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Peppery Salt

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some alternative vision is proposed for us. It is such alternatives, rather than polemic or “merely” logical deconstruction that will displace the (already overly homogenized) paradigm of poststructuralism from its position of imaginary, but also institutionally real, dominance as Other. For this reason alone, *Film in the Aura of Art* is an indispensable book.

At one point in *Concepts of Film Theory* Andrew reminds us of a fundamental asymmetry that exists between art and psychic fantasy such that we may be able to locate the psychic fantasy in the work of art, or mass culture, but we cannot locate the work of art in the psychic fantasy. Similarly it may be that there remains an asymmetry between theories like poststructuralism that can offer an explanation of ideology and others like hermeneutics that cannot. It is significant that Andrew offers no definition of ideology, let alone an explanation for it, nor an account of how it might enter into the “valences of sexual difference which obsess us” in a gender-specific manner. The choice would appear to be that we must repress it from consideration in order to “take from” films the messages they bear for us. Andrew’s case against poststructuralism and his attempt to close the brackets on the days of its dominance would be all the stronger if he had given his alternative approach an equivalent power to address, and place, the work of ideology, a power that might elaborate a theory of how constraints differ from causes or “effects,” how figuration and expression transform expectations even as they also build upon them, and how the construction of the subject within ideology

leaves the “semiotic freedom” for a subjectivity that is not wholly controlled from without.

“Ideology,” Andrew writes, “must lose its connotation of massive univocity.” Perhaps there is a univocity in the narrow bend of poststructuralism Andrew puts before us. Certainly there are severe limitations and weaknesses in its perspective that dozens of scholars are at work redressing. Clearly there is a need to reconceptualize ideology itself in an historical mode. Surely there is place for a hermeneutics engaged in “reading expressive language, fleshing out the indeterminate array of concepts and feelings introduced and regulated by the [art] work” (p. 188). Yet, whatever the other virtues of the hermeneutics Andrew favors, it cannot repress or even displace another body of work, broader than any single stream of poststructuralism, preoccupied with different problems and conceiving of the ends of criticism in different terms. It is not the theoretical dimensions of poststructural theory that create the compulsion to refute its claims; it is the institutional dimension—its battles for entrenchment within the academy, its desire for custody of the archive—that incites struggles for recognition and power, a point Andrew acknowledges at times without ever quite nudging it into the central position it demands, the one position from which the impulse toward polemic, on all sides, can be understood. That this understanding entails an understanding of ideology as well tells us something about the uses of an ideologically informed criticism, without, however, authorizing confidence in the ultimate resting point of Dudley Andrew’s own suspicion—the adequacy of any over-arching theory.

—BILL NICHOLS

## Controversy & Correspondence

### PEPPERY SALT

Ernest Callenbach is right to feel hurt by my ingratitude to him for his efforts on my behalf, and his long, and in the circumstances (fairly) generous review of my book is suitable coals of fire on my head. However, I feel no guilt towards the University of California Press and *Film Quarterly* and their various boards and committees of academic advisers. Although four chapters of *Film Style and*

*Technology: History and Analysis* are based on material that was in three articles published in *Film Quarterly*, this material has been reorganized and considerably expanded. (As published in *FQ* those articles totalled 23,000 words, whereas the chapters with the same titles in my book total 35,000 rewritten words. There are about 250,000 words in my book, so less than 10% (not half as Ernest Callenbach has it) of my book has any close relation to anything published in *FQ*. More importantly, the University of California Press was given

the opportunity to publish my book in 1978, and for three years after that Ernest Callenbach gave me the impression that they *would* publish it, though I now see that this false impression probably arose from his enthusiasm for some parts of my work. However I have heard indirectly, via a passing stranger from California, that his enthusiasm for my work was not completely shared by the editorial board of *Film Quarterly*, which was opposed to the publication of my initial article on style analysis in 1974 (not 1977). Which makes me even more ungrateful to him personally, since he did get it published. But as you can tell from his review, Ernest Callenbach has no enthusiasm at all for my questioning of the basis of the favorite beliefs of many American literary intellectuals.

For it happens that later in 1974 Ernest Callenbach and *Film Quarterly* rejected an early and short version of my criticism of French film theorizing, including its basis in psychoanalysis, Marxism, and French-style linguistics, on the grounds that such grand, imposing, or venerable ideas could not possibly, merely because of those qualities, be vulnerable to my criticisms. Although this is a reason *of a sort*, it did not seem to me a satisfactory argument against the logic of my charges, but I had lots of constructive historical research in progress, so I let the matter rest there. Shortly after this initial difficulty, *FQ* instituted a new policy against publishing purely theoretical articles, presumably to prevent the recurrence of such challenges to the prevailing psychoanalytic and left-wing party line. The editorial in *FQ* for Winter 1974-75 saying “. . . most people in film studies are leftists . . .” I took that at the time to be a signal from Ernest Callenbach to myself (and any similarly inclined person) to desist from attempting to criticize Marxist-based ideas in the magazine, and a later letter to myself spelt it out with respect to psychoanalysis. Nothing may be said against the Big Daddies Freud and Marx!

Despite these warnings, I foolishly did not take seriously the opinions of the anonymous readers on the brief critical introduction to my book, because I thought it would be obvious to whoever is in charge of the University of California Press that no film academics in America (or elsewhere) had the special competence and qualifications to pronounce by simple assertion, as they have done, to dispose of my *arguments* against various favorite beliefs by simply calling them “naive,” or “jejune” or “crude” or “tendentious,” and then leaving it at that, as Ernest Callenbach, and also all other readers for University of California Press, and later readers for various other American academic presses have done. After 11 years I have still not seen one single counter-argument against the arguments in my book criticizing various aspects of Marxism and psychoanalysis, including their basis, nor has Ernest Callenbach managed to produce a reasoned rebuttal, even taking advantage of the slightly distorted form in which he presents some of my arguments in his review. And they are *arguments*, not assertions. Most significantly, the strongholds of

Marxist and psychoanalytic film theory in England (which have the full backing of the director of the British Film Institute behind them), namely the magazines *Screen* and *Framework*, and the Education and Publishing departments of the BFI itself, have made absolutely no answers to the criticisms in the introduction to my book, even though they have had copies of it since the beginning of 1984, when it was published in England.

