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Art and the Structuralist Perspective*

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Years ago, when I was a student, I happened to see an entry in a bookseller's catalogue for an edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* described as "beautiful" and "illustrated." That entry caught my fancy, produced a kind of mental cramp, and intrigued me so that I eventually made the trip down to Fourth Avenue to have a look at the book. But not, of course, before I'd spent some time trying to relax that cramp, speculating upon the order and imagining the style of those illustrations.

This kind of tension recurred quite recently when, reading through the theoretical writings of Eisenstein, I came across notes on a project for a filmed version of Marx's *Das Kapital*. History—the history of Marxism, in fact—has deprived us all of this version. The man does not live who can say, "No, I haven't read the book, but I've seen the movie." What, however, might that movie be? How is one to imagine its form, describe its possible contours? The nineteenth-century novel does offer some partial dramatizations—of the celebrated chapter on the working day, among others. And Brecht, I think, provides the closest aesthetic exemplification of Marxist analytic method; the formal strategy of the distancing or alienation effect suggests itself as a powerful instance. Can one, however, proceed to figure the idea of surplus value? Or a sentence such as the following: "It is value . . . that converts every product of labor into a social hieroglyph"?

As for the illustrated edition of the *Critique*, I remember that my speculations—more like musing, really—tended to center about notions and images of geometric forms, those which are described in the *Philebus* as the truest, and consequently the most beautiful, of figures. "What I mean," says Socrates, "what the argument points to, is something straight or round, and the surfaces and solids which a lathe or carpenter's rule and square produces from the straight and round. I wonder if you understand. Things of that sort, I maintain, are beautiful, not, like most things, in a relative sense; they are always beautiful in their very nature, and they offer pleasures peculiar to themselves, and quite unlike others. They have that purity which makes for truth. They are philosophical."[1]

* First delivered as a lecture at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art in 1969 as part of the series "On the Future of Art" and published in *On the Future of Art* (New York: Viking Press, 1970). Reprinted here courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

1. Plato and R. (Reginald) Hackworth, *Plato's Examination of Pleasure: A Translation of the Philebus*

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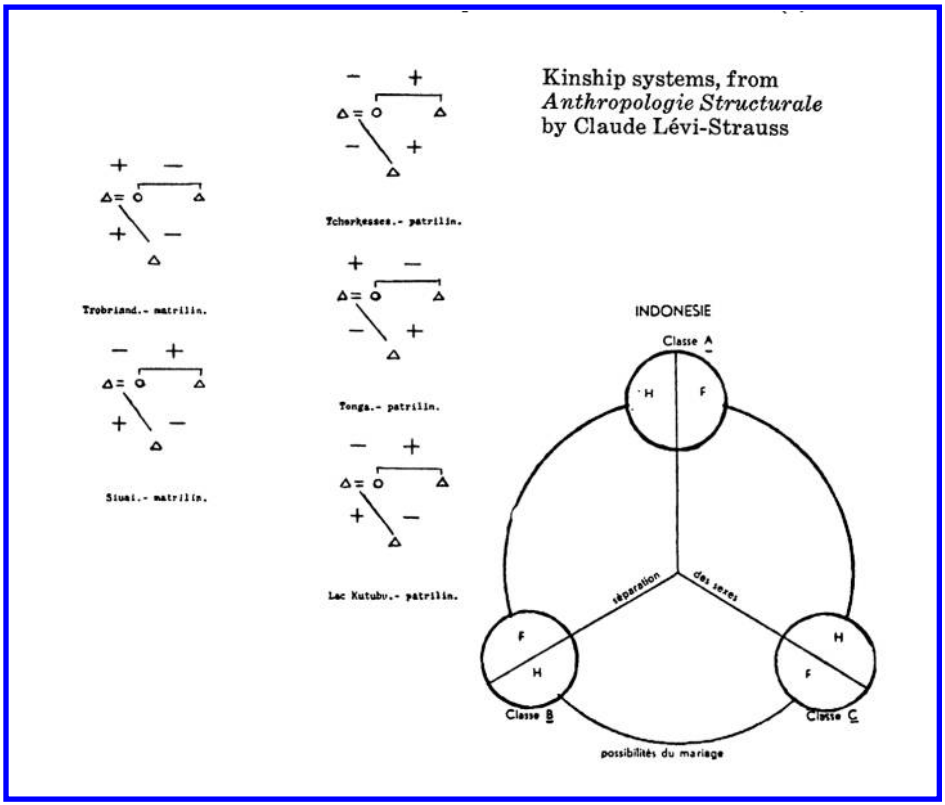
Immanuel Kant.

Plato, of course, never conceived the notion of those "philosophical things" or geometrical forms as providing the substance and vocabulary of art itself. An art of "pure plastics," that ultimate variant of aesthetic idealism, was unknown to him. It was, however, familiar to me, and I enjoyed, then, fancying an illustrated edition of the *Critiques* as a kind of series of Icons of the Rational. Although that cramp was not relaxed entirely by thoughts of late Mondrian and Kandinsky, I remember that my imaginings were tinted by them. I actually fancied these two distinguished disciples of Madame Blavatsky as Iconographers of the Rational! I was wrong, of course, for when I got down to Fourth Avenue and opened the volume, I saw that the illustration consisted of a frontispiece, a portrait of Kant. I should have anticipated this but did not, and it now occurs to me that I probably did not want to, because the imagining had involved a game, a very primitive exercise in sign theory or semiology.

The notion of an illustrated edition of the *Critiques* seems, in any case, to have slumbered on in me until much later, when, opening a volume of the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, I came upon some plates which seemed to offer closer approximations of an illustrated edition of Kant than the engraving of the philosopher himself. Here they are: two diagrams comparing kinship systems of primitive tribes.

And how can these be said to constitute effective Icons of the Rational? They represent an attempt, initiated by Kant and implemented by the analytic methods

(Cambridge: The University Press, 1958), p. 100. Citation corrected.—*Eds.*



of structuralist anthropology, to extend our knowledge of reality, to acquaint us with the manner in which the human mind organizes its experience of the world. Inviting us to explore the dynamics of the mind, they propose an intelligibility of our universe. These diagrams illustrate an undertaking as ambitious and as impressive as any that one could conceive. The manner in which that enterprise is articulated and set in motion is something to which we will return. Consider, for the moment, a definition of its aims, as they have informed a life-work covering a vast range of empirical observation and grounded in linguistic theory, issuing, through the study of kinship systems in the tribes we call primitive, through comparative studies of myth, of cookery and table manners, in an epistemology.

> The destination remains unchanged; it is still the inventory, based on ethnographic experience, of our mental contours, the reduction of seemingly arbitrary data to an order, the location of that level upon which necessity, immanent in the illusions of freedom, is revealed. Beneath the apparent and superficial randomness, incoherence and diversity characteristic of marriage regulations, we have disclosed,

> through our study of Basic Kinship Structures, a few simple principles. Through their application a very complex set of customs and usages—at first view, seemingly absurd and generally judged as such—was assembled into a meaningful system.[2]

The province of anthropological research is neither that of individual psychology nor that of the social sciences as developed within the context of the Western philosophical tradition. Unlike the philosopher though sharing his concerns, the anthropologist rejects the hypothesis of universal suppositions, proceeding instead through empirical observation of the innumerable "concrete systems of representations" that animate and structure the social processes of communities.

> And since, for the anthropologist—and he is always a man of a given social origin, a particular culture, region and historical period—these systems represent the entire range of possibilities within a given type, he expressly chooses those which seem to differ most sharply, in the hope that the methodological principle used to translate these systems into the terms of his own system—and conversely—will disclose a network of fundamental common constraints. This involves a supreme form of gymnastics in which the exercise of reflection, pushed to its upmost objective limits (since these have first been surveyed, measured and inventoried through research in the field), brings out each muscle and joint of the skeleton, thereby exposing the lineaments of a general anatomic structure. The important thing is that the human mind reveal a structure that is progressively intelligible. We have stressed our effort to transcend the opposition between the physical and mental by placing our investigations on the terrain of the linguistic sign. Indeed, when used in even very small numbers, these signs lend themselves to rigorously arranged combinations capable of translating the entire diversity of felt experience, even to its subtlest nuances.[3]

It is, then, the business of structuralist analysis to reveal the extraordinary propensity of the human mind to organize, through symbolic sign systems, its experience of the world.

Thus structuralism through Lévi-Strauss inherits the aims of rationalism, its methods and metaphors, its stance of objectivity, and the strategies of observational, empirical research. Taking his cue from his master, Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss believes that "when we wish to study men, we must stay close to home, but in order to study man, we must look away, abroad, further into the distance. We must, if we wish to discover the basic, common properties of things, begin by observing the differences between them." The anthropologist departs from the context of his

2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques 1: Le Cru et le cuit* (Paris: Plon, 1964), p. 18. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

3. Ibid., p. 19.

own culture to rediscover it in rebound through observation of foreign cultures. He departs from the notion of a culture evolving in history to study that of a culture bent upon preserving its identity from transformation through time, as the highly ritualized, preliterate cultures are.

In his search for the order within and beneath the apparent irrationality of social organization, Lévi-Strauss follows the nineteenth century's movement from belief in transcendent causes to belief in immanent ones. His acknowledged masters are Freud and Marx, who were concerned, like himself, with the logic of the immanent.

Unlike Freud and Marx, however, he is concerned with the dynamics of neither individual psychology nor class structure, but with human thought in its most general aspects; he must locate the threshold of the human, that level at which man, passing from nature into culture, becomes man. And he discovers it not in the manufacture of artifacts but in the constitution, through communication, of the social group, in the structuring of experience through exchange, governed by rules and articulated through signs.

The rule involves the particular or the relative, as opposed to law, which implies the universal. The domain of the rule is culture; that of Universal Law is nature. Looking for the primary level upon which nature and culture fuse, Lévi-Strauss finds it in that rule which is universal throughout all cultures—the prohibition of incest—instituting always, in its immense formal variety, the preeminence of the social over the natural, of the collective over the individual, of organization and order over the rule of the arbitrary.

Lévi-Strauss observes that rules governing kinship and marriage guarantee exogamy; they institute exchange and constitute, in themselves, the emergence of culture as a system of exchanges. It is, as we might have expected, on the terrain of sexuality that the threshold between the two orders is necessarily located.

The rule acts, then, not to prohibit but—and this is most important—to guarantee exchange. In kinship systems, structure alone remains constant. Within them, individual elements may shift or change respective positions, provided that relations between them are respected. The taboo on incest, then, is not biologically functional, as previous anthropological, psychological, and historical theory and tradition had assured us. It simply ensures the inevitability of exchange as such.

The prohibitions governing language are as universal as language itself, and we know considerably more about their origins than about those of kinship systems. Structuralists suggest that by following the comparison as far as possible we may hope to penetrate the meaning of these institutions.

Exogamy and language have parallel and essentially positive functions: the establishment of bonds between men that permit biological organization to be transcended by social organization. Both exogamy and language ensure communication with others and integration of the group. The structuralist is thus led to see sexual relations and language as modes of communication.

If I dwell upon the fusion of nature and culture in social institutions interpreted in symbolic signs or structures as guarantees of communication, it is because I wish to convey the importance of the linguistic mode for structuralist analysis, in order to examine the nature and limits of its consequences for art and aesthetics. It is the radical quality of the application of the linguistic model which distinguishes Lévi-Strauss's effort to illuminate the mechanisms of thought in terms of "primitive," preliterate societies which, unlike ours, apply their energy to maintaining the maximum stability of their symbolic systems and institutions. Rejecting the process of perpetual transformation within history, these societies conserve those systems and institutions through ritual, myth, art, language, and custom.

In adopting language as a model of symbolic systems, Lévi-Strauss is indebted to the methods and achievements of structural linguistics inaugurated by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and extended by the work of the generation of revolutionary critics, aestheticians, and linguists of Russia and Prague. For methodological clues he has looked most particularly to the work of Roman Jakobson, one of the principal animators of this discipline as it has moved from East to West and back again within our century.

Saussure's conception of linguistics as part of a new, more general science of semiology was inspired by Émile Durkheim's emphasis on the necessity for the study of signs considered within social context. Saussure saw the linguistic system or code as preexistent to the individual act of speech or message and therefore as commanding logical priority. Communication was understood as operating on the basis of this double articulation of code and message.

For Saussure, the arbitrariness of the individual sign (its unmotivated character) was fundamental. And the importance, the function, of the sign lies primarily in its differences from others in the same system. C. S. Peirce, his American contemporary, extended and articulated the notion of sign, defining several different kinds. Basically, schematically, there are three: icon, index, and symbol. Anything can be the icon of any object, insofar as it is like that object and used as a sign or representation of it. An icon is a sign which possesses the character that renders the object significant, even though the object may have no existence. Thus the images we call "likenesses," such as Kant's portrait, are icons, and since the actual existence of the object or referent does not determine iconicity, one might say that an image representing "real toads in imaginary gardens" would be an icon as well. A diagram is also an icon, in that it represents the relations of parts in a model by analogous relations between its own parts. Degrees of iconicity—higher and lower—exist.

An index is a sign representing a characteristic of its object in a physical or observable manner, a sign which would lose the characteristic that makes it a sign if its object were removed, but which would not lose the characteristic if there were no one to interpret it. A piece of wood with a bullet hole is the index of a shot; without the shot there would have been no hole, but the hole is there, whether or not its cause is perceived. A weathercock is an index of the direction of

the wind, in that there is a physical connection between them. Other examples would be footprints in sand, a rap on the door, or any signal telling us to pay attention. And Jakobson suggests that medical symptoms are indices, and symptomatology may be considered a study of indexical signs.

Photographic images and cinema, of course, present a particular problem, as they would seem to involve iconic resemblance to objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to their being produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. Seen in that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs, those involving physical connection. Overlapping and difference in degree are, of course, inherent in the nature of signs.

The symbol is the conventional sign—a word, a sentence, a book—and it has, in Peirce's term, "the force of law"; it is "a regularity of the indefinite future," linked neither in terms of likeness to its object, like the icon, nor physically with its object, like the index. The symbol is connected with its object by virtue of the idea of a symbolizing mind, without which no such connection would exist. It is closest to Saussure's notion of the sign as arbitrary but presents again the problem of overlapping and definition. The word is the supreme symbolic sign.

