3

Representation

THE WORLDS WE REPRESENT

In the second chapter we saw that the seemingly simple substratum of the cinema, visual perception, is an immensely complicated and disputed concept. In contrast, the issue of representation which stands before us now as the next level to be treated has never been thought of as simple by anyone and has been an explicit battleground for competing theories of the cinema. It will be even less possible here to present a satisfactory summary of views and arguments surrounding this issue, so vast is it, touching even upon the nature of thinking itself. But we can highlight and isolate the special conditions of representation which govern the cinema and the peculiar questions which the cinema raises as questions of representation.

Amidst all the varying types of experiments with perception, barely outlined in Chapter 2, there dominates a nearly univocal belief in the importance of "attention" in visual life. Only acts of cognitive expectation permit our eyes to move and focus in such a way that we see images. D. W. Hamlyn, berating all mechanistic discussions of perception, including even Gestalt psychology, demands that we study not just the eye, the stimuli, and the neural patterns of the brain, but the general conditions at play in any moment of perception.[1] Our eyes work differently in different circumstances, literally forming different images depending on the expectations which guide their use.

Given this framework, we would have to say that the general circumstances of perception for the cinema spectator seem quite limited and specific in the first instance. We enter a theater and stare in front of us at a two dimensional screen for two hours. Yet within this strait jacket our eyes expect to coagulate film grain into shapes, objects, actions, and scenes; more important they expect to do so in ways which mimic the nearly unlimited viewing circumstances of life in the world. Cinema perception is a mode of "seeing as" wherein we see an array of light and shadow as a particular object and we see several hundred fragments of a full film as a particular world. Far from being a rare occurrence in perception, or a particularly devious one, cinema here joins myriad other instances of "seeing as," instances in which we notice an oscillation between what our senses deliver to us and how we identify this. Certainly the most startling cases of this involve illusions, but as E. H. Gombrich, Nelson Goodman, and others have stressed, this structure of experience is ubiquitous.[2] In daily life we are prone to identify geometric patterns of stimuli (an oblong, for example) as objects named by a different geometrical figure (a round table, set obliquely to our eyes). If this is the case for veridical perception, how much more pervasive is "seeing as" for explicitly judgmental visual acts which organize percepts into coherent wholes. We identify a set of varied stimuli not only as human beings, but as a group we call "the class" and oppose it to another blend of stimuli which we name "the teacher." Our experience, in short, does not merely add to our perception, it makes perception possible, for we perceive inferentially.

Goodman has pursued the consequences of these observations to the end, arriving at a pluralistic and nominalist philosophy which makes explicit use of art. There is no primary real world which we subsequently subject to various types of representation, he contends.[3] Rather it makes far more sense to speak of multiple worlds which individuals and groups construct and live within. Worlds are comprehensive systems which comprise all elements that fit together within the same horizon, including elements that are before our eyes in the foreground of experience, and those which sit vaguely on the horizon forming a background. These elements consist of objects, feelings, associations, and ideas in a grand mix so rich that only the term "world" seems large enough to encompass it.

Goodman is fond of using art as an explanatory model for his notion of "world." We step into a Dickens novel and quickly learn the types of elements that belong there. The plot may surprise us with its happenings, but every happening must seem possible in that world because all the actions, characters, thoughts, and feelings represented come from the same overall source. That source, the world of Dickens, is obviously larger than the particular rendition of it which we call *Oliver Twist*. It includes versions we call *David Copperfield* and *The Pickwick Papers* too. In fact, it is larger than the sum of novels Dickens wrote, existing as a set of paradigms, a global source from which he could draw. Cut out from this source are anachronistic elements like telephones or space ships, and elements belonging to other types of fiction (blank verse, mythological characters, and even accounts of the life of royalty).

It should be clear that even such a covering term as "The World of Dickens" has no final solidity or authority. A young reader of *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist* might consider these texts to be versions of a world of education and family relations which concern him outside of literature. The Dickens scholar naturally would consider these texts to be part of the complete writings of Dickens. What they represented for Dickens himself, who lived within them during the years of their composition, no one can say. One goal of interpretation has always been to make coincide the world of the reader with that of the writer. Although not a futile enterprise, the difficulties of accomplishing it, or of knowing that it has been achieved, are obvious.

Artworks are indeed suitable examples of worlds and worldmaking, for they are cut off in time and space from our everyday life. Not only is "The Woman Weighing Gold" a world within a frame which can hold a viewer's entire attention, so also is the Vermeer room in a museum featuring his work. The museum itself is a kind of world that we enter and leave bringing with us expectations, memories, particular codes of behavior, and a very special type of perception.

But out on the bustling street we likewise live in a world divided by comprehensive types of interest. For most of us the world of politics exists as a separate sphere to which we occasionally attend. This is an immense world frequently represented for us on the news or in papers. The New York *Times* editorial on "detente" is a version of part of this world as is the rebuttal of this version printed the next day in *Pravda*. Whatever encompasses our attention is a world we have constructed to live within. Whatever organizes our sense of that world or of some portion of it is a version; and versions we call representations.

THE WORLD OF AND IN FILM

Goodman's formulation makes it possible to speak of standard sense perception as "representational" in that each percept consists not only of its own quality but also of an indication pointing to the world to which it belongs. "This is a chair in the dining room" or "this is a swarm of molecules" is an equally true statement pertaining to a single ocular impression which the physicist had as he came down to breakfast. The first statement fits into his domestic world and the second into his professional world. Nor can we say that one statement is truer than the other, if both are in fact true to the worlds in which they belong.