But despite all the above events, I have never thought that the way I have been treated over this book is the result of a cabal against me, merely that it is the result of individuals acting independently to protect their own interests, though this does not lessen my anger when I think about the affair. In fact I have restrained myself from giving full expression to my feelings in my book, and in any case only people who hold baseless opinions unthinkingly are offended by the tone in which those opinions are questioned, as is clear from the completely positive reviews of my book here in England, where there has been absolutely no mention of the tone of my critical introduction.

As far as I know, unlike the many Americans, the few British film academics who were shown my book (and they were not friends of mine) by a few British publishers recommended its publication, but you should realize that the British market alone is too small to commercially support the publication of large, well-illustrated and *serious* books about film, which can only be achieved by co-publication with an American academic publisher. So here again American film academics call the tune, and that is exactly what happened in my case. The only subsidy for publishing film books here is from the British Film Institute, but of course this is controlled by the Marxists of the BFI Publishing Department who have managed to lose nearly \$1,000,000 in the last five years publishing their chosen texts written by their comrades.

I did not expect much recognition of my work on statistical style analysis, so I am not bitter on that score. As it happens Harv Bishop at the University of Colorado has recently finished an MA dissertation applying my methods to an analysis of the films of Peter Bogdanovich and their possible relationships to the work of other film-makers, which is enough to keep me happy for the moment. I understand that Bishop obtained a Scale of Shot distribution for at least one film quite close to that independently obtained by myself, and also that his results were even less flattering to the perceptiveness of writers about Bogdanovich than mine were with respect to Ophuls. I hope that doesn't get him into more trouble than I am in. Also David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, though they had previously denigrated my work in various places, in their new book *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* take up my general approach in terms of investigating norms and differences both informally and statistically (though their sampling is highly suspect), and even use the specific technique of finding Average Shot Lengths to this end, though they do not acknowledge their source for this. Actually,

Kristin Thompson goes even further, and in her outline of stylistic developments 1909–1917 uses exactly the same previously unknown films I uncovered in my 1976 article on the early development of film form and the rise of continuity cinema (not in *FQ*, though recently republished in *Film Before Griffith*) to tell the same story in their book (except where she gets it seriously wrong), though she does not acknowledge her source in this case either. (Poetic justice, I hear Ernest Callenbach say, but I say that when it comes to dishonesty and dirty tricks, I am a mere beginner next to some American film academics.) Bordwell and Thompson’s book also illustrates the danger of using references uncritically, in just the way that I correctly anticipated someone would in my book. There I mentioned as one likely future instance an article on film lighting in *Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* for May 1919. And just this very article is quoted in their book as a description of standard lighting practice for 1919, whereas a comparison with a reasonable sample of films of the period shows that it is years out of date in its recommendations. Scattered elsewhere in their book are failures to recognize other examples in the old journals of ignorant comment by non-professionals and exaggerated claims from Hollywood for what they are, which inevitably leads them to mistaken conclusions. In general, references are good, but they guarantee nothing.

And now we come to the issues with major importance for film studies which reach beyond the particular points at dispute. There are real, and I would have thought obvious, differences between the current states of scientific research and research in film, and these call into question the unthinking imitation of current scientific review procedures. Since it is only during the last couple of decades that film studies has very rapidly expanded and begun to be institutionalized, I would say it is a little early to be certain as to who is so distinguished a “scholar” that they should have the right to decide anonymously what should be published in books. Particularly since there is no one in film studies who knows as much as I do about the subjects in my book. Or is it the idea that merely having the post of professor in a department of film, and a seat on a few committees makes one an “established scholar”? Actually, the present elaborate refereeing system in science is a development of this century, and physical and chemical research got along very well indeed without it one hundred or so years ago. Ernest Callenbach is not up to date in his examples from the history of science, for in the last thirty years old conceptual frameworks (or “paradigms”) have come to be abandoned for new ones very much more readily than they were in Max Planck’s time, as researchers in cell biology, for instance, have noted. It is no longer necessary in science for a generation to pass away for radical new views to be considered, and if American film studies is to be so constituted that all its professors of film have to die off before any of their basic beliefs can be questioned in print, I want nothing

to do with such a vision of mindless bureaucratic totalitarianism. And behind these more specific points are the really big questions that film academics and serious film magazines, including *FQ*, do not seem to want to face, but which they should feel obliged to face if they are so eager to attach the distinction “established scholars” to themselves, namely —What shall count as valid interpretation of films?, and why?, —Of what should film studies properly consist?, —and even beyond that —What is film studies actually *for*? —BARRY SALT

#### Ernest Callenbach replies:

I should obviously have done my own quantitative work more carefully; Salt is correct that I substantially overestimated the proportion of his book that had appeared in *FQ*. (There was also a typo in the date of his first article; 1974 is the right date.)

Contrary to Salt’s reported rumor, my enthusiasm for his original quantitative and historical work was shared by the *FQ* board; we make decisions by consensus, and if its members had indeed been opposed to publication of his articles, they would never have seen print here (or perhaps anywhere, since they had evidently been turned down by all British film publications).

I have already described the reaction that Salt’s later and more polemical writings inspired in American film academics, including the *FQ* board, and readers should refer to my review on this point. Far from being a “signal” to Salt, incidentally, *FQ*’s attempt to discourage “purely theoretical” articles was in fact aimed in quite another direction —at the many people who were then exploring semiotic, Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches to film but neglecting to deal with (or indeed sometimes even mention) any real films. We, like Salt, regard confrontation with actual films as the essential test of any proposed “theory.”

I am delighted to hear of Harv Bishop’s replication of some of Salt’s findings; we would be pleased to know of other such efforts.

The use of referee procedures, whose imperfections are familiar to all in both the hard sciences and the humanities, nonetheless remains the only reasonably fair and impersonal method yet devised for apportioning the use of public resources. (In my *Ecotopia*, I imagined that granting bodies might give a fixed percentage of their money to high-risk proposals; and some lottery element now seems to me worth experimenting with. But we are speaking here of the real world.) In the days when, according to Salt, science got on well enough without refereeing, money came from rich patrons who often exercised notorious favoritism. The recent rapid progress in biology, of which I am as conscious as Salt, has in fact been a highly collective achievement—relying on normally refereed publication.

