In making the processes contributing to the creation of a fictional reality in cinema a significant part of a film's represented world, so that it is the act of creation rather than the fictional reality which achieves a level of transparency to the real, as a critique of conventional "realism" or "illusionism," the viewer is always conscious of

the filmmaker tactical manipulation of space and time and Godard's creative decision or in-decision.

In all of these ways, as artists who critique or challenge traditional conceptions of originality and creativity in film and the visual arts which, as each recognize, are rooted in perceived correspondences between images and the realities they picture, on one hand, and the relation of artistic process to product, on the other, Godard and Lichtenstein both stand-together and in diametric opposition. In a loaded formulation, one could say that Godard begins in cinema from the point at which Lichtenstein arrives in painting.

Pop, as "common image" art, shifts attention from the art work's depicted object to the act of its selection among so many numerous possibilities – why this comic, why this soup can? As a general style it is full of contradictions: first criticized for its supposed strong pro-American, pro-consumerism sensibility, art as a naive mirror of modern life, this dimension, if it ever was present, has faded with time to reveal more complex impulses. Like the Pop painter turning his eye to a visually pre-formed reality, already image saturated, the reflexive, *seeing-with cinema* filmmaker turns his camera on modern life, particularly in an urban setting, in a process of sifting and straining images. Rather than virgin creation, emphasis is laid on combinatory possibility. (The dilemma is posed not only for the reflexive filmmaker, a Godard, Wenders or Egoyan, trying to present images powerful enough to sustain a critique of the image, but for the visionary *seeing-through cinema* filmmaker, like Herzog and Tarkovsky, who set themselves the task of somehow finding new ones.) This brings us back to the collage/montage aspects of *Pierrot* and *2 ou 3...* and their sheer visual multiplicity, which does not find a parallel in Lichtenstein's radical isolation of the single image, but does in the work of James Rosenquist.

### II. 3.2ii. Godard and Pop art: Rosenquist

Rosenquist, a former billboard advertisement painter, produced equally large scale canvases, marked by slickly polished, 'licked' surfaces and unnaturally glossy colours.

His works depict an overlapping *mélange* of hyper-real cultural artifacts and bodily fragments. “A billboard surrealist who marries Magritte’s paint handling to collage space” is how one critic described him.<sup>282</sup> But Rosenquist’s art lacks not only the literary playfulness of surrealist art, but also the psychological and metaphysical superstructure underpinning it; as in the momentary intuitions of Juliete in *2 ou 3 choses...*, his images offer only a fleeting glimpse of a higher Gnostic world, obliquely reflected in the shiny, expendable and contingent detritus of this fallen one.

In early reviews of Rosenquist’s paintings, a number of writers speak of their “montage” effects, pointing to the fragmentary nature of his compositions coupled with their enormous scale.<sup>283</sup> And indeed, in forcing the eye to move from one side of the work to another in successive stages, Rosenquist’s paintings, which often take up an entire wall or are designed as three panel triptychs, filling a 180 degree field of vision on three walls, do lend themselves to the use of the cinematic term. Rosenquist’s best know painting, the three paneled *F-111* (1964-65, see detail Figure 5) eighty-eight feet long and ten feet wide, depicts a section of a fighter jet, canned spaghetti, a tire, a hair dryer and a mushroom cloud, among other objects, all roughly the same size in defiance of any naturalistic scale or spatial realism. Lawrence Alloway, making an important and helpful distinction between ‘montage’ and ‘collage,’ argues that

Rosenquist’s method is that of montage, the photographic and figurative method of collage. Whereas in cubist collage separate bits of material are assembled in a mainly flat space, montage unites imagery from separate sources in a scenic way. It is the method of Soviet movies from the forties.<sup>284</sup>

While this comparison is generally apt, a better one would be to the montage of Godard and other modern “neo-avant-garde” filmmakers, who influenced by Soviet-style montage construction, adapted many of its techniques to different, less programmatic, ends.

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<sup>282</sup>Rose, Barbara. “Pop Art at the Guggenheim.” In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 84.

<sup>283</sup> Alloway, Lawrence. “Art.” In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 263.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

Produced in the now bygone age of the drive-in movie theatre (and Rosenquist's imagery often harkens back to the 1950s), those cinematic billboards with a viewing ritual all their own, many of Rosenquist's canvases are roughly the dimension of film screens. His three panel works are metaphorically comparable to the multi-screen effects of Abel Gance's *Napoléon* with its action covering three screens, or, more recently to the super wide screen IMAX format which, in taking up the viewer's entire peripheral vision achieves as total a perceptual immersion into the represented reality as is possible with celluloid based cinema. Other formal features of these paintings, however, repel such imaginative entrance into the image. Rosenquist, who said that he "only emotionally responds to works life size or larger," believed that it was "possible to bring something so close that you can see through it, so it comes to you right of the wall."<sup>285</sup> Something, that is, like a film projecting off a screen. As in film, the objects in Rosenquist's paintings "slip in and out of focus, losing their boundaries. Enlargement and identity loss reinforce each other."<sup>286</sup> The scale of Rosenquist's compositions ensures that there is no escape for the eye via easy distraction. For the viewer situated centrally in front of the canvases there is, for all intents and purposes, no frame or border. The painting is not separated from the world, something set off within a larger perceptual manifold. Rather, like a projected film in a dark room, the painting becomes the environment. (The spectacle of large scale paintings, murals, and film screens have this in common with natural vistas, versus smaller framed pictures and the television box/computer monitor which, being on a less than human scale, are more perceptually appropriable as use objects – ones to which attention need not be *surrendered to*, but is, rather, *created by*.) The result verges on a kind of sublime, and Rosenquist's works can be seen in the tradition of the large-scale, pre-cinema panorama paintings and photographs of natural wonders that, prior to moving pictures, toured around the world like magic lantern shows.

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<sup>285</sup> Lippard, Lucy R., "James Rosenquist: Aspects of a Multiple Art." In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 245.

<sup>286</sup> Alloway, "Art," in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 265.

Although never losing the sense of an undifferentiated visual *Gestalt* when confronting Rosenquist's paintings, the viewer is forced to 'read' or scan them, in some ways analogous to a moving image, particularly when projected on a very large screen or, as in Godard's cinema, when the frame is overloaded with juxtaposed image and text. The eye must make a series of perceptual jumps from one object, one section of the canvas to another. The resulting discontinuity is entirely graphic since, like the film screen, it is all surface, with no actual variation of texture or depth as provided by visible brushstroke. The depicted objects themselves are pushed up to the front of the picture plane as if jostling for attention. The lack of shadow in Rosenquist's paintings also contributes to this lack of recess, space for the eye to anchor in, and it is therefore propelled from one object to the next. Moreover, the size and quality of one object changes upon what one looks at before and after, in a sort of painterly Kuleshov effect (seeing a baby's face against either a hair dryer or a mushroom cloud instinctively jolts the imagination in different composite directions).

Such formal features are mirrored in the content of Rosenquist's paintings, as a sort of collective visual unconscious of image saturated mid-to late twentieth century life, springing from television, advertising, fashion and the "military-industrial complex." The world that Rosenquist depicts springs from the same sources as the phantasmagoric Los Angeles described by Thomas Pynchon in the *Crying of Lot 49* (1967), and which, in its Parisian manifestation, Godard attempts to "diagnose" in *2 ou 3 choses...* . This is an environment which is only approachable, both Godard and Rosenquist implicitly suggest, from a trans-subjective, multi-perspectival viewpoint. Rosenquist insisted that the objects and fragments of objects in his works are not its subject but that

the relationship may be the subject matter, the relationship between the fragments I do. The content will be something more gained from the relationships. If I have three things their relationship will be the subject matter, the content will hopefully be fuller, balloon to more than the subject matter.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Quoted in G.R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Part II, Interviews by G.R. Swenson" in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 117.

Rather than inherent in the things he represents, “meaning” in Rosenquist’s art is generated in the imaginary space between objects, prompted by their jarring collision (“the fragments or objects of real things are caustic to one another, and the tile is also caustic to the fragments.”<sup>288</sup>). Although this suggests obvious parallels with Soviet montage effects, it also applies to Godard’s less didactic “collage” juxtapositions and, on the level of the discrete image, his desire, expressed, as we have seen, in *Pierrot*, not to film objects but the spaces between them.

In total, the viewer’s perceptual engagement with Rosenquist’s large-scale work is very different in kind from that of traditional paintings and, conforming to Walter Benjamin’s description of montage as an “art of distraction,” is experientially closer to watching Godard’s collage films. Rather than the expressive monumentality of Pollock and Rothko’s large canvases, with their monistic fusion of color and form finally resolving into an undifferentiated unity, Rosenquist’s paintings reflect an endlessly multiple, heterodox world in all of its visual contradictions. In a representational sense, at least, his art expresses an empirical rather than metaphysical vision. The sublime here, as in *2 ou 3 choses*, *Pierrot* and the apocalyptic *Week-end* (1967), with its endless parade of wrecked cars, is a function of numbing multiplicity - the unlimited amount of seemingly self-generating objects and attendant significations which the mind cannot fully encompass or unite under a rational concept – one which given concrete form in Antonioni’s *Zabriskie Point* (1970) becomes a literal explosion of consumer culture. In Godard’s cinema, this representational excess is mirrored, not in a dearth of narrative (as his early realist critics maintained) but in a narrative over-abundance, the sense of many stories, plots and even entire films superimposed one over the other, which, from a literalist perspective, result in the general resistance to “narrative comprehension” Bordwell sees at work in Godard’s films, one which causes them to “remain elusive on a simple denotative level.”<sup>289</sup> In Rosenquist’s demonstratively non-narrative paintings, the depicted objects are not so much elusive as over-present. Like the omnipresent,

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 116-17

<sup>289</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 311.

constantly recycled television image, the objects in his paintings are, in his own words, “expendable” (“images like no-images”<sup>290</sup>).

Rosenquist’s Trojan-horse challenge to traditional painting - the installation of *F-111* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1968, before it had stood the ‘test of time,’ caused great controversy<sup>291</sup> - mounted from within the bounds of the figurative, through his playing with scale, fragment, surface and subject matter, is similar to Godard’s mid-to-late sixties assault on conventional continuity cinema in films which none-the-less maintain recognizable genre elements and some aspects of conventional film grammar. Both turn spectacle in on-itself, representing everyday objects of modern life and over-familiar images which, owing to the original ways in which they are depicted, rather than being wholly perceived as formal abstractions or socio-historical signifiers, constantly oscillate between the two poles. Yet rather than forcing a passive surrender to the image, both Rosenquist’s paintings and Godard’s films prompt a reflexive seeing calling on the viewer to consider what they are looking at in every moment as a concrete act of perceptually engaging with a visual world that cries out to be made some sense of, an act which is often frustrated.

To conclude the comparison, in form and content both Rosenquist’s and Godard’s work concretely dramatize the failure to apprehend this total picture, the meaningful whole, but rather present the world in “all those episodes in which we lose our grip on it.”<sup>292</sup> A catalog description of a 1964 Rosenquist exhibition held in Paris (one wonders if Godard was aware of it) is not too far from aptly describing one dimension of Godard’s mid-to-late sixties cinema:

The only fixed point of reference is our subjective capacity to comprehend simultaneously all the complexities of such a continually changing and totally

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<sup>290</sup> Swenson, “What is Pop Art? Part II, Interviews by G.R. Swenson,” in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 115.

<sup>291</sup> See Sidney Tillim, “Rosenquist at the Met: Avant Garde or Red Garde.” In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff, 258.

<sup>292</sup> Alloway, “Art,” in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 65. This, one imagines, is also the attraction of Rosenquist’s work to Alain Robbe-Grillet who re-creates a Rosenquist-style composition in *L’Eden et l’après* (1971).

relativistic world; and ultimately through this capacity we participate in the aesthetic recording of such a world on a flat surface.<sup>293</sup>

Here a caveat should be added. Although I have stressed a number of analogies between Godard's films and Pop art, often by way of contrast with Abstract Expressionism, one can actually see his cinema as posed between these two main camps of mid-to-late twentieth century painting. Both can be termed 'reflexive' in the phenomenological sense of the term that I have adopted, at least as they are frequently characterized: the inward, intense and self-scrutinizing Romanticism of Abstract Expressionism, with its earnest gravity, famously defined by Clement Greenberg as "art about art," set against Pop's outward looking, ironically impersonal, and humorously tongue-in-cheek art about the critique of "Art." Godard's sixties films, streaked through by an intense Romantic yearning, self-reflexively speak to the formal properties of the cinematic medium and its history, while simultaneously engaging with wider visual culture and the concrete circumstances of modern life, often in a pronouncedly ironic, often self-depreciating fashion (free of the didacticism that marks much of his later overtly 'political' cinema). Indeed, the great virtue of Godard's sixties films is their seemingly effortless combination of both of these apparently contradictory 'styles' or modes, and their ability to move from one to the other, and back again, in the space of a few shots.

### II. 3.3 *Passion*

In his critical biography of Godard, Colin MacCabe calls *Passion* not only the "greatest" and most "beautiful" of Godard's films, but one of the "great works of European Modernism."<sup>294</sup> While there can be no denying the film's moments of genuine cinematic poetry, especially as pertains to its painting inspired set-pieces, which benefit greatly from Godard's reunion with Raoul Coutard after a long break in their collaboration, some writers have a less enthusiastic view of the film. For Orr, the

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<sup>293</sup>Fry, Edward. "James Rosenquist." In *Pop Art: A Critical History*, edited by Stephen H. Madoff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 243.

<sup>294</sup> MacCabe, *Godard: A portrait of the artist at 70*, 276-278. MacCabe defines modernism here as a "rejection of ready-made meanings."

film is an “inspired failure” that retreads ground explored more effectively in *Le mépris*, and it is most notable as an indication of the malaise setting into reflexive art cinema in the 1980s.<sup>295</sup> Like much of Godard’s later work, this is a polarizing film, and a good deal of ‘truth’ likely falls somewhere in-between these two assessments. What is more certain is that *Passion* marks a break from the radical political films Godard had been making more or less continually since 1968 in which, with a few exceptions, narrative cinema in any recognizable form was all but abandoned. This is not to say, however, that *Passion*, a film nearly impossible to absorb on a first viewing, with its overlapping dialogue, image and sound disjunctions, dramatically unmotivated action, and occasionally pronounced spatial-temporal discontinuity, signals a return to Godard’s *genre*-rooted, more or less story/character driven films of the early and mid-sixties.

Overtly Godard’s most in-depth engagement with painting, *Passion* combines its reflexive treatment of art with a return to the film-within-a-film structural motif of *Le mépris*. Jerzy (Jerzy Radziwilowicz), a Polish film director who bears many similarities to Godard in speech and method, is in the midst of making “*Passion*,” a television film that largely consists of re-creations of famous paintings in the form of *tableaux vivants*, on a sound stage outside of Geneva. Jerzy struggles to maintain his motivation, creativity and independence in the midst of familiar conflicts with the film’s producer, financiers, and crew, while simultaneously juggling affairs with two women, against the backdrop of a worker’s dispute at a local factory and the political upheaval of Solidarity in Jerzy’s native Poland. (MacCabe, casting this narrative density in a positive light, says the film has “too many stories and not enough.”<sup>296</sup>)

*Passion* is peppered with Godard’s reflections on cinema, art, politics and sexual relations, often with Jerzy as their mouthpiece. If Godard, like other reflexive, *seeing-with cinema* filmmakers, can never make a film that is not ultimately ‘about film,’ he can equally never make one *only* about film, or its relation to other art forms - for this would be to fuse narrative and meta-narrative, the medium and its representation, and Godard’s filmmaking thrives on dissonance and the collision of opposites. Accordingly,

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<sup>295</sup> Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 149.

<sup>296</sup> MacCabe, *Godard: A portrait of the artist at 70*, 277.

all manner of extra-filmic political, social and cultural realities are brought into *Passion* and, at points, threaten to overload it. It is interesting to see *Passion* as a pointed response to Truffaut's *Day for Night*, towards which Godard showed a decided ambivalence, strongly criticizing his former friend and colleague for what he considered the dishonesty of Truffaut's self-portrait, specifically the fact that Truffaut pointedly avoided making direct connections between the film director Ferrand's private life (i.e., his own) and his filmmaking.<sup>297</sup> (In *Passion*, in contrast, conforming to one of the film's often repeated lines, that "love" and "work" are, or must be, the same, Jerzy's personal relationship with his actress Hannah, for instance, is so entwined with the film being made that it is often impossible to tell whether much of the visible video footage of the two of them together is intended as part of the film-within-the-film or their 'home' movies.) As one would expect, *Passion*, a much more abstract film, substantially differs from *Day for Night* in overall tone and intention, yet on one level both films cover much of the same representational ground: the frustration individual creativity meets in the practicalities of film as a collaborative art, the physical and emotional demands placed on the director, fraught with on-set romances, the crucible of a film-set as a heightened microcosm of human relations within any collective (although Godard, of course, takes these issues into a much more serious political and ethical area). And this is not to mention Jerzy, as Godard's surrogate, who, like Truffaut's Ferrand, offers quotable maxims on cinema and the filmmaking process ("one must live stories before inventing them," etc..). The major difference is that whereas in *Day for Night* film and life run in parallel, each reflecting or refracting each other directly, in *Passion* painting is a third term interposed between.

The film inter-cuts between the action occurring within the studio amongst the *tableaux vivants* and the life outside of it; arguably, these two realities never fuse, even so far as providing a coherent rejection of 'coherent' narrative. Of visual note in the sequences that take place away from the studio, is that right from the bravura opening

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<sup>297</sup> See MacCabe, 272. Along with *Day for Night*, *Passion* also has echoes of another great post-war film-within-a-film, *8 1/2*. At one point in *Passion* a member of the crew says that the would be film exists only in Jerzy's mind, recalling Guido's identical response when asked about his film in *8 1/2*.

shot – tracing a jet’s exhaust trail in a dramatically alternating light and dark sky - landscape figures more prominently in *Passion* than in much of Godard’s earlier cinema. Long-shots, creating a distanced, less intimate view of the action, are also much more prevalent in *Passion* than in Godard’s sixties films. Against conventional expectations, the re-creations of paintings in *Passion* are seldom shown in their entirety, as frontally centered *tableaux*. Instead, the camera either moves in close, tracking or panning to pick out small details of the costumes, gestures, and the facial expressions of the re-creation’s models, or sweeps around them in wide shot, as Jerzy’s crew chaotically blocks them out for the cameras.

By way of *Passion*’s film-within-a-film fiction, the voice-over near its beginning suggests some potential explanations for this presentation, as well as introducing a number of the film’s thematic pre-occupations. Excerpts from part of an on-set interview with “*Passion*’s” cast and crew, of the kind typical of a film’s promotion in France, are played over images of a section of Rembrandt’s *The Night Watch* (1642), the first of Jerzy’s re-creations shown. Here we, as viewers, are offered a number of different perspectives on the images of the *tableau* we simultaneously see, and the film as a whole, from members of Jerzy’s/Godard’s crew, the first two appearing to speak, at least to an extent, on Godard’s behalf. First comes Jerzy’s script-girl (played in the film by Sophie Lucatchevsky, and introduced here as “Miss Lucatchevsky”) who calls Jerzy’s film, a story “*separated from the real world by profoundly calculated acts of verisimilitude.*” Next we hear the actor Patrick Bonnel (playing himself in the film), who cautions viewers not to “*scrutinize the structure or shots,*” but, “*like Rembrandt,*” to look closely at “*the human beings*” who make up the *tableaux*, patiently regarding their faces and body language. This is followed by Coutard, identified as himself, who responding to an interviewer who is looking for a succinct summary of the film’s plot, states “*Il n’y a pas d’histoire.*” This phrase is a repeated refrain of Jerzy’s throughout the film, when constantly asked, like Guido in Fellini’s *8 ½*, the same question by his crew and producers. “*Why does a film need a story?*” a frustrated Jerzy asks himself aloud, at one point. As a substitute for the film-within-the-film’s non-existing, or, at least, non-reducible plot, Coutard, with reference

to the *Night Watch tableau*, offers as an alternative the fact that “*everything is properly lit*,” taking evident pride in calling attention to his re-creation of Rembrandt’s *chiaroscuro* effects and offering the view that, as it is depicted, the light in the painting confirms that it is actually set at the break of day. (This answer, although not surprising from a director of photography, is presumably not what the interviewer was after.) As we will see, the differences of emphasis in each of these brief commentaries underscores similar contrasts and tension inherent in both Jerzy’s production and Godard’s.