The philosophical issues here go back centuries and can hardly be solved in this chapter. Does the Eskimo actually live in a world of multiple cold, white substances that we identify grossly and simply as snow? Goodman refuses to accord priority to the world of the chemist for whom such substances are particular definable states of the H_2O molecule.[4] Whether we agree with him or not, it is enough that recent philosophy has provided us with the room and the terms to permit a subtle description of the processes and effects of art in general and of the cinema in particular. Fortuitously, the relevant issues that crystallize around the notion of "world" derive not just from Anglo-American language philosophers like Goodman but from continental phenomenology. Sartre's writings on the imagination, Alfred Schutz's sociology of "life-worlds," and Mikel Dufrenne's "Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Experience" give weight to the common parlance of film critics who have always been comfortable with phrases like "Chaplin's world" or "The World of *Citizen Kane*."[5]

Instinctively we have cut off from our other experiences the special sensibility, gestures, and objects that belong to Chaplin's films or that fit into the kind of sepulchral space exemplifed by *Citizen Kane*. More generally theorists and the average spectator have cut off from ordinary life the world that exists within the movie theatre. "The World of Film" suggests the mechanism by which anything reaches the screen and, on reaching it, affects us. Instead of being a catalogue of things appearing on the screen (as in the Chaplin and *Kane* examples) "the world of film" is a mode of experience, rather like "the world of imagination." How does the cinema represent anything for us? In trying to answer this question Goodman advises us not to measure the adequacy of our representations against some supposed "reality" existing beyond representation but to isolate and analyze the peculiarities that make up the representational system of the cinema and that make its effects distinctive.

Now the first elements of cinematic representation are perceptual. Earlier we discussed the tension of belief and unbelief in cinema as equivalent to the oscillation between looking and seeing or seeing and recognizing which is the integral structure of perception in general. It is this equivalence that permits the casual, though philosophically naïve, claim that "reality" is rendered in cinematic perception. More accurately we should say that the structure of cinematic perception is readily translated into that of natural perception, so much so that we can rely on information we construct in viewing films to supplement our common perceptual knowledge (which is also, as we have often noted, constructed knowledge). This explains the confidence that jurors place in cinematic records submitted by a lawyer, or that astronomers have in video images sent back from Mars, or that ethnologists have in footage brought back by explorers to distant lands. In all these instances cinematic information supplements what we know about one or another of the worlds we inhabit.

To some degree the tension between belief and doubt operates in every iconic sign system: the cinema, still photography, drawing, painting, and so on. In each of these an image strives to produce the *effects* of natural perception through a *process* quite different from natural perception. We *effectively* recognize our friend in an image *processed* by Kodak.

If cinema heads our hierarchy of such sign systems, so that the jury accepts a filmed record of the murder but rejects a drawing by an eyewitness and even a still photograph, it is due to cinema's mechanical and temporal aspects. The automatic registration of light on celluloid involves us in squinting at the image to "make out" the object in the glare and the grain (whereas a drawing could be much more clear). And the temporal flow which throws us from one image to the next demands that we adjust our recognition of what we see to the overall image which organizes itself gradually before us. But it is just this work that makes us assent to the film image, for ordinary perception involves precisely the same types of work even if the actual visual cues (the stimuli) are somewhat different. So at its basis cinema may be said to represent the numerous objects signified in light and shadow

over the course of an hour or two. But cinematic representation is more than a sequence of photographs, for the thousands of *photogrammes* meld into pictures of scenes enduring over time. Instinctively we strive to put disparate scenes together so that the entire projection coheres. Thus, from the automatic operation of the phi phenomenon which produces movement out of static and separated *photogrammes* to the classification of an entire film, the mind actively constructs images from the light that stimulates it. At the first level the percepts we identify in the flowing grain depend in a major way on our expectation that they will contribute to the larger representation which is at stake in the film.

These still images then become animated and begin to pull us through the film along what Béla Balázs called a current of induction[6] toward a final representation. It is this ultimate sense of a developing representation that makes the individual *photogrammes* readable and that likewise assures their smooth linkage in montage. Yet what is this final representation other than a construct built up of the individual fragments it supposedly makes comprehensible? Just as the basic percept of cinema is a unit constructed out of light and shadow on film grain, so the entire cinematic representation is a major unit our mind puts together. More important, the structure of cinematic representation from beginning to end is one of process, where fragments are ruled by the wholes they add up to, and where belief and unbelief keep our eyes on the screen while our mind glides into the world of the representation.

Quite simply the oscillation at the heart of all instances of "seeing as" becomes in the cinema a vacillation between belief and doubt. The cinema fascinates because we alternately take it as real and unreal, that is, as participating in the familiar world of our ordinary experience yet then slipping into its own quite different screen world. Only an unusually strong act of attention enables us to focus on the light, shadow, and color without perceiving these as the objects they image. And, on the other side, only an equally strong hallucinating mode of attention can maintain from beginning to end the interchangeability of what we perceive and the ordinary world, negating all difference of image and referent. Cinema would seem to exist between these two extremes as an interplay between "the real and the image." The film experience in general and every instance of viewing a film can be analyzed in terms of a ratio between realistic perceptual cues and cues which mark an effort and type of abstraction.