My review closed with much the same questions Salt’s letter ends with. These are good questions, but they are also questions that writers and scholars have been addressing with respect to other arts for

several thousand years. It remains to be demonstrated how useful Salt's undoubted achievements will be in helping to answer them for film. But for what he has accomplished, the entire field will remain heavily in his debt.

(*Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* is available from Starword, 3 Minford Gardens, London W14 OAN, for \$33.00.)

## FILM SOUND

Thanks for William Johnson's intelligent and provocative groundbreaking on film sound ["The Liberation of Echo: A New Hearing for Film Sound," *FQ*, Summer 1985]. There is, it seems to me, one argument for primacy of the image that Johnson hasn't adequately dealt with: You can run, say, *Intolerance* with no live accompaniment and no recorded music, just absolutely silent, and no one would deny that it's still a movie. But just try running a film that's all sound and no image, and see if anyone accepts it as a film. The sound-without-image idea has been tried often, in commercial films (*Wait Until Dark*) as well as experimental independents (Ken Jacobs's *Blonde Cobra*), but only in the form of short sequences in the middle of more conventional image-and-sound movies. Until someone finds an effective—and accepted—way to make a movie that consists of sound and no image, it's hard to argue for equality of both in film ontology.

Fortunately, debunking of the primacy of the image is not a prerequisite to the intelligent and exciting exploration of the interrelationships of sound and image. Johnson's article succeeds in what it aims at: opening up "new perspectives on the film."

—ROBERT C. CUMBOW

**William Johnson replies:—**

I'm grateful for Robert Cumbow's kind remarks and also for the opportunity to amplify my contention that sound is ontologically equal to the image.

If *Intolerance* is projected without music, then the resulting silence itself constitutes the sound component, and the audience will experience the image-plus-silence differently from image-plus-music. The fact that (to my knowledge) no full-length film has been made with sound and no image may be attributed to pro-image bias among filmmakers and audiences, since there is no theoretical reason why such a film should not be made. If anyone wishes to argue that a film must provide something for the eyes to focus on or else it is not a film (the ears, of course, do not focus), a blank screen or the projection of black leader may serve this purpose.

In practice, any sustained use of image without sound or sound without image belongs in the realm of experimental film-making: general audiences protest impartially when either the image or the sound track fails.

WILLIAM JOHNSON

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A Salt and Battery

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the others on whom this title was bestowed, he resisted it and its implications. Nevertheless, the empty hallway became an unfortunate emblem for his work; his films were thought of as self-contained formal constructs, having no reference to the external world.

*Signal—Germany on the Air* is a departure for Gehr. The image of the sign, and its reference to Nazi Germany, seems like the opening of a Pandora's box, releasing demons into the film's every image. A closer look at Gehr's earlier work reveals, however, that the change is one of degree, not of kind. The horror under the surface of daily life has always haunted Gehr's images. It has been more apparent recently, in the cartoonish automotive violence of *Shift* (1972–74, but not released until the late 1970s) and the aged, anon-

ymous hands of *Untitled* (1981). It is also present, I think, in the New York street scene of *Still* (1971), and in much of Gehr's earlier work, including *Serene Velocity*. *Signal* differs from the earlier work in that it gives a name to the horror.

A long sequence at the end of *Signal* was shot in the rain. This is almost comforting. The subdued colors of an overcast day seem more appropriate than the bright, saturated colors of the storefronts earlier in the film. It seems for a while as though the rain can wash away all traces of the past. But, when a bright orange flare-out signals both the end of a camera roll and the end of the film, the steady hiss of the rain reveals itself as the roaring of a conflagration.

—HARVEY NOSOWITZ

## Controversy & Correspondence

### A SALT AND BATTERY

We have no desire to intervene in a dispute between an author and his reviewer, especially when his reviewer was also once his editor. But as we are virtually the only members of the community of American film academics whom Barry Salt mentions by name in his reply to Ernest Callenbach, and as we are dragged into Salt's diatribe as instances of "dishonesty and dirty tricks," we feel compelled to offer a response of our own.

Salt accuses our portions of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (written with Janet Staiger) of borrowing from his work without crediting him. He claims that we take up his "general approach" of examining stylistic norms. Salt will be surprised to learn that he did not originate the idea of studying norms, it being a commonplace of Russian Formalist poetics, Prague Structuralist semiotics, and art-historical research generally. Our citations in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* are to E. H. Gombrich, Jan Mukařovský, and Roman Jakobson, among others. But perhaps Salt will claim that these writers stole from him as well. In any event, we have been using the concept of stylistic norms in our own work for over a decade, beginning in our article, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Yasujiro Ozu," written in 1975 and published in *Screen* in 1976—the same year as Salt's *Film Form* article, from which he accuses us of cribbing.

Salt asserts that we derived from him the idea of statistical sampling. But we deliberately described

our sample as "unbiased" to distinguish it from others, such as Salt's, which even he has admitted to be biased. (See "Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures," *Film Quarterly* 28, 1 [Fall 1974]: 14, and "Film Style and Technology in the Forties," *Film Quarterly* 31, 1 [Fall 1977]:56.) We learned from Salt here, but negatively, in the sense that we wished to avoid his mistakes. We did not explicitly criticize Salt on this score, out of a wish not to attack work for which we had some regard. But since Salt keeps a record of all of what he considers "denigratory" references to his research, he can now add this to his list.

In his reply to Callenbach, Salt also claims that we use the Average Shot Length concept without crediting him. This is utterly false. On page 60 of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Salt is credited, both in the text and in the footnote, with computing statistical norms of average shot lengths. True, his use of the concept is mildly criticized for being insensitive to the range of choice open to filmmakers at a given period. But cite him we did. Apparently, though, we can't win: if we don't cite him, we are stealing; if we do, he just ignores it.