Appropriately, in a film-within-a-film which re-creates a number of paintings, light - its quality, effects, and significance – is a running theme in *Passion*. In the original paintings Jerzy/Godard re-creates, light is virtual, as one depicted feature among others. In film, of course, it is everything, both the generative precondition for the image and its substance. Delacroix’s enigmatic advice to aspiring painters, that there are “*no real shadows, only reflections*” is quoted in the film. Shadows imply an object hypothetically fixed and isolated in relation to a light source (as in a painting) rather than one in dynamic interaction with others in a shared perceptual field, where light merges and re-emerges in a complex web of reflections, that is, *cinema*. All through the film Jerzy complains that, in spite of the fact the he has spent most of the production’s money on it, going over-budget as a result, the studio lighting is still not right, since “it doesn’t come from anywhere or go anywhere” (Jerzy, here, in typical Godard-ian fashion turns a statement of literal fact, on one level, into a philosophical question/speculation). At another point in the film Jerzy passes on his producer’s offer to go to Hollywood and achieve the technical effects of “*Sternberg and Boris Kaufman*.” This being, of course, an ironic comment on Godard’s own neo-Bazinian rejection of the expressionistic visuals associated with large studio productions and elaborate artificial lighting. Away from the studio and the film’s making, many of *Passion*’s interiors are under-lit by conventional standards, re-calling the inky natural shadows of the opening sequence of *Week-end*. In an obviously self-reflexive moment, Hanna (Hanna Schygulla), the actress and owner of the hotel where the film crew is staying, stands in a dim corridor and asks aloud why there is no light. One of the

answers is Coutard's general propensity for using only natural, available light from a single source, often pushed to an extreme in Godard's films, at the director's insistence, and no more so than in a number of *Passion's* interior shots where characters are often barely visible in the shadows. Rather than purely atmospheric, the 'chiaroscuro' lighting in *Passion*, in *Prenom*, *Carmen* (1983), and, more recently, *Éloge de l'amour* (2001), can be taken as a rejection, or problematising, of the ethos of uniform visibility within the frame, associated with Hollywood continuity-style studio filmmaking and its three point lighting schemes. The latter having reached its height in the 1950s and is still today a dominant means of lighting non-*genre* mainstream film and television. In *Passion*, however, this cinematically reflexive stylistic choice has an added self-referential dimension, in that it allows the characters to dramatically stand out from the murky background in a way reminiscent of the Rembrandt and Goya paintings Jerzy recreates in the studio.

While sitting on the floor of the empty set, Jerzy's exhausted producer (László Szabó) asks the director for a "*clear vision*" of what is going on with the film. By way of an answer Jerzy has his grips dim the studio lights until the pair sit in near darkness. Epistemologically speaking, this and all of the above examples are continued variations on the reflexive seeing/not-seeing dynamics already noted in relation to *Vivre sa vie* and *Pierrot le fou*, where sight as an access to knowledge and truth can never be taken for granted. In a more practical filmic context, lighting, traditionally that most regimented, hide-bound and technical aspect of filmmaking, is squarely in the cross-hairs of Jerzy/Godard's contention that "*there are no*" [read 'there must not be'] "*rules in cinema.*"

The nature of Jerzy's production of "*Passion*" brings up a wider contextual irony at the heart of Godard's film. In 1982, Godard, having recently set up shop in a small home studio in Rolle, Switzerland, working with very small crews, small budgets, and commissioning manufacturers to create super-small and portable film cameras (a prototype model of one being the camera Godard spontaneously filmed *Passion's*

opening shots on<sup>298</sup>), would never have used many of the studio techniques employed in Jerzy's film -- which is being shot, as Jerzy's producers keep telling him, on the "most expensive set in Europe." Moreover, he would likely not go about re-creating famous paintings in such a direct, literal fashion as Jerzy does (however beautiful the result); that is, however, without the simultaneous possibility presented by *Passion*'s structure and the reflexive frame-work of the film-within-a-film, to critique the technical practices of studio-based filmmaking and the possibility (and problems) of 'translating' painting into cinema. If this was indeed Godard's intention, however, questions remain as to whether or not he takes full advantage of the opportunity in this case, and, indeed, whether these issues can be significantly addressed on a high level of abstraction within a narrative film simultaneously attempting to speak to so many other non-filmic, non-aesthetic realities.<sup>299</sup> (If not, does Godard metaphorically end up in the same dead-end as Jerzy, who eventually abandons "*Passion*"? And would this amount to an unintended (?) reversal of the Fellini/Guido mirroring in *8 1/2*?) Stylistically, whereas in *Pierrot le fou* and *2 ou 3 choses...* the fragmentary collage style largely rooted in the juxtaposition of discrete shots naturally complimented its thematic multiplicity, in *Passion*, especially outside of the studio, a similar representational inclusiveness grates against its long take, long-shot style and predominantly naturalistic *mise-en-scène*.<sup>300</sup>

Along with Delacroix's *The Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople* (1840) the film's main set-piece, complete with a model city background, and *The Night*

<sup>298</sup> See Jean-Pierre Beauviala and Jean-Luc Godard, "Genesis of a Camera." In *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*, edited by David Sterritt. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, Jackson 1998, 140.

<sup>299</sup> MacCabe says that by the time of *Passion* it is the "dead-ends" of the "Western tradition of art and religion" that "provide the colours for Godard's palette" (MacCabe, 280). If this is indeed his subject, the potential criticism of *Passion* is not that it does not offer clear-cut solutions to intractable dilemmas, ones which can perhaps only be approached dialectically but, rather, that the problems or questions themselves are never clearly stated in the form of narrative fiction but simply assumed.

<sup>300</sup> Godard performs a similar formal and thematic juggling act in *Détective* (1985) with more consistent and satisfying results. In this ostensibly more conventional, but equally fragmented, film, a more effective level of reflexive meaning is provided by the Jean-Pierre Léaud's character's inept video surveillance operation (filming, like Godard, the criminal going on in the Parisian hotel). Although the situation is farcical, Léaud's activity proves a more interesting directorial surrogate for Godard's than does Jerzy's in *Passion*, owing to the former's metaphorical remove from filmmaking, as well *Détective*'s surer narrative tone and tighter focus. This gives further credence to John Orr's suggestion that *Passion* and other reflexive films of the 1980s show that cinematic reflexivity had reached a point where the overt "film-within-the-film" has ceded much of its impact to films in which cinema is addressed by way of other representational forms and more metaphorically 'filmic' situations.

*Watch*, the other paintings recreated in *Passion* include Goya's *The Third of May* (1808), El Greco's *The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception and Saint John* (1585) and Ingres's *The Bather of Valpinçon* (1808). In a few instances the paintings clearly mirror the off-set action, as when Isabelle's (Isabelle Huppert) losing her virginity to Jerzy is inter-cut with the El Greco staging. Such blatant parallels, however, seem more like ironic afterthoughts than part of a grand design, and what ultimately links the art works to the film's action is left for the viewer to ponder. But why the choice of these particular paintings and what connects them together?

In a wide-ranging essay on *Pierrot le fou*, the surrealist poet and novelist Louis Aragon proclaims that "Godard is Delacroix,"<sup>301</sup> and goes on to draw a number of analogies between the painter and filmmaker. Pointing to the primacy of red, often in the form of blood, in *Pierrot* and many of Delacroix's paintings, he notes Godard's and Delacroix's shared monochromatic tendency, and their representation of colour *as* colour, rather than a merely descriptive property of objects. Through Aragon's surrealist lens, Delacroix's dynamic compositions, his full use of every inch of the frame, the visual fragmentation of the action in his paintings (mirroring their depicted violence) that makes "order out of disorder," and the associational nature of the juxtapositions between the figures and inanimate objects, all have cinematic equivalents in *Pierrot*, and are also a precursor to the modernist collage aesthetic central to Godard's films.<sup>302</sup>

Aragon's comparisons are apt, and his essay as a whole is a stimulating analysis of a filmmaker's style by way of a painter's. But beyond the potential stylistic and contextual affinities between Godard and Delacroix, or each of the other painters whose work is re-created in *Passion*, lies their being firmly installed in the canon of European painting and easily recognized. This both makes them likely subjects for a television film (which Jerzy's "*Passion*" is) and conforms to Godard's propensity for re-presenting the images of well known art works in novel ways, in order to call attention

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<sup>301</sup> Aragon, Louis. "What is Art, Jean-Luc Godard?" In *Authors on Film*, edited by Harry M. Geduld. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 145.

<sup>302</sup> Aragon also points to the hostile reception that both Delacroix's and Godard's work met with by traditionalist critics, only for it to be later celebrated in many of the same quarters. Aragon, "What is Art, Jean-Luc Godard?" in *Authors on Film*, 150.

to frequently neglected formal, thematic and historical aspects of the originals. Some of the paintings re-created in *Passion* represent a specific historical event, others have a more generic subject, but taken together they provide a kind of grand overview of the stages of European social and cultural life, as well as the ideological forces shaping Western civilization itself (e.g. El Greco's depiction of Christianity, Delacroix's Crusades as a clash between West and East, etc.). MacCabe argues that the paintings in the film are linked by a common availability to be understood and interpreted with reference to such extra-aesthetic criteria rooted in the depicted subject, whether this pertains to the life of the artist or the work's historical context, such as the burgher politics of Rembrandt's world and the stark Catholicism of El Greco's. For MacCabe, however, who fastens on *Passion's* firmly "modernist" sensibility, the film then rejects such readily available interpretations. For these would reflect a traditional reduction of artistic significance to representation at the expense of form. Thus

...*Passion* is not interested in the meanings of these paintings. It is interested in their organization of space and in the light which can render the everyday reality of the sun over Lake Geneva, or the movement of Isabelle Huppert as she works in the factory, just as luminous.<sup>303</sup>

Certainly with respect to the *tableaux*, Godard does focus a great deal of attention on the formal properties of the image in *Passion*. When judged against the original works, many of Godard and Coutard's re-creations (in collaboration with the film's art designers) achieve remarkable effects of color and texture. These include the light falling on the burnished metal of the muskets the soldiers hold in the *Night Watch*, the sculptured texture of El Greco's robes, the surface contrast between the skin of the model's back and a crimson towel in Ingres's *Bather*, to cite a few examples. Yet, although there are also some memorable natural-light compositions in the film's non-studio locations, as well as startling natural imagery in its opening, in sharp contrast to the vibrant treatment of the paintings, a number of the sequences shot outside of the studio, including those in the factory and in and around the hotel, are visually 'flat' by

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<sup>303</sup> MacCabe, *Godard: A portrait of the artist at 70*, 279.

Godard's standards, drained of potentially expressive light and colour. In general, the *mise-en-scène* outside of Jerzy's studio is unremarkable, certainly in comparison with Godard's sixties films, and seems to strive for a naturalism verging on the banal. While not wholly undermining MacCabe's suggested formal analogy at work in the film between 'art' as embodied by the *tableaux* and the representation of quotidian life, this suggests, at least, that his interpretation rests on an over-generalization. In this respect the advice offered at the beginning of the film, to focus on the human element of the *tableaux* rather than on their formal features exclusively should perhaps be taken at face value, and should hold true not just for Jerzy's "*Passion*" but for the film itself.

MacCabe arrives at his 'formalist' interpretation of the *tableaux*, and the film as a whole, via his wider reading of *Passion* as a metaphor for the "failure of politics" and Godard's reflexive retreat from political subjects into formal abstraction: having for years examined issues of cinematic representation and the conditions of film production and distribution, *Passion* marks a return to an interest in the fundamental physical properties of the film image as conceived apart from, or other than, its content. Surely in comparison with Godard's films of the seventies, both *Passion* and his subsequent *Prénom: Carmen* show a renewed concern with visual expression seemingly "for its own sake"- just as they exhibit a renewed concern with character and narrative, however oblique. But whatever the content-heavy "meanings" of the paintings in *Passion*, which MacCabe sees Godard rejecting, might be, it is simplistic to see him divorcing, or intending to divorce, form from content here (even is this divorce is couched in dialectical terms). Godard's entire cinematic practice has been centered on showing that such a separation is an impossibility, prevented by both the photographic and temporal nature of the film medium and the ethos of the authentic and committed filmmaker. This is reflected in Jerzy's comment (an echo of Godard's own statements) that the director has, and must not shy away from, the "hard *task of representing everything*." Indeed, the higher-level inseparability of form and content in cinema, and all representational art, is something that Godard's referencing of painting, both as image and subject matter, reinforces (often in a dialectical manner), in all of the films

we have looked at. And if Godard's use of painting and its history has any consistent 'moral,' it is surely this.

Although it is never made entirely clear, for at no point in the film is it revealed exactly how the *tableaux* re-creations are to be finally presented in Jerzy's film, they appear to be photographed by his cameras both still and in motion. If for no other reason than convention would dictate, Godard certainly has no interest in showing these paintings as static *tableaux*, like waxwork exhibitions, but as dynamic, shifting realities possessing the same capacity for deflecting the camera's direct gaze as his characters. Thus on closer examination the re-creations do not attempt to reproduce the paintings down to the last details, but are sketches, short-hand interpretations of their form and action, in many cases picking-up on a few specific areas of each of the compositions and magnifying it. This is most noticeable in the Delacroix re-enactment, with its grieving Turk woman in the foreground mourning over a dead body. With head bowed and her back to the viewer/camera (avoiding it as do Hannah and Isabelle, when Jerzy attempts to film them or persuade Hannah to look at her image on screen) this figure is central in the recreation: with Jerzy's camera's rolling, she dramatically drops into the foreground of the *tableau* (and Godard's shot), in *deus-ex-machina* fashion from a platform lowered onto the set, in one of the film's most evocative moments. In Delacroix's actual painting, however, this figure, proportionally much smaller, occupies the right foreground. Although the viewer's eye, following the circular sweep of the painting's action from left to right eventually comes to rest on her, she is by no means the dominant focal point that she becomes in *Passion*.

If one sought a symbolic 'reading' of this change of emphasis through the image's framing, and its re-focusing on the anonymous female victim of historical forces, it could no doubt be related to the film's over-arching concerns with the politics of sexual relations and the representation of women, fore-grounded in Jerzy's ambivalent personal and working relationship with Hannah and Isabelle. Contrary to MacCabe's view, this suggests there is some attempt in the film, whether or not successful, to bring the content of the paintings to bear on extra-aesthetic, socio-cultural issues. Indeed, much more than a formal analogy between the painting's re-creation

and the film's visual representation of the world outside of the studio, what is explicitly stressed are the links between the workings of Jerzy's production and the factory/hotel worker's dispute. (Clear parallels, for example, are drawn between Jerzy and the film crew's repressive treatment of the extras on the set, and the factory workers oppression at the hand of Piccoli's character, often in slapstick fashion, as the police chasing Isabelle around the factory is later mirrored by Jerzy's crew wrestling with a number of unruly extras.) Rather than Godard retreating from the concerns of his seventies films in *Passion*, it is often the paintings themselves (or their re-creation), as *aesthetic* realities, which are pushed to the periphery of the film's narrative.

*Day for Night* plays with the viewer not knowing at certain points if an action unfolding on the screen is 'real' or fictional; that is, whether or not a given event is staged as part of the film being shot is often not telegraphed to the viewer initially, but this is always subsequently revealed. In *Passion* Godard refuses to play this game of only temporarily delaying or withholding the real or fictional status of the film's events on a 'scene by scene' basis, thereby upholding the clear-cut reality/fiction dichotomy that such resolution for the viewer implies. Instead, what often blurs in the *mise-en-scène* is the real or make-believe status of what occurs within the shot and within the context of the re-creations themselves. Jerzy's film is, after all, being made for television and utilizes a standard multiple-camera set-up, ensuring that one action is being simultaneously filmed from multiple viewpoints, later to be cut together. In the bustle of the on-set sequences, as filmed by Godard, the viewer remains unsure to the end whether much of the seemingly chaotic occurring in and around the re-creations is intended as part of Jerzy's "*Passion*" or not. More importantly, and emblematic of Godard's filmmaking, since Jerzy's cameras in many cases appear to keep rolling after the *tableaux* have been broken up, or some new production disaster has ensued, the 'real' is continuously being fed into the filmic fiction. In one extraordinary long take sequence during the re-creation of Delacroix's *Constantinople*, the actors on horseback, in the role of the Crusaders overtaking the city's women, chase down one of the female models (a deaf-mute girl discovered at the factory where Isabelle works), who may just

as well be in reality trying to escape from the anarchic frenzy of the circus-like set over which Jerzy has lost control.

The shooting of Jerzy's "*Passion*" with its live-television aesthetic highlights Godard's perennial emphasis on capturing the durational unfolding of the 'pro-filmic' event, both as it is being recorded and as it is being effected by the act of that recording, much more than standard on-camera film shoot would, with its constant stopping and starting. This reflects not only on Godard's interest in television in the 1970s, but also his use of video technology, beginning in earnest in the 1980s and continuing to the present. He acknowledges its greater possibilities for both entering into the moving image as it is actually being created/recorded and subsequently manipulating it (actual video footage, in the form of the screen tests for Jerzy's actors is, in fact, incorporated into a number of sequences in the film).

Godard's own camera acts as a counter-point to Jerzy's, in certain ways akin to Chris Marker's shadowing of Kurosawa's in *A.K.*, a remarkable on-set documentary made during the latter's shooting of *Ran*. In Marker's hands the representation of seemingly trivial, behind-the-scenes realities, ones which appear to hover on the periphery of *Ran*'s making, are slowly revealed as integral to Kurosawa's on-screen vision. The re-creations in *Passion* are shown mostly as works-in-progress, with their lighting being adjusted, costumes retouched, the models taking breaks, etc..., thus capturing the process of staging the *tableaux* as much as their "performance." This reminds the viewer of each referenced painting's own origins in the studio, and the artist's use of life-models in each case. The mere presentation of paintings as *tableaux*, marks a decisive break from Godard's referencing of painting earlier in his career, where the emphasis always lay on the art work as a cultural object, finished and released to its audience, and therefore available for quotation and borrowing, or, in Godard's words, the "plagiarism" that he sees as healthy for art.<sup>304</sup>

As Godard's camera travels from one painting's re-creation to another, in various stages of completion, 'characters' from one *tableau* wander into neighboring

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<sup>304</sup> Youngblood, "Jean-Luc Godard: No Difference Between Life and Cinema," in *Jean-Luc Godard Interviews*, 23.

ones, creating odd juxtapositions of costume and historical period, thereby bringing the paintings themselves (rather than just their simulation) into associational collision. As a result, in *Passion* the collage aesthetic of films like *Pierrot le fou* enters by way of the body (i.e., of the models who, remaining in costume, signify the works they are embodying) into the represented world of the film. This live-action art-historical juxtaposition, filming painting as performance, which also plays with the contrast between the 'fictional' status of a painting's depictions in contrast to that of cinema - where the fictional character and the actor playing it are physically identical - anticipates Peter Greenaway's later "museum" films. The models that perform the paintings are both mere props in their realization, yet also individuals rebelling against Jerzy's harsh treatment of them as such. Here again the reflexive theme of cinematic prostitution surfaces, depicted also in Jerzy's less than merely professional interest in his actresses and his potential use of his private off-screen relationships with them as material for his film.

One further form of art reference and cross-reference is added to the mix in *Passion*. At one point, the camera pans from the Delacroix recreation to one of the crew members. In an echo of Ferdinand's Velasquez reading in *Pierrot*, the man shows his young daughter reproductions of Delacroix's work in a monograph while reading quotations from the painter. Delacroix's aphorism, concerning light, shadow and the 'truth' of painting, prompts us, as viewers, to reappraise the film's *tableaux vivants*. Here painting's direct recreation in the *mise-en-scène* and its referencing in the dialogue/voice-over are conjoined. Instead of painting being a non-diegetic counterpoint to the live action in the form of insert shots, as a function of editing, as often occurs in *Pierrot*, here paintings and the film's dramatic action is fused in the uninterrupted continuity of the image through camera movement and a theatrical staging. (Thus the collage properties of Godard's mid-to-late sixties films, which, as has been noted, are rooted in a "dialectic of materials" played out in an abstract space, are here transferred to the one-take image grounded in a concrete space, and tied to its unfolding, internal, duration.) This sequence integrates painting into film in a multi-layered, structurally interesting manner, one which sheds new light on both art forms,

and builds on the potentials of *Passion's* reflexive design which are otherwise blunted by the film's half-hearted narrative realization and its scatter-shot satire.

As it is depicted, the casting of Jerzy's *Passion* is determined less by his conception of the film than the by paintings themselves - one young actress is deemed "too pretty for El Greco" – which, rather than the director, seem to be driving the otherwise aimless project. In what can be viewed as an allegory of adaptation, the problem the filmmaker faces in adapting the work of other artists in other media, be they paintings or novels, Godard shows the absurdity of this situation, in the same way that *Le mépris* underscored the quixotic nature of adapting Homer for the screen in a literal fashion. *Passion* suggests that in spite of the surface beauty of the re-creations, the problems for Jerzy's film comes in the *a-priori* misguided attempt to literally translate painting into cinematic terms, just as many films fail in trying to remain stylistically 'true' to the novels on which they are based, something, as Richard Roud notes, Godard always made a point of avoiding. The alternative, one which Godard attempts to adopt in *Passion*, as he has in other films, is to create a more critical dialogue between the art forms, inevitably entailing aesthetic losses and gains on both sides. Although the re-creations give the lie to the notion that painting and film can have no common currency on the level of the image, predictably it is when narrative is involved that, for both Jerzy and Godard, the problems arise. From this point of view, the reflexive pairing of Godard/Jerzy arrives, by different means, at the same conclusion as Ruiz and the Collector in *L'Hypothèse*, discussed earlier. It is ultimately realized that the *tableaux* represents the limit to which the cinematic interaction with painting can be pushed in a certain literal direction, and is ultimately something of a dead-end or holding pattern.