Contributing to the sense of reality (of immediate apperception and non-mediation) are at least four elements, some of which Christian Metz outlined in his earliest writing.

1. Experimental preconditions, such as the darkened auditorium.
2. Analogical indices such that the image of an object shares actual visible properties with its referent.
3. The psychological imitation which cinematic flow provides of the actual flow of reality. Importantly, movement in the cinema is actual movement, not represented movement, and our mind is brought alive by it.
4. Finally, the lure of sound, which establishes a second sense to verify the first and which analogically is more exact than image representation.[7]

All of these characteristics tend to put us in front of a filmed image as if we were in front of a real scene in life. What keeps us from accepting the image as life is a fissure which we sometimes leap, sometimes refuse to leap, and most often straddle. Consisting of such experiential counters as bodily immobility, of nonanalogic aspects such as foreshortening, and of the more basic fact that the scene has been put before us by another, these anti-illusionistic elements lead us to treat the film not as life but as an image in the Sartrian sense, as a presence of an absence.[8]

All films present themselves to us as real/image according to various ratios. To move across the bar is to shift intentionality in a manner not unlike what happens in figure/ground experiments. Reality is here taken to be a type of consciousness characterized by certain indices of appearances and a certain mental activity. To shift to the imaginary is to move, as in daydream, to another "realm" while still adhering to many of the phenomena associated with our reality state.

The crucial marker of this particular experience of oscillation is the frame itself. The frame is the physical embodiment of the bar between image/reality and it marks as well the case that this experience is presented to me by another. I must attend "there" to the frame and not elsewhere. Classically stated, the screen as "window" is a place of perception; as "frame" or border it delimits and organizes perception for signification. Jean Mitry saw this long ago.[9]

The frame keeps us off our guard. We search the screen as we search any perceptual field, yet we feel the force of "this particular" disposition of objects and shapes. The superfluity of the facts of the visible

world imprints itself on every image, but the frame demands selectivity and motivation. We are given over to the world, yet we are given over to signification. Nor is this the end of it, for the image changes before our eyes; both the film and the world move on. The fact of movement introduces the category of narrative or, at least, its possibility. For while the framed image dissolves before us and the vibrant life of perception is reaffirmed, this flow engages a narrative intentionality marked by reframing and shot changes. Although we perceive the dissolution of every scene, we group scenes into events that are not allowed to fall away but are held together as on a chain.

From the angle of phenomenology, narrative refers to a type of consciousness into which audiences lock themselves when attending to the chain of movement in a film. It involves a particular form of image processing wherein sensations are read as significant in their temporal and causal interrelation. The study of narrative in cinema ought therefore to begin with a determination of our relationship to the images and to the current of induction which runs through them, pulling us after it. Such determinations would amount to genre studies if we formalized their results, since they would name and describe the customary relation into which spectators lapse (or against which they struggle) with regard to the filmed material and its organization.

If every film is a presence of an absence, we are still obliged to differentiate the types of imaginary experience possible within various ratios of this relationship. A filmed image may be considered the presence of a referent which is absent in space (live TV coverage) or in time (home movies). It may also be taken to be an image which is non-existent or whose existence is not in question one way or the other.

Consciousness immediately makes decisions about the status of the image and from these decisions it processes the filmic flow in different ways. If the absent referent is deemed nonexistent we attend to the peculiarities of the image, necessarily striving to give existence to an unknown. If, on the other hand, the absent referent has solidity for us (as a friend or a public figure in whose existence we believe), we may utilize our recognition of the image to launch our consciousness into a state which calls up a *mise-en-scène* of the imaginary, producing nostalgia, desire, and the like.[10]

In this way we can consider our relation to the flow of various types of movies. In the home movie situation each point interests us not as an accumulation of a past (retention) throwing us into a necessary future (protention), but only as a potential triggering device allowing a shift of consciousness. We wish to transcend the home movie by means of one or two of its images and attain a more private state. In other words, the intention of "conjuring up the past" lords it over the basic intentionality of "movement," using the life of movement to restore the dead past. Our frequent recourse to still-frame and creep-speed projection techniques certifies this hierarchy.

Documentaries achieve a variety of ratios of presence/absence or image/referent. Since in most cases we know and believe something about the referent and its world, the documentary can sometimes serve the imaginary function already described in relation to home movies. We use and discard a hundred minutes of the Rolling Stones in order to recognize those five minutes that are sufficient to launch us into a reverie. The sound track in such a film already guarantees this sort of response. But if the film is about an obscure woodcutter of the Northwest, we must attend to the specifics of the image and try to build a sense of a world about which we know little even though we may have "faith" in it. Every documentary relies on our faith in its subject and, more important, utilizes our knowledge of it. Barbet Schroeder's portrait of Idi Amin[11] summarizes a good deal of data through voice-over narration in its first five minutes, but otherwise forces us to process the images of Idi within a field of consciousness already full of the Idi story. Indeed like many documentaries, Schroeder's film was under little compunction to achieve formal closure since his subject would continue to survive and his spectators would in fact have a greater understanding of the denouement of his film than he possibly could have had in 1973, not knowing Idi's final atrocities.