Turning, then, from historical immediacy, the structural anthropologist addresses himself, with a lucidity born of a certain guilt, to the studies of those societies that his own Western culture had begun to despoil by the sixteenth century. His openness to foreign cultures hinges on his acceptance of himself as rooted in the culture of rationality, of historical progress; he seeks to discover, through analysis of the ritualistic stability of preliterate cultures, something of himself, to scan its mythology for the roots of rationality. Like Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss bears within him a nostalgia born of both that estrangement and that sense of affinity which Panofsky has described as the very essence of the Renaissance sensibility. Like a man of the Renaissance, Lévi-Strauss directs his intellectual heritage, the rationalism of Kant, Rousseau, Marx, Freud, and Cuvier, toward the conquest of knowledge, the dissipation of mystery through the observation of mysteries.

Linguistic method implements the study of social institutions as systems or structures, their nature depending not upon the nature of the individual signs which compose them but on the relationships which organized those signs into meaningful systems.

We may say, then, that structuralists, placing themselves under the auspices of linguistic method and of the sign, adopt a point of view particularly familiar to us, a view of the human mind as possessed by the demon of order. Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss, in fact, describe their subject and method in a way analogous to the means of both artistic creation and art criticism. If it is, indeed, the relating or ordering of differences into a structure which confers interest or value upon signs, we understand the full force of Jakobson's affirmation when, quoting Braque, he says he believes not in things, but in the relationship between things.

Considered within this perspective, classes of objects or institutions within a given culture demand to be treated in terms of their formal coexistence. If in

structuralist analysis—either linguistic or anthropological—the analysis of structures of widely different cultures establishes the existence of common constraints, that is because structuralist analysis places an emphasis on what we term the synchronic aspect of systems—their manner of arrangement, the relationship of parts within the structure—as against the diachronic, the succession of events or elements in time.

Nietzsche had called attention to that hypertrophy of historical consciousness which characterized the nineteenth century. If linguistics and semiology are tending, in our century, to replace history as a dominant discipline, then we must expect a certain uneasiness in reaction to that shift of perspective. And we get it, of course. When structuralism claims the primacy of the synchronic over the diachronic, it points out that history is an abstraction, the positing of a dynamics that cannot, in fact, be directly deduced from a succession of forms, systems, or structures.

That claim challenges the culture, the sensibility rooted in the historical consciousness of the past century. It challenges the powerfully operative suppositions bequeathed by the last towering philosophical system, that of Hegel. And in France, the Marxist-Hegelian left has responded with a cry of alarm; Sartre reproaches structuralism, in a striking metaphor, for attempting to "replace the moving picture with a magic-lantern slide." I recently observed at a symposium of art historians and historically oriented critics and scholars the extraordinary vividness with which this opposition was rehearsed, and the strong, though unconscious, sense of synchronic perspective as a threat to the aims, methods, and traditions of historical scholarship. That clash now reveals itself in most fields of discourse. If it is to be resolved, it can be so only, I should think, through an acceptance of a complementarity of approach, rather like that involved in the simultaneous admission of both the wave and the corpuscular theories of light in modern physics.

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If I have chosen to limit this discussion of the structuralist perspective to a discussion of the work and thought of Lévi-Strauss, and of their implications, it is because he has sought to radicalize the structuralist perspective and activity, extending its province in the service of a supremely ambitious enterprise, and he has done so with a power, elegance, and intellectual tact incomparable in our time.

To confront structuralist perspective in his terms, however, is to confront its deeply problematic and troubling response to the claims, the nature, the facts of modern and modernist art. Here, then, is an initial statement on the art of our age:

> . . . one could describe non-figurative painting in terms of two characteristics. The first, which it shares with easel painting, consists in a total rejection of a contingency of destination: the picture is not made for a

> particular use. [This in contradistinction to the art of primitive societies.] The other, which is proper to non-figurative painting, consists in the methodological exploitation of the contingency of execution, which is claimed as the pretext of the external occasion of the picture. Non-figurative painting adopts manners or styles as its subjects; it claims to present a concrete representation of the formal conditions of all painting. The result is a paradox in that non-figurative painting does not, as it believes, create works as real as—or more so than—the objects of the physical world, but realist imitations of nonexistent models. It is an academic school of painting in which each artist strains after the representation of a manner in which he would execute his pictures if he happened to be painting any.[4]

That statement is followed by another, elsewhere, that same year.

> Impressionism is a reactionary revolution because the Impressionists cease to take cognizance of the semantic character of the work of art. A surface revolution, though not completely, since content is still retained as important. Impressionism's objects are charmless, modest. Its role is didactic; it functions as a social guide, its task lies in reconciling society to a decline, to the disappearance of a Nature of the first order or quality. Impressionism continues the tendency of Occidental art to possess the object through illusion initiated in Greek sculpture and in the painting of the Renaissance. The real problem is to know if the object is signified or reconstituted in a kind of possession—or at least this is one's aim, since the object is never really reconstituted.
>
> The academicism of Impressionism was one of the signified (or object); the academicism of contemporary art is that of signifier (or manner). The academicism of language replaces academicism of subject because no real language is possible, since this requires social stability and homogeneity. The abstract artist analyzes his own system of signs, dissolving and exhausting it, voiding it of its signifying function, and of the very possibility of signifying.[5]

These statements, made by an intellectual hero of our time, one century after the first Salon des Refusés, ring in my own ears, and I assume in yours, with something of a shock, that shock compounded, of course, by awareness of the culture in which he was born and came to maturity—that of Paris, a focal center of modernist energies for a century and more. One thinks of Freud, and of his violent rejection of both Expressionism and Surrealism, his insistence that "the

4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Librarie Plon, 1962), p. 43.

5. Ibid., pp. 81–82.

concept of art resisted an extension beyond the point where the quantitative proportion between unconscious material and preconscious elaboration is not kept within a certain limit."[6]

What makes these statements by Lévi-Strauss possible? What do they indicate about the nature of structuralism on the one hand and of our art on the other? Is the conflict real? Can we localize it, resolve it? If not, why not? How can a scientific methodology so closely analogous to that of a modern aesthetics of form reject contemporary aesthetic forms?

The source of conflict would seem to lie principally in the application of the linguistic model and of the semantic function to our contemporary painting and sculpture, which resist the notion of any authority or model, any notion of code and message in their stubborn claim for autonomy, immediacy, and absoluteness. To say this is not to deny the manner in which modern art continues to rehearse the contradictions of Platonic idealism, but to recognize that the history of art is, like that of philosophy, a history of ambivalences. The crisis in our notion of the real, initiated in the philosophy of the seventeenth century, inhabits the movement toward abstraction, that movement which rejects the notion of idea or object preexistent to its aesthetic form, turning from that illusionism through which such objects could be rendered, tending toward the constitution of a more purely pictorial, sculptural, or literary fact. No appreciation of Western art can afford to ignore this, and it has been the strength of American art that its critics and painters have consistently concerned themselves with this crisis and its implications.

This movement, reflected in the development of all the arts, finds an initial affirmation in literature, in a text which stands as a manifesto of modernism, in Flaubert's celebrated letter to Louise Colet, written in January 1852.

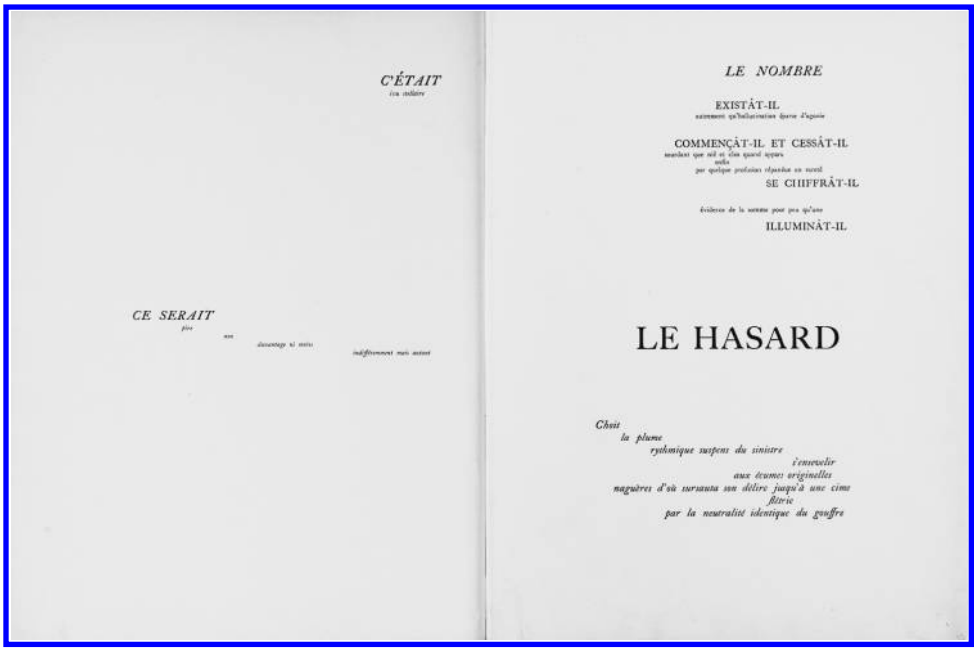
> What I consider fine, what I should like to do, is a book about nothing, a book without external attachments of any sort, which would hold of itself, through the inner strength of its style, as the earth sustains itself with no support in air, a book with almost no subject. Or at least an almost invisible subject, if possible.

The dissolution of the subject in the interests of style and structure was effected through the mediating strategy of the redefinition of the subject, a leveling of it, the repudiation of the concept of the "fine" subject, the rehabilitation, the redemption, through style, of the ordinary. Hence the "modest" quality of Impressionist landscapes.

There is an epistemology of modernism that questions the object as it questions the word, thereby questioning the sign. Art, in questioning mimesis, redefines and loosens its relation to the signified, aspiring, however, as if by compensation, to the most radical and most enveloping signification of all, to that of an

6. This statement appears in a letter written by Freud to Stefan Zweig after a visit from Salvador Dalí, published by E. H. Gombrich in "Freud's Aesthetics," *Encounter* (London) 26, no. 1 (January 1966).

absolute presence. Poetry, consenting, through Mallarmé, to be poetry only, aspires to be "the Orphic explanation of the world," of a world "meant to end in a book." That book, unwritten, is prepared by Mallarmé's supreme effort, *Un Coup de dés*, in which the primacy of the word as symbolic sign is questioned at every point of utterance by the felt necessity to make meaning palpable, as it were, directly perceptible, through the recognition of the space and silence from which it emerges, which sustain it on the page and in the ear and in the mind. The word itself, that supreme semantic sign, aspires to a concreteness, an immediacy of presence, greater than that which any purely linguistic concept affords. Henceforth the application of the classical Saussurean linguistic model will do a certain violence to art and poetry alike, to their stubborn resistance to meaning and to their desire to redefine the possibility of meaning through playfulness and speculation.


C'ÉTAIT

CE SERAIT

LE NOMBRE

EXISTÂT-IL

COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL

SE CHIFFRÂT-IL

ILLUMINÂT-IL

LE HASARD

Choit
la plume
rythmique suipens du sinistre
s'ensoveler
aux écumes originelles
naguères d'où surnauta son délire jusqu'à une cime
flétrie
par la neutralité identique du gouffre

Stéphane Mallarmé. Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. *1897.*

Using Peirce's definitions, one could trace the evolution of painting from the iconic function of Renaissance perspective to the emergence of the indexical sign in Impressionism, its development culminating in the 1940s and '50s as in Jackson Pollock or Franz Kline. One sees the play and speculation at work in Jasper Johns's fusion of the iconic with the indexical, as in his Targets, figured and bearing the traces or indices of facture. Early works by Robert Morris, involving a plaster cast of a hand, a photograph of the artist, or cardiographs, combine the

Jasper Johns. Target with Plaster Casts. *1955. Jasper Johns/VAGA at Aritsts Rights Society (ARS), NY.*

iconic with the indexical, objectifying process. Lichtenstein has painted in the trajectory of a paintbrush the icon of an index.

No conception of art as language, however, can neglect the manner in which the notion of language itself calls for a certain refinement or extension (the accent on the referent being by no means the only possibility, as Jakobson has pointed out). There do exist messages which perform only the function of establishing, prolonging, or interrupting a circuit of communication, of attracting attention or ensuring that it not be relaxed. This accentuation of contact can give rise to a profusion of ritualistic formulas, or to entire monologues or dialogues whose sole object is to establish or sustain conversation, not to further it. The effort to establish and maintain a communication circuit is a characteristic of talking birds, and we call this the phatic function of language, the only one which birds share with us. It is also the first verbal function to be acquired by children. In children, the tendency to establish communication precedes the capacity to emit or receive information-bearing messages. Certain dialogues between critics and artists have that quality.

A year or so ago, while thinking about current art and its resistance to the semantic function, I was struck with the manner in which the notion of the "formal statement," a phrase current in contemporary art criticism, represents a vestige of that same tradition which modern criticism proposed to abandon in order

to accommodate the intensified immediacy and autonomy of the art object. While rejecting the dualism of code and message and confining its concern to an art of a single level of articulation, criticism has, nonetheless, retained something of the old rhetoric. It is that contradiction which gave a certain pungency to John Cage's statement "I have nothing to say and I am saying it." Art tends increasingly to posit "formal statements" which are positive and nonambiguous, their reductive or nonrelational character resisting denial, debate, and qualification. Statements of this sort we term "apodictic." And the ultimate statement of this kind, the height of immediacy, is reached by the work whose formal statement is merely "I am that I am." The utopian ideal of the century is, indeed, as Lévi-Strauss has suggested, the construction of a sign system on a single level of articulation. It is the dream of absolute immediacy pervading our culture and our art, which replaces, in a secular age, a theology of absolute presence. That dream is figured on the reverse side of the idealist coin.

Faced with abstraction's single level of articulation, structuralist thinking retreats. (It is significant, by the way, that structuralism has been neither absorbed nor challenged by French art criticism and art history.) Much as Freud turned from Expressionism, Lévi-Strauss turns away from the critical view of illusionism and language basic to the epistemology of modernism, and he calls, literally, for the return of an art of imaginary landscapes in trompe l'oeil, evoking with Rousseauistic nostalgia the restoration of natural harmony through an art of delectation.