Salt's other claims are equally absurd. He accuses us of having "previously denigrated" his work. "Denigrate" is a pretty strong word, meaning "to sully or degrade," and we have not done any such thing. Thompson's review of the Brighton Conference proceedings (*Iris* 2, 1) characterized Salt's work as taking an evolutionary approach to early film history—hardly a slur, since the title of his article is "Evolution of Film Form up to 1906." Salt's 1977 *Film Quarterly* article on film style in the 1940s is cited, approvingly, in Bord-

well's *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (p. 237), published by the same University of California Press that Salt now despises. A couple of brief citations of Salt in our *Wide Angle* (5, 3) article "Linearity, Materialism and the Study of the Early American Cinema" are completely neutral, except for the expression of some surprise that Salt would use the term "Missing Link" in promoting Reginald Barker. No; one must read Salt's attacks on various authors, editors, reviewers, and presses to learn what "denigratory" really means.

Salt then virtually accuses Thompson of having stolen the examples, ideas, and even the organization of her section of our book from his 1976 *Film Form* (1, 1) article, "The Early Development of Film Form." Thompson's chapters, he asserts, tell "the same story" as does that article. Aside from the patent absurdity of the notion that a text equivalent in length to a small book could be taken in detail from thirteen pages of Salt's prose, the accusations are completely false. Salt states that Thompson "uses exactly the same previously unknown films" he discussed in the *Film Form* article. Let's do a bit of what Salt claims to do so well—counting. He refers to about 66 titles from the pre-1918 period in that article; Thompson cites about 118 films from the same period in her chapters. Of these, 25 are the same titles. Of those, a fair proportion are such previously unknown films as *The Birth of a Nation*, *The Cheat*, *A Corner in Wheat*, *The Great Train Robbery*, etc. Moreover, only seven are used to make the same point about the same scene. In two cases, Thompson does refer to Salt as having originated the examples—when Salt was indeed their originator. (See p. 209, "Barry Salt has pointed out an early example of shot/reverse shot in *The Loader* . . ."; p. 274, "Barry Salt has found a number of early films which use arc lamps . . ."; other citations of Salt by Thompson are: p. 438, fn. 2; p. 442, fn. 24; p. 443, fns. 16 and 22; p. 444, fn. 35; and p. 453, fn. 44.) In four of the seven cases, Salt was not the first to point out the device and hence was not footnoted (e.g., the cut-in in *The Gay Shoe Clerk*, close framings in *The Widow and the Only Man*). Indeed, in a number of cases, Salt's examples duplicate those of Kemp Niver's 1968 book, *The First Twenty Years* (e.g., *A Search for Evidence*, *The Story the Biograph Told*), yet Salt does not do him the courtesy of giving him a single footnote or mention. (Thompson does refer to Niver's book.) For all one could tell from *Film Style & Technology*, barely anyone had ever written on early filmic devices before Salt. The only case in which Thompson uses a Salt-originated example without citing him is a shot from *A Friendly Marriage* (1911), where a woman sits in the foreground with her back to the camera. Since Salt saw this film at the National Archive, which at that time had it incorrectly catalogued as *Love's Awakening* (1910), under which title Salt discussed it, Thompson did not notice the identity of the two examples until later; she had used a correctly identified print

at the Library of Congress. Admittedly, both Salt and Thompson use *Her First Adventure* (1908) as an example of crosscutting, but since Salt incorrectly claimed this to be the first use of crosscutting, Thompson felt it unnecessary to cite him. (Both Thompson and Salt independently saw *The 100-to-One Shot* [1906], currently the earliest known case of crosscutting, and this film figures in both their books—though not in Salt's *Film Form* article.)

All this leaves us with approximately 93 films of the pre-1918 period which Thompson cites and Salt does not, and 41 which only Salt mentions. "Exactly the same previously unknown films," Mr. Salt? Some titles used by Thompson but not by Salt include: *At Old Fort Dearborn*, *The Bandit of Tropico*, *Behind the Footlights*, *The Bells*, *Broncho Billy and the Greaser*, and *Brother Man*, with the list continuing through the alphabet.

A certain degree of overlap is inevitable, because Salt and Thompson visited some of the same major archives, and archives have limited numbers of titles from this period available as viewing prints. But more importantly, Thompson often uses the duplicated titles for different purposes. For example, Salt draws upon the 1914 *Detective Burton's Triumph* for examples of match on action and lack of dialogue titles, while *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* discusses its remarkable, extended shot/reverse-shot scene. The same is true for most of the titles cited by both authors.

Finally, it should be noted that Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson were doing their archival film viewing at the same time that Salt was watching films used to expand his previous work into his book.

Salt also says that Thompson "tells the same story" of the early cinema that he does. But where is Salt's equivalent of Thompson's extended comparison of narrative forms, based on examinations of early scenario manuals and comparable playwriting, novel, and short-story manuals? Does he discuss goal-oriented protagonists, deadlines, and the like? Most crucially, he does not use *any* of the same arguments that Thompson does—about narration, the spectator's relation to the playing space, the disruptive qualities of early editing, the dramatic functions of backlighting, and so on and on. Thompson does not in fact organize her section chronologically as a "story," but by large-scale topics—quite different from Salt's randomly ordered small-scale sections which overall *are* organized in strictly chronological fashion. (Given Salt's lack of arguments concerning causal connections among his atoms of data, his book does not add up to a story, either—only a chronicle.)

Finally, Salt accuses Thompson of being unable even to steal his material efficiently—she often "gets it seriously wrong." This is mere assertion again, as he gives no examples. He does criticize a 1919 article from the *Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* on lighting, calling it "years out of date in its recommendations." Yet this is irrelevant, since Thompson does not employ



the *Transactions* article for direct stylistic evidence or for the author's "recommendations," but only for one mention of the number of arc lamps owned by the Vitagraph studios—something that no one, even Salt, could tell simply by looking at the films. Moreover, Salt's complaint is wholly *ex cathedra*, since he offers no counter-evidence. And if Salt is so skeptical about the *Transactions* as a source, why is it one of the only two journals (along with *The American Cinematographer*) that he used for "the basic research" (p. 381) on technology in his own book? We investigated a great variety of con-

temporary documents, most of which Salt ignored in his own research, and we checked our data against various sources. Salt himself, through a lack of print sources, occasionally dates major technological innovations years too late, as with the Bell & Howell all-metal camera and the Sunlight Arc. (For evidence of this, see our forthcoming review of *Film Style & Technology*.)