Every fictional film likewise relies on some substratum of spectator understanding of the type of world that becomes the subject of the film. We bring our own sense of boxing to *Rocky* and of the strictures of bourgeois life to any Douglas Sirk film. But the fictional film, at least in most of its genres, quickly transfers our interest to the world of the image, calling on, but not playing to, our knowledge of its referent.

In the fiction film all moments become significant as we construct a referent whose absence is determinant, not merely accidental or logistical. Movement in fiction film is coterminous with the film itself. The viewer is asked to swim in a time stream, and he cannot look away without the fiction threatening to disappear. As Hugo Münsterberg noted fifty years ago,[12] our mental flow coincides with the filmic flow in those

fictions that produce the strongest mental events. Whereas the techniques and codes that construct the illusion of the continuity of movement in the fiction film may be the product of history and labor (may change from era to era), the mode of consciousness by which spectators have always participated in the construction of a fiction is ahistorical and transcendental to the degree that it stems from certain conditions of perception and cognition operating in the everyday life world (conditions such as retention, protention, filling in, and so forth). It is for this reason that those filmmakers who break the cinematic flow (Godard, for instance) need to labor to do so, for they thwart the mind in its act of seizing something that seems to disappear for it when stopped.

Among fiction films themselves we can categorize different ratios of perception to signification and begin to list genres and styles as we do so. *Nashville* and *Paisa* affirm an overbrimming perceptual flux out of which certain stories have eddied. *The Third Man* and *Rosemary's Baby*, on the other hand, construct tight networks of signification which wither all but certain perceptual possibilities. In all fictional cases we appropriate the situation of the narrator by succumbing to the film flow in the proper way. Propriety varies from genre to genre, from *Paisa* to *The Third Man*, but the demands of narrative consciousness remain—demands that include its drive toward totalization, identification, explanation—even while these demands operate in different ways for each genre.

Some of the differences amongst genres and films can be catalogued as functions of the imagination. The supplying of background information is negligible in the standard Western for our minds instantly fill the horizon of these films with the appropriate atmosphere, landscape, and props. But in a film like *Wind Across the Everglades* or *Dersu Uzala*, both of which depend crucially on the relation of atmosphere and landscape to character and both of which are set in landscapes unfamiliar to most filmviewers, the filmmakers must continually offer background shots, through composition in depth, pans away from action, and descriptive exposition.

The film noir, to take another genre and another aspect of film construction, frequently employs both voice-over narration and returns to past action. The viewer is asked to gauge the action represented on the screen in relation to an overall judgment which is, so to speak, simultaneously present with the action. In standard gangster films, on the other hand, the straightforward, third person approach to the action asks us to project the end of the film (the death of the gangster) in the actions he sequentially institutes. The film noir hero, on the contrary, not only appeals to us through first person address, but speaks from a point where the action has reached its end.

More modernist narratives like *8½* or *Last Year at Marienbad* befuddle those viewers unable or unwilling to supply interconnections, background data, multiple categories of image status (dream, wish, memory, reality). By taking our powers and aspirations for explanation, totality, and identification to the limit, such films bring out into the open the value, the labor, and the fragility of representation in the cinema.

THE IDEOLOGY OF REALIST REPRESENTATION

In laboring to thwart the normal "way of the cinema," the radically avant-garde film draws attention to the strength and ubiquity of that "way." No matter what appears on the screen, audiences will instinctively shape it into a representation of something familiar to them. The film that gratifies this attempt, the most satisfyingly representational film, we call realist. Such a film will cut up the world of appearances into perceptual images organized into patterns that make sense to us because these images and patterns exist in our culture. Without effort we can identify in the film something we have identified already in our culture as important. Thus the film reinforces the world we have constructed.

Recent critics of realist cinema have shown all too clearly that this mapping of cinema on life is hardly natural at all but is the product of enormous technical resources and traditional knowledge. The cinema reproduces identifiable parts of our world by framing, focusing, and juxtaposing aspects of the visible in "acceptable" ways.[13] Furthermore it does so teleologically; it shows the dramatic or rhetorical significance of a certain arrangement of these parts from an integral and integrating perspective.

The history of the cinema is usually measured as the progressive adequation of the rules of cinematic organization to the habitual ways by which we organize life in our culture. The movement from long shot to mid-shot to close-up, for instance, termed in the industry the "ac-

cordian sequence," imitates our usual method of surveying the context of a situation and only then attending to human speech.

This and other codes of representation are meant to disappear as we grasp (identify) and assent to the representation itself. In other words, realism in the cinema is driven by a desire to make the audience ignore the process of signification and to grasp directly the film's plot or intrigue; for most filmviewers, the plot is precisely and fully what a film represents. In this way realism stabilizes the temporal dimension of film, turning the flow of pictures into a single large picture whose process of coming into being has been hidden behind the effect of its plot. While the semiotic work of such theorists as Metz and Barthes[14] has disclosed the cleverness of the realist system, it has simultaneously provided an impetus for both the critic and the filmmaker to go beyond realism.