Despite MacCabe's suggestion to the contrary, Godard in *Passion* is not content with surrendering to the purely aesthetic at the expense of the conceptual (even if this may be forced on him, as MacCabe maintains, by the late-twentieth century artistic predicament.) The result is that his presentation of the *tableaux*, and the integration of the paintings into the film on both a formal and thematic level, is strangely divided, marked by the contradiction in Godard's cinema between the Bazinian pull of the image

as an in-itself good, an access to a truth beyond the filmmaker's conscious intention, and a desire to radically undermine it at every moment through direct subjective intervention, what Orson Welles figuratively referred to as Godard's "marvelous" and "anarchistic," "contempt for the medium."<sup>305</sup> Although it is this very tension between what could be termed a Bazinian transparency to the real and a formalist reflexivity, drawing in large measure on both Brecht and modernist painting, which gives Godard's sixties films their great vitality, in *Passion* it threatens to become an unbridgeable gap derailing the film's reflexive project. There is some truth in Orr's contention that for a film so directly concerned with art, painting as a reflexive subject strangely recedes into the background in *Passion*, the elaborate re-creations threatening to become little more than a spectacle that can do little to fill holes in a patchwork quilt of other concerns and interests.

*Passion's* other merits aside, from this standpoint the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* films prove the more wholly successful reflexive combination of painting and the moving image in Godard's later work. As opposed to being an ostensible subject, one literally staged for the camera, here, on one level, painting is tangential to the serial film's main narrative discourse – the story of the evolution of cinema as both an art form and a mode of historical reflection/understanding. In this role, the referenced paintings act in supplementary fashion, either echoing the content of the film footage, or as a pointed contrast to cinematic representation, whose virtues and limitations, it is suggested, arise from conditions unique to the film medium. Simultaneously, however, paintings, or their images, comprise part of the actual substance of *Histoire(s) du cinéma's* dynamic video image, as analysed in some detail by Godard and Ishaghpour in their dialogue/critical companion to the multi-part film. In this respect, in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, film and painting are placed on an equal presentational footing, with video providing a less arbitrary and more stylistically 'organic' or cohesive platform for their collision, than is present in *Passion* in the form of the *tableaux*. With this visual

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<sup>305</sup> Welles, Orson and Peter, *This is Orson Welles*, edited by Jonathan Rosenbaum. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998, 139.

foundation in place, Godard is able, it could be argued, to dialectically explore the two art forms in a more direct and more effective fashion.

In summary, we have seen how throughout his career Godard's changing conception of *seeing-with cinema* filmmaking has revolutionized the formal and thematic use of painting within a film's world. Characteristically, rather than pursuing this artistic 'project' independently of other concerns with film form and representation, Godard has chosen to embed it within varying models of reflexive cinema. Although this has met with equally varying degrees of success from film to film (and style to style), not only has it always pushed against the boundaries of current film practice, but it has also forced its audience (including film theorists and art historians) to conceive the relation between art and film in new ways. In addition, by engaging with the history of art via the new technologies that have become available to the filmmaker over the past forty years, Godard has been able to move the interaction between film and the visual arts forward: such looking towards the possible future(s) of the film medium, on the one hand, and back at its history, on the other, is another defining trait of *seeing-with cinema* filmmaking. In now turning to Tarkovsky we will see a very different type of cinematic engagement with art, yet one which equally evolved in the course of a long filmmaking career. As in the case of Godard, tracing the presence of art from film to film chronologically will allow us to extrapolate those characteristic features of Tarkovsky's *seeing-through cinema* which it persuasively manifests.

#### Chapter 4: Andrei Tarkovsky: Art, Time and Subjectivity

Due to the prominence of well known paintings and drawings in Tarkovsky's films, from his first feature, *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), to his last, *The Sacrifice* (1986), more has been written about his use of art than any other post-1960 filmmaker, with only the possible exception of Godard. Within the growing body of scholarly literature on Tarkovsky's cinema, particularly in English, this discussion of art has largely been confined to cataloguing the works that appear in the films or has focused on direct parallels between the styles of the artists that Tarkovsky represents and his own 'painterly' images. By now it is clear *which* art works Tarkovsky references and although the second approach has its merits, it is also problematic in relation to both his *oeuvre* and to particular films (as I will discuss with respect to *Andrei Rublev* [1966]). Comparatively less attention has been devoted to the complex interactions that exist between the art images present within the highly 'organic' world of Tarkovsky's films and what surrounds them: the perceptions and actions of the characters, the narrative structure in which they are situated, and, in some cases, the 'non-diegetic' material (documentary footage, elements of the soundtrack, other two-dimensional imagery) with which they are juxtaposed. There are, however, notable exceptions to these tendencies in Tarkovsky scholarship, and analyses of art in his films which are more sympathetic to the methods and aims of the present study. Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie's *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, which includes a brief but significant sub-chapter on Tarkovsky and the visual arts, is particularly good at suggesting possible philosophical and aesthetic affinities between the director and the artists he references, ones which go beyond what surface similarities may, or may not, exist between these works and his film images.<sup>306</sup> Maya Turovskaya's *Andrei Tarkovsky* provides an equally well-rounded perspective on Tarkovsky's use of art that

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<sup>306</sup> Johnson, Vida T and Graham Petrie. *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994.

is careful not to overly divorce form from content.<sup>307</sup> The general portrait of Tarkovsky as a filmmaker that emerges from these two balanced studies, as a director who combines aspects of both a 'realist' and 'formalist' aesthetic in pursuit of his intensely visual and spiritual art, partly through the representation of art works, is one with which I am in agreement.<sup>308</sup> Given their relevance to my project, I will draw on both of these studies, as well as Tarkovsky's own writings on film collected in *Sculpting in Time*,<sup>309</sup> as I look closely at three films - *Andrei Rublev*, *Mirror*, and *The Sacrifice*. These films are examined through the lens provided by the *seeing-with/seeing-through cinema* distinction, as well as the preceding analysis of art and reflexivity in the films of Godard and other directors. These films, in which the presence of art is especially conjoined with the representation of time and subjectivity, confirm Tarkovsky as a paradigmatic *seeing-through cinema* filmmaker, as clearly as the representation of painting in the films of Jean Luc Godard that we have considered mark him as a *seeing-with cinema auteur*.

#### II. 4.1 Between Realism and Formalism: *Andrei Rublev* as 'Iconic' Cinema?

On one common interpretation Tarkovsky's cinematic image is a filmic translation of the style of Russian icon painting. Peter Greene calls Tarkovsky "...an icon painter in film."<sup>310</sup> Of course, with regard to *Andrei Rublev*, a film depicting the life of a fifteenth century Russian icon and fresco painter, it is clear why a number of writers pursue this analogy. For Dalle Vache, the "iconic" nature of Tarkovsky's images distinguishes his cinematic "conception" of painting from that of Godard, with which she contrasts it, opposing Godard's "iconoclastic avant-garde stance," to the "conservative orientation

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<sup>307</sup> Turovskaya, Maya. *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*. Translated by Natasha Ward. London: Faber and Faber, 1989.

<sup>308</sup> Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 125.

<sup>309</sup> Tarkovsky, Andrei. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, Translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

<sup>310</sup> Greene, Peter. *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest*. London: MacMillan Press, 1993, 1.

and iconophilic project” of Tarkovsky’s *Rublev*.<sup>311</sup> Although the architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa is more measured in directly equating Tarkovsky’s style in *Andrei Rublev* and other films with icons - pointing out some contrasting influences at work in his *mise-en-scène* – he also forwards this interpretation. In addition, Pallasmaa finds in Tarkovsky’s films another pronounced non-Western artistic influence, that of traditional Japanese painting.<sup>312</sup>

There are a number of features of Tarkovsky’s *mise-en-scène* in *Andrei Rublev* and other films, that Dalle Vache, Pallasmaa and other writers point to as evidence of its affinity with Russian icon painting and/or a related ‘rejection’ of Western perspective-oriented representation. Dalle Vache maintains that Tarkovsky’s cinematic image is “conceived more as a door leading to the soul and less as a window open onto the world, reversing the well known metaphor associated with Albertinian perspective and Renaissance painting,” and that Tarkovsky’s visual style, “...by avoiding windows as openings onto narrative developments and using doors instead to frame the arrival of new characters...summons otherworldly presences.”<sup>313</sup> While it is true that in *Andrei Rublev* and other films Tarkovsky uses doors as framing devices, he also films through windows. And even if this were not the case, Dalle Vache’s argument for such a “reversal” of the window motif/metaphor in Renaissance painting is rather attenuated. Pallasmaa actually suggests the opposite: rather than distancing Tarkovsky from Western painting on this point, he holds that the Russian director shares with Renaissance perspective painters a symmetrical sense of framing, and that Tarkovsky’s use of windows, mirrors and doorways as framing devices is reminiscent of “Fra Angelico, Bellini, Botticelli and other quattrocento painters.”<sup>314</sup> Yet, just as Dalle Vache points to the “flatness of Tarkovsky’s compositions and its decontextualization of

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<sup>311</sup> Dalle Vache, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film*, 7. Beyond their respective use of painting, Dalle Vache is not alone in contrasting Godard and Tarkovsky. Le Fanu argues that Tarkovsky “in his belief in the *necessary connection* between language and truth, stands at the opposite pole to a modernist like Godard” (Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 82) and that given his spiritual concerns, “his work opens up profoundly different vista from those suggested by, say, the secular radicalism of artists like Godard and Fassbinder” (Le Fanu, 142 ).

<sup>312</sup> Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*. Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2001, 70.

<sup>313</sup> Dalle Vache, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film*, 147-8.

<sup>314</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*, 71.

disparate elements” which recalls icon paintings “habitual rejection of depth,”<sup>315</sup> Pallasmaa suggests that Tarkovsky’s “compressed space also bears a strong resemblance with the representational canon of icon painting.”<sup>316</sup> In Pallasmaa’s view, the organization of space in Tarkovsky’s shots is also similar to Japanese painting, where space is depicted in planes rather than through perspectival recession; an “archaism of spatial representation” which serves to “flatten the scene into a two dimensional image, a painting.”<sup>317</sup> Pallasmaa sees this, together with the frequent diffusion of solid objects in mists and colors in Tarkovsky’s films (a prominent feature of both Japanese painting and the films of Kurosawa, an acknowledged influence on Tarkovsky), as well as the use of telephoto lenses, perpendicular framing and slow motion, as part of a sustained strategy to “reduce realism and depth, and emphasize pictorial flatness.”<sup>318</sup>

In theory, these analogies with non-Western painting, backed up by reference to specific filmic techniques, sound quite convincing. When one looks more closely at Tarkovsky’s actual use of each of the techniques that these writers focus on, however, rather than cataloging the visual effect which they are conventionally assumed to produce, such characterizations are misleading. On the question of relative depth, a film image can, like a representational painting, maximize or diminish a sense of three dimensionality in a number of different ways and a cinematic image is not *necessarily* more or less ‘painterly’ owing solely to its relative two dimensionality. For instance, the use of telephoto lenses in *Andrei Rublev*, which Dalle Vache and Pallasmaa draw attention to, does in-itself diminish the represented depth of the image in one apparent form, as is suggested.<sup>319</sup> Yet Tarkovsky’s use of zooms, sharp black and white contrasts, a strong foreground presence and overlapping movement within the frame - all techniques which are well known in film, photography and painting to cue depth as

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<sup>315</sup> Dalle Vache, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film*, 150.

<sup>316</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*, 75.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>319</sup> Owing to their optics, telephoto lenses cause the foreground and background of the photographic image to appear closer together than the human eye (and lenses of focal lengths that better approximate it) would normally perceive the same scene.

either a compliment to mathematical perspective or apart from it - reinstate a strong sense or 'illusion' of three-dimensional depth in other ways. And although it is true that in Tarkovsky's *mise-en-scène* the background elements of the shot are often brought forward, the strong presence of people and objects in the foreground in constant motion in relation to it, and the perpetual flux of the image's distinct focal planes in relation to one and another, ensures that the images on the screen are never 'flattened' or rendered graphic, in the way they often are in Godard's films, for instance. (And Godard achieves such an effect, it must be added, largely *without* the use of telephoto lenses.)

In *Andrei Rublev* the highly mobile camera roams restlessly through the country side and interiors alike. This peripatetic camera coupled with the alternating use of zooms and deep-focus, carves out successive picture planes, like a series of images being constantly superimposed over one and another without the use of dissolves, in a kind of stereoscopic effect. Together with the movement of the actors in the frame, the resulting dramatic foreground/mid-ground/background dynamic (even allowing for the generally perpendicular movement in the shot which Pallasmaa notes), as opposed to denying depth perception (at least in relative terms) is like Western perspective painting, founded upon it. Many of Tarkovsky's most startling sequence shots, the pagan celebration in *Andrei Rublev*, the burning barn in *Mirror*, the famous seven minute long take of the house on fire at the end of *The Sacrifice*, all depend on a pronounced perception of depth and simultaneous movement on different planes of the film image, which, *experientially*, at least, does not correspond to the "shallow" or "two-dimensional" characterization of it; just as the majority of Tarkovsky's multi-layered sequence-shots offer little support for the "suppression of dynamic effect" that Pallasmaa finds in Tarkovsky's cinema. Instead, these attributes of Tarkovsky's images further corroborate Orr's account of Tarkovsky's "meta-modern" filmmaking (or the "cinema of wonder") founded on an overall depth of field and the visually dynamic shot.<sup>320</sup> In *Andrei Rublev* the dynamic framing and composition seems a direct result of the action unfolding before the camera rather than it being determined by, and held

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<sup>320</sup> See Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 65, 67-73.

within, an abstract spatial grid or frame. In this respect, the composition and framing in Tarkovsky's cinema is quite different from that not only of most Renaissance painters, but of most painters in general.<sup>321</sup> (Tarkovsky, in fact, speaks out against what he perceives as "the facile convention that equates the frame of a shot and of a canvas."<sup>322</sup>)

In a wider sense, it is problematic to see either Russian icons (with their so-called 'reverse perspective') or traditional Japanese painting as somehow actively in opposition to Western perspective painting. As Nelson Goodman suggests as part of his wider critique of the "innocent-eye" view of artistic representation, in which he stresses its conventionality and relativity rather than naturalism, this notion risks a simplistic divorce of style from subject or content.<sup>323</sup> Goodman argues persuasively that it is misleading to think of an artist taking a pre-formed subject and choosing to represent it according to one style or another, as one would pour the same mixture into one mould or another.<sup>324</sup> An artistic style is instead part and parcel of a unique way of conceiving the visual world in symbolic terms and of representing it in accordance with that schema. When discussing the relation between Western painting and the icon in *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky too refuses to separate form from content, in advocating the theory of Pavel Florensky that Russian icon painters were both familiar with, and capable of using, Western perspective, but could happily "ignore" it, as it was not essential to the particular "spiritual problems" with which their art was concerned, that is, their unique way of conceiving the world *artistically* and of representing it on a two dimensional surface.<sup>325</sup> Western perspective painting and Russian icons, or traditional Japanese painting, all represent different, incommensurable ways of ordering space, but

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<sup>321</sup> In effect, both Dalle Vache and Pallasmaa attempt to make Tarkovsky's a formalist by making him an anti-realist, but on an implied definition of 'realism' that glosses its complex and often contradictory cinematic manifestations. If Tarkovsky is not a 'realist' on many common understandings of the term, his deviation from realist theories and practices are not rooted only, or mainly, in the particular shots, or techniques, that Dalle Vache and Pallasmaa point to, but rather what happens *between* them and the movement within and without the frame.

<sup>322</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 70.

<sup>323</sup> See Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*, 23.

<sup>324</sup> "In more ways than one, subject is involved in style. For this and other reasons I cannot subscribe to the received opinion that style depends on upon an artist's conscious choice among alternatives" (Goodman, 23).

<sup>325</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 82.

not necessarily rival or antagonistic ones, as they do not share a common symbolic or aesthetic ground of presuppositions on which to compete. And something similar can be said of Tarkovsky's *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking, in so far as it does deviate from the received visual conventions of Western representational painting, as well as that of those film styles which may be indebted to it.

Moreover, Dalle Vache and Pallasmaa's interpretation of Tarkovsky reflects a curious attempt on the part of a number of critics and theorists to "de-Westernize" his cinema, pitting it against both the visual traditions of Western film and representational art: a tradition embodied by the very paintings of the Renaissance masters whose works fill Tarkovsky's films (ironically more than those of any Western European filmmaker) and for whom the director expresses profound admiration in writings and interviews. On this view Tarkovsky is cast as kind of anti-Western reactionary artist, perpetually looking backward for inspiration, whereas, in fact, he actively borrows from the forms and techniques of post-1960 modernist cinema. As original as Tarkovsky's films are, they are clearly indebted to Antonioni and *Persona*-era Bergman, for instance, as much as to the Japanese cinema of Mizoguchi and Kurwosawa, merging all of these influences in a unique style which combines both Western and Eastern cinematic and artistic traditions.<sup>326</sup> This is not to denigrate the significant influence of Soviet and Eastern European film on Tarkovsky's cinema - the later works of Eisenstein, the films of Dovzhenko and the Georgian director Sergei Parajanov, among others - nor Eastern traditions in the visual and graphic arts (or, for that matter, the social and historical realities shaping the Eastern Bloc and all of its artistic output that Orr draws attention to), but to put this in a more balanced perspective.<sup>327</sup> In fact, the icon-based film style that Dalle Vache and Pallasmaa attribute to Tarkovsky actually applies much more

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<sup>326</sup> Bresson and Buñuel are other Western *auteurs* who Tarkovsky has claimed as a profound influence. See Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 28.

<sup>327</sup> With respect to the relation between the icon and film, it is important to note that in an historical context Eastern icon painters were viewed as 'writers,' as much as painters (in a modern sense) and that the icon image was bound to storytelling practice. Perhaps some deeper connection exists between this aspect of icon tradition and Tarkovsky's cinema, one that relates as much to narrative as to *mise-en-scene* in-itself, and one that is more convincing than the suggested analogy between icons and Tarkovsky's visual style. Interestingly, many of the prominent Russian interpreters of Tarkovsky *do not* dwell on the icon analogy. In her excellent study, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, Maya Turovskaya, a friend and colleague of Tarkovsky, avoids drawing such parallels.

directly, and convincingly, to the later films of Parajanov, whom Tarkovsky knew and admired, particularly *The Colour of Pomegranates* (1968). *The Colour of Pomegranates* is truly 'two dimensional' in its visual sensibility, made up of hieratic *tableaux* the use of which does appear to constitute some sort of complete rejection of, or alternative to, not only perspective conventions in Western art and film, but also conventional cinematic narrative in a way in which Tarkovsky's films clearly do not.

When taking both form and content into due account, the more general comparison that Dalle Vache and, to some extent, Pallasmaa, make between the icon as representing a direct access to a metaphysical reality without reflexive visual mediation, and Tarkovsky's image as 'transparent' to an otherwise perceptually inaccessible realm of experience, seems largely true. Mark Le Fanu claims that while it is tempting to ask if Tarkovsky is attempting to emulate "the conditions and achievements" of the Russian icon form in *Andrei Rublev*, this cannot be a "matter of surface similarity."<sup>328</sup> But he too draws a connection between an apparent lack of interest in "psychological truth" in *Andrei Rublev*, as this is revealed on the surface, and a deeper "spiritual" truth which icons manifest.<sup>329</sup> If this suggested supra-aesthetic relation between Tarkovsky's cinema and the icon exists, as a function of what in some mysterious way transcends the 'merely' perceptual, it is fully in line with my classification of Tarkovsky as a *seeing-through cinema* filmmaker. However, the direct analogies between his *mise-en-scène* and the icon form, while perhaps convenient for making this case, can be pushed much too far. In effect, both Dalle Vache and Pallasmaa implicitly appeal to a static model of Tarkovsky's cinema, one which fails to fully take into account both the dynamic interplay of form and content and a film perceived as an experiential whole unfolding in time. For the purposes of analysis, they regard the film shot as if it were a *still*, isolated from what comes before and after, rather than a dynamic image unfolding and apprehended in time. Dissecting a film in this manner, which in this case at least can be compared with the abstract fragmentation that results from trying to spatially represent

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<sup>328</sup> Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 52. Le Fanu writes that whereas the icon is an art of stillness, the film camera "constantly moves, queries, sets up relationships" (Le Fanu, 52).