It is ironic that Salt should accuse us of not acknowledging sources, when *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* probably has one of the highest proportions of footnotes to text of any book ever

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published in the field—and when Salt's own book has no footnotes at all. In the light of his strident complaints about the lack of scholarly rigor in film studies, both his book and his letter clearly—if unwittingly—reveal his own standards of accuracy.

If Salt responds to this reply, we expect that he will fire back more invective, hint again that he has special evidence up his sleeve, and conveniently forget that the issue he originally raised is not whether we are right or wrong but rather whether we are scrupulous. He will also probably continue to ignore all the things that our book sets out to do that he has apparently never dreamt of—discussing principles of narrative construction and spectatorial activity, showing the systematic nature of classical style, tracing changing modes of film production across Hollywood's history, showing the institutional causes and consequences of technological change, comparing the Hollywood style with other styles, and so on. The usual response to Salt's fulminations has been to compliment him for his genuine accomplishments while clucking one's tongue about his eccentricities. After Salt's irresponsible and unfounded charges, however, we can only suggest that he lift his gaze from his navel to the printed page and actually read what other scholars have written.

—DAVID BORDWELL  
AND KRISTIN THOMPSON  
15 February 1986

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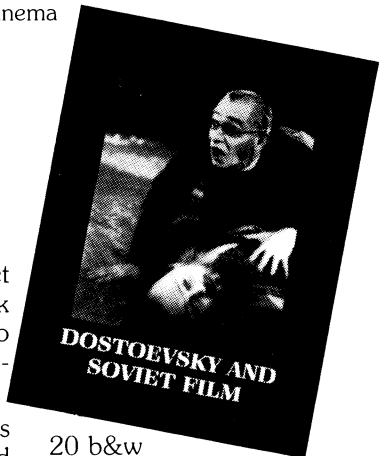
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Andrzej Wajda, *Un Cinéma nommé Désir*. Stock. Somewhat disappointing memoirs of the director of *Ashes and Diamonds*; one hopes that Wajda's career will warrant another better thought-out book.

*Orson Welles*, Cahiers du Cinéma. Just about everything that ever appeared on Welles in the pages of this venerable publication.

# Correspondence and Controversy

## Reply to Bordwell & Thompson

“Conversely, and perversely as well, Burch allies himself more with Barry Salt; . . . his account contains more than a grain of Salt, and should be taken so.” (*Iris* Vol. 2, No. 1, 1984). Readers can make up their own minds whether, like the letter in *FQ* for Winter 1986-87, this typical quote from Kristin Thompson is a sneer at my work (and that of Noël Burch, to whose observations much of their previous work has been indebted), or an expression of regard for it. And yet without my work Bordwell and Thompson would not know what to look for, where to look for it, or how to look for it.

I may not have been the first person to talk about norms and differences in art when I first wrote about film style analysis in 1968, but I was certainly the person who introduced them into film studies. In 1974 I published “Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures” in *FQ*, in which I not only suggested the use of norms and differences for studying stylistic questions, but I also began to do something about it by introducing various stylistic variables such as Aver-

age Shot Length (A.S.L.), Scale of Shot, and others, and by obtaining the first results published there. (Another quite different theoretical article I published in *Sight and Sound* in Spring 1974 also mentioned the importance of applying these ideas to film.) I also pointed out in *FQ* in 1974 that ideally one would use a random sample of films to establish the norms. Since I recognized there were considerable problems in obtaining a truly random sample of films, problems which Bordwell and Thompson have completely failed to deal with, I resolved to get an approximation to a random sample by sheer quantity of results. In their 1976 article, written one year after my article appeared, Bordwell and Thompson mentioned the idea of norms for the first time in their work, but they did nothing whatever about it, and they also said nothing about how one might tackle the problem. (The Russian formalists did nothing much concrete towards establishing norms in literature either.) In 1976 I repeated these ideas in “Film Style and Technology in the Thirties,” and continued to present more results of my program, as I did in 1977 in “Film Style and Technology in the Forties.” In this last article, mentioned in their letter, but *not*

in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, though like my other articles David Bordwell read it soon after it was published, I summarized A.S.L.s for nearly 400 sound films, and presented a clear picture of the norms and dispersion for this particular variable; i.e., the “paradigmatic range of choice” in use by filmmakers in the various six-year periods I illustrated. Yet typically Bordwell and Thompson, on page 60 of their book, give the absence of such a feature as a good reason for ignoring my work. And in 1977 they had still not actually done anything about establishing stylistic norms and differences, they had merely mentioned the idea in passing a few more times.

When after this they finally tried to select a random sample of films from 1916 to 1960 to establish norms, what they achieved was far from “unbiased,” even with respect to the surviving films, as a glance at their breakdown by studio and period shows to anyone who has not only some idea about statistical sampling, but also of what is contained in the world’s film archives. Because of faulty sampling technique, it is in fact a markedly non-random sample from the films they could lay their hands on easily, particularly all those Warner Brothers films in their Wisconsin archive. Worse than this for their claims, nearly all of the generalizations about the developments in American film style and its norms in their book are in fact *not* based on their “unbiased sample,” but on their “extended sample,” which was very definitely hand-picked by them for their own purposes. Their “extended sample” is not specified, even as to size year by year, though it is certainly smaller than even my 1977 *FQ* sound film sample, let alone that in my 1983 book *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*. (Now in paperback at \$15. Covers up to 1970, and deals with European cinema too. A quarter of a million original words, and none wasted in laboring the obvious about narration, or anything else. The bargain of the century.) As a result of the shortcomings of their sample, Bordwell and Thompson markedly underestimate the range of stylistic variation in A.S.L. at any particular time, most obviously in their treatment of the fifties and the introduction of ‘Scope. Other formal variables treated quantitatively in my pre-1983 papers they do nothing about. Another way my statistical work is misrepresented is in the matter of my using a section of film 30 minutes or greater (and greater than 200 shots) to estimate the overall A.S.L., though a proportion of such results of mine have always been from complete films. In fact I briefly demonstrated the justification for this sectional sampling in my original 1974 article, which discussion Bordwell ignores. This is what repeatedly happens on the occasions when Bordwell and Thompson refer to my work: it is misrepresented and then there is the suggestion that it is not worth looking at. If they were really interested in advancing knowledge, they would have dealt with these matters, rather than concealing them.