This modernist ideal is in harmony with Gombrich's celebrated *Art and Illusion*.[15] Just as Gombrich sought to trace the invention of strategies in drawing and painting that produced the illusion of reality for each succeeding generation, so Barthes suggests a method whereby narrative can be treated as a practice, conventional and even rhetorical, in which fragments are joined in a way to promote an illusionistic experience. Plot in narrative is analogous to design in graphic art: we think of it as the first thing seized, as that which structures the whole, as meaningful in itself, as referential. The other elements in narrative, we believe, flesh out the plot, just as texture, color, and ornament operate on design. Like designs, plots can be more or less intricate; they can be produced by continuous line, broken line, or successive approximations. In the classic (or as Barthes has called it, "readerly") narrative, action has been organized for a reader-viewer which places him or her just as definitely as perspectival painting situates its viewer in relation to a vanishing point. The scene is intelligible only through the complicity of the spectator, a task we take on every time we read a classic story or see a classically built film. We exhaust such realist works once we have successfully identified what they are about, once we have, for example, arrived at the final clue which makes the entire detective plot clear to us.

The solidity of such plotted films puts us at ease before the fictional world, but it greatly restricts the possibilities of art. First of all, it assumes that every work wants to express precisely what it represents. While this may be true in science or ordinary discourse, artistic

expression frequently is at odds with what it represents. This is why we find so many "still lifes" in painting, all of which may represent a bowl of fruit but each of which expressing a different mode of vision or feeling, a different way of painting. The narrative or the design in art ought really to be thought of as one element in a mobile system. Roland Barthes is the prophet of this view of artistic texts urging us to escape the trap of narrative, a trap that naturalizes conventions by relating the "view" of the story to views we have of the world at large in our non-literary experience.

In *S/Z* Barthes systematized the aspects of any narrative text which command our interest and attention. He calls these aspects codes and he lobbies for a free interchange between codes instead of the dominance of one of them, narrative. Barthes here gives definition to insights which Bazin and Eisenstein arrived at years ago. After discussing the movement from aggregate impressions to the "whole image" of Forty-fifth Street Eisenstein makes an important distinction (familiar to students of Russian Formalism) between the function of representations in life and in art.

> We have seen that in the process of remembering there are two very essential stages: the first is the *assembling* of the image, while the second consists in the *result* of this assembly and its significance for the memory. In this latter stage it is important that the memory should pay as little attention as possible to the first stage, and reach the result after passing through the stage of assembling as swift as possible. Such is practice in life in contrast to practice in art. For when we proceed into the sphere of art, we discover a marked displacement of emphasis. Actually, to achieve its result, a work of art directs all the refinement of its methods to the *process*.
>
> A work of art understood dynamically is just this process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator. It is this that constitutes the peculiarity of a truly vital work of art and distinguishes it from a lifeless one, in which the spectator receives the represented result of a given consummated process of creation, instead of being drawn into the process as it occurs. . . .
>
> Hence the image of a scene, a sequence, of a whole creation, exists not as something fixed and ready made. It has to arise, to unfold before the senses of the spectator.[16]

Eisenstein here has gone beyond the rather Pavlovian view which supported his earlier notion of montage of attractions.[17] He has also gone

beyond much current semiotics which has been reluctant or unable to describe the path by which perceptions in the cinema become absorbed in the overall narrative representation. Semioticians assume the simultaneity of signifier and signified. It makes no sense, in the science instituted by Saussure, to speak of the sensory base of a sign preceding the mental image it brings up. Yet it is precisely in the space between seeing and recognizing that, in the second chapter, we lodged the specificity of cinema and it is in just an indeterminant space the Eisenstein here finds the specificity of art in general.

It is instructive to note that while Bazin too looks for cinematic value in perceptual labor leading up to signification, he grounds this value not in the tradition of the arts, as did Eisenstein, but in the phenomenology of everyday perception. This indeed is the heart of his realism, a realism obviously at odds with that nineteenth-century narrative realism and with the realistic illusions of classic Hollywood cinema. On more than one occasion Bazin explicitly ridiculed standard cinema because it had inherited the codes of style and content made obligatory by Balzac and Zola. Against this he affirmed a realism of perceptual experience wherein the daily life habit of apperception, recognition, and mental elaboration is structurally reproduced in the cinema.[18]

This insistence on active intentionality in the bringing into existence of cinematic representations of events, places, states of affairs, characters and the like, leads to the classification of types of representations as genres. Whereas "realism" appears to be a zero degree of cinematic representation (one involving no marked labor), we have seen how dependent it is on conventions and habit. Other genres such as neorealism, expressionism, even science fiction, clearly depend on extraordinary operations before their content will body itself forth with the proper effect.

Yet even though our consideration of representation once again has dispelled the hegemony of realism, it has not thereby removed the notion of representation from that of reality. Representation is obviously dependent on textual cues and is in an important sense a textual effect, but this does not of its own throw us into a realm of artistic anarchy. First of all a given textual arrangement produces a limited number of representations in its audience. We are not free to construct whatever we like from these cues, for our minds fill in, filter, delete, and emphasize according to laws or habits. More important, since in every case representation establishes a relation between a text and something outside the text, our sense of that which is outside is constitutive of the representation. As a relation, rather than a pure construction, representation is governed by issues of adequacy, novelty, usefulness, and even rightness. To return to Nelson Goodman's terminology, a representation is always a version of some world or other. Though it is not for us to decide about the priority of one world over another, and certainly not to insist on a real world against which all representations are pale copies, nevertheless we are entitled to demand of a version that it be better, more instructive, richer, more useful than an earlier version. Representation insists that we examine not only the text but the text in relation to the world it produces through our imagination.