And yet it is, I think, not solely the inapplicability of the linguistic model to modern art but also the radically rational stance of structuralism that inhibits understanding of the art of our day. The initial Kantian assumption is that "all concepts, even the questions posed in pure reason, reside not in experience, but in reason. . . . Reason it is which engendered these ideas; it is therefore necessary to render account of their value." It follows that only the radical discontinuity between the reality of lived experience and the real as knowable guarantees precision, objectivity, and scientific accuracy. The work of art, however, is that sort of object which is never simply understandable as object, observed like a foreign cultural pattern, from outside, in a kind of transcendental objectivity, in repudiation of the intentional activity of consciousness. It poses for us, after all, the conditions of experience, of perception, and of apperception, eliciting, within our culture, a response to those perceptions which is cognitive. Our perception of the work of art informs us of the nature of consciousness itself. This is what we mean when we say—as I do say—that although art no longer means or refers, it does have a deeply cognitive function.

The structural anthropologist, approaching the nonreferential work with the strategies proper to his discipline, ends by treating that work—and, by extension, all of contemporary art—with the arrogance of a linguistic colonialism, throwing a missionary's mantle of the semantic over the nakedness of art's presence. Garments of this sort are notoriously unbecoming.

It is a curiously paradoxical development, a singular flaw in the exquisite tact and openness which characterize this ethnologist-as-aesthete. The paradox does, however, have a certain logic; or, rather, it tells us that this structuralist's "perspective" on the art of our culture is rooted in the past, in that art of high iconicity which flowered in the rationalized space, through the pictorial perspective, of the Renaissance. (Structuralism may have more to say about the richly semantic field of film.)

Criticism and aesthetics, art itself, can no longer proceed without the recognition of continuity between the real as experienced and the real as knowable, or meaning as radically immanent in nonsymbolic signs. They demand that intensive reflexiveness and unsentimental interrogation of our felt experience that is suspect to Lévi-Strauss, though proposed by the cherished friend and colleague to whose memory *La Pensée sauvage* is dedicated.[7] Although that proposal has been slow in reaching our country, its aim and methods and, inevitably, its rhetoric now begin to inform our criticism. The detail between the synchronic and diachronic, between form and history, is being drowned in the dialogue between structuralist and phenomenologist, both claiming, of course, the primacy of an ultimate perception.

7. The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty "was unsatisfactory to me insofar as it postulated continuity between experience and reality. Although I agree that the latter surrounds and explains the former, I had learned (from the study of geology, Marxism, and psychoanalysis) that the passage from one to another of these two orders is discontinuous; that in order to reach the real we must reject experience, with the possibility of later reintegrating it into an objective synthesis stripped of all sentimentality." Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955), pp. 44–45.

A Conversation with Annette Michelson*

EDWARD DIMENDBERG

Between 2008 and 2014, in a series of recorded interviews, Annette Michelson spoke at length with Noël Carroll, Edward Dimendberg, Stuart Liebman, Tony Pipolo, and Malcolm Turvey about her life and career. These interviews were then transcribed by the Getty Research Institute, today the repository of her archive. In the following interview, conducted in July 2014 by Edward Dimendberg, Michelson discusses her first encounters with North American avant-garde film and the early days of Anthology Film Archives.

Edward Dimendberg: What are your early memories of Jonas Mekas and the Anthology Film Archives?

Annette Michelson: I encountered Jonas quite soon after I came back to New York [in 1965]. I should say that I'd become very interested in film living in Paris. While I was in Europe, I had become very interested in a number of French filmmakers, a few of them at least. I also met a few expatriates like myself who were making films. Chief among them were Kenneth Anger and Robert Breer.

Dimendberg: You met them in Paris?

Michelson: Yes. They were living in Paris at that time. At least, Breer was. As for Kenneth Anger, he was, I think, living in Paris when I first came there, for the first two years. Afterwards, he returned to America. He also spent time elsewhere, but I can't remember his travel schedule.

Breer's work was a revelation to me. The kind of work that went under the rubric of completely independent, we might say artisanal, production and was available for the most part at that time was not particularly interesting to me. But when the American Center in Paris, which was located in Montparnasse and provided galleries for exhibitions of work by Americans and also working spaces for painters, screened a program of Breer's work, I saw it with Noël Burch, who was at the time a good friend. And we were both elated by what we saw. It was the first kind of abstract film work we'd seen that excited us. And so when I came back to New York, having heard that there was a fair amount of work to be seen, I went to the place where it was essentially on view. Anthology did not yet quite exist, but Jonas, with his

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usual extraordinary and mysterious kind of magical spells, had induced someone to rent a certain amount of space in a building on West 42nd or West 43rd Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, I think, in a basement somewhere. And quite alone throughout much of the summer I sat and I watched a great deal of the film—well, a certain amount of the film—that later went into Anthology. I saw work at that time by filmmakers who otherwise would have remained totally unknown to me. It was good preparation, if you like, for a further, deeper adventure into not only the knowledge of what was being done but also into the milieu in which it was being produced.

Dimendberg: What films do you remember seeing?

Michelson: I remember seeing another film by Anger, which I hadn't seen before. I remember seeing films by Ron Rice, Stan Brakhage.

Dimendberg: What was your reaction to the work of Anger?

Michelson: I found it very interesting. I was not seduced by his work, I was not overwhelmed by it, and it was not for me the source of a great discovery. But I was impressed by the fact that he not only made the kind of films that he made but that such films could be shown publicly in the United States. And I was also impressed by the youth of this filmmaker who had begun as a teenager and who had matured, obviously, but was still making films which had a somewhat scandalous air to them. I don't think that I was quite as impressed by what later became so important in independent filmmaking, which is to say the intense focus on the body, on the culture of the body, on eroticism . . .

Dimendberg: Were the possibilities of expression different in France? Were things "freer" there?

Michelson: Oh no! First of all, one didn't see much truly independent film. That is to say, the young Frenchman who wanted to make films, wanted to become a filmmaker, did not go out and acquire a 16-millimeter camera and start shooting. He applied for some support from the government. There were special funds for first films, and there was funding for somewhat more difficult films that might not have found an audience quite so quickly. And [by the mid-1960s] there was no sign of any—how shall I put it—any of the treatises of independent filmmaking by the Surrealists. The postwar period lasted in many ways about twenty years, a glorious period of filmmaking. There were Bresson, Tati, and Godard, plus many other interesting filmmakers in one kind of vague generation. It was an extraordinary development, but it did not last. I think after 1968 it was over. But even before then, because filmmakers had access to government support, the idea of independence and an artisanal mode of filmmaking was nonexistent.

Dimendberg: The situation was different in New York. Anthology was resolutely independent.

Michelson: Anthology was founded by Jonas with P. Adams Sitney and a committee of filmmakers who essentially voted for the films that became the final collection of Anthology. By the time I came to be acquainted with all this, I knew Jonas fairly well, and I had gained a bit of knowledge of the filmmaking scene and

Invisible Cinema, Anthology Film Archives. 1970.

had become familiar with the limited but very productive artisanal basis of this mode of filmmaking. Then I began to feel that I wanted to write about it. And that became a principal—one of the principal—directions of my life in New York; and it very happily coincided with the beginning of my teaching as well, so that I was able to develop my ideas in classrooms, by showing films to my students. I was able to take my students to Anthology. And I was also able to have the benefit of a kind of library and the kind of collection that they had. I even taught some of my classes down at Anthology. I owe a great deal to the hospitality of both Jonas and P. Adams; they were extremely helpful. I was able to acquaint my students, and even some of my colleagues at NYU, with films through their archive; but I was also able to enrich, or shall I say correct and modify and polish, the kinds of essays that I began to write through contact with that institution and the world which it represented.

Dimendberg: What do you remember about the first Anthology space, including the famous design of the cinema?

Michelson: I remember everything about it; it's very clear in my mind. It was much attacked, largely by people who were not all that committed to that kind of cinema or to the Anthology Film Archives to begin with, and there may have been filmmakers as well who attacked it. But I felt that it represented one utopian vision of what a cinema might be. There were others.

As you know, there have been interesting architectural proposals for ideal cinemas. And this was one in which attention was focused only on the screen. And it also involved a repetitive system of exhibition, modeled, it seems to me, on Kubelka's, on the ring which encircles Vienna, from which Kubelka and many of his ideas for the construction of that cinema emerged. The criticisms, I think, were trivial. It was a theater that its designers hoped would simply facilitate the complete focus of the audience, of the public, on the work. That's what it was about.

Dimendberg: Do you think that aspiration was realized? Did the architecture enhance the film-viewing experience?

Michelson: I don't think we ever took a poll or handed out a questionnaire. It might have been a good idea to do that. I know for myself that I was so fascinated much of the time by what I was seeing that nothing apart from the screen had my attention. Whether this was true for everyone—I doubt it. There isn't probably a film in the world that everyone loves or concentrates on. But I think to some degree the architect's aspiration may have been realized. It represented, in any case, iconically, as it were, the desire of the filmmakers, the architects, Jonas, and P. Adams. It was a representation of the desire for unfettered, unspoiled, complete absorption in the work being shown. Whether or not it worked that way, I'm not sure. But it had an iconic relation to desire—and that I think was important.

Dimendberg: What do you remember about the early Anthology film audiences? What sorts of people went to see films there?

Michelson: Audiences were scarce. The screenings were not crowded. One didn't know who attended them. But one imagined that they were largely young people, students, who had heard about this strange adventure. There were probably quite a number of people who had been reading Jonas in *The Village Voice*, because Jonas was the second critic of *The Village Voice* for several years. And so his was a name that was not unknown to them. And he wrote interestingly, sometimes rather aggressively; and I think that attracted quite a number of people. What disappointed me greatly was that essentially—I won't say the artistic community, because there's no such thing—but essentially most of the painters, sculptors, dancers, and choreographers I knew were not going to Anthology. They were absolutely mesmerized by Hollywood film.

Dimendberg: Even Hollis Frampton, Robert Smithson?

P. Adams Sitney, Jonas Mekas, and Peter Kubelka at the Invisible Cinema, Anthology Film Archives. 1970. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives.

Michelson: No, no, no. When I say the artists, I mean painters, dancers, architects, etc. I don't mean filmmakers.

Dimendberg: So there was no crossover between artists working in those media and artists making film?

Michelson: No. When Yvonne Rainer used film in performances—and that was a novelty, actually, for a dancer at that time—she was using excerpts from Hollywood films. They had a place in what she was doing, and it was fine. But you didn't feel that she had any particular interest in or curiosity about the films at Anthology. That came later, when she became a filmmaker herself and a feminist; the two were coincident.

Dimendberg: So was film viewing by artists connected with a certain celebration of Hollywood as mass cultural kitsch?

Michelson: Not exactly. Yvonne—and she's the archetypal figure in that movement—used films to make a point, to emphasize something, and sometimes to inject a bit of humor into the generality of what she was doing. But on the whole, those films were not the films that one saw at Anthology. The films by the young, mostly American artists, a new breed of filmmakers, were not seen by much of the artistic community, such as it was in New York. Now, what I

have to say, of course—what I must make explicit—is that the programing at Anthology was, as I've already intimated, secular; that is to say, there was a repertoire of films which was limited. It was large but limited. And it circulated, month after month, year after year, at the time. And it included what Andrew Sarris would have called "the pantheon"; that is to say, the filmmakers whose films in the eyes of the reigning selection committee of Anthology deserved to be received into the pantheon of really important filmmakers. So Bresson, of course, was there. Eisenstein, I think, was there.

Dimendberg: At the time, did you believe that the Anthology canon of essential cinema was necessary to develop film study in this country?

Michelson: There may have been other ways. But it was an absolute boon. You had both Hollywood production, very often at its very best, and a historically conceived canon. It was not complete; it was not huge. But it was representative and it was of great quality. So you had what was being done very recently or at the moment by young people, people still in their twenties, thirties, and forties.

Dimendberg: Did the same people see both types of films?

Michelson: I don't think we know. There exist records somewhere in Anthology's archives. It would certainly be interesting to investigate. There may be records or polls or various kinds of questionnaires that may have been handed out. But I had no knowledge of any such activity.

Dimendberg: Do you remember talking with P. Adams Sitney and Jonas Mekas about the essential cinema and what films should be shown at Anthology?

Michelson: No. I felt that I would not be welcome. I accepted that this was what certain representatives of a new generation of film lovers and filmmakers—because everyone on the committee was a filmmaker, including Brakhage, of course—wanted. I felt that this was their project, a collaborative project in which I did not feel I had the right to intervene. And I didn't, because I wasn't a filmmaker. I couldn't have.

Dimendberg: Do you remember any of the conversations with Brakhage, Kubelka, and Harry Smith about selecting films?

Michelson: No. I didn't have such conversations. One reason, by the way, was that for the first time I was seeing so many films that I had never known before. I don't think I had any question about their selection of the older films. They all seemed reasonable to me. There were one or two that I felt were not all that important or great, but it didn't matter very much.

Dimendberg: What were the differences between the films being screened at the Museum of Modern Art and the films being screened at Anthology? Anthology probably showed more recent films and more contemporary films, of course, but what about the canon and the classics?

Michelson: Well, the museum was collecting films. A lot of the classics—some of them, in any case—were not collected by Anthology; they were rented. The museum, on the other hand, was acquiring films. It was, in fact, the

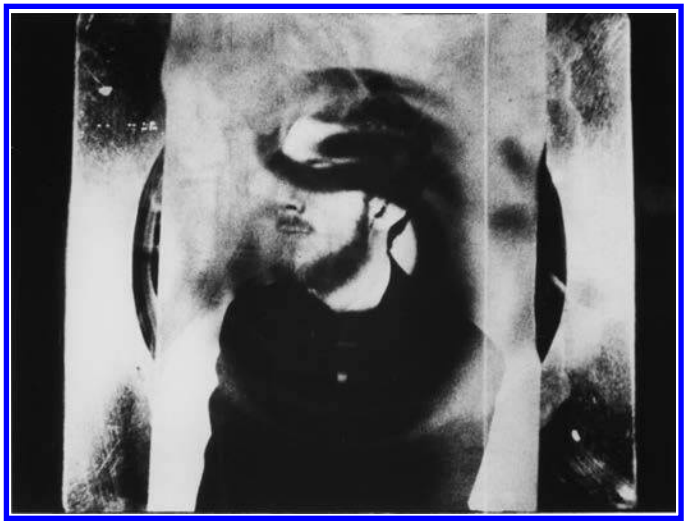
first collector of the sort in the country. So it had a very different relation to the filmmaking community. It was not the beneficiary of Hollywood's prosperity. I remember somebody at the museum in the film department telling me once that,so far as she knew, there'd been no money offered by anybody in Hollywood—with the exception, I think, of Fritz Lang, $500. At that time—this was quite a while ago—the Hollywood community was not particularly generous.