When we turn to early cinema, their 1979 book *Film Art* was content to reproduce the traditional lazy errors about Porter and Griffith inventing everything. Yet in my 1976 “The Early Development of

Film Form,” I outlined for the first time the development of the key constitutional stylistic features of mainstream cinema up to 1918 (I intentionally avoided the expression “classical cinema,” since I felt it was already devalued by loose usage), namely forms of movement continuity from shot to shot, directional continuity, reverse-angle cutting, the introduction of dialogue titles, and non-frontal stagings at Vitagraph. No historians had discussed the emergence of these features before, and the previous consideration of the other features I discussed there such as scene dissection, flashback construction, naturalism in acting, camera movement, and all aspects of film lighting, had been inadequate. I did this not by reading other people’s work, but by viewing about 200 films, most of which no one had heard about or considered before, and from these I selected a smaller number of films to illustrate my novel generalizations. For the 1909–1918 period these unknown films included *The Fear*, *Rory O’Moore*, *The Loafer*, *An Ill Wind*, *After One Hundred Years*, *Weights and Measures*, *The Eagle’s Mate*, *His Phantom Sweetheart*, *Detective Burton’s Triumph*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Love’s Awakening (A Friendly Marriage)*. In 1979 Kristin Thompson came to the National Film Archive, mentioned my work to the Viewing Officer, Elaine Burrows, and asked to see those films, along with some others from the period. Yet at the end of 1985 Kristin Thompson told an audience gathered here in London to be sold their book that “Noël Burch and Barry Salt were working on this area at the same time as us, but we were not aware of this,” and when challenged about the above films, said, as she says in the *FQ* Winter letter that “. . . I just happened to come across these films because we were working in the same archives.” In fact the National Film Archive had about 300 viewing copies of American films from the 1909–1917 period in 1979, not “a limited number of titles,” and so the odds against lighting on those ten films by chance were rather large.

Introducing her treatment of the first twenty years on pages 157 to 159 of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), Kristin Thompson gives the impression that she is the first to give a full and correct objective treatment of formal developments, though in fact she is using my 1976 article, and also my 1978 “Film Form 1900–1906,” and the films in them, as guides, without mentioning this. Inevitably Thompson comes to the same conclusions, but she tries to cover this up by pretending that I got it wrong when she does mention these articles later in connection with a few specific points in footnotes. To take one instance, when discussing the introduction of dialogue titles (p. 185), her mention of my article, tucked away in a footnote as usual, says “Barry Salt has suggested that the placement of dialogue titles at the point in the scene where they are spoken was minority practice *around 1911 to 1913*.” (my emphasis) In fact what Barry Salt wrote was, “By 1911 the use of dialogue titles was fairly common, though not in Griffith’s films, but although some are at the point between shots where they would be heard, most are not, and it is doubtful that the principle had yet been

realised.” This exactly accords with the evidence Thompson produces, despite the very small sample of films she is considering. This misrepresentation of what I wrote is followed by the statement that my work is wrong because I ignored written sources. In fact, a decade ago, when I started on my work I went through the trade papers for this period, and discovered that there were no contemporary references to the introduction of the major features of mainstream cinema *at the time that they happened*, and often no references even much later. Nor have Bordwell and Thompson been able to find any stylistic developments that I missed out because my primary method was working through the viewing of thousands of films. In the particular case of dialogue titles, all Thompson has been able to find and quote in their book are discussions in 1911 and 1912 of the placement of *narrative* titles, and a 1913 quote saying of dialogue titles “. . . they should be made to follow the action . . .”, which certainly does not describe the majority practice in 1913.

On the other hand, where I went seriously wrong in 1976, through believing the traditional publicity accounts, was in my ascription of the introduction of chiaroscuro lighting for expressive purposes to Alvin Wyckoff working for De Mille in 1915. Thompson follows my 1976 account in believing this, whereas in fact there are many previous examples of low key or “Rembrandt lighting” years before this, at Vitagraph and elsewhere. Naturally I get this right in my book, with plenty of illustrations.

Kristin Thompson does attempt to improve on my work, as is only right, but when she discusses the final scene of *Detective Burton's Triumph* (now known to be *The Bank Burglar's Fate*, directed by Jack Adolphi), and builds a big argument on the reverse-angle cutting she sees in this scene, she goes badly wrong. As can be seen from the frame enlargements in their book, not to mention the film itself, there are no reverse-angle shots in this scene, it is all shot from the same side on a two-walled L-shaped set. Up to this point my observations have mostly borne on the ethics of Bordwell and Thompson's doings, but now we are talking about a point of major importance for the study of film history: their lack of technical competence. This is confirmed by many examples throughout their book, in the first place by the major topics in the development of film style that they miss, such as the reduction of depth of field in studio shooting from 1918 onwards, the use of double backlighting likewise, the introduction of duplicating stock and its consequences, the development of the insert shot (and its vital relation to film narration), the reduction of lens diffusion in the late forties, and etc., etc. The effects of these developments are visible in some of the films they illustrate, but they can't see them. Then there are the other terrible errors they commit because of their lack of technical knowledge, such as the description of the foot pedals on the Bell & Howell semi-automatic splicer (which actually actuate the clamps) as being “to run the film through” (Ill. 21.3), the Bell & Howell continuous printer as using the intermittent “shuttle gate” mechanism (page 252), the main lights in the

foreground of illustration 17.41 are reflector-type spotlights, not floodlights, Illus. 28.1 given as an example of the *absence* of backlighting in color films visibly shows the presence of backlighting, and so on and on and on. But how to deal with this problem for the advancement of knowledge of film style and technology? For when confronted with their mistakes Bordwell and Thompson's reaction is as in their letter, where Thompson attempts to conceal that she *does* give the 1919 *TSMPE* article I mentioned as an example of standard contemporary lighting practice, as you can read on page 412 of their book, with no mention of the number of lights at Vitagraph. But the inadequacies and misleading nature of the coverage of such matters in the technical journals, which are ignorantly accepted as Holy Writ by Bordwell and Thompson, and then further misinterpreted by them, needs a long article in itself. —BARRY SALT