REPRESENTATION AS PLOT AND PROCESS

Because it maintains a relation to the world it calls up, cinematic representation has been a concept under siege in our era. Both modernists and traditionalists have attacked it for its purported rootedness in things. Traditionalists from Erich Auerbach on have accorded to the representation of reality the highest cultural function, yet they have sequestered cinema somewhere in a cave beneath true representation, believing that it has condemned itself to pornographic spectacle. Modernists like Barthes and Gombrich hold little regard for representation deeming it to be an overvalued, purely psychological lure which distracts our attention from the possibilities of art. Ever since the age of realism our culture has been obsessed by plot in literature and design in painting. Cinema, seeming to combine both these representational traits, is the heir to this retrograde tradition and has therefore made fewest strides in escaping its servile and puerile function of merely duplicating a sense of the world for a mass populace.

The traditionalist position has been most forcefully advanced by Roger Scrutton who pushes the Bazinian position to the limit, claiming that cinema enjoys a relation to the physical world that is so tight and unmediated that neither human intentions nor values can enter in. For Scrutton, as for Auerbach before him, representation is always an act of will, a shaping of materials to produce a significant picture of the world.[19] Cinema for them is too easy, too like everday perception. Scrutton gives an example. Suppose we frame a street scene through our viewfinder in the middle of a city. Would we say, as we got ready

to shoot, that we were looking at a fine representation of that street? "The very idea is absurd," says Scrutton, for we are looking at the street itself. Similarly, when that button is pushed and the film developed and projected, it is outrageous to him to claim we are watching a representation of the street, for what we see is effectively what was there.

Earlier, on the basis of Nelson Goodman's remarks, we suggested that our ordinary perceptions involve intentions and might be called representations, since they signal the world to which they belong. Scrutton need not deny this to maintain his point, for all he declares is that cinematic perception operate at the same level and in the same implicatory way as natural perception. True representation drives a second intentional wedge between what we see and what it means, as when Giacometti's small, stick forms in bronze represent a man, or man himself. Cinema is basically pornographic to Scrutton since it keeps our attention on the texture and quality of that which it depicts. It is a simple substitution for experience. This is why its inventions bring it ever closer to the original (sound, scope, depth). For we go to the cinema to sense life, not to encounter a view of life. Our bodies more than our minds assent to what we behold.

Scrutton's moralism, his undisguised elitism, is not the only thing that needs refuting. Even if we grant that at the purely perceptual level cinema does indeed enjoy (or is condemned to) an affinity with standard perception, the construction of an entire film out of such percepts would seem to be an act of the highest intentionality. In the first place we can point to those cases where two or more cinematic versions depict the same man, story, or state of affairs, recalling that in Goodman's vocabulary a version is precisely a representation. Think of the Frank Borzage version of *A Farewell to Arms*, so different from the David Selznick version of 1957. Scrutton would claim that the cinema in both cases merely reproduces dramatic representations and that the differences we sense in these films derive from differences in dramatic construction. The speciousness of this retort is answered by another example: What about two versions of New York City as proposed by the 1920 *Manhattan* and the Willard Van Dyke 1938 *The City?* Through camera angle, editing, lighting, and organization we are here given two quite different versions (representations) of the same city.

Where Scrutton discusses cinematic representation as a special or enlarged case of perception, modernists of the semiotic and post-structural camps treat it as a special and limited case of signification.[20] To them cinematic discourse, like any discourse, proceeds by the articulations of codes producing a myriad of meaning effects. One of these effects is representation, which, far from being deprived of intention, is a fully ideological effect whereby a picture of reality arises out of the interplay of differential signs. For the health of society as well as for the satisfactory working of the cinema, the solidity of such pictures must be dissolved back into the mechanism of signification which gave it life. Only in this way, they argue, can communication free itself from the automatic reproduction of ideology (or false pictures of reality) and open up the more logical or anarchic possibilities of signs.

Semioticians tend to stress the instantaneous and invariable movement from signifier to signified in the articulation of cinematic meaning. This automatic operation implies a spectator whose role is that of a relay in an impersonal movement of cinematic and cultural language. Post-structuralists, given over more and more to the free play of the signifier, revel in constructing an indefinite variety of provisional significations out of the materials (codes) of film. Whereas the spectator would appear to have a more crucial role here, that role is limited to teasing out the possibilities embedded in the codes themselves. Once again the material codes of the system rule the spectator, taking him willy-nilly in the endless flight of texts. Anti-humanists applaud this.

Representation is doubtless a humanizing term, for it suggests that texts exist in part by means of the relation they establish between readers (spectators) and a world of some interest. Although representation should not be thought of as the terminus of a film (as should no single aspect of what is always an interacting system), its peculiarly intermediate status tells us a great deal about the experience of watching a film. When leaving *North by Northwest* we will feel correct, though inadequate, if we characterize it as a thriller (genre) or as a film about a man pursued by unknown enemies (premise). Yet these descriptions are surely more apt than one which would label it "a film about a man in a taxi" or "about a man on Mt. Rushmore," for neither of these fragments gets at the overall picture the film renders. If pressed to elaborate that picture (as the scriptwriter must have been when he proposed the film to the producer, or as we are when our friends are deciding whether to see it), we generally recount the plot, that is, we indicate the characters, the intrigue, and the values that are at stake.

In this way we identify what can be expected and suggest how the film ought to be perceived.