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

lived time *as duration* (i.e., as composed of moments, episodes, or any other discrete and separable parts) as famously criticised by Henri Bergson, is always a temptation in theorising potential relations between the moving image of cinema and static painting.<sup>330</sup> However problematic it may be generally, such an atomistic approach is particularly inappropriate with respect to Tarkovsky's 'holistic' cinema, anchored as it is in the mutual inter-dependence of objects and events changing through time.

Although no analysis of a filmmaker's work should be entirely governed by their own comments on it, in relation to these attempts to push Tarkovsky's *mise-en-scène* into conformity with a two-dimensional artistic form or style, we should perhaps take seriously both Tarkovsky's rejection of any film theory or practice that conceives the discrete film shot in isolation from the sequence and his condemnation of "tableaux" style cinema, which he feels results in an "empty" and "pretentious" painting-cinema "hybrid."<sup>331</sup> In discussing the evolving "autonomy" of cinema from the other arts with which it was initially welded to, Tarkovsky writes disparagingly of "...trying to adapt the features of other art forms onto the screen," something which will "always deprive the film of what is distinctly cinematic."<sup>332</sup> Tarkovsky, like Herzog, maintains that he does not recreate specific paintings in his films. It is in this context that, with reference to *Andrei Rublev*, he writes that he deliberately *avoided* patterning the visuals of the film on Russian icon paintings, which would have resulted in a visual style "reminiscent of miniatures or icons of the period," but which is "not the right way for cinema."<sup>333</sup> Instead, Tarkovsky insists on his hope that the cinematography of *Andrei Rublev* is the "antithesis of the revived painting."<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> See Henri Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by T.E. Hulme. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999, 30-31.

<sup>331</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 64.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> Both Dalle Vache and Pallasmaa fail to acknowledge this statement. Tarkovsky is also quoted as saying "If we had decided to stick to a re-creation of artistic tradition, to the world of painting of that time, then we would have given birth to a stylised and artificial medieval Russian reality...One of the things we were aiming for in our work was to re-create the *real* world of the fifteenth century for the audiences of today; in other words, to show that world in such a way that they could really *feel* what would otherwise be a shadowy world of museums and monuments" (Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, 50).

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Tarkovsky's rejection of the influence of painting on his own cinema, *on the level of the image*, has a number of possible explanations. One is a general reluctance, which, as we have seen, is shared with other *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers, to acknowledge or discuss the direct influence of other visual artists on his films, be they painters or filmmakers, with respect to specific compositions or sequences - even when this influence may be clearly present.<sup>335</sup> But there are other reasons for Tarkovsky's skepticism of cinema which attempts to use the forms and techniques of painting, ones that are directly related to both the nature of his film style and the way in which it positions the viewer in relation to the cinematic world.

Tarkovsky's cinema is predicated on the phenomenological 'three-dimensionality' of the cinematic image. After all, it is "sculpting" that is his chosen metaphor for cinema. Sculpting "in time," of course, but time in Tarkovsky's cinema is not conceived, or articulated, as distinct from space (in the way that it is in Eisenstein's early montage films, for example). Tarkovsky's films create a fully rounded experiential reality in which the viewer is perceptually and imaginatively immersed. As such they are radically distinct from films that present an overtly reflexive, surface-based cinematic image *as image*, stress the separation between the seer and the seen at the expense of their identity, and resist such imaginative entrance on the part of the viewer. In this and other respects, Tarkovsky's cinema is not quite as far from the 'realism' advocated by André Bazin as one might expect.<sup>336</sup> With the partial exception of *Mirror*, Tarkovsky films firmly maintain a spatial-temporal continuity rooted in the *plan-séquences*, taken to a long-take extreme in his last three films (*Stalker*, *Nostalgia*,

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<sup>335</sup> With respect to the influence on his work of other filmmakers, Johnson and Petrie suggest, echoing Corrigan's comments on Herzog, that "...Tarkovsky was always wary of displaying direct indebtedness to any another director, and his films remain, as he would have wanted them to be, *sui generis*" (Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 28)

<sup>336</sup> Dalle Vache maintains that "although Tarkovsky is likely to be sympathetic to Bazin's philosophy of the image," he "differs from the French theorist to the extent that, because he has aligned his filmmaking with the religious practice of Russian icon painting, realism for him cannot be just a style or an aesthetic mediation between the imaginary and the documentary" (Dalle Vache, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is used in Film*, 140). Yet for Bazin, as for Kracauer, "realism" is not posited as just *one* style among others, but *the* authentic style for capturing the ontological ambiguity of the visible/material world. Equally, it is unlikely that the metaphysical impulse defining Tarkovsky's cinema is wholly the result of the influence of icon painting, even if this influence is recognized as a significant one.

and *The Sacrifice*). Rather than fragment space and time in the 'modernist' manner of Godard and Resnais, Tarkovsky perceptually unifies it to a degree well beyond that which one perceives in the course of 'normal' or everyday perception, and thus his cinema can be seen as an extreme heightening or amplification of Bazinian principles rather than their rejection.<sup>337</sup> The unity of time, place and action, usually associated with the realism identified (and advocated) by Bazin is one which Tarkovsky adapts to his own stylized ends to create a stable and, from the viewer's perspective, 'objective' perceptual continuum, one which in turn *allows for* seamless changes of time and place from within, rather than with-out, the image. Yet these transitions occur within the highly *subjective* context of a character's heightened perception of the world around them, often in the form of dream, memory or vision.<sup>338</sup>

For Bazin the 'positive' "ontological" or metaphysical ambiguity of the "real" is revealed only in so far as the filmmaker's formal activity in shaping the image stays within certain limits. These are limits laid down by the nature of the film medium as mechanical, or optical-chemical representation, and its irreducible photographic illusionism.<sup>339</sup> What Tarkovsky rejects, as a filmmaker rooted in the transparency of metaphysical vision, is any medium essentialism which in theory or practice takes away the expressive capability of the filmmaker as artist and cedes it to the camera, as Bazin, in effect, does. For Tarkovsky, as for Bazin, cinema is an art form which, in Tarkovsky's words, uses "materials given by nature itself" and operates "*with*" and not against "reality."<sup>340</sup> And by focusing on cinema as 'sculpture' rather than photography, Tarkovsky does not repudiate film's capacity for objectively representing visual reality (in more than a purely physical sense), as do many formalist and *seeing-with cinema* filmmakers. Rather, he emphasizes that mimetic representation is only a starting point. Tarkovsky's own brand of cinematic essentialism is a far more *auteur-ist* in orientation

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<sup>337</sup> Orr writes of the cinema of wonder's "exoneration" of Kracauer's "redemption of reality" and also of its "meta-modern enhancement" of Bazin's realist cinema rooted in the "replica of the human gaze." See Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 53-66.

<sup>338</sup> Johnson and Petrie note Tarkovsky's "extensive use of the long take, which traps us within the protagonist's subjectivity" and "removes any external guidelines beyond their own immediate perception" (Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 237).

<sup>339</sup> See Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema, Vol.I*.

<sup>340</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 177.

than Bazin's and the realist illusion of cinema is posited as only the raw material of the director's art. Like the marble block awaiting the sculptor's chisel, the filmmaker shapes this reality according to the contours of a unique subjective vision,<sup>341</sup> a vision which finds its perceptual analog on screen only through a more intense stylization or formalization than is suggested by Bazin's prescriptions.

Tarkovsky's use of colour is relevant in this respect. As Johnson and Petrie note, Tarkovsky struggled in dealing with the potential expressive dominance of colour in film, which often has emotional and psychological affects on the audience at odds with a filmmaker's intentions. Tarkovsky's "respect for 'realism'" led him, according to Johnson and Petrie, to avoid the solution "suggested by Eisenstein and affected by Godard, Antonioni, and Fassbinder...of employing color in a clearly non-realistic and highly stylised fashion."<sup>342</sup> This rejected option, is, as has been noted in relation to both Godard and Greenaway, embraced by many *seeing-with cinema* filmmakers who do not feel bound by any obligation of visual fidelity to the 'real.' When filming in colour Tarkovsky instead chooses to limit his palette to "muted tones," and also frequently alternates between color and monochrome within the same film. Although Tarkovsky's artistic decision to avoid a conventional use of colour may have been motivated by 'realist' principles, his refusal to take the second 'modernist' option that Johnson and Petrie identify is perhaps better explained by his anti-reflexive tendencies (which, as I have suggested in the first chapter of this study, cannot be strictly equated with 'realism' versus 'formalism'). Moreover, the visible results of Tarkovsky's limited palette are certainly highly stylised, despite Johnson and Petrie's suggestion, and it is as non-naturalistic as Godard's use of colour, if in a different way. This speaks to how, in both theory and practice, Tarkovsky both adhered to some realist principles and adopted others as a kind of cloak for his visionary cinematic experiments. This duality is also reflected in Tarkovsky's statements concerning the filmmakers who he most admires, including Bergman, Bresson, Kurosawa and Buñuel, for their "ability to create imagery

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 63-4.

<sup>342</sup> Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 189.

that respects the reality of the material world and yet simultaneously transcends it.”<sup>343</sup> With the possible exception of Kurosawa, whose films can be seen as possessing both *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* characteristics, these directors are prominent *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers with whom Tarkovsky recognizes an affinity in terms of the way in which their work incorporates, or dialectically synthesises, a number of realist and formalist practices.

Whereas for Bazin the camera eye substitutes for the viewers’, showing what *could* be seen by *anyone* in the given perceptual situation, in Tarkovsky’s cinema the camera sees what normally cannot be seen. It provides access to a realm hidden from everyday perception, through a perspective often aligned with a character’s consciousness made externally visible. Correspondingly, as Orr notes, ambiguity in Tarkovsky’s cinema, even in the enigmatic *Mirror*, primarily pertains to questions of point of view and to the waking or dreaming status of the subject (whose perception we, as viewers, *enter into* while at the same time remaining distanced from via the formal properties of the image). In contrast the ‘objective’ chronology of events and their spatial-temporal inter-connections in this mosaic film are by *Mirror’s* conclusion - and certainly after repeated viewings - if not completely clear, largely discernable.<sup>344</sup>

Revealing the influence of phenomenological thought on his film theory, Bazin advocates the cinematic presentation of the metaphysically *immanent* in nature, i.e., that which may be ambiguous, or overflowing with potential significance, but is always profoundly visible. His is a ‘naïve’ realism in the sense that it appeals to an innocence and transparency of vision which the camera on its own can access, to a degree supplanting the film artist as visionary ‘seer,’ whose productive activity is largely assigned to the viewer as a creative interpreter of the image. Tarkovsky, in contrast, appeals to the *transcendent*, as that which the artist, as visionary, alone can wrestle from nature and the world of appearances, breaking through Blake’s “doors of perception” in order to access the genuinely real. It is only through an stylization of the image (demonstrated, for example, in Tarkovsky’s use of slow-motion and the anti-naturalistic

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>344</sup> Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 69.

colour in his later films), as well as by the manipulation of perceptual elements in both the editing and shooting stages of filmmaking, that Tarkovsky's films can convey the "metaphysical poetry of being."<sup>345</sup>

In this respect, another painterly comparison that Dalle Vache makes, not between Tarkovsky's film style and the icon, but with Russian Suprematist painting, is more revealing. Dalle Vache notes that Tarkovsky's cinema, like Kasimir Malevich's abstract art, with its pronounced subjective and otherworldly or 'spiritual' dimension, "strives to make the visible invisible."<sup>346</sup> Indeed, although Suprematism is much less amenable to concrete cinematic analogies owing to its rejection of representation, rather than viewing Tarkovsky's style through the lens of pre-modern representational painting, perhaps it is more fitting in many ways to situate it in the context of the early modernist abstract art and its metaphysical pole, represented not only by Malevich, but also Kandinsky (author of *On the Spiritual in Art*) and Orphic Cubism, rooted in 19<sup>th</sup> century Idealist philosophy and the Symbolist painter's attempt to give an objective perceptual form to the transcendent "Idea."<sup>347</sup>

Returning to *Andrei Rublev*, what the strong "icon" interpretation of Tarkovsky's style with respect to this film fails to take into account is that it is actually because Tarkovsky's *mise-en-scène* is rooted in cinematic techniques which have no strong *perceptual* analog in painting, including the representation of a full illusionist depth and a palpable sense of external movement and internal duration, that the presentation of Rublev's actual fresco painting, *The Trinity*, in the film's epilogue, is so powerful and revelatory. It is here, in fact, that Tarkovsky's disavowal of film-painting hybridization finds its stylistic corollary, and also that his overall *seeing-through cinema* film practice can be seen in micro-cosm.

*Andrei Rublev* leads the viewer unflinchingly through the strife-torn world of medieval Russia life for more than three hours in black and white imagery that reinforces the film's unique combination of documentary-like realism and the visionary

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<sup>345</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*, 65.

<sup>346</sup> Dalle Vache, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film*, 156.

<sup>347</sup> See Moszynska *Abstract Art*, chapters 1-3.

immediacy of dreams. But the climactic sequence presents a screen full of vivid colour, and the actual works of the artist whose agonized life has been depicted. This non-diegetic visual epiphany has been effectively 'set-up' by everything preceding it. The implied contrast between painting and cinema, the film's fictional representation of Rublev's life and his surviving art, still glorious but showing the visible signs of ageing in its cracked and faded surface, that is indicated by the switch to colour, is further sharpened by Tarkovsky's filmic treatment of Rublev's work. The camera pans and tracks *The Trinity*, fading in and out on sections of the painting, giving the viewer successive impressions of the work rather than a single static image. Referring to an interview Tarkovsky gave with Michel Ciment, Johnson and Petrie state that

Roublev's work was shown in fragments rather than as a whole because the perception of a painting follows a totally different temporal and spatial logic than the viewing of a film, and this experience would be distorted if he had shown the whole painting for a few brief seconds. Instead he allowed the viewer to recreate the sense of the total painting by accumulating a succession of details, guided by a "colour dramaturgy" that created a flow of impressions.<sup>348</sup>

If we accept this rationale, it indicates that Tarkovsky was guided by the same set of aesthetic principles, or aims, with respect to the intended *affects* on the viewer of both the live-action representation of Rublev's life and the filming of his paintings. These principles, which entail a unity discovered within, or imposed upon, the visual field of the image (rather than its fragmentation), the conveyance of powerful emotion, and the viewer's imaginative immersion into the world of the film (or the art work represented in it) are both congruent with those of *seeing-through cinema*, as I have described it, but also reflect on Tarkovsky's over-riding concern with the representation of 'lived time' in film. But although these aesthetic ends are the same, with respect to the way in which both the live-action sequences and the paintings are represented, the *means* in each case differ, owing to what Tarkovsky takes as essential differences between the *perceptual* activity involved in apprehending paintings versus the moving film image. (This may, in fact, be related to the way in which perception and imagination are at odds in other

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<sup>348</sup> Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 90-91.

respects in Tarkovsky's films, given that it is tensions or gaps between the world as it is perceived and as it is imagined, felt, or intuited, that frequently drive both the actions of his characters and his narratives.)

Tarkovsky's 'medium-specific' attitude towards art on film is also visible in *Mirror* and *The Sacrifice*, where, beyond the nature of their content and the narrative context surrounding them, two-dimensional art images are seen by the characters and viewers alike as something outside of the realm of both ordinary visual experience and its live-action cinematic representation. Yet in *Mirror* and *The Sacrifice*, the perceptual differences between the film image and the painted one (as it is presented on screen) merge, or fuse, on a higher *imaginative* level of apprehension, largely through the subjective experiences of the characters with which the viewer is sympathetic. In *Andrei Rublev*, given that the art work is outside of the fictional world of the film, this imaginative synthesis transcending perceptual differences takes the form of a retrospective 'dialogue' between it and the form of the film. The suggested differences between the perceptual experience of live-action film images and paintings, translating into their different cinematic presentation in Tarkovsky's films, also bears on the issue of reflexivity.

Tarkovsky's stated views on reflexivity in film are very much in line with the a-reflexive, transparent nature of his films noted by many writers. (Orr, for instance, draws attention to the fact that the movement of Tarkovsky's camera in his trademark sequence shots is "not a reflexive one in which the camera advertises its presence."<sup>349</sup>) Tarkovsky is opposed to a filmmaker allowing his or her "methods to be discernible" and of "expressive tricks" with cinematography and editing, believing that these undermine the audience's "ability to believe in what is happening on screen."<sup>350</sup> Yet when filming *The Trinity* in *Andrei Rublev*'s epilogue, Tarkovsky draws rare self-conscious attention to the movement of the camera and the dissolves, to techniques of

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<sup>349</sup> Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 66.

<sup>350</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 110-111. Tarkovsky goes on to criticize himself for not editing out a sequence in *Mirror* where, he believes, the slow-motion close-ups of Masha's face as she kills a chicken was a self-consciously "literary" technique that instead of springing naturally from the image of the filmed events was imposed upon them.

filmmaking *as expressive techniques*, because here painting is cast as *other* in relation to the film's fictional world. This world, as presented, is one which both requires the belief in its fiction, on some level, to which Tarkovsky often refers and in which, in formal terms, a certain kind of represented depth is central to the image in a way which it is *not* in Rublev's painting, with their reverse, or inverted, perspective.

In both the epilogue, as well as in the brief glimpses of Rublev's art -- and that of fellow icon painter Theophanes the Greek -- within the main section of the film, the abstract schematization of Russian icon painting and the shifting depth aesthetic of Tarkovsky's live-action style collide, in a dialectical confrontation that heightens the sensory experience of both. Tarkovsky's desire to reinforce this medium-based contrast even further perhaps 'explains' the inclusion of the film's final black and white shot of horses grazing in the field (immediately following *The Trinity*). For Turovskaya this shot is obtrusively "tacked on" to the end of the film.<sup>351</sup> While the image's inclusion is certainly open to question on purely aesthetic grounds, as one of so many juxtapositions of still art works and durational natural imagery in Tarkovsky's cinema it is not, from the perspective I have been elaborating, as anomalous as may first appear.<sup>352</sup>

The contrast between the mediums of film and painting drawn in the epilogue of *Andrei Rublev* also serves a thematic function. The film's live-action representation is based on the clear-eyed transparency of its presented world, however 'unworldly' the depicted events are, as rooted in the documentary-like spontaneity of the film's action and the means in which it is captured (as exemplified by the almost *cinéma vérité* feel of the opening sequence and the celebrated bell casting section).<sup>353</sup> Rublev's paintings, in contrast, are, on the level of form if not content, fundamentally opaque and almost alien. They are the creations of a fifteenth century reality executed in the style of a bygone age which, as Tarkovsky notes, is now the property of the museum rather than

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<sup>351</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 81.

<sup>352</sup> Johnson and Petrie argue that "Rublev's paintings, like Tarkovsky's film, respect and incorporate both the human and natural worlds, and it is fitting that the film should end not on the work of art but on the world of nature (the horses standing in the rain), without which art would have no meaning" (*The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* 97).

<sup>353</sup> *Andrei Rublev*, rooted in the clear-eyed transparency of the black and white image, relies less on atmospheric visual effects than Tarkovsky's later colour films.

living art practice.<sup>354</sup> For Tarkovsky, when viewed solely in a distanced, formal way, the twentieth century beholder can never fully access such art. Instead, the viewer, like Tarkovsky in making the film, must try to imaginatively re-capture some sense of the artist's 'being-in-the-world,' the historical reality that "gave birth to the *Trinity*,"<sup>355</sup> as well as the style within which it is painted, to show this life "transformed through the conventions of artistic expression."<sup>356</sup>

The epilogue of *Andre Rublev* is akin to the fusion of historical horizons that Hans-Georg Gadamer describes as central to the hermeneutic project of the interpretation of all cultural products.<sup>357</sup> The art work's radical historicity meets the historically-weighted eye of the modern beholder, a meeting given expressive form through its comparative visualisation. But, characteristic of *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking, what begins with a collision of widely disparate art forms and styles, as well as different historical periods, ends in a recognition of familiarity, the evidence of a shared, trans-historical ground of being on the plane of the works higher expressive dimension. This is a recognition which is made possible only by way of cinematic fiction which, in Tarkovsky's hands gives a mythical resonance to the otherwise largely obscure historical figure of Rublev and breathes new expressive life into his greatest work.<sup>358</sup>

In terms of the narrative's functioning, Rublev is both a central, active presence and a passive spectator, an observer of the film's major events.<sup>359</sup> This mirrors his artistic 'passion,' torn between engagement with the concrete events around him and the pursuit of his timeless, spiritual art, and attempting to reconcile the two. But on a meta-

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<sup>354</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 79. See note 17.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 97.

<sup>357</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1975, 302.