Dimendberg: When did filmmakers like Hollis Frampton begin to participate in the life of Anthology? When did Anthology connect to a filmmaker audience?

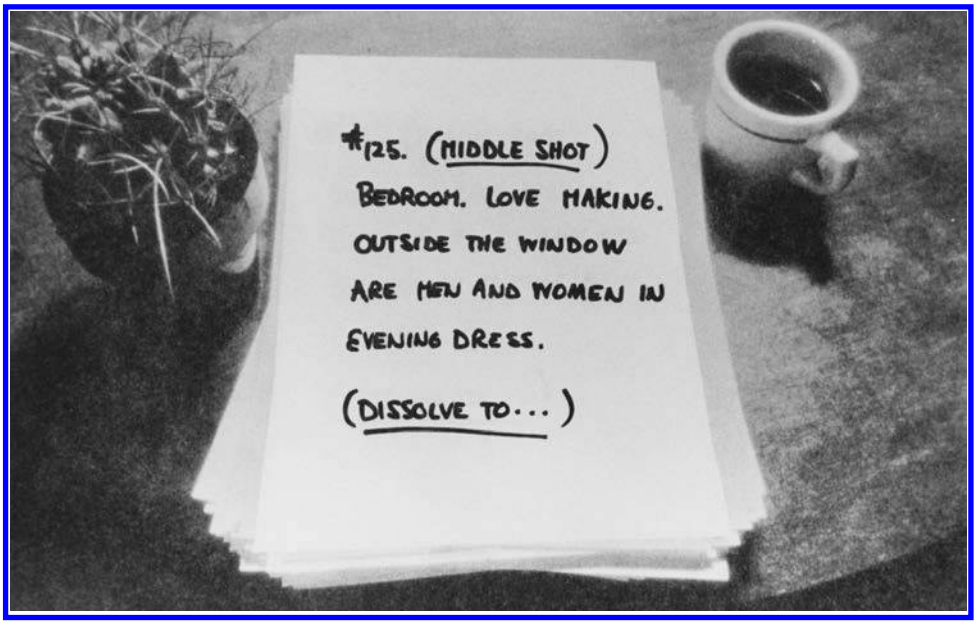
Michelson: Hollis was living in New York City when Anthology was being founded. Later, he got a job teaching in Buffalo and moved upstate, and so one didn't see him all that often. We became friends through screenings of his work in the early years, not at Anthology but elsewhere. And it always was a joy to see him, if only once or maybe twice a year. Our meetings were very intense and full of exchange of ideas.

Dimendberg: What did you talk to Hollis about?

Michelson: Certainly poetry. We also talked about film. And about science, because I was beginning to develop an interest in it. Although I am totally without scientific education, I was absolutely stupefied in wonder at what one could without any real knowledge of any sort divine about the nature, the range, and the prospects of physics, and particularly developments in quantum mechanics. It is an interest that I have pursued ever since, as you know. And Hollis was the only person with whom I could discuss science. Although he was not a professional scientist, he possessed a much more highly developed scientific culture and sensibility than I did.

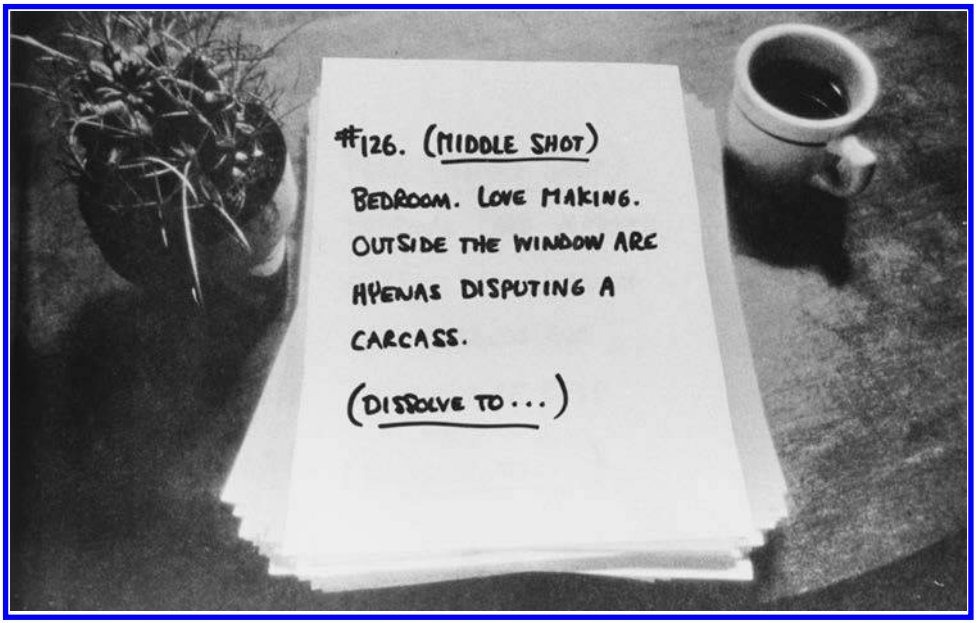


Hollis Frampton. Nostalgia. *1971.*



Frampton. Poetic Justice. *1972.*

Dimendberg: Do you think Hollis really knew something about science?
Michelson: I think he did, yes. And I think also that he poeticized about it as well.
Dimendberg: Was he one of the most learned filmmakers you ever knew?
Michelson: Oh yes, without any question.
Dimendberg: And the most literate?
Michelson: Almost too literate in his style. I have letters from him. I have a letter of recommendation that he wrote for me when I was being reviewed for tenure at NYU, and it's too fancy. And his written style was, I think, somewhat hyper-literate and somewhat—
Dimendberg: Precious?
Michelson: Yes, but also—
Dimendberg: Convoluted? Mannered?
Michelson: Oh, definitely mannered, yes. But there's still another word: exhibitionist.
Dimendberg: Exhibitionist. Where did that come from? From reading Joyce?
Michelson: I have no idea. I have never thought about it. He was very good at it, and it was very exciting to read him.
Dimendberg: What do you remember about seeing his films, about the first films you saw by him?
Michelson: I am not exactly sure when I first became aware of his work. The woman who founded Film Forum—



Frampton. Poetic Justice. *1972.*

Dimendberg: Karen Cooper.

Michelson: Right. She organized some screenings of his films in a loft on the Upper West Side. It was not one of these big huge places like the one I had on Wooster Street; it was a long, narrow space. She organized a series of screenings when Anthology must have already existed. The filmmaker would come and show his films and answer questions afterwards. And Hollis showed a film called *Lemon.* You know *Lemon*?

Dimendberg: I know it. It's a masterpiece.

Michelson: I had the same impression. And I asked him a question about it during the question period. And then we started to talk with each other. I remember he said, "You must be Annette Michelson." That was our introduction to each other. And from then on, the friendship just blossomed. He would come down to New York about twice a year. And our talk really ranged over a wide range of subjects, though I don't think we discussed politics much. To this day, I regret not having him around to talk to. He was for a while my closest intellectual companion here in the States. And I missed him acutely for years. I still miss him. I've tried to reconcile myself to his not being there, but it never quite happened. I still have that feeling of a gap in my existence.

Dimendberg: What were your reactions to watching his most famous films, *Nostalgia, Poetic Justice, Zorns Lemma*? What do you remember when you first saw them?

How did you respond to them? Did you have the sense that Hollis was reinventing cinema?

Michelson: My response to each one was different. I enjoyed enormously the idea that they compose, in some way, a larger work. The first two films you mentioned are part of *Hapax Legomena.* And yet, I also admired and enjoyed them separately. I felt that—I don't know quite how to put this—but I felt that each one of them afforded a look at or an example—a demonstration—of another kind of cinematic mode. And the fact that they were each, in a sense, demonstrations of cinematic modes gave them a certain compactness and a certain unity, despite the fact that they're all very different indeed. I remember writing about *Poetic Justice.* It's a film which also is a book designed completely in titles inscribed on the pages of a book. It's a film that I particularly valued, partly because of its placement. It's the last one, essentially, and it has a completely irresolute ending. More than anything else, it's a play, at least for me, on the nature of shifters in language, as Roman Jakobson describes them. So the individuals involved can have no real specific identity. The identity of the players is never defined. It shifts. It's essentially a drama that presents all the aspects of a structure but has no basic structure. And I admired that enormously. I thought it was perhaps the cleverest of them all. But they were all very clever, though they were more than that. Hollis brought a sense, an intellectual power, and an acuteness to filmmaking that was of a very different sort from any being offered elsewhere. It added an extra dimension to film. Probably closer to, let's say, the work of Jorge Luis Borges than anything else one could find in cinema, including the dramatizations of some of Borges's stories.

Dimendberg: Did it involve a reflection on language and thought, a set of reflections that until then had not, perhaps with the exception of filmmakers you were writing about such as Vertov and Eisenstein, been extensively explored in the cinema?

Michelson: Yes, but he was also exploring something they had not explored.

Dimendberg: And what was that?

Michelson: Well, a concept such as the shifter. It was extremely interesting that this purely linguistic concept theorized by Roman Jakobson could be embodied in a film.

Dimendberg: Do you think that Hollis's interest in poetry and poetics made him particularly sensitive to questions of language and to the development of linguistic theory?

Michelson: I think so. But I also think he was intellectually more adventurous than any of the other filmmakers I was involved with. When I say intellectually adventurous, I mean that. There's a way in which Brakhage, for example, was an extraordinarily adventurous filmmaker. But there was a kind of intellectual adventurousness in Hollis that is unique. And it is related to the kind of adventure found in Borges.

Dimendberg: What was your sense of P. Adams Sitney's theory of structural film, later presented in his book *Visionary Film*, and his attempt to develop a theory of what Hollis and other filmmakers at the time might have been doing?

Michelson: Well, P. Adams chose the wrong word for that. I had just given a lecture at the Guggenheim on structuralism, then published by Viking in a book. At the time, in the early 1970s, structuralism was new. Nobody knew what it was, and I presented this lecture to introduce structuralism to an American audience. (Around the same time, maybe a little later, but around the same time, a very important conference took place at Johns Hopkins in which structuralism was introduced to the United States. I don't know whether that was before or after my own single lecture at the Guggenheim.) But, in any case, I was speaking to an audience which was ignorant of structuralism. P. Adams chose the wrong word because people were likely to confuse structuralist film with structuralist theory. And they are not at all the same.

And I think people did, for a while, confuse them. Apart from that word, I thought that his emphasis on structure in film was perfectly correct. What this also meant—I don't think he wrote about it, but I did—was that the preoccupation with the erotic, which suffused so much independent film from Brakhage on, didn't exactly disappear. But the most interesting new film that appeared in that period was—like the work of Hollis—free of that kind of eroticism. That is to say, the preeminence of the body in film, whether it was Brakhage's idealist portrait of his wife giving childbirth or making love, or any number of other things, was no longer the preoccupation of this slightly newer generation of filmmakers.

Dimendberg: Do you think Sitney recognized the degree to which the films of Anger explored homosexual issues? Some later film historians think he wrote homosexuality out of avant-garde film history.

Michelson: As far as Anger is concerned, I don't think he wrote homosexuality out of it. He didn't do much with it—but who did? Yet it was there in what he wrote.

Dimendberg: Was it different with the reception of Jean Genet in France? Were the gay themes in Genet's work more recognized at that time?

Michelson: Gay film? In France? Where was it? I didn't see any. I mean, I may have seen some in the way in the 1930s I saw that Ramon Novarro was not quite as masculine as Clark Gable, but that was the limit.

Dimendberg: What do you remember of your first meetings with Stan Brakhage?

Michelson: Well, I had read Brakhage's written work before I met him. I had seen the films. And I thought they were absolutely remarkable.

Dimendberg: Did you see them in New York at a screening organized by Jonas Mekas?

Michelson: Yes. I thought they were very interesting, except that I was not completely conquered by them. In the first piece I ever wrote about film, I expressed my reservations about Brakhage. And I did not express them very well. But I

know that what I missed in Brakhage, or what I took for a defect, was what he inherited from action painting. And I said so. I didn't say it in those terms. I said it very differently. And I felt there was not enough mediation between him and the camera and between the camera and the subject, or the object. So I had reservations. On the other hand, I also felt that what he was doing had not been done before and that it was interesting and so on. But I had real reservations. I didn't respond to his work immediately and as warmly as I did to a great deal else.

Dimendberg: Did you ever express your reservations to Brakhage?

Michelson: I don't think I did because, quite quickly, I met him. But before I met him, I had read his writing. The best description of the way I received it lies maybe in the way I imagined the person who wrote it, whom I'd never seen. I imagined him as some scrawny guy with thick glasses, city-bred. I knew he lived in Colorado, but I expected somebody city-bred, somebody whose writing was involved in some kind of compensation for what he did not have in life, which would have been a certain fullness of expression sexually and otherwise. In other words, when I finally met the tall, handsome, extremely charming, self-possessed guy who was the opposite of the kind of disaffected intellectual that I had fancied and who was behind all this fuss about the body and vision and so on, I became much more deeply acquainted with his work. I became a great fan. I thought that P. Adams's vision of Brakhage was a very just one. Some of his very best writing is on Brakhage, and I can think of no one else who would have grasped what Brakhage gave and had to say as P. Adams did. I might not have seen everything the way he did, and I may not have agreed with everything, but in general, and in many particular ways, I felt that his writing was absolutely correct.

Dimendberg: And what about Peter Kubelka, another filmmaker connected to the Anthology?

Michelson: What about him?

Dimendberg: When do you remember first seeing his films? What do you remember of your conversations with him?

Michelson: I had never seen them in Europe. I first saw them at Anthology, right after they acquired them. And I loved them. I thought they were terrific. They were demonstrations of one sort or another of what film could do, what the elements of film could do. And as such, they were, I thought, very potent demonstrations.

Dimendberg: What about a figure such as Hans Richter? Was he important to you in the 1960s when you were back in New York?

Michelson: Not really, although I knew him then. Richter was one of the very few independent artisanal filmmakers whose work I already knew. I had seen it as a teenager at the Museum of Modern Art. I had met him during my career as an art critic. I used to cover the Venice Biennale, and I had met him there. Then, of course, he turned up as the father-in-law of Stan Lauder, who was

teaching at Yale and whom I also knew. And so I saw him again in New York in the 1960s. So Richter I had known at various times. I had met him when I was quite young, then in Venice when I was probably in my thirties, and then again when I returned here.