Although the plot is clearly no substitute for the film, it does relate the primary aspects of perception with the ultimate experience of meaning and value. The perceptual level of cinema is nearly intangible, while meaning and value surround the film like a horizon, out of reach almost by definition. Plot, on the other hand, is accessible for it is a sum of perceptual fragments (though not the aggregate of these) and it is an example of the world to which it belongs and which it delivers to us in specific form.

Considered this way as plot or argument, representation acts as a special kind of label allowing us to identify the whole picture before or after we fully immerse ourselves in it. Like any label it is a convenience and a fully conventional one. We identify a representation as whatever large unit holds and directs our attention. Eisenstein spoke always of a grand theme producing a controlling image capable of infusing and organizing the particular fragments of a film.[21] We make and watch films according to levels of intentional blocks or units, any of which we can term a representation. Even if such units are technically dissoluble into the elements which constitute them, they play a determining role in our experience of the film. The situation here is analogous to that which we found in perception where the raw stimuli could never fully account for the percepts they constitute. Attention and intention, guiding perception, operate even more apparently at the level of narrative organization. We identify an array of light and shadow as "a marching army," or "a man harranguing a crowd," and we label an array of such percepts as a representation of the life of Lawrence of Arabia, or as a version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Viewers may differ in the labels they feel compelled to supply for what they see, but the compulsion to see films as representations is universal and universally functional in the overall film experience.

Representation's intermediate position between the fragments of a film and its overall possibilities of significance should surprise no one familiar with Freud's use of the term, for representation appears as the indispensable form under which fantasies and dreams may exist.[22] Although listed as one of the four operations of the dreamwork, representation is clearly the first and necessary condition permitting condensation, displacement, and secondary elaboration to operate. Doubtless because of Freud, representation retains its connotation of an unconscious drive in which figures arise and present themselves forcefully to us. Closer to the common notion of symbol than to that of code, psychic representations demand a work of interpretation in which we must adjust ourselves to the meaning that seems proposed but not completed by the representation. This is exactly like the work of filling in, filtering, and underlining the cues provided by the images and the soundtrack of a film.

The modernists are right to insist on the limited range of representation. As in the Freudian case, it operates as a threshold permitting the real work (dream or artistic) to create value and significance. Representations are often used in texts which turn against them. A filmmaker may signify something quite ambiguous or even negative about the representation his film develops as Werner Herzog does with *Aguirre* or as Tony Richardson does with the Crimean War in his *Charge of the Light Brigade*. Irony is only one of the figures of discourse that work with and on representations to form signification. But as this chapter has sought to point out, representation (at least in the conventional cinema) is a necessary precondition for discourse. One can maintain that Piero de Cosimi's "Visitation" turns on the brilliance of its color with the excessive use of red signifying perhaps a hostility to earlier paintings or a revolt against the patrons who commissioned the piece, or that it expressess Piero's massively unresolved psychological tensions. Nevertheless his painting *represents* Mary encountering her sister Elizabeth as reported in the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.

Representation marks a key moment in cinematic discourse in its struggle to wrest signification from perception. The logic of plot develops only in a field of perceptual possibility with which it oscillates. The particular strategies and paths by which we move back and forth from picture to perception define the modes and genres of film. Eisenstein goes so far as to insist that only those representations that develop in deep struggle and difficulty can be deemed art.[23] Be that as it may, representation names that threshold at which viewers stand in their traversal of a film, a threshold that puts them not in control of the film, nor at the mercy of it, nor in a state of vertigo before its infinite openings (these are the reactions implied by realism, semiotics, and poststructuralism respectively): instead we find ourselves in a state of active "listening" to a world which might take shape and which, in this or that particular film, has taken a certain shape.

The irreducible perceptual manifold draws us of its own accord to

test the adequacy of any given provisional organization that seems to arise from it as a representation. Such organizations narrate a version of a world in textualizing it. If such texts produce a single or myriad significations, it is only out of the skin of perception and the flesh of representation.

4

Signification

THE ASCENDANCY OF SEMIOTICS

The weening of modern film theory from Mitry's paternal embrace is named by a single term: semiotics. Mitry's lengthy ruminations on the rapport between language and cinema, together with Albert Laffay's *Logique du cinema* and several other studies of the early 1960's, had evidently squeezed dry the fruits of gentlemanly speculation on the topic.[1] What seemed called for, and what arose, was a scientifically inspired investigation of the so-called language of cinema. Structural linguistics, advancing on the teachings of Hjelmslev, Benveniste, and Martinet and broadened by the use made of it by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, provided both the rigor and the model for such an investigation.

The semiotics of cinema was launched with a most heady optimism. Driven by an intuition that the intangible power of the cinema was knowable and that its mechanism was in fact only a mechanism, semioticians embarked on the requisite painstaking studies. In general these took the form of organizational outlines on the one hand and, on the other, of minute analyses of individual aspects of signification in film. The organic mystery of the movies was now thought to be a specific mélange or system of codes of meaning whose elements and interrelations could be detailed.