<sup>358</sup> See note 17. Interestingly, in this context, a poster of *Andrei Rublev* showing *The Trinity* is visible on the wall of Aleksei's house in Tarkovsky's later film *Mirror*. Turovskaya notes that it is owing to the power of *Andrei Rublev* that, more than simply a self-referential image creating a "bridge between the author [Tarkovsky] and the character [Aleksei]," the "now familiar icon of the Trinity," one which symbolizes "a nation's culture and traditions," functions as an "essential part of the spiritual world" of the later film. See Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, 80.

<sup>359</sup> Le Fanu claims that Rublev "could be seen not so much as the actor of the events of the drama, as their spectator" (Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 42).

level it also applies to Tarkovsky as a filmmaker who is committed to actively transforming the 'real' in order to arrive at the truth of fiction, while at the same time recording and preserving the physical duration of events in 'real' or extended time through techniques such as the long take.

Throughout this study, we have noted how artists - painters, architects, in some cases, filmmakers – as represented on screen by *seeing-with cinema* filmmakers are often self-reflections: not necessarily autobiographical self-portraits, but, in many cases, metaphorical self-projections of their creative personalities. As such many of these artist figures face similar creative tasks and difficulties that *seeing-with cinema auteurs* are confronted with in trying to successfully achieve their reflexive vision, as was discussed in relation to characters as diverse as Rivette's Frenhofer, Godard's Jerzy, and Ruiz's absent Tonnerre. But this strategy of reflecting back on their own creative projects through a character is not precluded from *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers, even if in this case such mirroring tends to take on less directly reflexive forms, achieved instead through the very transparency of the worlds they create. This certainly applies to Tarkovsky with respect to *Andrei Rublev*. Johnson and Petrie note that Rublev is presented as "the creator whose spiritual vision recognizes and experiences, but also assimilates and transcends, the sufferings and frustrations of everyday existence: the ideal *auteur*. Rublev is perhaps the artist as Tarkovsky would like to imagine and present himself..."<sup>360</sup> As the sole visual artist represented in Tarkovsky's *oeuvre* (apart from his fellow icon painters), Rublev is perhaps the clearest or most direct of his self-projections. As we shall see, in the case of *Mirror* and *The Sacrifice*, rather than the main character being linked to Tarkovsky through shared artistic struggles, they are connected by way of auto-biography (*Mirror*) or extra-aesthetic moral and spiritual concerns, where the character in question to some degree becomes a receptacle for the director's ideas and beliefs (*The Sacrifice*).

The world Tarkovsky creates in *Andrei Rublev*, so authentic in surface detail, is a highly stylized one, just as the film's narrative takes great liberties with the largely

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<sup>360</sup> Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 92.

unknown facts of the painter Rublev's life. It is an inescapably modern interpretation of an historical period which, unlike most period films, employs all manner of uniquely 'modernist' cinematic devices, including the pronounced time-image, the use of the hand-held camera, the incorporation of documentary-style elements, and the incorporation of painting and still photographs. These are all techniques which are equally capable of being deployed in a more reflexive fashion in the hands of Antonioni or Godard. But it is the phenomenological sum total, the combined representational and expressive effect of these techniques in the manner they are used, that re-connects Tarkovsky's cinema to the metaphysical realism of Bazin on a higher expressive level, and which leads Tarkovsky down a very different path than that taken by many of his post-1960 contemporaries in the realm of European art cinema. *Andrei Rublev* also illustrates that the true analog between Tarkovsky's cinema and painting - whether that of the Western European Old Masters or the Russian icon painters - is not to be found in the formal properties of his films conceived in isolation, or in comparison with specific works of art. Instead, it consists of the particular *gravitas* and presence of Tarkovsky's hypnotic images, and in many cases, the aura of the 'sacred' and the 'transcendent,' broadly defined, which surrounds them, and which he expressly considered the closest point of contact between his cinema and the paintings he most valued and referenced. In Tarkovsky's case, rather than trying to pin the label of a particular painterly form or style on his unique cinematic vision, it is more interesting and illuminating to look closely at how actual works of art are presented within the *mise-en-scène* of his films, and the narrative and representational contexts in which they appear. To this end, after first looking at some general characteristics of Tarkovsky's representation of art as it relates to the 'organic unity' he hoped to achieve in his cinema, we will turn to Tarkovsky's post-*Andrei Rublev* films, where painting is not an explicit subject, but remains an integral aspect of a particular mode of cinematic expression.

#### II. 4.2 Painting and Organic Unity

“No one component of a film can have any meaning in isolation: it is the film that is the work of art.”<sup>361</sup>

“The true artistic image is always based on an organic link between idea and form.”<sup>362</sup>

- Andrei Tarkovsky

The list of painters whose works appear in Tarkovsky's films evidences the affinity he felt for the art of the Northern and Southern Renaissance masters. Although Leonardo da Vinci is most prominent among them, the work of Bruegel (*Winter*), Piero Della Francesca (*The Madonna del Parto*), Dürer (*Four Horseman of the Apocalypse*) and the Van Eyck brothers (*The Adoration of the Lamb*) also appears, and re-appears, in Tarkovsky's cinema. If one were to generalize as to what all of the paintings and drawings that Tarkovsky visually cites have in common with one another and his own cinematic vision, it would be their distanced but unobstructed 'gaze,' which posits the artistic image as a window, not on to a shared empirical reality but a subjectively charged dimension over and above it. The fact that many of these paintings are explicitly religious in nature, depicting Christian iconography, although of course not incidental, only adds to a 'spiritual' or transcendent dimension inherent in the manner in which these subjects are depicted. For Tarkovsky, all great works of art are 'sacred,' and possess a spiritual value, whether or not they deal explicitly with religious themes.<sup>363</sup>

Viewed trans-historically, the collection of paintings in Tarkovsky's cinematic 'gallery' differs greatly from the works found in Godard's films -- those of Velázquez, Picasso, Renoir, Goya and the 1960s pop artists (by implied reference) -- with, as has been noted, their empirical (or, in Kantian terms, "transcendental") concern with modes of ordinary perception. As we have seen, like Godard's films these works, to a lesser or greater degree of self-consciousness, foreground the tensions between the acts of visual representation and its depicted subjects; they lay stress on painting's opacity, its mediated distance from the 'real' and, in terms of content, art's role as social observation, commentary or critique.

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<sup>361</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 115.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>363</sup> See Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 89.

It is an audacious gesture for a filmmaker to incorporate the art images that Tarkovsky does and in such a prominent manner. Few directors would be confident enough in their own visual artistry to give over so much space to Leonardo's art, for instance, and "to test himself against them."<sup>364</sup> Yet this is clearly not a case of a filmmaker simply reaching for 'high art' credibility through such citation, that is, one which his or her films might otherwise lack.<sup>365</sup> Nor does Tarkovsky's *mise-en-scène* collapse under the expressive weight of these masterpieces, as it undoubtedly would for lesser directors. It must be stressed that although in Tarkovsky's later films, especially, there is sometimes a gap between the effectiveness of the dialogue (which occasionally lapses into awkward platitude) and the plotting, and the bravura images and rhythms, it is a testament to Tarkovsky's cinematic virtuosity that his on-screen referencing of great art works never undermines his created worlds and that these are able to more than hold their own while containing them.

Like Godard, Tarkovsky often presents paintings and drawings in their entirety, as frame filling insert shots. But these art works are almost always first established within the film's represented world (save for one significant exception in *Mirror*, as will be discussed). As we have seen, although this is common in Godard's films of the 1960s, it is by no means the requirement that it appears to be for Tarkovsky. In Tarkovsky's films both the camera and the characters encounter paintings and drawings reproduced in books or on walls, or discover them in more unusual settings, as, for instance, in *Stalker*, where a section of the Van Eyck brothers' Ghent altarpiece *Adoration of the Lamb* (1425-29) floats in a puddle in the mysterious Zone. Rather than paintings serving a largely reflexive function, whereby they are presented from an objective point of view that draws attention to their self-conscious incorporation within a cinematic world whose *contingency* and *artificiality* is repeatedly drawn attention to, in Tarkovsky's cinema, paintings and drawings expressively deepen and dramatize the

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<sup>364</sup> Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 251.

<sup>365</sup> Given the ways in which art images are integrated into the narrative of Tarkovsky's films I cannot agree with Johnson and Petrie's claim that "on occasion these seem to be used mainly as a prop to give aesthetic and intellectual respectability to a still "suspect" art form..." (Johnson and Petrie, 251).

fictional world-reality of the films. This is a reality which the represented art works are integral to - almost as an organic extension - rather than a supplementary part. Art in Tarkovsky's cinema art is fundamentally 'diegetic.' As opposed to occupying an external or abstract space in relation to the film's main narrative, as in Godard's films, art images are almost always presented from a character's established or suggested point of view, even when they are seen in the 'mind's eye' of memory and dream.<sup>366</sup>

Along with art works being invested with such highly subjective significance in relation to his characters, the second distinctive feature of Tarkovsky's use of art is a more structural one. Whereas Godard's representation of paintings and other art images in his 1960s 'collage' films is fundamentally fragmenting, a way of dividing spaces and realities, Tarkovsky uses paintings as a means of unification, both in a formal and thematic sense, in conformity with his employment of the long-take sequence and the preservation of spatial-temporal continuity. Godard often uses paintings in the way that other filmmakers use freeze-frame images, with the still two-dimensional image acting as a rhetorical punctuation of the live action, pausing the film's dynamic motion in a rhythmical effect imposed from without. Tarkovsky, in contrast, integrates the images of paintings into the live action of his films as much as possible; they act as intensely durational transitions between events/realities from the *within* the same experiential space.

Unlike Godard, who presents paintings in static shots, Tarkovsky frequently moves in and around them, with the camera panning and tracking them like Resnais in *Van Gogh* and Greenaway in *A Walk through H*. Yet, with the exception of the epilogue of *Andrei Rublev*, rather than showing off what the camera, together with editing, can do in filming a two dimensional surface, this movement sews art images into the visual fabric of Tarkovsky's films as experiential wholes. The most emphatic example of this occurs in *Solaris*, where the camera alights on Bruegel's *Winter*, the

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<sup>366</sup> This is not to suggest that the paintings incorporated into Godard's films do not heighten the expressive power of his cinematic image but rather that their referential or associational function - signifying the identity of the artist and the nature of his or her life, the movement of which the works are a part, and how the art images reflect on the film's own visual style and presentation - all tend to outweigh it.

framed reproduction of which hangs in Kelvin's space station. Within the earthy peasant scene of the famous painting, brimming with life rooted in the depicted landscape, the camera picks out small details for view and enlarges them, as a representational and emotional counterpoint to the sterile aridity and emptiness of the station drifting through inhuman outer space. This sequence also aptly demonstrates how a film's soundtrack (effects as well as music), can, when thoughtfully employed, sharpen or modify our perceptual experience of a painting. Such a presentation could easily be distracting or pretentious, but in Tarkovsky's hands the muffled voices, barking dogs and the sound of boots tramping through snow all more thoroughly immerse the viewer in an imagined world, such as would not be possible when seeing the painting in a crowded museum, or looking at its reproduction. (Although, as Johnson and Petrie point out, Tarkovsky uses similar methods in filming Bruegel's painting that he had with Rublev's, given the paintings concrete narrative contextualisation and the fact that the work is being directly perceived by a character in *Solaris*, here the art image is integrated into the narrative rather than standing outside of it.<sup>367</sup>)

But here there is also a tension. In the films of Tarkovsky paintings are not part of a montage framework within which they are juxtaposed with other art images and live-action insert shots in an abstract space. Hence they do not acquire or attract a single associational meaning by way of the edited sequence. Although they resonate with the live-action representation, as static images within it, they resist, or are immune from, a direct cause and effect significance as dictated by editing: thus they are never *wholly* assimilated into the film's narrative presentation. In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky suggests that works of art are both rooted in the lived time of their beholders, and also exist in a state of universal, spiritual timelessness. This duality is reflected in the paintings incorporated into his films having one foot in the narrative sequence and, as

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<sup>367</sup> Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 109. Johnson and Petrie note a number of aspects of Bruegel's paintings that Tarkovsky "may admire," including (quoting Ann Hollander) their "movielike" quality, featuring "a sweep and coherence of motion that is like the movie's camera kind of scan," and how they "offer the shifting, subjective view of central events that only movies now employ" (Johnson and Petrie, 251).

self-defining aesthetic objects, one forever outside of it. More broadly, the images of paintings in Tarkovsky's cinema concretely suggest the palpable presence of that which is intangible and incommensurable in experience, that which falls outside of both rational conceptualization and direct, live-action, cinematic representation. This defiantly subjective realm of experience evoked by art in Tarkovsky's films is located within the context of an *a priori* 'objective' cinematic image which itself seeks to attain to a level of artistic expression that the represented painting has already achieved in its own medium. In each case in which a painting appears it is as if a sacred opening was set for it within the space of the narrative. Art in Tarkovsky's films is always accompanied by an air of reverence, or 'aura,' as established by the duration of the shot or sequence, which the duration-less art image both stands out from and is absorbed into.

Like all the other represented objects in Tarkovsky's cinema – a pitcher of milk, a burning house, an antique book - the art image is imbued with the atmosphere of mystery and otherworldliness which his films create. Rather than presenting a representational painting *as a painting*, emphasizing its formal properties and status as a created, historical artifact, over and above that which it depicts, it is treated like a magical or sacred object/experience on one hand, and a natural object or event, on the other - since for Tarkovsky, unlike Blake, all of nature is invested with a sacred aura. Painting is accorded the same serious and reverent, yet distanced attention, that Tarkovsky's camera pays the flowing water in the opening shot of *Solaris*, or the wind sweeping through the forest in *Mirror*, conforming to Turovskaya's suggestion that "in the work of Tarkovsky the life of the human spirit always flows within the banks of nature and the arts."<sup>368</sup> All in all, art in Tarkovsky's films is a kind of elemental force as well as a prominent feature of the inner mental landscape of his characters, one in which subject and object, past and present, memory and desire, fuse.

#### II. 4.3 Art and Memory: *Mirror*

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<sup>368</sup> Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, 55.

The formally and thematically unifying role of painting in Tarkovsky's films and the "organic" relation between the represented art work and the live-action image is best exemplified in *Mirror*.<sup>369</sup> Here Leonardo da Vinci's art, praised by Tarkovsky for its exalted detachment and inexhaustibility of meaning, is especially central.<sup>370</sup> *Mirror* is a memory film consisting of a collage of images and events occurring, it is suggested, in the mind of the unseen poet Aleksei (whose life, in this auto-biographical film, reflects Tarkovsky's own), inter-cut with scenes from his present. Yet rather than remaining a jigsaw collection of unrelated fragments, *Mirror*'s disparate events and time frames are synthesized in various ways to form a perceptual and imaginative unity: and this synthesis is achieved partly through the presence of Leonardo's art. In this unconventional cinematic portrait (of a person whose face is never seen) the first art image is a static shot close-up of a drawing not *by* Leonardo, but *of* him: the *Portrait of Leonardo* (after 1510) by Francesco Melzi. This work is seen reproduced in an old monograph which Ignat, Aleksei's young son, flips through on a visit to his father's house. In the quick tour of Leonardo's *oeuvre* that this book provides, the camera also takes in a number of Leonardo's paintings and drawings, including the *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (1510) and the *Lady with the Ermine* (ca. 1490). When Ignat comes to the page on which a sketch study for the *Last Supper* is reproduced, he finds an old leaf pressed between the pages - a linking of art and nature that will take on a particular narrative significance somewhat later in the film. This sequence is immediately followed by one in which Ignat reads aloud from Pushkin's account of the Church Schism and the relation between Russia and Europe. Here the presence of Leonardo's painting is placed in the historical and cultural context of a long-standing debate concerning the extent to which Russia should look to the art and culture of Europe as a model or cultivate its own traditions. Although it is not entirely clear

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<sup>369</sup> I am in agreement with Johnson and Petrie when they say that one of *Mirror*'s "underlying themes is a visual dialogue with other arts, with poetry and painting, in an attempt to create not a "composite" art but rather an organically unified one" (Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 118).

<sup>370</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 108-109.

exactly where Tarkovsky positions himself in this debate,<sup>371</sup> the questions it raises would appear to have a contemporary relevance, bearing directly on his cinema in terms of both his use of Western European art and his wider attempt to combine the techniques and sensibilities of Western European 'art' cinema (that of Dreyer, Bergman, Antonioni) and Soviet film tradition. (This duality became more pronounced later in Tarkovsky's career, after he left Soviet Russia for voluntary exile in Italy and France.)

The Leonardo book next appears in one of the film's 'flashbacks' to Aleksei's own childhood (in which he is played by the same actor as Ignat). As a young boy, Aleksei browses through the book in the forest behind the family *dacha*, having recently taken it from the house, before his younger sister joins him and notices the 'theft.' At this point Masha, Aleksei's mother, calls the children back to the house, as their long-absent father has just returned from the war front. As Aleksei and his sister run to meet their father, the camera pans with the children as they run towards the house in the distance, but then leaves them and tilts down to the art book sitting on a tree stump. The book is again open to a portrait of Leonardo, but this time his own famous *Self Portrait* from 1512, covered with pine needles from the surrounding trees. The astute viewer here realizes that it was at some point around this time that the leaf Ignat found in the book so many years later fell there accidentally, or perhaps was left by Aleksei to mark the place where he was interrupted.

In purely narrative terms, the book of art is the kind of linking object used as a continuity device in so many films which play with non-linear form and mix time frames, as *Mirror* does. In the case of Tarkovsky's cinema, it is not surprising that it is a book of paintings and of Leonardo's art, more specifically, which bridges the spatial and temporal distances between *Mirror's* events. Also significant is the manner in

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<sup>371</sup> Johnson and Petrie believe that the Pushkin passage re-affirms Russia looking to "its own indigenous religious and historical traditions," and this explains the fact that "Soviet critics have praised *Mirror*, like *Andrei Rublev* before it, for being a thoroughly nationalist, Russian film" (Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 124).

For Le Fanu, the Pushkin reading asks the rhetorical questions, "does Russia "mirror" the West; or is it in fact part of the West. Those paintings by Leonardo: are they (from Tarkovsky's point of view) *his* tradition? Or are they necessarily the Other, the opposite, the speculum?" (Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 74)

which these art images appear. The fact that they are viewed in a book and situated in the context of the memory of a central event in the life of an individual and a family reinforces the fact that it is not Leonardo's art in-itself which links the past and present, the lives of father and son, in these two sequences, but the subjective *experience* of it, within the character's concrete life-world.

These sequences also depict what is likely to be the first encounter with Leonardo's art for both Ignat and Aleksei. Although by the standards of objective time these events are separated by decades, as part of the film's presentation of lived or subjective time, they are cast as a parallel discovery.<sup>372</sup> (In this sense the book is like a doorway connecting two parallel realities which exist alongside one another horizontally.) Art is the main source of continuity between generations in the film's trans-subjective "mind-screen," one which appears to be composed of both Aleksei's memories and Ignat's emotionally charged perception of the world around him, each infused with a mystical sense of the inter-connectedness of disparate events.<sup>373</sup> Through this bridging of generations, Tarkovsky here associates art not only with the subjective experience of time, but with the defiance or overcoming of temporal process itself, something which will be made much more literal in *The Sacrifice*.

In relation to the representation of Aleksei and Ignat, Peter Greene argues that *Mirror* is a "remarkable attempt to recapture the vision of childhood."<sup>374</sup> "Vision of childhood" can here be taken both literally and figuratively, as Tarkovsky's attempt to visualize and re-present his own childhood in the film (down to the meticulous reconstruction of the *dacha* in which he lived as a child), but also to replicate, or find a cinematic corollary for, the perceptual and emotional experience of the child: one marked by intense visual curiosity, the comparative lack of conceptual mediation between experience and its objects, and a tendency to see disparate events as inter-

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<sup>372</sup> Art and childhood are frequently linked in Tarkovsky's films and these sequences in *Mirror* echo one in *Ivan's Childhood* where Ivan looks at Dürer's *Four Horseman* in a book captured from a German soldier, an image which Tarkovsky presents as a frame filling insert.

<sup>373</sup> As Orr points out, a number of the film's events in which Aleksei does not figure are shown from what appears to be the point of view of Ignat and Masha -- although it is also quite possible that here Aleksei is imagining their experiences. See Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 69.

<sup>374</sup> Greene, *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest*, 86.

related. This attempt to 'see' and represent a world as a child may experience it is another way of describing *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking and its visionary qualities and intentions.

Within *Mirror*'s complex and multi-layered, audio-visual presentation, the inclusion on the soundtrack of poetry written and recited by Tarkovsky's own father, Arseni, is a more literal, self-reflexive reconciliation of father and son - in a film which, on its most directly autobiographical level, is a fictionalized account of Tarkovsky's difficult relationship with both of his parents.<sup>375</sup> Both Leonardo's paintings and drawings and Arseni Tarkovsky's poetry give an expressive depth and density to the film's dramatic action, which in turn are complimented and contrasted by the use of archive and newsreel film footage of seminal 20<sup>th</sup> century events. But they do so in different ways; the poetry provides a rhythmic and thematic counter-point to the images, propelling the narrative forward in time, whereas the static art images provide reflective interludes, which also bridge the film's non-linear events as they weave in and out of memory and imagination.