## Salt II

Readers (if any remain) of this tiresome controversy may not have the stamina to return to the original texts. We want to point out that, with the exceptions noted below, Salt has conceded our previous points simply by neglecting to rebut them. He initially claimed that we used his ideas without citing him, but we showed that he was indeed cited. He claimed that Thompson's section of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* “tells the same story” as does his 1976 article; we showed that it did not. He charged that she used “exactly the same previously unknown films” he did; we showed that she did not. He asserted that she used inadequate documentation for certain points; we showed that she did not. On all these matters, Salt now remains silent. But he is unfazed. He prefers to occupy his time, our time, and your time with more invective. Once more, as a matter of principle, we feel obliged to reply, and since it takes less space to fling an unsupported charge than to mount a supported defense, we must presume once more on the reader's patience.

First, the exceptional passages in which Salt does address our rejoinder.

1. He answers our claim that we have not denigrated him by assuming that a passage, from Thompson's review of the book *Cinema 1900/1906* is a “sneer” at him. Yet he assumes wrongly. Anyone who cares to read the quotation in its original context (*Iris*, Vol. 2, no. 1, p. 142) will realize that it criticizes only Noël Burch's contribution to that work. Burch, who claimed to be doing a *non*-evolutionary history of the early cinema, contributed a highly evolutionary account. Salt, on the other hand, labelled his essay “Evolution of the Film Form Up To 1906” and gave a consistently evolutionary description. Burch contradicted his own premises, while Salt was completely true to his: that was the point. Thompson's reference to Salt's own essay (p. 141) is approving, placing him in a group of authors who contribute to the revision of traditional film history.

2. Salt insists that he brought the concept of norms into film studies. However, he now collapses

the concept of norms as such into the concept of *statistical* norms. We are concerned, like the Russian and Prague poeticians, with both qualitative and quantitative norms, as a glance at any of our work since 1976 will show. The notion of average shot length, which we do use in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* and do attribute to Salt (as we indicated in our first response), is only a part of a much broader account of a paradigmatic set of options. We do not, frankly, consider quantitative norms to be as important as Salt does; witness our neglect of his other quantitative dimensions, such as shot-scale. (For a brief discussion of the relevance of quantitative norms to stylistic study, see Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 152.)

3. Salt does not acknowledge our demonstration that Thompson's citations of films from the pre-1918 period overlap in only a small number of cases with his citations, and that many of those titles are previously known classics. He now narrows his charge, listing fewer than a dozen titles that overlap, all of which are in the National Film Archive in London. He estimates that in 1979, when Thompson did her research, the Archive held about 300 viewing prints. Whether this is a "limited number" the reader must judge for him or herself. Thompson viewed just over 50 titles, or about one-sixth, during her two-week research stay in 1979. Given that Salt lives in London and dedicates his book to the National Archive, he presumably had seen a considerable proportion of these films. It is therefore hardly surprising that he and Thompson saw a dozen or more of the same titles there. Certainly Thompson did not, as Salt implies, ask viewings coordinator Elaine Burrows to show her all the films used in Salt's article; she did, however, use the same list of available viewing prints, shown her by Ms. Burrows. To the best of Thompson's recollection, the only film she viewed specifically because Salt mentioned it was *The Loafer*, as an early instance of shot/reverse shot, and, again, she cited Salt on this example. Salt's reply ignores entirely the point in our previous reply that most of Thompson's references to these films do not use them *for the same purpose* that his article did. One must conclude that Salt thinks that anyone viewing these same films, for whatever ends, must inevitably cite him—as if viewing them for the first time in modern days had conferred a sort of copyright privilege on him. (Which reminds us that Salt also never answers our original point about his failure to cite any previous authors, including those, like Kemp Niver, who *have* made the same points he has.)

Finally, Salt claims that there are ten offending titles on his list, but he in fact mentions eleven. This should embarrass a writer who stakes his reputation on quantitative research.

So much for his attempts to address the points made in our first reply. Now we turn to his new round of unfounded, unsupported charges.

Few readers will be interested in squabbles about the sort of esoteric points Salt makes, but they have symptomatic importance. Originally, Salt wanted to claim that we stole from him. That claim did not hold up. Now he uses the occasion of a reply to snipe

at small, putative inaccuracies without having to go to the trouble to analyze our book properly. In effect, he writes a mini-review. By contrast, our own discussion of *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* was recently published in the *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* ("Toward a Scientific Film History?" in Vol. 10, no. 3 [Summer 1985]: 224–237). There we examined his book in detail, drawing on evidence and using footnotes to support claims that differed from his. In his discussion of our book, we find no such effort to back up his criticisms. Indeed, it is remarkable that nearly all his criticisms of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* bear upon *stills illustrating the text*; the others refer to the Appendix or a few footnotes. There is no evidence that he has actually read the book. Still, this is progress. His first attack betrayed no familiarity with the book at all.

Salt's attempts to claim that Thompson both stole his ideas on early cinema and managed to get them completely wrong are wholly untenable. For example, if there are no references to intertitle usage in contemporary trade papers, as Salt asserts, how does Thompson manage to cite any? Thompson also does, contrary to Salt's claim, cite instances of low-key, or effects, lighting prior to De Mille's famous usage in 1915 (*The CHC*, pp. 223–224, also Figures 17.23, 17.24, and 17.29). Salt manages to make Thompson's analysis of a shot/reverse-shot scene in *Detective Burton's Triumph* "wrong" by claiming that it contains no "reverse-angles"—something he can do only by using his own very limited (and idiosyncratic) definition of shot/reverse shot as necessarily involving distinct changes of angles at each cut. We define shot/reverse shot as consisting of shots taken of characters at opposite ends of a 180-degree line. By this definition, which is in wide usage, the scene is exactly as Thompson describes it.