Dimendberg: Do you think his films of the 1920s, the rhythm films and the geometric-abstraction films, had any influence on the later generation of avant-garde filmmakers?

Michelson: I never asked them—I guess because I never saw myself as writing a history of independent film. I was always exploring it and writing about what I had found, but I didn't have that much of a historical approach to filmmaking. In my mind, yes, but not in my writing.

Dimendberg: What about Harry Smith? What do you remember of your encounters with him?

Michelson: Well, I saw the films at Anthology fairly late. I think he made some fuss about not showing them or something. And I thought they were fantastic. You know that piece I wrote about him?

Dimendberg: Yes, I do.

Michelson: So you can tell from that. I was really quite intrigued by them in a lot of different ways. But then one night with P. Adams, no doubt, and Jonas, I spent an evening in his apartment or room at the Chelsea Hotel. And I vowed never again. I just felt it was all too messy and that I was not going to get very much out of this relationship. What I saw of the *opus majeure* that he was preparing did not excite me. And that was that.

Dimendberg: What about Jack Smith?

Michelson: I delivered a lecture at the Panofsky centenary at Princeton that I also planned to present at Anthology. I remember that he phoned me, and either he told me or someone else told me that he was going to come and hear my lecture. I was very excited because I wondered what he would be like. But he didn't come. At first the only thing I knew about Jack Smith was the article that Susan Sontag had published in *Partisan Review.*

Dimendberg: About *Flaming Creatures*?

Michelson: About *Flaming Creatures.* So of course I wanted to see *Flaming Creatures,* this film about pleasure, which was the central idea of that article. Anything less like a film about pleasure I have never seen. People were screaming at each other. For no reason at all. I'm probably not the best audience for the extremity of camp that Jack Smith represents. That's the only thing I can say because I realize that I haven't seen very much of his work. For some reason or other, I think I always had something else to do. Now, why, I don't know, but I just didn't feel this was for me.

Dimendberg: What was the impact of Susan Sontag's writing at that time on the work of Smith, Bresson, and Godard? Did it change the way people thought about cinema? Did it promote a conversation that had not been taking place before?

Michelson: If it did, I was unaware of it, totally unaware of it. I came to know Bresson very well. I knew he appreciated that this good-looking young American woman had written about him. But that was it. I don't think they had any further conversation, whereas, as I said, I really spent a fair amount of time with him. He also invited me to watch him filming one of his late films, which I did. But I would think that, since Sontag had a very intense public here, a number of people who read her would have gone to see work by those filmmakers, and that people who had seen the films perhaps thought about them a little more because of what she wrote. It seems quite possible that she might have had some influence on American filmgoers, though a very limited stratum of filmgoers.

Dimendberg: Do you think the 1960s in the United States represented a rare moment when a larger public was becoming interested in film as art?

Michelson: A slightly larger public, I would say. I started teaching in the late 1960s and have taught so many students over the years. For a time there was a larger public for film. That tide has receded.

Dimendberg: And what about Marcel Duchamp and the legacy of *Anémic Cinéma* in those years? Were people talking about Duchamp as a filmmaker?

Michelson: This is very interesting. There was a conference on Duchamp organized in part by Barbara Rose. It took place in California at one of the UC campuses, I forget which one, in the really early 1970s. And every Duchamp scholar alive was there. But, of course, there were not all that many Duchamp scholars at the time. I was really very surprised, when I came back to New York, by the fact that the generation of Johns, Rauschenberg, and so on were just coming to know Duchamp. They were unfamiliar with his work. And they were also meeting him in New York for the first time. I already had an introduction to Duchamp from a friend of his, a writer in Paris, Robert Lebel.

Dimendberg: In what year approximately?

Michelson: Oh, this would have been around 1965. I was visiting New York. By the end of that year, I decided to return permanently. And so I went back to Paris, packed up my stuff, and came back here, which I much regretted because I missed '68 in Paris.

Dimendberg: What do you remember of '68 here?

Michelson: Wait a moment. Back to Duchamp. Duchamp was not really yet very well known by the generation of painters and artists who by then had just come into their seniority as artists. In any case, I saw a lot of him.

Dimendberg: Did you ever talk to Duchamp about cinema, about his filmgoing, about film in general?

Michelson: No, never about film. He once asked me, "Why does Hilton Kramer hate me so much?" And I knew perfectly well why he hated him, but I couldn't tell him.

Dimendberg: What was the reason?

Michelson: Because to him, Duchamp was a complete fake. But I couldn't tell him that.

Michael Snow. Wavelength. *1967.*

Dimendberg: Do you remember meeting Michael Snow?

Michelson: Well, fortunately he was living in New York. In fact, there existed something called the Brotherhood of Chambers Street, because he was in a loft on Chambers Street, and so was Ken Jacobs. I don't quite remember when I met Michael for the first time. It certainly would have been in the early 1970s. I became totally transfixed by *Wavelength*, as is probably obvious in what I wrote. I became very interested in everything he did, though I didn't write about everything he did. Well, perhaps it's not quite true that I was interested in everything he did because I was not really interested in the free music that he performed. He has an excellent technique on the piano, but it's total improvisation with these wild Canadians. It's just unlistenable to me. But he's very involved as a pianist, as a musician as well as a filmmaker, and his work in general, most of his visual work, really engaged me for a long, long time.

Dimendberg: Even his sculpture?

Michelson: Not the *Walking Woman*. The reason Michael didn't have the gallery attention that he should have had was that the *Walking Woman* series just did him in. The art world here just did not like it.

Dimendberg: Why not?

Michelson: Well, maybe for the same reason I didn't. It's the only work of his, or one of the very few, that I didn't like. The figure of the *Walking Woman* was a kind of primitive cartoon, and placing her, this figure, in different environments didn't do anything for either her, the environment, or the picture that they made together. What more can I say?

Dimendberg: What about women in the avant-garde film community in the '60s and '70s? What about Shirley Clarke, what about the presence of Yvonne? Was avant-garde filmmaking largely a male preserve?

Michelson: For the most part, yes, it was. Michael's wife, Joyce Wieland, was a filmmaker.

Dimendberg: A rather good one.

Michelson: She did a couple of quite nice things. She also made finally some big, fairly well-financed, lengthy fiction feature films, which were moderately interesting, but no more than that. She made a series of films involving a trans-Canadian railway trip, which I rather liked. But she was practically alone during that whole period. Shirley had really done most of her best work by the time I started to write. *The Cool World* . . .

Snow. Wavelength. *1967.*

Dimendberg: A great film.

Michelson: And one that I continued to show in my classes all the time. You're right, it is an extraordinary film—a great work. Her *Portrait of Jason* is also good, if not the kind of thing that I feel indebted to her for. But she was no longer making films after that, as far as I know. And then, of course, she unfortunately developed Alzheimer's. It was a great pity.

Dimendberg: Do you think she had the talent to go on to make more strong films, but not the opportunity?

Michelson: Talent, I don't know. It's not just talent that's required. I am really very sorry that she developed that health condition and that she never had a chance to make another film.

Dimendberg: Did you meet Agnès Varda when she came to New York in the 1960s?

Michelson: Oh, I was her guide and her closest companion.

Dimendberg: What is your recollection of her?

Michelson: I took her up to Bob Breer's and she saw his work. Of course I knew that wasn't something she would care about. I tried to show her a certain amount of film, but she just had no feeling for it. No feeling at all for it. But we had a good time together.

Dimendberg: What about the avant-garde film community? Did filmmakers meet? Did they socialize together? Do you have the sense that in the late 1960s and '70s there was an experimental-film community that involved social events?

Michelson: That's an intriguing question. Actually, as I said, there was this community formed of filmmakers who lived on Chambers Street, the Chambers Street Brotherhood. Most of the social occasions involved film screenings. You would always see filmmakers at Anthology Film Archives. You might not see other people, but you would see filmmakers. And that became even more pronounced for a while, when people were moving down to Soho. Soho began sprouting places where you could also attend screenings. Galleries held screenings from time to time and so on. The only artist I knew who came regularly to Anthology—you can guess who it might be—

Dimendberg: Andy Warhol?

Michelson: Nope.

Dimendberg: Not Johns, not Warhol, not Duchamp. I give up.

Michelson: Richard Serra.

Dimendberg: So you remember seeing Richard Serra in screenings?

Michelson: Yes. I think it was Richard who called me from California when I published my first article on Vertov in *Artforum*. He called me because he was excited by that, and then, after a while, he stopped. But of course, he made a film which I liked a lot, his *Folding Bridge*. Then he made other short films about gestures and hands and inaction and so on. He had a real interest in film. When the editor-in-chief of *Artforum* resigned, I was allowed to fill in a

month before he was replaced. I published an all-film issue. And Richard did a piece for that, in images and text, on film actually. He had a real interest in film.

Dimendberg: Do you think film culture in the '60s and '70s was vibrant? Do you remember seeing many of the same people at screenings at these different venues . . .

Michelson: Yes.

Dimendberg: Several times a week?

Michelson: I used to depend a lot on the Museum of Modern Art for some of my work with students and for my research. And the Bleecker Street Cinema and many others were very important for film culture. And I myself, I managed to do several little mini-festivals at several of these theaters. I did one on Marguerite Duras at Bleecker Street. Marguerite and I were close friends. And she was scheduled to have a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. Then the Museum of Modern Art personnel went on strike for the first time, and I think the only time, in the history of the museum. And we at *Artforum* published on our cover a picture of the big line of strikers lined up in front of the museum. A number of the people we knew working there were absolutely thrilled to find themselves on the cover of *Artforum*. If not for this incident, they would never have gotten on the cover. That was amusing. Marguerite did not want to cross the picket line. She was due for a retrospective, that's why she was in New York at that time. So I arranged a retrospective in two theaters. One was on the East Side. Another was, I think, at Bleecker Street Cinema. All the films that she'd made until that time were there, and she was very happy. And then I had a great big luncheon for her, with only women.

Dimendberg: Who were some of the other women who attended the luncheon, do you remember?

Michelson: I think Chantal Akerman, who lived here at that time; Yvonne, no doubt. Louise Bourgeois . . .

Dimendberg: Was there a sense of solidarity among the women interested in film? Was there a sense of staying together?

Michelson: Yes.

Dimendberg: In the sense of being part of a community?

Michelson: Yes, definitely. I'm trying to think of who else was in attendance. There were about fifteen or sixteen at the table.

Dimendberg: When would this have been, approximately what year?

Michelson: It would have been in the 1970s, probably in the mid-1970s. One could easily find out. I think it was soon after Mitterrand's election. Marguerite was very pro-Mitterrand. She knew him quite well, I think. And so it was around then.

Dimendberg: What was the impact of the Vietnam War on the independent-film community? Were filmmakers talking about the war, making films about the

war, demonstrating against the war? How did this global political event manifest itself, or not, in the practice of being a filmmaker in New York?

Michelson: I will tell you a story. Some years ago, probably about twenty years ago, I was sent—invited, but also sent—by the Committee on the Arts, I think, to both Israel and to Egypt to show films. And so in Israel I showed films in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv and in a couple of kibbutzim up in the north. The reaction to the films in Israel was of no interest whatsoever. I showed them a representative sample of some really beautiful films, but no, they were not interested. Then I went to Egypt, and I was only in Cairo. As I traveled in Egypt—on my own time and money, and it was wonderful—I visited a number of filmmakers and people connected with the industry and some women who were making some documentaries. When I showed the films at the University of Cairo, the audience was mixed. I would say it consisted almost entirely of intellectuals and journalists. I remember that one of the films that I brought with me was Brakhage's film about the birth of his first child. Before showing it, I warned them as to what they were going to see; and they said that didn't matter, they wanted to see it. And they saw it and they liked it. In Israel, women were shocked and appalled at having to look at a woman's cunt on film, as well as the birth and so on. Whereas in Cairo, nobody complained. So, after screening several films one after the other, I went out into the hall, to wait until the session was over. Suddenly, I realized that the lights had been turned on. It was obvious that the screening was not over, but the lights were on. So I went back in. What was the trouble? Well, there were deep and profound and violent objections to the Paul Sharits film that I was showing. I wanted to know what they were. A young woman who was, I think, a journalist said, "Well, you know, that kind of film is a—well, what shall I say—a kind of formal exercise that is interesting to people in your country, but here, where we confront real problems, this film doesn't interest us at all. And it's too abstract; there are just single words and pieces of words, and visual something-or-other that have no meaning at all." And so I expressed that I was surprised, for this was the first time I'd heard a reaction of that sort to this film. I said, "I just spent the morning as a tourist visiting a number of your mosques and other buildings. I was entranced to see the glory of abstract art; it's all over your mosques and your libraries and so on. In addition to which, it is full of writing; I'm surprised that the abstraction and the calligraphy or the writing in the Sharits should be so shocking to you." And so, I thought, that was that. Except that a woman then raised her hand and said that although she understood what I had said, she also wanted to point out that this film was made at a very violent time in the United States, and that this seems to be a filmmaker whose temper is the temper of the times. *S :TREAM :S :S :ECTION :S :ECTION :S :S :ECTIONED* is

a violent film; it really performs violence upon the eye, but it was made during a time of extreme psychological and, of course, physical violence. "I think we ought to think about that." Yes. So, both of those reactions were far more interesting than any of the reactions I had showing the films in Israel.

Dimendberg: Were there similar reactions on occasion in the United States? Did people talk about avant-garde film in relationship to violence in New York or violence in Vietnam?

Michelson: Yes. There was a certain amount of violence in independent filmmaking. While on the whole, I think it is fair to say that when Sitney named the films that I was interested in structuralist, he chose the wrong word. I understand why he chose it. There was a certain justification for it. These were films about structure and things pertaining to structure. They were not political films; they were political only in the way in which adventurous—formally adventurous—works of art can be felt or experienced as violent or as works of deprivation, which is another form of violence.

Dimendberg: Do you think that the New York avant-garde film scene ran out of energy at the end of the 1970s as video began to develop, as the culture became more apolitical and more depoliticized after Ronald Reagan became president? Was there a cessation of the excitement that had existed earlier?

Michelson: One of the filmmakers that we haven't discussed and who I think was brilliant was the filmmaker who made that extraordinary work on the assassination of Kennedy.

Dimendberg: Bruce Conner.

Michelson: Right. He's an amazing filmmaker, I think.

Dimendberg: Indeed.