Apart from father and son, there is a third subjective presence hovering over these sequences. The reunion of Aleksei's father with his children is captured in a single emblematic shot in which, head turned downward, the father's uniformed body is clutched on either side by Aleksei and his sister, to the accompaniment of swelling choral music. The camera moves down to Aleksei's head pressed against his father's waist, before a cut to a detail of the landscape of Leonardo's *Woman with a Juniper Twig* (1474-76, see Figure 6) suffused with a blue light that flares in the lens, before a reverse zoom reveals the whole of the portrait, filling the entire frame. While we may assume that the painting is also from the book, this is not made explicit. In this way the *Woman with a Juniper Twig* stands out from the other paintings represented in the film. Although it may have been originally seen in the book, the painting is here presented as if it were located in the mind of Aleksei, or even Ignat. The woman in Leonardo's painting bears a notable resemblance to Margarita Terekhova who, in a remarkable performance, plays both Aleksei's wife -- and Ignat's mother -- Natalya, in the film's

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<sup>375</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 134.

present, and Aleksei's mother Masha, in the past. As Masha, Terekhova's hair is often pulled back in a way reminiscent of the woman in Leonardo's painting (whereas playing Natalya it is worn down), opening up the possibility that as shown in the film as a young woman Masha corresponds to Aleksei's memory of her as filtered through, and idealized in, Leonardo's painting, rather than in 'reality.'<sup>376</sup> In fact, when Masha's husband returns, we see only a brief reaction shot of her, turning away in tears from him and her children. In Aleksei's mind, if it is his indeed his imaginings that we are witnessing in this sequence, the mother's reaction to the father's return is not only given in an image of Terekhova but in the enigmatic expression of Leonardo's woman, with her rueful air of Olympian detachment, whom Tarkovsky describes as "attractive and repellent...beyond good and evil."<sup>377</sup> Moreover, the woman's expression is not dissimilar to Masha's look of stoic resignation as she sits on the fence awaiting her husband's return in the film's first post-titles sequence. That Leonardo's art, which links Aleksei with Ignat, also channels the emotional presence of wife/mother for both of them (as well as the viewer) is reconfirmed in the next cut to a black and white shot of Natalya in the present - presumably from Aleksei's point of view - which seals this double identification. (And Aleksei's mother is, in fact, a frequent topic of conversation for Aleksei and Natalya, with Natalya at one point reprimanding Aleksei for letting his troubled relationship with his still living mother cloud their own life together.)

Tarkovsky's decision to cast the same actress as wife and mother in *Mirror*, 'doubled' by his casting of the same actor to play both Ignat and Aleksei as boy, creates the opportunity for this ambiguous mirroring. The complex linking of Masha, Natalya, and the painting, is founded on the objective physical resemblance between the two women, one which Natalya herself comments on, thereby providing it with a fictional justification. But it is only in the mirror of Leonardo's art that the resemblance between the two is subjectively charged, mother and wife idealized and projected on to

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<sup>376</sup> Tarkovsky writes that in *Mirror* Leonardo's *Woman with a Juniper Twig* is necessary "in order to introduce a timeless element into the moments that are succeeding each other before our eyes, and at the same time to juxtapose the portrait with the heroine, to emphasize in her and in the actress, Margarita Terekhova, the same capacity at once to enchant and repel..." (Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 108.)

<sup>377</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 108.

Leonardo's model by Aleksei and Ignat. It is interesting to compare this with Godard's equally idealized linking of his (soon to be ex-) wife Anna Karina, with the faces of Renoir's girls and young women in *Pierrot le fou*. In *Pierrot*, as in *Breathless*, with respect to Jean Seberg, this 'mirrored by art' motif is rooted in a reflexive resemblance between Renoir's female figures and Anna Karina the *actress*, as much as the character she plays. The visual analogy between Karina and the paintings is presented accordingly, through insert shots of Renoir's images outside of the main narrative. In Tarkovsky's case the association of Terekhova with Leonardo's *Woman with the Juniper Twig*, in contrast, only has resonance with reference to the character of Masha and the film's dramatic context in the moment that the painting appears. Thus the comparison between Masha/Natalya and Leonardo's masterpiece is firmly rooted in the time and space of the unfolding events.

It is notable that these two highly stylized extended sequences depicting Ignat's growing awareness of both his family's history and that of Russia's, as well as the return of Aleksei's father, in which painting comes to the fore, are located at the film's chronological and expressive center. Both episodes illustrate just how densely woven into the fabric of the narrative Leonardo's art is in *Mirror*, as distinct from being reflexively outside it. They also testify to the ways in which art binds the inner as well as outer lives of the characters, as situated within lived time, and to the inexorable movement of time itself, which Tarkovsky's supra-human, if not omniscient camera (and editing) is both a witness to, and has the power to transcend.<sup>378</sup> If painting and cinema as art forms are brought into analogical or dialectical relation in *Mirror*, than this, like the mirroring of Aleksei's life and Tarkovsky's own, it is not as a result of a meta-narrative circuit that reflexively by-passes the fictional world of the film, but one which goes right through its experiential heart.

As presented in Tarkovsky's films, art works have two overlapping lives in consciousness, one as part of the fabric of highly personal association and the other as part of a communal or historical consciousness, a collective memory. In *Mirror* the contrasting public and private lives of art works is conveyed in the juxtaposition of

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<sup>378</sup> See Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 67.

images of paintings (or their visual referencing) and factual history, in the form of documentary footage of seminal and tragic events in 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet and World history, woven into the story of Aleksei and his family. As has been noted, to a large extent Tarkovsky's films are self-enclosed worlds, the product of the filmmaker's own private cosmology. Yet as *Mirror*, most directly, but also *Andrei Rublev* and *The Sacrifice* in different ways suggest, Tarkovsky's films do not ignore public realities and the impact of historical forces on the lives of the individuals around which his films center. As Turovskaya notes, in *Mirror* "history enters into the microcosm of remembered events, without being reduced to part of the plot. Its time flows in a different way from the micro-span of the human pulse."<sup>379</sup>

Despite the fact that Tarkovsky frowned on the deliberate re-creation of individual paintings in film, there is one clear instance in *Mirror* of his referencing a specific art work. This is a high-angled shot of a snow covered hill up which a young boy trudges in the foreground, with small figures seen moving about a frozen lake in the background. The shot clearly recalls Bruegel's *Winter*, the actual image of which is included in *Solaris* three years earlier. The boy, a classmate of Aleksei's whose parents, we have earlier learned, were killed in the Leningrad blockade, walks up the hill and toward the camera until his face is seen in close-up. There follows a cut to documentary footage of World War Two – comprising short clips of Hitler's dead body, Soviet soldiers capturing Berlin and the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima - before the film returns to the boy on the hill in a medium shot, at which point a bird flies to him and lands on his shoulder, in hypnotic slow-motion. (This is a rare instance of Tarkovsky employing conventional symbolism; the bird represents the soul, as is confirmed with its return in the film's penultimate shot of the moment of Aleksei's death.) Coming immediately before the image of the boy and the snowy hillside was archive footage of Russian soldiers on Lake Sivash marching forward to their death (soon after this footage was shot) in a battle with Nazi troops in 1943, over which one of Arseni

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<sup>379</sup> Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, 22. As Orr notes, the Eastern European "cinema of wonder," of which Tarkovsky's cinema is emblematic, addresses social and political themes. But, as opposed to officially sanctioned socialist realist cinema, it does so through the distanced lens of parallel worlds and intensely personal mediations (see Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*, 53-54).

Tarkovsky's poems, addressing immortality as the transience of temporal process, is read. What are we to make of this fiction/documentary juxtaposition within which painting is referenced?

Rather than an attempt at recreating a painter's effects, translating them into cinematic terms, 'for its own sake,' or drawing an explicit comparison between Bruegel's art and life and the film's subject, *Winter* seems to be referenced here in order to capture some form of universal, metaphysical truth which the painting embodies. Along these lines, Johnson and Petrie see this reference to Bruegel as evidence of Tarkovsky's being "inwardly tuned to what is most deeply original in the artist's work," which is (quoting Ann Hollander) its "internalisation of sacred themes in ordinary experience."<sup>380</sup> While this is no doubt true in general terms, the historical experiences the painting is coupled with are far from 'ordinary,' and this explanation is perhaps a bit too general. The conceptual significance of the *Winter* reference in *Mirror*, within the context that it appears, is ultimately enigmatic, known perhaps only to Tarkovsky. The expressive affects of this reference, however, are clear. Turovskaya writes that in this sequence "the space of the frame broadens to the universal point of view in Bruegel's pictures, while the music of Bach and Purcell given an elegiac gravity to the grey, muddy pictures of the newsreel."<sup>381</sup> Indeed, the visual echo of Bruegel's painting, like the classical music and the Arseni Tarkovsky's poetry, gives a universal dimension to the concrete reality depicted. It is a dimension that transcends the life of the individual and, in metonymic fashion, stresses the capacity of art – painting, poetry, and music – to transcend historical context and contingency, as represented by the archival footage, thus contrasting universal truth and contingent fact.<sup>382</sup> *Mirror* is an intensely personal film, which was condemned by many of Tarkovsky's critics and former colleagues for its overtly autobiographical dimension (against, of course, the background of Soviet socialism). Yet by virtue of Tarkovsky addressing his own life and memories, as well as chronicling the life of his family in such depth and with such unflinchingly honesty, the

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<sup>380</sup> Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 252.

<sup>381</sup> Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, 67.

<sup>382</sup> A similar contrast is provided by the combination of the dramatic footage of the soldiers marching through knee-deep mud and Arseni Tarkovsky poem "Life, Life" (reprinted in *Sculpting in Time*) which

film is also able to transcend its autobiographical context and speak to universal experience.

This is an intriguing reversal from what we have seen in the case of other films' incorporation of art, Tarkovsky's referencing of a famous painting within *Mirror's* stylized *mise-en-scène* has a more 'objective' value and function than the direct representation of actual paintings and drawings. Whereas the compositional reference to Bruegel serves to universalize the film's perspective, Leonardo's images captured by the camera have, as noted, a much more personal or subjective dimension and significance for the characters. For Turovskaya, art works and documentary footage are the "two points of reference which defined the world of Tarkovsky's films from *Ivan's Childhood* onwards."<sup>383</sup> As 'found' images in both cases, ones which Tarkovsky did not create, their juxtaposition (along with still photographs), highlight the tension between documentary and fiction in *Mirror* and in cinema *per se*: the film medium's ability to both report on the factual circumstances of history much more effectively than painting, for instance, and to offer a timeless aesthetic vision of experience. This is the uniquely filmic version of a perennial conflict facing the artist in any medium, the fact that, in what Tarkovsky calls the "theme" of *Andrei Rublev*, the artist "cannot not express the moral idea of his time unless he represents suffering truthfully" yet, must "transcend as well as observe" in order to "serve immortality."<sup>384</sup> This is the same basic dilemma that we saw exemplified in Godard's *Pierrot le fou* and *Passion*, in and through the reflexive use of Velázquez's life and art, and the *tableaux*, respectively. As his last film *The Sacrifice* demonstrates, Tarkovsky does not hesitate to embrace the challenge – to transcend as well as to observe. In Tarkovsky's films we find a manifest belief in cinema's capacity to address the most pressing concerns of modern life, but in a symbolic form which despite film image's representational grounding in the transient moment is able, like the canonical paintings and pieces of music he incorporates into his films, to in some sense speak beyond history, to all times and places.

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speaks of death and the passage of time as an illusion. See Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 142.

<sup>383</sup> Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, 67.

<sup>384</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 168.

## II. 4.4 Art as Redemption: *The Sacrifice*

In *The Sacrifice* painting plays a formal and thematic role similar to that in *Mirror*. But here art – and by implication, cinema – is more explicitly linked to a spiritual transcendence of the everyday world and quantifiable time and space, as well as the hope for final redemption. The film centers on Alexander, a drama/theatre critic and lecturer on aesthetics, living with his family on the Swedish island of Gotland. The celebration of Alexander's birthday is interrupted, or so he comes to believe, by the outbreak of a nuclear war that may or may not be a figment of his imagination. Alexander attempts to save the lives of his family and, in effect, the world, by pledging to God that in return for time being reversed and the apocalyptic event not occurring, he will take a vow of silence. He also promises to renounce his worldly possessions, destroy his home and leave his cherished young son.

Tarkovsky, living in exile in the West, was ill with lung cancer during the making of *The Sacrifice*. Whether or not he knew that this would be his last film is a matter of debate, but there is no doubt that *The Sacrifice* is a conscious summation of Tarkovsky's career.<sup>385</sup> As such, it is an artistic endorsement of the power and nobility of individual faith and the essential role of art, including cinema, in human experience. The film is similar in tone to the valedictory final chapters of *Sculpting in Time*, written during and just after its shooting (and in which Tarkovsky discusses the themes and action of the film, and his general aims in making it, in much greater and explicit detail than any of his other works). In this sense *The Sacrifice*, with its final dedication to Tarkovsky's young son “*in hope and confidence*” is the filmmaker's most overtly self-referential work yet its highly personal concerns are made universal through its parable-like form.<sup>386</sup> Tarkovsky continually denied that his films as wholes, or particular aspects of them, such as the enigmatic “Zone” in *Stalker*, had an allegorical significance (a

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<sup>385</sup> Johnson and Petrie argue against Turovskaya that Tarkovsky did not know he was ill until after the film had been shot, although they admit that “it may well be legitimate to see it as a final testament” (Johnson and Petrie, 183).

<sup>386</sup> Tarkovsky himself refers to *The Sacrifice* as “a parable” (Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 219).

denial that is not surprising, given the difficulty this may have caused with the Soviet authorities). Yet all of Tarkovsky's works to some degree function in the manner of parables or allegories in that they are founded on the entirely earnest and transparent presentation of a free-standing, self-enclosed fictional reality, with little reflexive or critical probing or undermining of that reality. Yet *The Sacrifice* does walk a slightly uncomfortable tightrope for Tarkovsky, given the weight of meaning that its fiction is intended to carry. Although its visuals have been highly praised, the film has been described as both "didactic" and pretentious.<sup>387</sup> After considering the role of art in the film, I will return to some of these justifiable criticisms.

Stylistically, *The Sacrifice* takes the paired down, long-take style Tarkovsky re-discovered in *Stalker* to an extreme, as evidenced by its celebrated one-take, seven minute long penultimate sequence. (Turovskaya sees *Stalker*, *Nostalgia* and *The Sacrifice* as a kind of unofficial trilogy, marked by a similar aesthetic and the theme of personal sacrifice.<sup>388</sup>) Here again Leonardo's art, in this case one painting, appears repeatedly, and marks a liminal threshold that divides the film's central narrative in half, as well as introducing and closing multiple dream or vision episodes. The painting, appropriately enough in this tale of repaying gifts, taking place on the protagonist's birthday, and heralding the sacrificial offering of the title, is *The Adoration of the Magi*. (1481-1482, see Figure 7)

In *Mirror* Leonardo's painting and drawing was an associational bridge between past and present, memory and desire, within the same presentational and experiential fold. In *The Sacrifice* it links the film's two very different worlds, ones which are visually represented in contrasting styles: the everyday or profane realm of objective reality, accessed by reason and governed by cause and effect relations, and the sacred realm of dream and vision, prophecy and miracle. The latter, it is suggested, is a fundamentally non-rational domain, the full acceptance of which when viewed from the perspective of modern secular society - of which Tarkovsky is highly critical - necessarily appears as a form of madness. Regardless of the extent to which Tarkovsky

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<sup>387</sup> See Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*. 183.

<sup>388</sup> Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, 137.

was the devout Orthodox Christian for which he is often taken, religion in his films is not represented as an organized social activity but, as for Kierkegaard, a matter of an individual's private and often agonized relationship with God as the ground of his or her being. In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky argues that in the twentieth century a spiritual 'sense of life,' in some form, is embodied in the experience of authentic works of art as much, if not more than, the practices of official religion. Art is given the "ennobling"<sup>389</sup> role of providing a social unity for its audience, rooted in the cultivation of empathetic understanding, which Tarkovsky defines in spiritual terms. Greene argues that although the film cannot be seen as "a direct translation" of Leonardo's painting into a film, "...The Sacrifice is especially imbued with the ideas of this painting. The two works are of a kindred spirit..."<sup>390</sup> There is no doubt that the painting also signposts key events in *The Sacrifice* ("a list of all the times that the camera returns to the *Adoration of the Magi* would conclude all the important turning points in the film, where the finger of fate is apparent").<sup>391</sup> In order to see how the painting concretely embodies the conjunction of visionary experience, dreams, and art - all perennial concerns of Tarkovsky's cinema given a more emphatic significance in *The Sacrifice* - let us look in detail at where and how the painting appears and at the narrative context surrounding it.

The film's titles appear over a close-up detail of *The Adoration*, centered on the figure of one of the Magi kneeling before the child Christ, to whom he offers a gift, and the trunk of a tree prominently located in the middle of Leonardo's composition. After the title's end, the camera slowly tracks up the image of the painting, following the vertical line of the tree. As in *Mirror*, here Leonardo is paired with Bach's music, this time "Saint Matthew's Passion," which gradually fades and is replaced by sounds of the sea shore. When the camera reaches the top of Leonardo's tree (in full-bloom), the film cuts to a live-action shot of Alexander, with his son, replanting a damaged tree in a symbolic act of hope. (This is further stressed by Alexander simultaneously telling his son the story of a monk who patiently watered a dead tree for three years until it

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<sup>389</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 182.

<sup>390</sup> Greene, *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest*, 123.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

miraculously blossomed.) The film's last shot is a return to this "tree of life,"<sup>392</sup> still bare, with the camera vertically tracking it as it did the one in the painting. *The Sacrifice* continues the association of art with the continuity of generations with which it is linked in *Mirror*, through another father and son pairing: a continuity directly threatened by the prospects of nuclear war.<sup>393</sup>

*The Adoration* is next seen later in the film, following the ominous roar of jets which shakes Alexander's house and announces (to him, at least) the possibility of a war. Here the painting heralds, and is the symbolic doorway into, Alexander's first dream, hallucination or vision – which of these it may be is never made certain. These dream sequences, as I will refer to them, which continue from this point until the final sequences of the film, are marked by oneric compositions and slowed action, and are filmed in either de-saturated colour – with the sepia-like hues of Sven Nykvist's cinematography in the interiors of the house recalling *The Adoration's* dark amber tones - or black and white.

The first of these otherworldly images, and the one which begins one of the film's pivotal sequences, is a shot of the bedroom of Alexander's young son – referred to in the film as "little man" - where he lies sleeping. A frame-filling shot of the *Adoration* follows. But the dark reproduction of Leonardo's painting is almost entirely hidden under a thick pane of glass that reflects images of trees blowing in the wind, an echo, or combined association of the tree Alexander painted and the one represented in the painting.<sup>394</sup> (The painting, we shortly learn, hangs in Alexander's study, opposite a door leading out onto a balcony). This is followed by a frontal close-up of Alexander and his friend Otto, looking and acting as if they were hypnotized by the painting, as seen from its 'point-of-view.' Following a biblical reference to seeing or not-seeing the painting "through a glass darkly," which, along with being a phrase from scripture can also be taken, whether or not it was intended, as a nod to Bergman (and thus a rare reference to cinema in Tarkovsky's films), Otto, who says that the painting frightens

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<sup>392</sup> "The tree they plant is, of course, a reflection of the tree of life, beneath which the Virgin and Child are seated in the Leonardo painting" (Greene, *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest*, 124).

<sup>393</sup> See Greene, 82-83, 125.

<sup>394</sup> See Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 213

him, leaves the room. Alexander, still in frontal close-up, walks forward toward the painting, the camera simultaneously tracking back.<sup>395</sup> There is a reverse shot of it from Alexander's point of view, this time seen in its frame hanging on the wall. (It is at this point that we begin to hear, on the soundtrack, a radio broadcast by a government official announcing the impending nuclear exchange.) But, in a startling shot, rather than seeing the reproduction of the painting under the glass, the camera/viewer is here presented with Alexander's dramatic reflection. As the camera moves in closer to the painting, and the focus is pulled, Alexander's reflection disappears to reveal the figures of Mary and Jesus now seen clearly (as the only figures in the painting that Leonardo did not cast in shadow).