Some of these codes (for instance, visual punctuation and visual trick

14. See Nicholas Pastore, *Selective History of Theories of Visual Perception, 1650–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). For a further account of the empirical school, see Julian Hochberg's contribution, "The Representation of Things and People," to E. H. Gombrich, Hochberg, and Max Black, *Art, Perception and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 47–94.
15. Sully's 1884 observation appears in Pastore, *Selective History*, p. 186.
16. For a history of the origins of the Gestalt movement and an excellent critique of its position, see D. W. Hamlyn, *The Psychology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957).
17. Hochberg in Gombrich, Hochberg, and Black, *Art*, p. 52.
18. Hamlyn, *Perception*, ch. 6.
19. Danto, "Moving Pictures," pp. 1–22.
20. Nelson Goodman distinguishes various terms of this sort in chapter 1 of his *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976).
21. The original experiment was performed by G. M. Stratton and reported in the *Psychological Review* in 1896. For an extended discussion of this and related experiments see Ivo Kohler, "The Formation and Transformation of the Perceptual World," *Psychological Issues* 3, no. 4 (Monograph 12, 1964). Current research in this area is being conducted by Richard Held, Charles Harris, and Irvin Rock.
22. Gombrich's views are laid out in chapter 9 of his classic *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956) and have been reiterated in innumerable essays.
23. This argument is detailed in Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Rediscovery of Perspective in the Renaissance* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).
24. Gombrich, Hochberg, and Black, *Art*, p. 55.
25. Pastore, *Selective Theories*, p. 270. This view has become a commonplace, as is clear from its appearance in *Scientific American* 219, no. 3 (1968): 214.
26. George A. Miller, *Language and Perception* (Cambridge, England; Cambridge University Press, 1976).
27. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 4, 5.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
29. Pier-Paulo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry" (1965), in Nichols, *Movies*, pp. 546–47.

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1. Hamlyn, *Perception*, pp. 110–15.
2. Nelson Goodman, *Languages*, pp. 27–31, Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, pp.

4–9; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953) pp.194 ff.

3. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), pts. I and VI present the nominalist position.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
5. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Psychology of the Imagination* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1948); Schutz, *Social World;* and Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Experience* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
6. Béla Belázs, *Theory of the Film* (New York: Dover, 1970) p. 126. Balázs explicitly conjurs up this electrical metaphor with its aspects of "spark" and "flow."
7. Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), ch. 1.
8. Sartre, *Imagination*, ch. 2.
9. Mitry, *Esthétique*, vol. I, ch. 31. See also my *Major Film Theories*, p. 191.
10. See Jean-Pierre Meunier, *Les Structures de l'expérience filmique* (Louvain: Vaner, 1969).
11. Barbet Shroeder's *General Idi Amin Dada*, first screened in New York in April 1975.
12. Hugo Münsterberg, *Film: A Psychological Study*, (N.Y.: Dover Press, 1971), p. 74.
13. See Stephen Heath's essay, "Narrative Space," in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), ch. 2.
14. Christian Metz, "Story and Discourse," in Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 89–98. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Boston: Hill & Wang, 1974), esp. pp. 1–16. Barthes has denigrated plot in favor of other signifying aspects or codes in many other essays as well.
15. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, ch. 9.
16. Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1975), p. 17.
17. See David Bordwell, "Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift," *Screen* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1974, 1975): 59–70. See also my *Major Film Theories*, pp. 60 ff.
18. Andrew, *Major Film Theories*, pp. 159–70. Bazin's clearest distinction between classical realism and cinematic realism comes in his "Defense of Rossellini," *What is Cinema?*, vol. II, p. 98.
19. Roger Scrutton, "Photography and Representation," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 577–604.
20. Among semioticians criticizing the notion of representation we can mention Umberto Eco; among structuralists, Gerard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov; and among post-structuralists, Barthes and Derrida. These names are meant to suggest that virtually all of continental thought in philosophy and criticism since 1960 has worked in one way or another to expose and deflate representation. Their writings subtend the film theories of the *Screen* school (Ben Brewster, Peter Wollen, Colin MacCabe, and Paul Willemen), which have constantly attacked representation in cinema.

21. Eisenstein, *Film Sense*, pp. 10, 17, and 37–40.
22. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York, Avon Books, 1965), sect. VI, pt. D.
23. Eisenstein, "Word and Image" in *Film Sense*, p. 7.

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1. Mitry, *Esthétique*, chs. 3 and 4; Albert Laffay, *Logique du cinéma* (Paris: Masson, 1964); and Dina Dreyfus "Cinema and Language," *Diogenes*, no. 35 (Fall, 1961): 23–33.
2. Metz's essays on punctuation and on trick effects appear as chapters 5 and 9 of *Essais sur le signification au cinéma*, vol. II (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972).
3. I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946, originally published in 1923).
4. Richards's essays collected in his *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925) amount to an ethics and a psychology of reading signs in culture.
5. For an explication of Saussure's basic position and of its influence see Jonathan Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure* (London: Modern Masters Series, Penguin Books, 1977).
6. Sol Worth, "Symbolic Strategies," *Journal of Communication* 24 (Autumn, 1974): 27–39. Also see his posthumous book, *Studying Visual Communication* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981) where this essay is reprinted alongside other important essays in visual semiotics.
7. Umberto Eco, *Semiotics*, pp. 8–28.
8. André Bazin's writings reflect this impulse throughout, most forcefully in "Ontology," and "Cinema and Exploration" in *What is Cinema?*, vol. I.
9. The most thorough treatment of this topic is certainly Metz's *Language and Cinema* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) translated from *Langage et cinéma* (Paris: Larousse, 1971).
10. Eco, "Articulations," in Nichols, *Movies*, pp. 590–607.
11. Bazin's famous phrase appears in his *Jean Renoir* (Paris: Editions Champs

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