Michelson: And there were very few who were his equal in capturing, condensing, and structuring such a brilliant film about his own time. He was not the only one, but he was, perhaps, the best. There were all kinds of interesting attempts being made to address politics in film at that time, even in narrative film. As well as series of films about political events that aimed to capture them as they happened.

Dimendberg: Far from Vietnam, for example, that kind of compilation?

Michelson: Yes. I think, too, of Godard's film on the photograph of Jane Fonda, *Letter to Jane*. It's a brilliant film. And one thinks of how many other brilliant films he could have made politically but didn't. A lot of his political films are just nowhere near that one. Much more should have been done and made with more expressly political purpose. The filmmakers with whom I was concerned were in a way quite rightly termed formalist. But there was a lot of other work going on that was of enormous interest and filmed by people who were not essentially all that interested in Brakhage or Frampton, for that matter. They worked in a different world, a world of political immediacy, closer to newsreels.

Dimendberg: Had it become a different field? By the early '80s, had something changed?

Michelson: Sometime in the 1990s, I must have made a remark to Michael Snow to the effect that it had been very interesting to have a movement, because I felt that he had been part of a movement. I said, "Of course, there's no movement anymore," of the kind to which he once belonged. And he said, "Oh yes there is." I said, "No, no, Michael." I said, "There are some good filmmakers who continue to produce; you are one. But it is not what you call a movement." And it wasn't. From about the late 1970s on, I would say. The mid-1970s on, even. It was not only the Chambers Street Brotherhood that had disintegrated into units here and there. In general, there was a milieu which had more or less dissolved. There was no movement anymore.

Jean-Luc Godard. Breathless. *1960.*

Letters from Paris

YVE-ALAIN BOIS

The corpus of Annette Michelson's early art criticism is voluminous (by early I mean written while she lived in France, before her definitive return to New York in 1966). By my count she wrote forty-five short columns for the *International Herald Tribune* from August 21, 1957, to March 30, 1960, twenty-five longer pieces for *Arts Magazine* from December 1957 to May–June 1964, most of which were entitled "Paris Letter," and fifteen similar surveys for *Art International* from December 1962 to April 1965 (plus two "New York Letters" published in this last journal in February and March 1966). The topics were extremely varied—dependent on what Paris museums and galleries had to offer in terms of exhibitions, though it is clear that AM had full discretion with regard to what she'd choose to comment on; she often contrasted one show with another or paired them as unexpected bedfellows. Her choices were idiosyncratic, to be sure, but no matter what the topic, the tone is constant, inimitable—supremely self-confident, often ironic (even sarcastic if need be), and bold. What other critic, for example, would begin the review of a Goya retrospective by focusing on its poor reception and accusing André Malraux of being responsible for it, thanks to his then prevalent view of the painter as a *noir* romantic (in *Saturne,* his much-discussed book on the artist) to the exclusion of his immense talent as a portraitist? Who could utter without blinking something like "I therefore protest against the public reaction to this exhibition"?[1]

Writing a weekly column in a daily newspaper, or a monthly "Letter" in a magazine, is demanding. Though she published a lot during her long career, AM was notoriously finicky as a writer during the last five decades of her life, ever reluctant to commit something to print (the dog often ate her homework). As a young writer, however, she willingly submitted to the hectic rhythm of journalism, later recognizing that she had learned from the experience: "As far as working for the *Herald Tribune* was concerned, I fell into it. And I liked it a lot, it's a very good and effective kind of discipline. And for someone like myself who tends to be slightly elliptical, it was a very good kind of training ground."[2] She willingly submit-

1. "Goya in Paris," *Arts Magazine,* April 1962, p. 29.

2. AM quoted in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art:* Artforum *1962–1974,* p. 79. The occasional gaps in the publication of her weekly column in the *Herald Tribune* correspond to her absences from

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ted—but with a twist: "I wrote their weekly column which I revised completely in terms of its format, what I felt its function to be and what I felt its intellectual level should be."

Given the richness of AM's "French" output, the ideal solution would be to reprint it all, which far exceeds the possibility of this journal (it would make a hefty tome). Short of that, what I offer below is a *flânerie* (festooned by a *florilège* of excerpts) around certain themes or aspects, in order to stress the consistency of her approach (and unearth a few gems in passing). However, I want first to republish at least one article in its entirety, to give the reader a sense of the ebb and flow of her writing. And none seems to me better for that purpose than her very first column for the *Herald Tribune:*

> It is the feeling of dizzying acceleration and of climax, of a radical break which meant both an end and a beginning, that lends to almost any exhibition of cubists, major or minor, its singular excitement.
>
> A casual stroll through the 1911–1913 corridor of the School of Paris sets one's historical sense tingling. Attentive study easily and promptly establishes the line of logical filiation from Cézanne, and yet the body of cubist painting retains its aspect of crisis urgently proclaimed and sumptuously resolved.
>
> For some time now, of course, we have been able to divide the sheep from the goats and accomplishment from effort; on one side the masters, Braque, Gris, Picasso, Mondrian; on the other, the line of minor figures, Metzinger, Gleizes, Le Fauconnier—the first generation of honorable academicians.
>
> It is somewhere between these two that Robert Delaunay now, I think, takes his place. The retrospective exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne, considerably larger than that organized in 1955 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, leads one, nevertheless, to speculate on his very special case.
>
> One's general impression, as one proceeds from the early "Self Portrait," with its precocious intimations of cubism, the "Steeple of Notre Dame" (1909) and the "Eiffel Tower" series of the same year through the "Circular Forms" (1913) to the "Cardiff Team" and "Homage to Blériot" (1919), is of genuine if intermittent vivacity.
>
> But Delaunay's ambition was immense, respectably if not irreproach-

the French capital, often for trips back home.

ably so. He wished to extend that metamorphic process begun by the cubist masters to the domain of color, to exploit it as a disruptive, analytical and eventually re-integrating force. To do this meant, as he thought, to liberate European painting from the tradition of chiaroscuro, to proclaim and consolidate the independence of color from form, to endow it with an absolute fluidity, much as Boccioni, Carrà and their futurist companions were trying to do for mass and volume.

In his attempt to do this, Delaunay was led, as early as 1913, to abandon representation and, though he returned periodically and with success to the object, the late work of the '30s is exclusively non-representational. The "Reliefs" and "The Joy of Living" (1930–1936) are latter-day extensions of experiments with the color-disk paintings begun in 1913.

A large "Still Life" of 1916, one of a series painted in Portugal, where Delaunay spent the war years, is particularly instructive. In this work, the forms of melons, fruit and receptacles on the right-hand side are echoed and reworked in the beautifully related composition on the left, in which large, purely abstract, circular and ovoid forms, composed of brilliantly colored concentric disks, are piled in perilous imbalance. Again, in the later "Football" the heads of sprinting athletes are rhythmically echoed by the beautifully distributed line of balls which races along below them.

The extra dimension of visual wit and allusion evident in these two paintings Delaunay gradually lost as he cut loose from the object. The result was eventually to be little short of catastrophic; his initial vivacity was weakened and another sensibility was "violated by an idea." Another painter might have sustained this loss; another painter, Mondrian, in fact, did. But the works executed in the last years of Delaunay's life, the "Rhythms" and the "Decorations for the Aeronautics Palace," designed for the Paris exposition of 1939, illustrate the inability of his open and militant faith in industry and progress to sustain his formal creative powers. The whirling color disks, the interlacing spirals and intersecting sphere of the "Decorations," conceived, certainly, in a spirit of light, resolute optimism, are disheartening.

To walk through these last rooms is to plunge once again into the spiritual climate of the early '20s and '30s, to meditate again on why the mystique of technology and the furious optimism and doctrinaire faith on which it was postulated no longer commands our wholehearted

> assent. One feels uneasy in this climate of uncritical piety, remembering that in the decades that have passed since Delaunay, Léger and the young Le Corbusier, since Severini and the futurists, one has become somewhat more intimately acquainted with the repressive and sinister aspects of their Brave New World.
>
> Yet, to deny the importance of this tradition—for such it has, by now, become—is to deny something very seminal indeed. One walks through this exhibition counting the entirely successful works on the fingers of one's hands, less enjoying than seeking to enjoy, but with a sense, nevertheless, of history being made, of being in on some fabled battle.[3]

This modest entry is typical.[4] We get a condensed lesson in art history that starts with a puzzle (something that tingles one's historical sense): Why do Delaunay's late abstract works, after such momentous beginnings, feel so disheartening? This is followed by a brief but precise account of the painter's career (and a reaffirmation of the modernist taxonomy: sheep and goats, inventors and followers, "masters" and "honorable academicians");[5] the formal analysis of at least one work (they would become more elaborate over the years); the solution of the historical puzzle: We can no longer adhere to the techno-optimism that motivated those late works; and finally, the moral of the story (often a nostalgic one): For all Delaunay's foibles, this exhibition gives us "a sense, nevertheless, of history being made, of being in on some fabled battle." Irony is still gentle in this first piece, but it already affects the syntax ("tradition—for such it has, by now, become").

AM's historical sense is recurrently tingled by the modernist past. She does not depart from the canon on that score, but she likes to revisit the work of the historical avant-garde. Cubism but also Futurism remain high on her agenda. She occasionally deals with a single artist, always providing a brilliant insight. A case in point is her review of a Juan Gris exhibition organized by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. Taking issue with the latter's view (she provides an excellent summary of his 1946 monograph on the artist), she quotes Gris's own exposé of his "deductive method" (geometric armature comes first; the rest is pure ad hoc filling), paying particular attention to an overlooked passage. The painter had written: "I therefore never know in advance what aspect of an object is to be depicted. When I particularize plastic relationships to the point of representing

3. "Delaunay Paintings Recall '20s," *Herald Tribune,* August 21, 1957, p. 5.

4. With the exception of a date mistake, no doubt occasioned by rush; usually AM was scrupulously exact (the Paris Exposition Universelle occurred in 1937, not 1939).

5. In the May–June 1964 issue of *Arts Magazine,* she faults the André Lefèvre donation of Cubist works to the Musée national d'art moderne for containing far more paintings from the "academicians" than from the "masters." A hilarious footnote is appended: "I understand that a Gleizes retrospective is forthcoming at the Guggenheim Museum. This seems unthinkable except as a symptom of doctoral despair" ("Change in the City," p. 90).

objects, I do so in order to avoid the spectator's doing it himself, so that the ensemble of colored forms will not suggest a reality I myself have not foreseen." AM's reaction: "What Mr. Kahnweiler takes, therefore, for a quasi-neo-Platonic Realism is, to Gris, a preventive strategy, a check imposed upon our imaginative or associative powers." This accounts, she ventures, for the weakness of Gris's late works: "It is as though the caution and compromise implicit in the safety device involve an initial dissociation of form and object and a consequent involuntary and irreparable gap between them. The result betrays the timidity of the strategy, the poverty of its economy."[6]

In general, however, when dealing with historical phenomena, she likes above all to set up dialectical oppositions as well as to gauge aftereffects. With regards to Cubism, this yields 1) musings on the advantage of working in an established tradition for a minor artist, and even a not-so-minor one, such as Léger;[7] 2) the inadequacy of the Cubist model as a means of rehabilitating the human figure in the postwar context (on Ossip Zadkine: "'The burden of our time' is crushing figurative sculpture");[8] 3) the promotion of Raymond Duchamp-Villon's sculpture, in contrast to that of his Cubist contemporaries (notably Lipchitz and Laurens), but also of the Futurist Boccioni. (Why is Duchamp-Villon so much better? Response: "I believe it is because [he] defined, with a precision denied to either Boccioni or the Cubists, the exact limits of visual dynamics within static sculptural form.")[9]

6. "Paris," *Arts Magazine*, January 1958, p. 17.

7. In the March 5, 1958, issue of the *Herald Tribune*, a parallel is traced between the Cubism-derived work of an Argentinian artist and that of a contemporary Japanese painting in the classical Kano style of the sixteenth century. The works of these two artists "demonstrate, very strikingly indeed, the possible advantage, for the minor and modest talent, of the common style, of the opportunity to work within a tradition, of a vision that is sufficiently complex, original and profound to provide capital for more than one generation." There follows a critique of Léger's late work: "The development of Léger from 1923 on, the almost simultaneous evolution of a personal style and the gradual impoverishment of his art, is, probably, one of the more complicated and interesting studies still entirely open to us. One would have, for example, to consider the slow decline of the revolutionary scientific sensibility behind cubism into the doctrinaire piety of Léger's machine worship (far less innocent than Delaunay's, as it persisted into the atomic age), the attempt to compensate for a reduced, if personal vocabulary by insistence and disrespect of scale" ("Questions of Style," p. 5). The trope of the minor figure comes back in a long review of the 1962 Venice Biennale written for *Arts Magazine*. After a comment on the retrospective of Mario Sironi and his relationship to Futurism, AM alludes to the Peggy Guggenheim collection as offering a "supplementary demonstration" of the ability of an established vanguard style to "fecundate second- or third-rate figures": There, "in company with Juan Gris, with Braque and Picasso, Gleizes and Metzinger testify to the seminal force of Cubism, its ability to animate the minor figure, thereby creating the 'school,' a homogeneity of ambition and quality, however transitional and brief. Actually, the relationship between Cubism and Futurism is perhaps to be traced and defined in terms of the development of the minor figures" ("The Venice Biennale," *Arts Magazine*, October 1962, p. 23).

8. "Zadkine and 'The Burden of Our Time,'" *Herald Tribune,* July 16, 1958, p. 4.

9. She insists on this point, repeating it almost verbatim specifically in opposition to Boccioni: "Rather than attempt to render the real complexity and dynamism of objects in the world, Duchamp-Villon concentrated his effort on the creation of an object whose power derives from the tensions created within an admittedly static form." ("Swiss Sculptors at the Rodin Museum, Duchamp-Villon at the Louis Carré Galerie," *Art International*, September 1963, pp. 90–91.)

Before moving on to other topics, I cannot resist pointing at two mini-bombs somewhat buried in the long review just quoted. In the first, she beats Hilton Kramer—who had been her boss at *Arts Magazine*—at his own game and shames him for having "indicted the Futurist movement and its achievement on the basis of its uncritical participation in the cult of technology and the shallowness of its ideology" instead of looking at the art itself. For "the failure of Futurism (and it is localized largely in Boccioni's sculpture, the most radical of the movement's enterprises) lay not in its ideology, but rather in its fascinating effort to create a new structural dynamics." This is followed by a crisp formal analysis of several works by Boccioni and by an unexpected return to Kramer's argument, but flipped: "None of these sculptures is more than a plastic representation of its idea." (That is, the shallowness of the Futurists does not primarily reside in their shallow technicist ideology but in defining their job as that of representing it, in thinking of their art as mere illustration.)