Salt goes on to attack our "technical competence." Each of his charges deserves separate rebuttal, but so as not to expand this discussion, we can reply to only a few examples. We fail, he says, to deal with "double backlighting." This was a new term to us, as it has never been in common usage or professional parlance. But, fearing we had overlooked something, we went to Salt's own book for enlightenment. There is no such term in his glossary/index or text. Presumably he is referring here to the use of "two backlights," beginning in 1919 (discussed in *Film Style & Technology*, pp. 141, 143). Given that backlighting can come from one lamp or from dozens, the adjective "double" seems a bit misleading. We preferred to discuss backlighting in terms of its effect on the screen; when backlight surrounds the figures in light and picks them out against the background, we used the Hollywood term, "rim" lighting: e.g., "By the end of the teens, films often extended and refined backlighting by using it to surround the entire figure—creating what was called 'rim' lighting" (*The CHC*, p. 225, also Figures 17.36 and 17.37). Again, Salt either has failed to read what we wrote, or he uses a different term (of his own invention) in order to pretend that we have committed some egregious error.

More unsupported claims follow. For example, Thompson's description of the Bell & Howell semi-automatic splicer was taken from a reliable contemporary source. Where is Salt's evidence for claiming that description is wrong? As to the "spotlights" in the foreground of Figure 17.41, Salt should surely be aware that the Sunlight Arc could be used as either a flood or a spot lamp, depending on the accessories used and the adjustment of the carbons. It is fairly evident that at least the righthand unit has a diffusion disc mounted on it, indicating *in this case* its use as a floodlight. He also claims that "Thompson attempts to conceal" a point about her use of a "1919 TSMPE article" Salt dismissed as "years out of date" in his original letter. Had he specified *which* reference to a 1919 article from the *Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* he meant, it might have made it possible for us to answer his charge; we assumed he meant the citation on p. 274 (fn 47). Now it turns out he meant the *other* reference to this 1919 article. Had we been able to read Salt's mind on this point, we could have stated to begin with that Diagram 9 in Appendix D (p. 412) seems to us a fair representation not only of a lighting set-up for 1919, but for any situation in a 1920s films where the effect desired is a strong sidelight from one side of an L-shaped set and a weaker one from the left rear, through windows in the set. Again, Salt asserts that this is out of date, but does not support his claim. (A photograph of a 1920s Lewis Selznick production reproduced on p. 178 of Salt's own book shows a rather similar lighting set-up to that in our Diagram 9, though there are more mercury-vapor lamps than arcs providing the main side light.) Our space here is limited, but these examples should suffice to indicate how we would reply to Salt's nit-picking.

Not content with misunderstanding our book, Salt moves to the realm in which he always seems most comfortable: personal attack. Both of the "quotations" Salt attributes to Thompson are his own fabrications. In her 1985 University of London Institute of Education lecture, Thompson did say that in the 1977-78 academic year, when she and her collaborators were formulating *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, she was not aware that both Salt and Burch had independently concluded that the classical continuity system was in place by 1917. She was not, in fact, aware of this because she had not at that time read Salt's article. She did, of course, read it during the early stages of researching our book and had never pretended that she was unaware of his conclusions by the time she viewed films at the National Archive in October, 1979. (A tape of this lecture, along with Salt's original oral accusations against Thompson, Routledge & Kegan Paul, the BFI, and others, is on file at the Institute of Education.) The second "quotation" ("... I just happened to come across...") appears neither in Thompson's talk nor in our previous response. Such fictitious quotations indicate the level of accuracy and care which characterizes the rest of Salt's claims.

Salt also implies that Thompson acted in a crassly commercial fashion when she gave a lecture, "Study-

ing the Cinematic Institution: The Case of the Classical Hollywood Cinema" at the University of London Institute of Education in 1985 (co-sponsored by the Institute, the BFI, the Society for Education in Film and Television, and Routledge & Kegan Paul). The audience was there, he says, "to be sold their book." The audience was actually there to hear a lecture on the historical methods used in the writings of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* and Thompson's *Exporting Entertainment*. (One wonders, incidentally, given Salt's conviction that Thompson is incapable of doing her own work, from whom he thinks she stole the latter book's contents.) Copies of each book were available in the lobby afterwards, but there was no sales pitch. Such sales of books at academic functions are standard practice, we believe. Indeed, Salt's initial sales of his book were partly done at academic conferences where he was giving lectures. Moreover, in spite of his denigration of the BFI and his frequent reference to his own lack of institutional support, Salt himself wrote the program notes for a season of early features, "The Birth of the American Feature Film: The Other Story," which he programmed at the National Film Theatre in London. This series coincided with the appearance of Salt's book, which was prominently mentioned in the notes (see NFT program, February 1984, pp. 10-13). Were the audiences who came to these films there "to be sold his book"? Presumably not. Certainly Salt's parenthetical promotion of his book ("The bargain of the century") speaks for itself.

The reader's endurance, sorely tried by this affair, may be somewhat revived by a final piece of background information. The first version of Salt's reply, which was reluctantly shown to us by the Editor and his Editorial Board, was judged legally actionable by two attorneys whom we consulted. We pointed this out to the Editor, who had this opinion confirmed by the counsel he consulted. The Editor requested that Salt revise his reply to make it non-defamatory, and, within the letter of the law, Salt complied.

The incident is revelatory. There has never been a serious intellectual issue at stake in this controversy. Initially, Salt used the pretext of replying to a review of his book in order to abuse the British Film Institute, academic presses, and the community of American film scholars. Since we were named, we decided, at the advice of colleagues and friends, to defend our professional reputations, but this was undertaken on sheerly moral grounds. That Salt's original diatribe was published, that the Editor explicitly welcomed readers to write in with letters supporting Salt, that initially the Editor and Board refused to allow us to respond to Salt's new round of accusations or even to show it to us before its publication, that neither the Editor nor his Board detected the litigious aspects of his first version, and that Salt has been given yet another forum for his ungrounded assaults—all this suggests that on this occasion *Film Quarterly* has overlooked the difference between scholarly debate and mere mud-slinging.

[This exchange is now closed. —ED.]