In the first chapter of this study, I spoke of reflections on semi-transparent mediums in cinema, as well as the conjunction of art and mirrors in the context of *seeing-with cinema* and the reflexive filmmaker's fascination with the ambiguous 'double' image. This sequence in *The Sacrifice* superbly illustrates how in Tarkovsky's *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking, such perceptual ambiguity has no place. At different moments we see either the painting or a reflection on its glass but, through the camera placement, lighting and focus changes, *not* both at the same time. That would result in the sort of indecipherable composite image to which Noël Burch refers.<sup>396</sup> Rather than creating a *mise-en-abyme* referring to the illusionistic nature of all visual representation, the 'painting as mirror' here dramatizes a central thematic ambiguity concerning the nature of the supernatural events suggested in the film, as well as emphasizing a life-defining change for Alexander. This intensely subjective moment can be interpreted either as the dawning of a new self-awareness on Alexander's part (and awareness of the true nature of the world around him) or his delusional loss of self.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> *The Sacrifice* was shot in Sweden on the Baltic island of Gottland with Erland Josephson, one of Bergman's most frequent collaborators, in the lead role, and was photographed by Bergman's celebrated cinematographer Sven Nykvist.

<sup>396</sup> See note 40.

<sup>397</sup> Johnson and Petrie argue that the various reflections of Alexander form a "pattern that seems to accompany the various stages of self-discovery" (Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 225).

In stylistic terms, this either/or approach to treating the painting *as a painting or* as a mirror image but not both simultaneously, can be related back to Tarkovsky's belief that the presentation of dream imagery in cinema - and here the presence of the painting marks the beginning of a dream state of some form - should be clear and transparent, free of the visual haziness and perceptual confusion often achieved through the use of dissolves, mists and blurred focus, which conventionally signals the transition from waking life to dream in cinema.<sup>398</sup> Rather than to draw lingering attention to the 'merely' perceptual/visual indeterminacy, or mediation, on the surface of the film image, so to speak, Tarkovsky wishes to convey a deeper ambiguity here, one beyond appearances. This is evident in the film's persistently ambiguous refusal to answer *not* the question of whether what Alexander and the viewer alike perceive is actually happening - for Alexander is certain until the end that it is - but the causal relation between this private reality and the world external to his consciousness. This is to say that *The Adoration* here dramatizes a larger narrative ambiguity, one that pertains to the film as a whole on the level of story or plot, rather than a perceptual one, pertaining to the images in-themselves.

Significantly, Alexander's reflected image on the glass covering the painting is not captured in an over the shoulder shot which would suggest a locally reflexive perceptual dynamic, confirming the character's being totally rooted within the represented physical environment, but rather a close-up on the painting shot from an angle which avoids showing any part of his body, and which makes it appear as if he were somehow *inside* of the painting, looking out at the camera/viewer from within it.<sup>399</sup> Metaphorically, this stresses the imaginative immersion into the world of an art work which Tarkovsky writes of in *Sculpting in Time* as central to aesthetic experience as he conceives of it, an immersion that Tarkovsky attempts to allow in the case of his own films. This 'immersive' quality is also, as I have suggested, a central aspect of the practice and ethos of visionary *seeing-through cinema*.

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<sup>398</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 71-72.

<sup>399</sup> See Greene, *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest*, 124.

*The Adoration* re-appears on three more occasions. In two of these it is directly linked with the film's two acts of sacrifice: Alexander's holy pledge and its apparently blasphemous or at least, morally contradictory counterpart, where on the advice of Otto, Alexander sleeps with Maria, his maid, who may be a 'witch' with the power to reverse time.<sup>400</sup> In the first instance, Alexander kneels in front of the painting as if it were an altar, before lying down on the couch underneath it. This serves as a transition to another "dream-within-a-dream" sequence, in which Alexander once again sees his reflection in the glass of the painting. The next and last appearance of the painting comes after Otto persuades Alexander to go to Maria's house. Here, circularly signaling that the unworldly events of the film's second half are approaching a climax, there occurs a *reverse* of what occurred in the painting's first post-titles appearance. A close-up shot of the painting is followed by a zoom out (rather than in), with another focus switch, one which this time obscures the painting and *brings back* Alexander's reflection on its surface. Now, however, Alexander is not standing directly in front of the painting but outside of the house (on the balcony), realistically too far away from it to be reflected in this fashion.

The *Adoration* here aids in a magical location switch for the character, in which the previously established spatial relationships in the house - to that point, even in the dream sequences scrupulously adhered to - are apparently violated, as is so common in dreams. Similar to the way in which in its penultimate appearance in *2001: A Space Odyssey* the Monolith pulls astronaut David Bowman inexorably forward into (quite literally) another world, the *Adoration*, appearing for the last time in the film, in effect pushes Alexander from the house and onto his meeting with Maria, setting in motion the film's climactic events, when Alexander, believing he has in fact saved his family and the world, fulfills his promise to God by setting the house on fire and (in effect) leaving his family.

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<sup>400</sup> This second "sacrifice," which on the surface is (even) more problematic, in its ostensible absurdity coupled with its earnest presentation, than Alexander's first pledge, has been described by Orr (rightly, I think) as a "pleasure of the desire-dream" counter-pointing Alexander's earlier "plea of the-God dream." See Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, 38.

Like Leonardo's *Woman with a Juniper Twig* in *Mirror*, *The Adoration* in *The Sacrifice*, has a double function. In its concrete objecthood, as a thing in the world among others that the camera represents, the painting serves as a linking image, a narrative bridge and source of continuity for the viewer. At the same time, as perceived and experienced by the characters, and as this experience is communicated in hypnotic imagery, it lifts the film into a much more enigmatic realm and mode of expression. Tarkovsky writes that Leonardo's art allows its beholder to interact with the "infinite."<sup>401</sup> In so far as something like a Divine presence has been concretely manifested in Tarkovsky's cinema, it is embodied by the Stalker's young daughter, with her potential telekinetic powers, captured in a mesmerizing long take at the end of *Stalker*, and in Leonardo's *Adoration* in *The Sacrifice*, which, presides over the white-hot emotional hysterics of the film's events with a serene but severe, otherworldly detachment, one which is both like and unlike the time and space defying presence of the camera itself. It is in this sense that the analogy between the presence and function of Leonardo's painting in the film and that of the Monolith in *2001* is apt, the later being the product of an alien intelligence exponentially evolved past mankind, which although set in within the more secular/naturalist philosophical framework of that film, can in comparison with human consciousness only be conceived of as Divine.<sup>402</sup>

In each case the movement of the camera towards and into the mysterious object signals the film entering into a more subjective – but no less 'real' - domain. The filmmaker is attempting to convey fantastic and unbelievable events as experienced by an uncomprehending protagonist, where these events are depicted in a way no less visually concrete or distinct than the more quotidian ones occurring earlier. Despite Tarkovsky's criticism of *2001* has being "cold and soulless,"<sup>403</sup> in *The Sacrifice*, as well as in Kubrick's film, the power and profound ambiguity of the climactic events stem largely from the unapologetic forcefulness and visual clarity of their presentation,

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<sup>401</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 108-9.

<sup>402</sup> Johnson and Petrie suggest that art in Tarkovsky's films routinely contrasts "the human and the alien" (Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 251).

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

removed from any trace of irony or reflexive bracketing, as well as a refusal to provide clear-cut rational explanations.

When, in *The Sacrifice*'s final moments, the camera tracks up the tree Alexander planted at the beginning of the film, as it did with respect to the painted one in the title shot of the *Adoration*, this is not a case of 'life mirroring art,' but life being endowed – through Alexander's selfless act of sacrifice, which, for Tarkovsky, is analogous to the selfless act of artistic creation - with the spiritual resonance of art, in this grand synthesis of Tarkovsky's cinematic style and themes. If in *2001* the embryonic "Star-child" floating in space is a literal representation of symbolic re-birth for both Bowman and humanity, conceived in the mythic terms of a spatial odyssey, Tarkovsky too universalizes Alexander's experience, but with reference to time and creation myths. 'In the Beginning was the Word' are the film's final words, a quotation from both the Gospel of John and Alexander (from the beginning of the film), spoken by "little man" as he lies under the tree. Most significantly, for our purposes, is the fact that in contrast to *Andrei Rublev* here, in Tarkovsky's final film, it is *cinema* in the form of the image of the tree and the water behind it gleaming in the sunlight, and not painting, that has the visual last word. Tarkovsky's dedication of the film to his son, "*in hope and confidence*" which accompanies this image is a testament to his unwavering faith in his chosen art and to what he calls cinema's "colossal" future.<sup>404</sup> Film, which has the opportunity to "become first among the arts, and its muse the queen of all muses," is here charged with picking up the mantle of painting and the traditional arts and serving as a force of cultural and spiritual unity in the lives of its audience.<sup>405</sup> To be sure this is a rather lofty ambition for cinema to live up to, as an art which - as Tarkovsky recognizes - has always had one foot in commerce and escapist entertainment.

In sum, like *Mirror*, *The Sacrifice* posits art as the timeless, eternal and impersonal reflection of a contingent, personal and subjective history, centered on the life of the individual and the family unit, with the wayward lives of countries seen as its outward extension. But within the represented world of *The Sacrifice*, Leonardo's

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<sup>404</sup> Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 63.

<sup>405</sup> Quoted in Turovskaya, "Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry," 71.

*Adoration*, like the magic mirrors in *Orphée*, is also associated with a literal rather than merely symbolic attempt to transcend the physical limits of time and space, through Alexander's Kirkegaardian "leap" of faith beyond all reason, a call to which the painting's somber tones and eternally suspended gestures mysteriously inspires.

Whether or not one shares Tarkovsky's stoic optimism, few would question the earnestness of his convictions concerning art's potential redemptive role in late 20<sup>th</sup> century society. However, as Le Fanu suggests (echoing the sentiments of other writers) the question is "whether the topos [of "redeeming hope"] arises naturally from the fable, or is imposed unnaturally from without, is the final unanswered questioning this great, last, most perplexing of Tarkovsky's films."<sup>406</sup> In a similar vein, Johnson and Petrie wonder if the film's "problems" are a result of "Tarkovsky's attempts to 'burden' his hero with all of his own philosophical and moral, as well as personal, concerns."<sup>407</sup> I have maintained that the cinematic world Tarkovsky creates in *Mirror*, through his expert mixing of time frames as well as of media and art forms, and the relation of these to the subjective experience of the characters, has an organic 'necessity,' a holism and transparency, that is an ideal of *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking. Despite the visually brilliant and highly expressive use of Leonardo's *Adoration*, the way in which this art work and the film reciprocally illuminate one another thematically, and the strong connection Tarkovsky establishes between the painting and the ways that the characters experience their world, *The Sacrifice*, as a whole, is a less successful film according to this *seeing-through cinema* criterion. Perhaps this due to an unresolved tension in the combination of its visionary images - rooted in the presentation of dreamed and hallucinated states - and the reflexive, auto-biographical, and didactic elements encroaching on it. Whereas much of the expressive power of the sequences featuring the *Adoration* stem from their refusal to be 'explained' or glossed, the film does succumb to a literalness and an unnecessary underlining of its 'messages' in other respects (in some of the dialogue, for instance).

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<sup>406</sup>Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 137.

<sup>407</sup>Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 182.

Given Tarkovsky's reliance on the long-take in the film, as well as its highly theatrical 'chamber-piece' setting, scrutiny inevitably falls on the actions of the characters (many of which the viewer witnesses in their entirety) and the motivations behind them. I do not necessarily regard the ambiguity surrounding the nature of Alexander's 'sacrifices' or the questions concerning what may be 'real' and what may be dreamed/imagined in the film as deficiencies. Yet although the world of the film is a compelling and convincing one (in its perceptual immediacy and the conviction with which it is presented), the characters as presented lack the three-dimensionality necessary for them to function both in accordance with the special 'rules' of this world, and symbolically, in relation to the reality outside of the film (the familiar world(s) of viewer to which the films undoubtedly refers, however obliquely). This may well be the result of Tarkovsky being too close to both the film's philosophical pre-occupations and to the character of Alexander, a difficulty that he did not face in relation to his other self-reflecting protagonists, such as Rublev and Aleksei (in *Mirror*), given the distance of history in the case of Rublev, and Aleksei's status (an adult) as an off-screen, purely observing presence. Also, given the fact that Tarkovsky does not convey character "psychology" via many conventional cinematic means, and that the attitudes and actions of the characters are *not* subject to the kind overt reflexive critique that characters often are in Godard's films, for instance, the viewer is in many respects put in the position of simply accepting their nature and actions, just as they are asked to accept the world that they inhabit. This is the demand that Tarkovsky's cinema makes on the viewer, and whether it is justified by, or through, the work, is up to each viewer to decide.<sup>408</sup>

We have seen that Godard's *Passion* is a weaker film in the French director's cannon of reflexive cinema because it fails to create a sufficiently strong represented world as a foil for its critical exploration of filmmaking. Surprisingly, Tarkovsky

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<sup>408</sup> Johnson and Petrie touch on this topic, when they argue that "despite the "problematic nature of these actions" as represented in the films, "it is only within the context of the character's and Tarkovsky's own faith and his increasingly apocalyptic vision of the world that these acts can be seen as truly sacrificial and therefore redemptive" (*The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 235).

encounters a similar difficulty in trying to impose meaning upon the film's narrative, rather than, as Le Faun suggests, allowing the ideas to spring more naturally from within it. *The Sacrifice* is a formally virtuosic and ultimately moving film, but it does have flaws. And these flaws attest to the fact that despite their different aims and methods, both reflexive *seeing-with cinema* filmmakers and a-reflexive, *seeing-through cinema* filmmakers, face similar creative challenges. One of these is ensuring that the conceptual is reached through the aesthetic, or, in other words, that a film first wholly 'works' on the plane of *art*, that is, of the concrete and particular, before the plane of *ideas*, that is, of the general and abstract – whether these ideas concern film art, social and political issues, or the nature of ultimate reality. In Merleau-Ponty's formulation, this is the requirement (bound to the 'primacy of perception' in art to which he is committed) that art is, and should remain, 'pre-philosophical.'<sup>409</sup>

We are now able to briefly sum up some of the major features of Tarkovsky's *seeing-through cinema* employment of paintings and drawings, as well as the main differences between it and Godard's. In Tarkovsky's films, art is primarily situated within the world of the characters as an object of their perceptions in time, as this is captured in a cinematic form which allows for time (as duration) to unfold before the viewer. Simultaneously, given the suggested 'timeless' nature of art, as well as the 'divine' (or at least, 'alien') spirit manifested in the art of Leonardo, for instance, and the ways in which the filming of art images must respect the differences between cinema and painting, as well as how each is concretely perceived, art is given its own elevated 'space' in Tarkovsky's cinematic worlds, just as the framed space of the art work is left relatively intact. (This respectful distance in terms of how art images are presented also reflects on Tarkovsky's rejection of painting inspired *mise-en-scène* and the hybridization of art forms.) In these ways art images are both woven into the fabric of a film's narrative and the life of the characters, and transcend that narrative and life, just as they are posited as existing within, and outside of, the course of history. In Tarkovsky's cinema, emphasis is squarely placed on art as it is experienced and lived-

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<sup>409</sup>See Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" in *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty*, 273.

with, rather than analyzed or theorized, mirroring the ways in which his films seek to be experienced from the inside-out, as 'immersive' realities, rather than constructed artifacts. In all these respects, Tarkovsky's employment of painting may be set in opposition to Godard's analytic, fragmenting, highly reflexive use of, and reference to, art images, in the form of a two-dimensional commentary on live-action narrative (in his films from the 1960s), the *tableaux* re-creation of paintings (in *Passion*), and the associational, film-painting dialectics of later video works (such as *Histoire(s) du cinéma*).

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion I would like to briefly address four issues. Firstly, I will consider what this thesis has achieved in relation to what it has attempted concerning the study of the use and referencing of art in post-1960 European cinema in relation to reflexivity. Secondly, I will discuss the reflexive and a-reflexive use of art in relation to film genre. Thirdly, I will identify some important issues pertaining to the *seeing-with/seeing-through cinema* distinction and also make some general points as to what phenomenology may have to offer film theory, as revealed by this study. And finally, I will consider possible future developments in the interaction between narrative cinema and painting.

I have shown that the representation of painting as both a subject and a filmed object in post-1960 European cinema is as diverse and multi-faceted as the styles and the works of individual filmmakers that comprise it. Equally diverse are the ways that painting incorporated into a film's world may have a reflexive or self-reflexive function, bringing into focus significant features of the film medium. In this respect modern and contemporary art cinema shares with much 20<sup>th</sup> century painting a seemingly inexhaustible interest in exploring its own forms and conditions.

In trying to map such a large artistic field and to better locate the representation of painting within it, I have proposed a distinction between what I term *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* filmmaking. The terms of the distinction correspond roughly to the reflexive and critically transparent poles of cinematic representation. In exploring the contrast between these two modes of filmmaking in relation to the representation of art and artists, I have touched on a number of key aspects of cinematic reflexivity. The relation between a film's represented world and its expressive dimensions, the increasingly blurred boundary between fiction and non-fiction film styles, and differing cinematic articulations of time and space that mirror particular processes of filmmaking and viewing, have all been considered. The writings of two philosophers and theorists

of art from different generations and traditions, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Arthur Danto, have helped to frame the suggested *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* distinction with reference to these and other facets of reflexive cinema. They have also aided in contextualizing filmic reflexivity with reference to wider historical developments in twentieth century visual art and aesthetic theory.

Elaborating on these general observations by looking to specific works, I have discussed how, in a post-1960 context, Peter Greenaway and Raul Ruiz present painting within the context of the semi-fictional 'mock-documentary,' while simultaneously comparing the experience of viewing works of art and watching films. Jacques Rivette, Victor Erice and Maurice Pialat pursue a different project. In their own ways, each of these filmmakers re-invent and re-vitalise the artist centered film and find innovative ways -- in many cases, highly reflexive ones -- to depict the creative process. Jean Luc Godard's career long cinematic engagement with the visual arts, as well as the formal and thematic relation between his films and the Pop art painting of Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist, has been interpreted through the lens of *seeing-with cinema*. For Godard to represent a painting on the screen is to commence a self-reflexive conversation with film as a visual art, a dialogue which frequently transcends the fictional context in which it arises. The films of Andrei Tarkovsky, representing *seeing-through cinema*, also 'speak' to film by way of art. But, in stark contrast to Godard, they do so from firmly within the fictional worlds that they compellingly establish.

Returning to the films that I have looked at, although I have remained within the unofficial 'canon' of European art cinema -- as both the above list of directors and the filmography at the end of this study attests to -- the reflexive/transparent dichotomy and its articulation through art that I have traced also extends to those *auteurs* working within a more recognizably genre-based idiom. To cite a few examples, Sergio Leone's studied familiarity with painting is evident in his *bravura* framing and layered compositions. Christopher Frayling confirms the inspiration Leone, also an art collector, found in De Chirico and Magritte, one he shared with cinematographer Tonio delli Colli on the revisionist Western masterpieces *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) and

*Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968).<sup>410</sup> Whatever one may think of Dario Argento's *giallo* horror films, their sheer visual inventiveness and barrage of tongue-in-cheek cinematic devices marks him as a black-sheep descendant of Hitchcock and Welles. Along with copious references to prior cinema, Argento's frequent nods to painting are not difficult to spot in films like *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980) and, most prominently, *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996, partly set in the Uffizi Gallery), where the violent action unfolds in stylized *tableaux* against the wider backdrop of an art gilded and decidedly European decadence. Self-consciously drawing the history of European art into its blood soaked frame, Argento's cinema can be seen as a kind of "low art" reply to Greenaway's 'inter-textual' "museum films."<sup>411</sup> Similarly, Harvey Kümel, the visually gifted Belgian director of baroque fantasies *Daughters of Darkness* (1971) and *Malpertuis* (1971) admits his delight in alluding to painting whenever he can, perhaps most conspicuously in *Daughters of Darkness*, where in one shot he borrows the foreshortened composition of Mantegna's Christ (in his *Lamentation* of 1490) and in another the anti-hero's climatic death is depicted in the manner of a Renaissance *pieta*. More generally, Kümel seems to have absorbed the work not only of fellow countrymen Magritte, but also Paul Delvaux. The latter's figurative brand of surrealism, with its ghostly female nudes, red drapery, and moonlit city streets, is also re-called, in far less ironic fashion, in the macabre dream sequences of Buñuel's *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. In the case of all of these filmmakers (save Buñuel), a reflexive toying with Western and horror film conventions mostly deriving from Hollywood film practice (and often indebted to literature) is combined with the particular European

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<sup>410</sup> See Christopher Frayling, *Sergio Leone: Something to Do With Death*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000, 262.

<sup>411</sup> Painters and art styles either informing the *mise-en-scène* of Argento's films or directly represented within it include the work of Caravaggio, the surrealists, and the *art nouveau* painters and designers. See Chris Gallant "The Art of Allusion: Painting, Murder and the 'Plan Tableau'" in *Art of Darkness: The Cinema of Dario Argento*, edited by Chris Gallant, Guildford: FAB press, 2001.

penchant, noted throughout this study, for self-consciously referencing celebrated paintings and artistic styles.