The second item of note is perhaps the earliest appearance in AM's writing of a central theme of her "American" years—that of film as the quintessential modern medium—and of Eisenstein's name:

> The absolutely dynamic articulation of interpenetrating objects, planes and lines of force, the re-creation of motion on the scale of which Boccioni dreamed was never to be realized in sculpture. That complete splintering and re-ordering of reality in movement was to be achieved only in another medium, in film. Compare Boccioni's sculptural oeuvre with what Eisenstein was to achieve, fifteen years later, in *Ten Days That Shook the World* [the title then often given to *October*], or with one of the great sequences from his later work, *Ivan the Terrible*. In the scene of the poisoning of the Czarina, the vessel containing the deadly brew describes a complex trajectory throughout a long, sustained sequence. The nature of this universe, the court, its very structure, is defined in the slow and sinuous passage of the vessel from one spot, from one plane, to another, ending ineluctably in acceptance and death.[10]

Cinema plays a surprisingly limited role in AM's "French" criticism—and most allusions to it congregate towards the end of her Paris stay.[11] This changes abruptly when she arrives in New York: In the penultimate review she writes for *Art International*, in

10. Ibid., p. 92.

11. A brief account of Polish films (Polanski and Kantor) in a review of the 1959 Paris Biennale ("Innocence, Experience," *Herald Tribune*, October 14, 1959, p. 6); revulsion at the way documentary film is treated in the Biennale des Jeunes, where it has just been introduced as a competing category ("Paris Letter," *Art International*, December 1963, p. 55); the necessity to address the space and scale of film when discussing Morris Louis's *Unfurled* canvases ("The 1964 Venice Biennale," *Art International*, September 1964, p. 39), an argument repeated at greater length, a few months later, this time in response to Greenberg's paean to flatness and opacity ("Paris Letter," *Art International*, March 1965, p. 39); an allusion to the fusion of opposites, "of violence and of refinement, for example," in Japanese cinema, as a mode of entry into Isamu Noguchi's world ("Noguchi: Notes on a Theater of the Real," *Art International*, December 1964, p. 22), and, in the same issue, a brief tribute to Francis Picabia and René Clair's *Entr'acte* ("Paris Letter," p. 61). That's about all.

February 1966, she uses Godard's *Alphaville* as a foil to denounce the "poverty and retardataire character" of Nicholas Schoeffer's sci-fi sculptural enterprise (the primary opponent she has Schoeffer face is Jean Tinguely);[12] in her last piece for the journal, she discusses in detail technical and formal aspects of Gianfranco Baruchello and Alberto Grifi's avant-garde film *The Uncertain Verification*. Though she praises the film (in particular for its use of color), she nevertheless concludes that "experiments of this sort, those of Bruce Conner or—in the context of commercial film—that of Samuel Fuller, are by now familiar to us."[13] As if to say: "I am henceforth venturing into the world of cinema: Hold on tight!"

Incidentally, another big absence from AM's columns is the Russian and Soviet avant-garde. She laments the fact that two Malevich paintings lent by the Stedelijk Museum were whisked back to Amsterdam before the end of the exhibition *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne* at the Galerie Denise René—she misses out entirely on that pioneering (and by now legendary) show—but then a year and a half later derides "the doctrinaire limits of [his] white-on-white," to which the "teasing effect of close value color" in Leon Poliakoff's canvases is favorably compared.[14] The longest treatment of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde is a paragraph included in a review of the retrospective of Jean Pougny (previously known as Ivan Puni), summarizing his quick backtracking from Constructivism to Suprematism to Cubo-Futurism and then, after his temporary exile to Berlin and definite move to Paris, to colorful still lifes à la Bonnard. ("What had happened since Berlin and Saint Petersburg? It is as though the youthful intellectual debauch had suddenly come to an end in an act of self-perception, a realization of limits, and a decision to forsake company that was a bit too fast for him and settle down.")[15]

Slim pickings—but one has to remember that Camilla Gray's *The Great Experiment,* which revealed to the world the scope of avant-garde art in Russia during the 1910s and early '20s, only appeared in 1962; apparently, and uncharacteristically for such an avid reader, AM did not set eyes on this book until her return to America. Furthermore, the reviews are of necessity reactive: With regard to exhibitions of Russian/Soviet avant-garde art, before the '70s there were as few bones to chew on, if any at all, in France as in the US.

12. "New York Letter," *Art International*, February 1966, p. 59.

13. "New York Letter," *Art International*, March 1966, p. 71.

14. The review of the Polish show is in the Paris report for *Arts Magazine* (February 1958, p. 17). AM allows more space to the discussion of the political circumstances of the show than to the exhibits (the fact that it was organized under the auspices of the Polish ambassador, with a patron committee including, among others, Jean-Paul Sartre and Tristan Tzara, "generated an atmosphere of euphoria rare even in the French intellectual Left, provoking a momentary rapprochement of Titoists, Repentant Stalinists, New Leftists and Unreconstructed Oppositionists with M. Aragon." Nothing on the Unist compositions and monochromes of Władysław Strzemiński of the '20s and '30s, and, sadly, a total lack of appreciation of Katarzyna Kobro's sculptures (misspelling her name as Kobor, she deems her work "much less successful" than that of Gabo). "Poliakoff's Oils and Gouaches" appeared in the November 11, 1959, issue of the *Herald Tribune* (p. 4).

15. "Paris," *Arts Magazine*, March 1958, p. 23.

As concerns conspicuous absences, or at least limited appearances, the case of Dada is more puzzling. AM alludes to it as, along with Surrealism and Art Brut, providing the "semi-official iconography" that an artist like Enrico Baj and others of his generation can elegantly manipulate "with an ease that almost contradicts its initial source." ("This source was the breathless and terrified awareness of metamorphosis and change, of the inherent precariousness of the human condition and of the cathartic efficacy of distortion.")[16] Speaking of the Dadaist ideology (once again with an invocation of Hilton Kramer), she sees it as having had "a certain definition and coherence on a tactical level and within a specific context of historical crisis."[17] Overall, she treats Dada wistfully, lamenting its lost edge:

> The Dadaist exhibition held two years ago at the Galerie de l'Institut had prepared us for the conversion of the ready-made into the official monument; the Man Ray *Gift* (the spiked flatiron), Rose Sélavy's camera were no longer calls to rebellion, dizzying emblems of absurdity, but reminders of an extraordinary moment in history, of a generation of gilded youth. It was all rather like looking at the toys of the Bourbon children at Versailles: one felt awe and nostalgia—tenderness. . . . One could feel esteem, respect, everything but that reaction of shock or helplessness in the face of an imperious challenge.[18]

The most intriguing discussion is that of Francis Picabia, whom she sees as "a sort of souped-up chameleon, genuinely involved . . . with the notion of history as a continual transcendence of the past, and therefore honestly convinced of the eventual unimportance of art and art forms." The review of two concurrent Picabia shows is worth quoting at length:

> There is neither an *oeuvre* nor a logic, but a tactic of subversiveness. . . . Everything refers to a surrounding climate or intention, and one looks for a thread, an image, a core from which to trace a centrifugal action.
>
> In one sense the entire career has rather the aspect of the *Entr'acte* made by Picabia and René Clair, the film intended to constitute "a real intermission, an intermission in the boredom and monotony of existence, in the respectability, hypocrisy and absurdity of convention . . . " and there is another, more literal sense in which that section of the work which claims our interest embodies the image. In his busy life, this gilded career, Dadaism is set, like a glorious interlude, between the early, worldly success of the infinitely respectable Neo-Impressionist and the hack work of the war-time supplier of nudes for the harems of

16. "Baj's Painting-Objects," *Herald Tribune,* February 19, 1958, p. 5.

17. "Paris Letter," *Art International,* November 1964, p. 59.

18. "But Eros Sulks," *Arts Magazine,* March 1960, p. 38. She did not review the Dada exhibition at the Galerie de l'Institut.

> North Africa. In between, for roughly a quarter of a century, the ebullience of Dadaism.
>
> Amidst all that is currently on exhibit [at the Galerie Furstenberg], not a work of central significance, none visually unique or irreplaceable. All the most delightful drawings of the "mechanical" period, for example, were certainly equaled or surpassed by Duchamp or Max Ernst. Richard Huelsenbeck has remarked, however, that dada tended to dissolve the frontiers of personality. Picabia was certainly released into his exceptionalness by emulation and example, after the meeting with Duchamp: he found an identity within a fraternity, and in this he is the Dadaist figure par excellence. . . .
>
> The *Entr'acte* came to an end for everyone, as we know, in the thirties. Cocteau said of Picabia that he had, together with Duchamp, carried out a vacuum-cleaning. In *le Chapeau de Paille?* [the only work on view in the show Galerie Louis Carré, replete with documents], the empty unsized canvas, with title and insulting inscription addressed to the spectator is pure provocation, and criticism is an inadequate, irrelevant response to provocation. So too is pantheonisation. The magical hygiene of the vacuum-cleaning operation is necessarily betrayed—more surely than that of the cult objects in our museums of primitive art—by their admission to the museum, their emprisonment in the glass case of the collection, Little Boy Blue has stolen away, leaving his toys. Sturdy and staunch they stand, but covered with dust. That dust is our nostalgia.[19]

AM's view of Dada markedly changed after her return to New York (Duchamp, notably, became more central), but her take on Surrealism was set early on. In her very first review devoted to it, a column published on October 1, 1958, in the *Herald Tribune,* she compares "the weaknesses of the painting of that first, heroic generation of Surrealists" to "those of the 19th-century romantics—a preoccupation with painting in its predominantly iconographic aspects," which goes hand in hand with the "theatricalism" of their conception of pictorial space. Moving on to the second generation, she singularizes Matta:

> The case of Matta is particularly arresting. From these several canvases, one also gets the feeling of an increasing identification of the tension and release of linear and coloristic elements with the actual subject matter.

19. "Paris Letter," *Art International,* December 1964, pp. 61–62.

> These are difficult paintings as they violate every possible canon of taste. The key to their color (to take only one aspect of the difficulty) lies in the realization that its use is only partly iconographic. The pinks, blues and yellows are used on the one hand for all the resonance that their suggestion of synthetic hideousness can add to these visual parables of dehumanized terror. They act also, however, to organize the movement of the canvas, to block the movement of one steely, aggressive form, to anchor it to the canvas's surface, or to organize its retreat into deep space. The assault on the sensibility is diabolically cold, as if attempting to elevate nausea to the level of an esthetic category.[20]

Her second brush with Surrealism, a review of the eighth Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, curated by André Breton and Duchamp (December 1959–February 1960), is much more elaborate. Eros was officially the theme, but that is redundant, notes AM: The structural principle of the Surrealist assemblage (as exposed by Max Ernst in his exegesis of Lautréamont's famous "chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella") is that of a mating—it is, per se, erotic. She is not terribly impressed by the installation, which she finds too literal (she does not mention this, but it pales in comparison with that of the first iteration of such a gathering, in 1938) and wonders why a sign is affixed at the entrance of the gallery ("Children under sixteen years are not admitted"): Censure by the police? Provocative tactic? Breton's own parental scruples? It seems that she favors the third possibility, for she underscores the narrowness of the poet's conception of sexuality ("Insofar as it constitutes a prolongation of a tradition of courtly love, Surrealism, in its orthodox, European aspects, is exclusively heterosexual; Lesbianism finds its way into its imagery as a mere spectacle—for the male voyeur"). The paintings included, mainly from the second generation of Surrealists, are only illustrative, a mere "description of the scandalous" that cannot "pretend to any radical radicalism":

> The really radical and fully expressive painting required that the artist recognize the formal necessities of revolutionary art, assume the responsibility of "provoking a basic crisis in the object." That crisis could not be restricted to its merely social or erotic aspects, but required a recognition of its plastic nature and a continuous formal renewal and vigilance. The provocation would be, then, extended from the level of imagery to that of spatial organization, texture, the visual dynamics of the brush. Failing this, the erotic image, once absorbed or accepted, declined—in the space of a generation—into academicism,

20. "Surrealism's Heritage," *Herald Tribune,* October 1, 1958, p. 5. AM will reuse this passage in a review published in the June 1959 issue of *Arts Magazine* (p. 16). She wrote often on Matta's work: on his prints ("Paris Letter," *Art International,* December 1962, p. 59), on his sculpture ("Paris Letter," *Art International,* April 1964, p. 70), and again on his painting ("Paris Letter," *Art International,* December 1964, pp. 62–63).

> eventually to be consigned, like the literature of observation and analysis, to history.

Not surprisingly, the only works that arrest her (with the exception, again, of Matta's) are sculptures: "Why, stopping before a *Couronne de Bourgeons* by Arp, the *Boule Suspendue* of Giacometti, do we feel for a moment an intensity, a fusion of erotic inspiration and formal mastery that seems out of place? Why the fatigue?" She goes back to reading Breton's *First Surrealist Manifesto* but does not really find an answer there. She does—already then!—in Georges Bataille's writing, whose dark vision of eroticism she opposes to Breton's rosy optimism.[21]

There would be brief remarks on belated Surrealism here and there, but AM's most serious engagement with the production of a Surrealist artist during her Paris years is with that of Max Ernst. Her enthusiasm for a show of his recent paintings, in 1958, came to her "as a shock," she writes: "It revealed a reawakened or quite unexpected plastic sensibility and power, a fusion, in almost every work, of image and idea in what can properly be called painting, and not imagery. . . . Iconography has resigned in favor of plasticity, and I think we are all the happier for it."[22] Perhaps less surprisingly, she would praise his collage technique—particularly in the books from the '20s and '30s:

> The use of extracts from 19th-century engravings and book illustrations, fragmented and juxtaposed, create a dark and claustral space, and transform each page into a theater of violence, absurdity and scandal. The nude makes her radiant appearance in the drawing room, the rape is performed on a staircase or in a public passageway, the monster intrudes in a sinister epiphany of the curtained bed-chamber. There is a suspension or reversal of natural law. Of gravity, for example. Into these scenes descend figures which have the weightlessness of otherworldly beings—of Tintoretto's saints and angels. The compounding of contradictions intensifies the sense of shock, evokes a shudder of dread and delight. Size and volume shrink and swell.[23]

She is equally eloquent on the technique of *frottage,* but then dismisses the artist's claim that it presaged developments in the work of young painters:

> Neither the post-cubist *collage* nor *frottage* . . . radically modified or extended the range of painting. . . . If one is going to discuss the importance of any painting technique—including that of the "drip"—one must take account of the manner in which it redefines our notions of

21. "But Eros Sulks," pp. 32–38. AM scoffs in passing at Duchamp's infamous vaginal door and at the boudoir décor. Such is the curio-shop atmosphere that she misses the inclusion of Rauschenberg's *Bed* and Johns's *Target with Plaster Casts* in the exhibition.