Less reflexive, and thus more akin to Buñuel's, the extraordinary *mise-en-scène* of the late Walerian Borowczyk is defiantly *sui-generis*. A former painter and award winning animator whose films, such as *Goto, l'île d'amour* (*Goto, Isle of Love*, 1968) and *Blanche* (1971), were prized at major festivals in the 1970s, the taboo-breaking excesses of many of Borowczyk's later films have led to their contentious classification, and outright dismissal by some, as soft-core pornography. The Polish-born director's eroticized excursions into his own private universe of textured bodies (often presented in a highly naturalistic, un-glamorized manner), period details, and 'found' objects are characterized by a striking flair for composition, where close-up shots of inanimate objects imbued with a surrealist intensity alternate with arresting rectangular *tableaux*. The latter are lucid, vividly colored 'cine-paintings' less busy and less purposefully ironic than Greenaway's. And, despite the fact that Picasso's daughter Paloma appears in one of Borowczyk's most visually stunning films, *Les contes immoraux* (*Immoral Tales*, 1974), Borowczyk's cinematic vision overlaps with painting (from Renaissance art to early twentieth century surrealism) less by way of studied appreciation or reflexive probing than instinctual proclivity and a will to re-instate the surreal and fantastic in cinema in the face of its realist rejection. (The films of Jan Svankmajer, mixing stop-motion animation and live-action, continue in this Eastern European fantastic tradition, where a graphic sensibility has fed into cinema through animation taken seriously as an expressive form to rival live-action film.)

I briefly mention these films and directors primarily to suggest that painting and cinema interact in intriguing ways on all levels of what may be seen as the unofficial hierarchy of European cinema, from modernist masterpieces to less celebrated genre re-workings. And from both within a *generic* context and outside of it the representation of art has sometimes been used to test this very hierarchy. It is not surprising, therefore, that in recent years an increasing amount of scholarly attention has been granted to hybridization between different art forms within European genre cinema.

There is one important aspect of the *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* distinction that I have not yet addressed directly, although it has been implicit throughout this study and mentioned in relation to differences between a number of the filmmakers discussed, principally Godard and Tarkovsky. This concerns film viewing as a mode of aesthetic experience, and in this connection certain strengths of the phenomenological approach this study has followed, as well as what it may offer to the study of filmic subjects other than art, are apparent.

I have largely focused on *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* as two contrasting modes of filmmaking, or, in more 'intentional-ist' terms, as attitudes on the part of filmmakers towards their cinematic subjects. But in so far as every film inculcates, or demands, a certain attitude on the part of the viewer in relation to its created world(s), these could equally be seen – and perhaps analysed – as two modes of film *viewing*. Yet rather than theorising the acts of cinematic creation and those of apprehension separately, as if they were divided by a pronounced gulf, with the film work 'in-itself' positioned somewhere precariously between them, phenomenology teaches us, as Mikel Dufrenne stresses, that the two are deeply conjoined *in* and *through* the work of art - the film - or more precisely, its world.<sup>412</sup> If existential phenomenology has a single aim in relation to art it is the attempt to bring together the world of the work (with the presence of its creator inherent in it) and the viewer's experience of that world (in turn shaped as by all of the ideas and experiences the viewer brings to a work) rather than divorce them; this against the wider backdrop of attempting to transcend, as much as possible, the dualities of subject/object, form/content.<sup>413</sup>

In relation to the audience side of the equation, while not 'subjective' in a strict sense, the *seeing-with* and *seeing-through* distinction, as a phenomenological one, ultimately hinges on each viewer's unique experience of a film. As indicated in the

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<sup>412</sup> See, in particular, Dufrenne's discussion of the "affective *a priori*" in relation to the experience of the world of the art work in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Part IV "Critique of Aesthetic Experience," 437-556.

<sup>413</sup> Merleau-Ponty suggests that the greatest achievement of phenomenology is its "uniting extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism" ("What is Phenomenology," in *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty*," 41).

introduction, this is what distinguishes its framing of reflexivity from other theoretical models. For this reason the distinction is not amenable to the level of 'objective' systematization that some might require, or perhaps expect, of such a dichotomy, one aiming to have explanatory power in relation to a film's most important aesthetic features. This does not mean, however, that because it may involve discussion of the 'tone,' 'overall atmosphere' or 'feeling' of a film's world, that the distinction is a vague or nebulous one, as I hope that my use of it has shown. One should not necessarily expect the most significant aspects of a film's world, taken as a whole, to be either easily formalized following the experience of it, or readily broken down into its constitutive parts. (In this respect the *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* distinction mirrors reflexivity as an irreducible, *Gestalt*, quality that a film possesses, as discussed in Chapter 2). As Dudley Andrew notes in distinguishing phenomenological approaches to film from semiotic/structuralist ones, rather than a deficiency speaking to conceptual weakness, this anti-reductive ethos and attention to what precedes and follows "signification" in the apprehension of films, can be viewed positively as one of the distinct advantages it possesses as a theoretical model.<sup>414</sup> A phenomenological approach is for these reasons well suited to works of art – be they films, paintings, or novels – which make a virtue out of immediacy, ambiguity, and a resistance to classification or conceptualisation, as I have demonstrated with respect to a number of films: this, in addition to, its particular appropriateness to the cinematic medium in ways which have already been suggested.

The *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* distinction has been arrived at via phenomenology (of its 'existential' variety, as applied to art works). As has been noted, Merleau-Ponty draws an analogy between modern painting and film - and by extension, reflexivity, as a prominent attribute of both - and existential phenomenology. I have used Merleau-Ponty's suggestion as a means of framing *seeing-with cinema* in contrast with its *seeing-through cinema* opposite; especially with reference to Merleau-Ponty's call to wholly accept, and 'see-with' the medium of perception, versus Blake's

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<sup>414</sup> Andrew, "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory," in *Movies and Methods, An Anthology, Volume II*, 627.

visionary attempt to transcend it. However, it is at the same time a phenomenological approach to cinema, as I have endeavored to elucidate it, with its emphasis on the film work as given, its orientation towards the film world in its *ideality*, its prioritizing of description over analysis, and its equal weight to both form and content conceived on some level as inseparable, which is best able to engage with *seeing-through cinema* films and directors.

Now this does not suggest, as it may first appear, that the distinction therefore dissolves or loses its explanatory 'bite,' as it were. Rather it indicates that although in some cases, reflexivity and transparency, *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema*, have been put forward as opposite modes struggling against the other, they are at the same time, as has been also noted in relation to some of the films we have looked at, two ends of the same spectrum. The full implications of this can not be followed up here. But combined with emphasizing the crucial role of the viewer in recognizing, or 'activating' the reflexive features of a film work, it suggests another route by which qualities of reflexivity and transparency, as both present in a given film and within a filmmaker's body of work, may be conceived as overlapping realities: the product of shifts of emphasis that correspond with, or depend on, shifts of apprehension, attitude, or knowledge, on the part of the viewer. This could in turn be related to the more holistic, less reductionist conception of reflexivity in film that I spoke of in relation to Danto's notion of reflexivity as a contextual awareness on the part of a work's audience corresponding to a 'consciousness-of-consciousness.' Viewed from this perspective, issues of context – the historical and cultural context within which a film is made, as well as seen, and the assumptions and knowledge the viewer brings to a film – rather than being 'bracketed' out of the equation, bear directly on the nature of the film world and its reflexivity or transparency. Moreover, rather than being at odds with them, phenomenology has the potential to complement other forms of film analysis, be they formal, historical, or rooted in theories of reception.

Based on the films and theories that have been discussed, beyond the *seeing-with* and *seeing-through cinema* analogy and the many issues it raises with respect to art on film, it is difficult to draw sweeping conclusions. But with respect to larger trends

we may speculate abstractly. Conforming to patterns of cross-art hybridization witnessed in other art forms, it could be that the teleological end goal - if one exists - of the dialectic between film and traditional visual arts that I referred to in the introduction of this study is cinema's working out its own inherent nature. Given the complex, heterogeneous evolution of post-1960 film form, breaking off into so many disparate branches, any 'real' or essentialist definition of cinema can only be construed in an 'existential' sense, as antecedent to, or a consequence of, the perceptually (self-) revealed conditions of the film work's concrete existence, rather than something preceding it as a theoretical *a priori*. Staying with the metaphor of existential self-discovery or awareness, perhaps cinema can only come to 'know itself' through interaction with other art forms, including painting, each one cast as a defining *other*. Within this on-going dialectical process, recognized differences and points of friction, are as productive as similarities. In this way film stakes out its own artistic territory in relation to painting's frontiers, for example, as a result of exploration and give-and-take exchange rather than conquest or a retreat into itself.

Although we need not accept the exaggerated predictions of its immanent demise, cinema as we know it does face an uncertain future. Recent changes in filmmaking and viewing technology only give an added relevance to film's mid-to-late twentieth century (and early twenty-first) quest for identity, in the form of attempts on the part of modern and contemporary narrative filmmakers to test the boundaries of their art through a critical dialogue with others, including painting. This is a dialogue which, as has been mentioned, new technologies can both aid in and hinder. In a European context, the past few years give some indication that in the hands of talented filmmakers new technology, particularly as pertaining to mixed or hybrid-media presentation, may lead to a resurgence and re-vitalization of reflexive narrative cinema which, with some notable exceptions, has largely lain dormant since its heyday in the 1960s and 70's. Whether these new capabilities will in turn ultimately bring cinema closer to the traditional visual arts in an experiential or phenomenological (if not formal) sense, or push it much farther away, and whether or not the cinema and painting

dialectic in post-1960 European film, as one key aspect of reflexive film practice, will enter yet another intriguing phase, remain for the moment open questions.

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## Selected Filmography

Films are listed alphabetically by director and in reverse chronological order.

### **Robert Altman**

The Long Goodbye, 1973

### **Michelangelo Antonioni**

Al di là delle nuvole (*Beyond the Clouds*), with Wim Wenders, 1995

Zabriskie Point, 1970

Il Deserto Rosso (*Red Desert*), 1964

Blow Up, 1966

### **Dario Argento**

La Sindrome di Stendhal (*The Stendhal Syndrome*), 1996

Inferno, 1980

Suspira, 1977

### **Ingmar Bergman**

Persona, 1966

### **Bernardo Bertolucci**

Il Conformista (*The Conformist*), 1970

Strategia del Ragno (*The Spider's Stratagem*), 1970

### **Walerian Borowczyk**

Les contes immoraux (*Immoral Tales*), 1974

Blanche, 1971

Goto, l'île d'amour (*Goto, Isle of Love*), 1968

### **Robert Bresson**

Lancelot du Lac (*Lancelot of the Lake*), 1974

### **Luis Buñuel**

La Charme discret de la bourgeoisie (*The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*), 1974

### **Henri-Georges Clouzot**

Le Mystère Picasso (*The Mystery of Picasso*), 1956

### **Jean Cocteau**

Orphée, 1950

**Clair Denis**

Jacques Rivette: le veilleur, 1990

**Victor Erice**

El Sol del membrillo (*Quince Tree Sun*), 1992

**Federico Fellini**

Otto e mezzo (8 ½), 1963

**Jean-Luc Godard**

Éloge de l'amour (*In Praise of Love*), 2001

Histoire(s) du cinema, 1997-98

Passion, 1982

2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle (*Two or Three Things I Know About Her*), 1967

Week-end, 1967

Pierrot le fou, 1965

Le mépris (*Contempt*), 1963

Les carabiniers, 1963

Le grand escroc, 1963

Une femme est une femme (*A Woman is a Woman*), 1961

À bout de souffle (*Breathless*), 1960

**Douglas Gordon**

Twenty-Four Hour Psycho, 1993

**Peter Greenaway**

The Tulse Luper Suitcases, Part 1: The Moab Story, 2003

8 ½ Women, 1999

The Pillow Book, 1996

The Baby or Mâcon, 1993

Prospero's Books, 1991

The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover, 1989

"A TV Dante," 1989

Drowning by Numbers, 1988

The Belly of an Architect, 1987

A Zed and Two Noughts, 1985

The Draughtsman's Contract, 1982

The Falls, 1980

A Walk Through H: The Reincarnation of an Ornithologist, 1978

Water Wockets, 1975

**Werner Herzog**

Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht (*Nosferatu the Vampyre*), 1979

Herz aus Glas (*Heart of Glass*), 1976

Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle (*The Enigma of Kasper Hauser*), 1974

**Derek Jarman**

Blue, 1993

**Abbas Kiarostami**

Ta'm e guilass (*A Taste of Cherry*), 1997

**Stanley Kubrick**

2001: A Space Odyssey, 1968

**Harry Kümel**

Malpertuis, 1971

Daughters of Darkness, 1971

**Sergio Leone**

Cera una volta il West (*Once Upon a Time in the West*), 1968

Il Buono, il brutto, il cattivo (*The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*), 1966

**David Lynch**

Blue Velvet, 1986

Lost Highway, 1997

**Chris Marker**

La Jetée, 1962

**Sergei Parajanov**

Sayat Nova (*The Colour of Pomegranates*), 1968

**Maurice Pialat,**

Van Gogh, 1991

**Alexander Sokurov**

Russkiy kovcheg (*Russian Ark*), 2001

**Jean Renoir**

Une partie de campagne (*A Day in the Country*), 1936

**Alain Resnais**

L'Année dernière à Marienbad (*Last Year at Marienbad*), 1961

Hiroshima mon amour, 1959

Van Gogh, 1948

**Jacques Rivette**

La belle noiseuse: Divertimento, 1991  
La belle noiseuse, 1991  
Out 1, 1971  
Out 1 Spectre, 1972  
Paris nous appartient (*Paris Belongs to Us*), 1960

**Raul Ruiz**

Ce jour-là (*That Day*), 2003  
Trois vies et une seule mort (*Three Lives and One Death*), 1996  
Le Jeu de l'oie (*Snakes and Ladders*), 1980  
De grands événements et de gens ordinaires (*Of Great Events and Ordinary People*), 1979  
L'Hypothèse du tableau volé (*The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*), 1978  
Colloque de chiens (*Dog's Dialogue*), 1977

**Andrei Tarkovsky**

Offret (*The Sacrifice*), 1986  
Nostalghia (*Nostalghia*), 1983  
Stalker, 1979  
Zerkalo (*Mirror*), 1975  
Solaris, 1972  
Ivanovo Detstvo (*Ivan's Childhood*), 1962  
Andrey Rublyov (*Andrei Rublev*), 1966

**François Truffaut**

La nuit américaine (*Day for Night*), 1974  
Les quatre cent coups (*The 400 Blows*), 1959

**Andy Warhol**

The Chelsea Girls, 1966

**Orson Welles**

The Lady from Shanghai, 1947  
Citizen Kane, 1941

**Wim Wenders**

The End of Violence, 1997  
Tokyo-Ga, 1985  
Paris, Texas, 1984  
Lightning over Water, Nick's Film, 1980  
Amerikanische Freund, Der (*The American Friend*), 1977  
Im Lauf der Zeit (*The Kings of the Road*), 1976



Figure 1

Courtesy of <http://www.abcgallery.com>

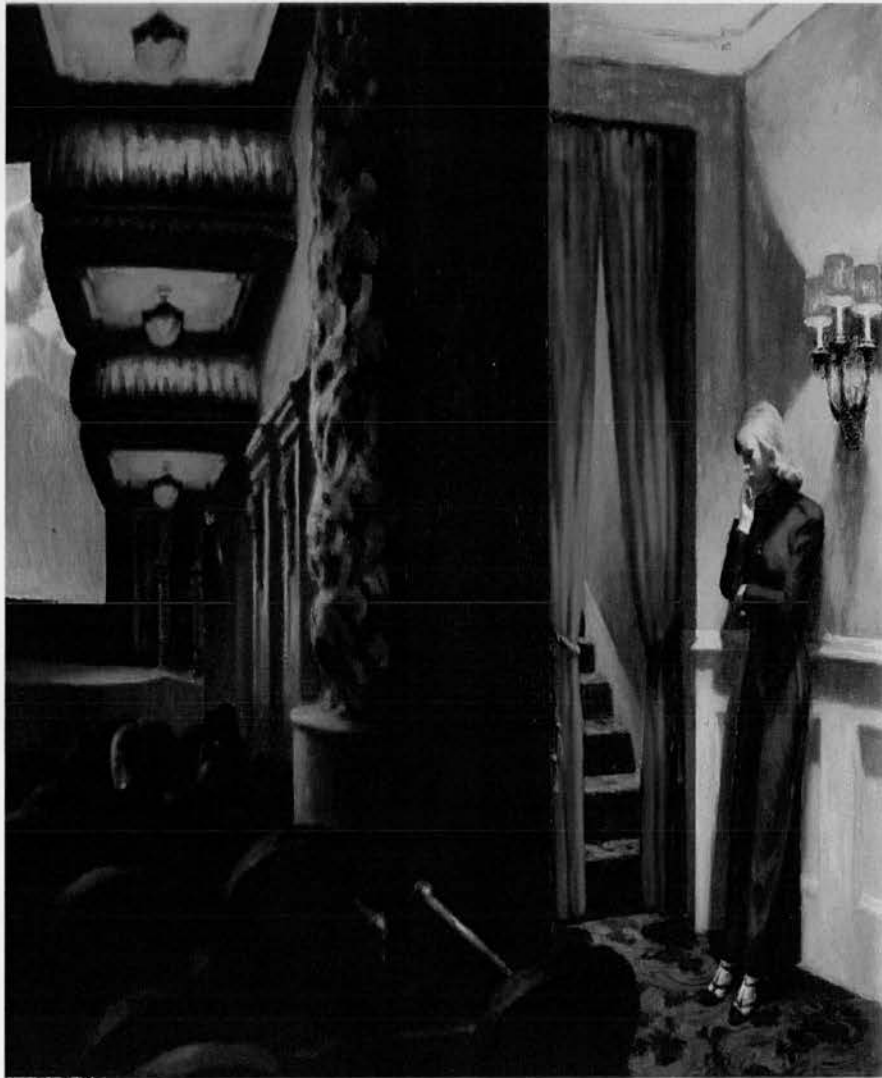


Figure 2

<http://www.postershop.com>



Figure 3

Courtesy of <http://museoprado.mcu.es/imeni.html>



Figure 4

Courtesy of <http://www.image-duplicator.com>

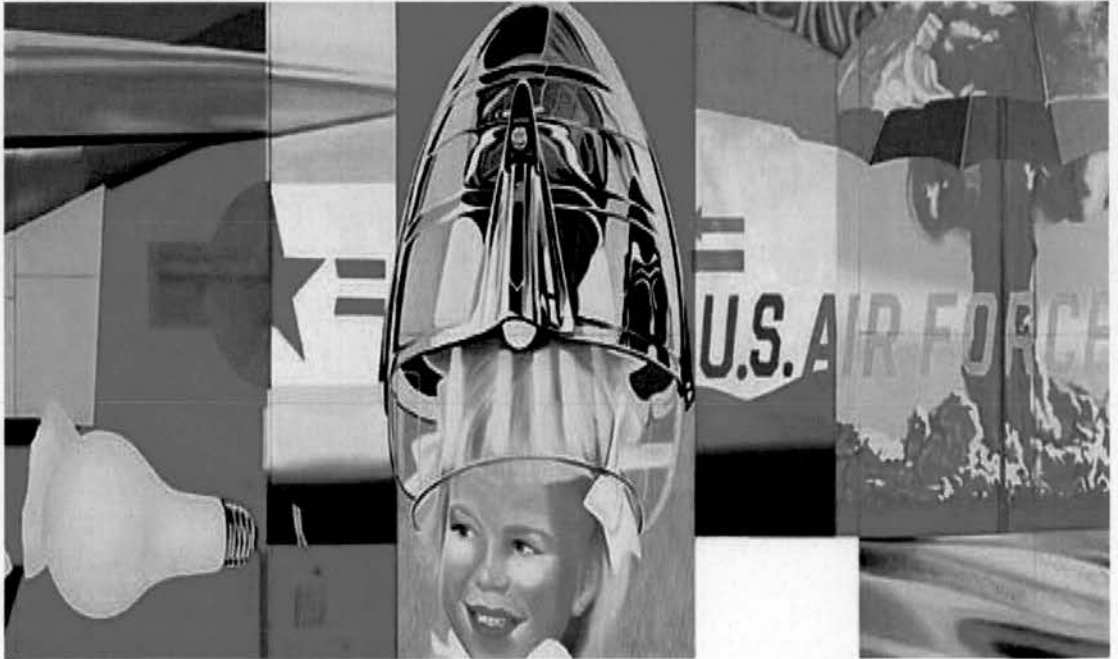


Figure 5

Courtesy of <http://www.guggenheim.org>



Figure 6

Courtesy of <http://www.wga.hu/>



Figure 7

Courtesy of <http://wga.hu/>