22. "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* March 1958, p. 22.

23. "Paris Letter," *Art International,* April 1964, pp. 66–67.

> pictorial space. For the paintings of Picasso and Pollock, at their very best, one can make this claim; for Ernst's painting, at its very best, one cannot, and his painting consequently has a marginal character even when it charms and impresses.[24]

So far, all the stops in my little tour have concerned the historical avant-gardes, but AM had to contend as well with both a more distant past and with the contemporary. In all periods, actually, she has a marked predilection for sculpture. She is particularly persuasive on Daumier's modeled busts (which she sees as the birth of modern sculpture, particularly for their emphasis on process), and, oddly, on the formal "range" of Maillol in his study of the female nude, insisting on his origins as a craftsman (notably as a potter) and eulogizing what critics call his "stupidity" as a form of "organic intelligence."[25] She is inspired by the work of then still little-known Otto Freundlich and equally by Matisse's *Petite figure accroupie* of 1949.

On Freundlich:

> In a text entitled *Ideas of a Revolutionary Painter* (1932), he analyzes the resistance to abstraction on the part of the middle class as an attempt to force a recognition of its own absolutism and permanence. "Behind the imitation of nature, behind the representation of perspective and the visible, material world, the revolutionary artist recognized the threat of a social dictatorship which had established a precisely determined scale of values, applied, with equal rigor, to social and aesthetic matters." For Freundlich, then, the elimination of the object, the opening of a horizon toward abstraction, corresponded to a destruction of an arbitrary social order and the need to establish new centers of gravity, a new equilibrium.
>
> It is precisely this concern with a more organically determined balance which is expressed in his sculpture. The pieces appear as huge accretions of rounded, rocklike forms (cast in bronze), piled up in defiance of traditional structural methods. They seem to hold together not through an inner armature or an imposed and strictly determined structural order, but through an intricate system of weights and counterweights. They have an aspect of freedom, of stability perpetually threatened. There is something true (or valid, or "workable") but non-final about them, as though they each could be rearranged in other, equally satisfactory relationships. By this I do not mean to say that they seem arbitrary, but rather that each

24. Ibid., p. 67.

25. On Daumier, see "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* June 1958, p. 14. On Maillol, see "Paris Report," *Arts Magazine,* September 1961, p. 49. She often uses the term "range," but wishes to question it. Noting that some critics find that of Poliakoff narrow, she writes: "This judgment, however, calls for a re-examination of the concept of 'range,' and of an artist's infinite capacities for variation, modification, reorganization and adjustments within the territory he has staked out for himself" ("Poliakoff's Oils and Gouaches," p. 4).

> seems merely to represent one highly satisfactory solution to a problem which contains a range of solutions.[26]

On Matisse:

> At the Berggruen Gallery, [this work] indicated a strength and concentration which far exceed that of the late paintings and collages. One was led to reflect once again on the exact relation of fauvism (and its ultimate results) to Expressionism, led to reflect on their paths, parallel in so many respects, threatening convergence, refraining from it, and reflect on the meaning of Matisse's visual distortion. Visual rather than expressive in its function, it refuses (for all the truncation, for all the roughness of surface) the aspect of mutilation, stopping stubbornly this side of pathos, becoming, consequently, *a-pathetic,* self-contained. The obstinate audacity of a bronze figure seated precariously on a block which is completely out of scale with that figure's size awakens in us a kinetic malaise; its literal improbability, however, is canceled when one absorbs the fact that the block is there, at that disturbingly tangential angle, in that particular size, because it is conceived as a purely visual element, corresponds to a need for that particular degree of concentration at that particular point. The sculpture then comes alive.[27]

AM is just as fluent on the work of Tinguely, though of her two reviews the best was written in New York (as mentioned above, she contrasts its irony with the lack thereof in Schoeffer's techno-fantasies). The whole text is too intricate for excerpting, except maybe for this passage at the beginning:

> Tinguely's skepticism and ambivalence in regard to a machine and its function are evident, not only in the extravagant, Rube Goldberg morphology of his engines and in their humor, but in the range of qualities, rhythms and styles of movement. These develop from the rickety-ness of the early work through the grinding aggressiveness of *M K III.* Their functioning is, in fact, frequently a progress from one *hesitation* to another. Schoeffer's objects, on the contrary, move at a rhythm that is steady, smooth, sometimes dizzying, always implacable. The complexity and ambivalence of the one disconcerts in its succession of contradictory positions and postures; the self-assurance of the other astonishes by its poker-faced exclusion of irony and doubt.[28]

26. "The Objectionable Object," *Arts Magazine,* May–June 1962, p. 24.

27. "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* November 1958, p. 15.

28. "New York Letter," *Art International,* February 1966, p. 58. The previous review written by AM of a Tinguely show appeared in the same journal in March 1965 ("Paris Letter," p. 40). As for Schoeffer, it is interesting to note that her reproach is similar—though harsher in tone—to the one she addressed earlier to Boccioni.

This said, AM's soft spot for sculpture leads her to rather peculiar assessments, unusually lenient. She is rather inexplicably fascinated by the "animal sculpture" of Pompon, about which she writes effusively several times.[29] Her support for "five or six first-rate sculptors, mostly young," whose very existence she deems "the happiest and most interesting thing about French art right now," is even more bizarre. "A revival of sculpture? Rather a generation in flower," she writes. Considering the names she offers, one is forced to admit that the flower wilted pretty fast, if it ever was in bloom (apart from Eduardo Chillida, whose work is far from negligible, the sculptors in question are mostly forgotten today).[30]

Sculpture is not the only field for which AM occasionally relaxed her critical muscle. With hindsight, her reviews are often far more laudatory of the postwar École de Paris painting (particularly the Cubism-derived abstraction, but not only) than one would have expected from someone who embraced Minimalism as soon as she returned to New York. Once again, the names of many artists she raves about would mean nothing today, not only to an American audience but just as well to a French one.[31] One of the most confounding essays, written for the journal *Cimaise,* is her apology for the painter Leonardo Cremonini, perhaps the worst she ever wrote; its only noteworthy feature is that it came out several years before Louis Althusser singled out the artist's work as the best example of what a Marxist aesthetic could offer.

Even in her most quirky accolades, AM usually abided by the cardinal rule of giving, as a starting point, a rigorous description of the works at stake. She is relentless in lambasting French art criticism for its lack of rigor: "Either a kind of secondary secretion of the man of letters, a degradation of the tradition of Mallarmé and Baudelaire, or an adjunct of merchandising technique; its range lies between the autonomous lyric and the blurb."[32] We need a new Fénéon, she keeps crying out![33] Critics as diverse as Michel Ragon, Michel Tapié, Pierre

29. Briefly in one of her first pieces for the *Herald Tribune* ("Rodin's Friends, Collaborators," August 28, 1957, p. 6), at much greater length in the same journal two years later ("Homage to Pompon," September 16, 1959, p. 6), and again in the May–June 1962 issue of *Arts Magazine* ("The Objectionable Object," p. 24).

30. "Paris Letter," *Art International,* Summer 1964, p. 84. She names four other artists in this review—Etienne-Martin, Miguel Berrocal, Robert Müller, Jean Ipousteguy. She wrote on the last three every single time their works were exhibited in Paris, even when in group shows. In a long (and, frankly, awful) piece on Ipousteguy published in the same issue of *Art International,* she footnotes an essay she wrote in 1962 on his work as well as Berrocal's and Müller's for the catalogue of an exhibition of the three artists at the Albert Loeb Gallery in New York ("On the Sculpture of Jean Ipousteguy," pp. 52–57). Another Parisian sculptor whom she praises repeatedly is Etienne Hajdu (see "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* June 1959, p. 17, and "Goya in Paris," pp. 30–31).

31. Among AM's French infatuations, let's list several truly mediocre artists on whom she wrote enthusiastically (and several times at that for most of them): Charles Lapicke, Gregory Masurofsky, Jean Pignon, Bernard Dufour, and Jean Piaubert.

32. "Paris: Grande Saison," *Arts Magazine,* May–June 1961, p. 46.

33. "Paris," A*rts Magazine*, June 1959, p. 18; "The 1964 Venice Biennale," *Art International,* September 1964, p. 39.

Restany, Jean-Clarence Lambert, Jose Pierre, Alain Jouffroy, Michel Seuphor, and many more (including James Fitzsimmons, and this just a few months before he became her boss at *Art International)* are mercilessly ridiculed. Quoting a particularly inept sentence from an exhibition catalogue (without naming the author), she exclaims: "If ever I come across a less accurate observation I will eat the paper it is printed upon."[34]

Though her writing was not totally exempt—albeit only in her monographic essays, notably for exhibition catalogues—from the flaws she diagnosed in French art literature (often coming off as autonomous lyric or blurb, and sometimes, I would add, both at the same time), she would have been perfectly justified in boasting about her descriptive and evocative powers. Read her on Berthe Morisot, for example:

> I was struck by two things: a peculiar inability, even in the most captivating canvases, to relate volumes coherently and on a large scale in deep space, and another, corollary, characteristic, a particularly radical and startling conception of composition in terms of direction on the canvas surface. . . .
>
> These two qualities are abundantly illustrated in the exhibition, in certain early landscapes influenced by Corot and even more so in the *Two Women with Child* of 1872. This painting betrays a hesitancy, an unsureness, a precariousness about the spatial relations obtained between the figured elements: the relationship in space between the two chairs, that of the woman-in-chair to the plants and wall section of the upper right-hand corner, that of the standing woman to the rest of the room. The result is an exquisite failure, rather like certain dishes—a sweet *soufflé*, let us say, which, though it has fallen, still tastes fine because of the ineradicable deliciousness of its ingredients.[35]

On Jean Fautrier's retrospective:

> The earliest of the seventy-eight paintings is a *Promenade de Dimanche* of 1921 in which six elderly peasant women stand stiffly grouped about four children, all in (Alsatian?) Sunday Best—a dour lot pitilessly portrayed, and with a sobriety, care and solidity that echo those of Le Nain and Courbet. . . .
>
> This first canvas is striking and, to myself at least, significant, not only for its early excellence but for the manner in which the image—those peasants—is "material-ised," reconverted by the artist's will and style

34. "Swiss Sculptors at the Rodin Museum," p. 87.

35. "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* May–June 1961, p. 17.

Jean Fautrier. La promenade du dimanche au Tyrol. *1921–22.*
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from the level of an articulated reality to that of brute state. Imagine *American Gothic* or *Daughters of the American Revolution* conceived by someone to whom the element of a rich *facture*, naturally assimilated as part of his birthright, serves both to establish the articulate, the human, the social and, at the same time, by a process of inversion or reconversion, to abolish them, restoring to pictorial reality and social contingency the vision of the brute matter in which their remote origins lie.

There are frequent suggestions in the early Fautrier [in *Les Poires* (1927), *Le Lapin Ecorché* (1926), *Le Paysage Jaune et Gris* (1928), *Le Lac Bleu* (1926)] of another, related duality which later becomes fundamental, characteristic: that of an expressionist intention (the influence of Soutine is visible, not only in *Le Lapin Ecorché* but in the landscapes as well) and a Latin style. This tension increases, assumes multiple form in the later work, expressing itself with a paroxysmic intensity through the

> development of a palette, the *hautes pâtes*, finally absorbing or informing the entire *oeuvre*, its form, scale, texture and themes.
>
> The *Hostages* of 1945, in which identity is established between the torn and bleeding martyrs' flesh and the heavy, aggressive quality of the paintings' *matière*, are followed eventually by *Objects* (circa 1955) and *Nudes* in which the duality of life and matter, substance and quality, figuration and abstraction, form a central thematic constellation. This theme (developed in an almost Aristotelian mode throughout Fautrier's *oeuvre*) is present in much of the significant art of the last hundred years. It is expressed in Daumier's sculpture, stated on another, more explicitly symbolic level in that of Rodin, and more recently, by that entire current, within which Fautrier's role is now established, that of *l'art informel*.
>
> If, as it seems to me, Fautrier's painting reached its height in the 1955 exhibition of *Objects* organized at the Galerie de la Rive Droite, this was due to a working out of this theme, an "exposition" of great precision animated by the solution of technical, formal problems. The "objects" (coffee-grinder, match-box, tin can) were both formal armature and images of emergent reality forming through thick paste or substance. The intense pathos of the conception was fully rendered, yet qualified, held, as if in suspension, by the steely precision of a suggested contour, smallness of scale and characteristically sweet, delicate colour. Of the scale and the use of colour, much remains to be said. ("Michelangelo reminds me of Cinerama.") The small format acted to check pathos, and so did the colour. Those sweet pinks, creamy whites and off-whites, tender greens and dulcet blues qualify the anguish and cruelty of flesh and/or *matière*, create a register of ironic comment upon that anguish or cruelty.[36]

But also on younger artists—Martin Barré, for example:

> Martin Barré has been showing recent canvases at the Galerie Arnaud. Barré, to my mind the most dynamic man of the Arnaud group, is now at a turning point. He has always been concerned with making the white of the canvas articulate in and of itself. Thus, in earlier paintings, a contrapuntal play of horizontals and verticals was inserted with what amounted to insidiousness into the canvas surface, rather in the manner of musical sound reinforcing a silence. Experiments in other for-

36. "Paris Letter," *Art International*, May 1964, p. 46. This is the third review AM wrote on Fautrier's work, always with the same sagacity. The first appeared as early as January 1958 ("Paris," *Arts Magazine*, pp. 16–17), followed by a shorter one in the *Herald Tribune* ("Origins of Non-Formal Art," September 24, 1958, p. 6).

mats—the canvas swiveled about into a lozenge form, for instance—represented, among other things, still another attempt to make the canvas speak, not merely an impatience with the convention of the square itself.

For the last year or so, Barré has been simply modifying the white surface with lines of black paint, applied with a spray gun. This produces rectangles traversed by single lines—some slightly curved, two thirds

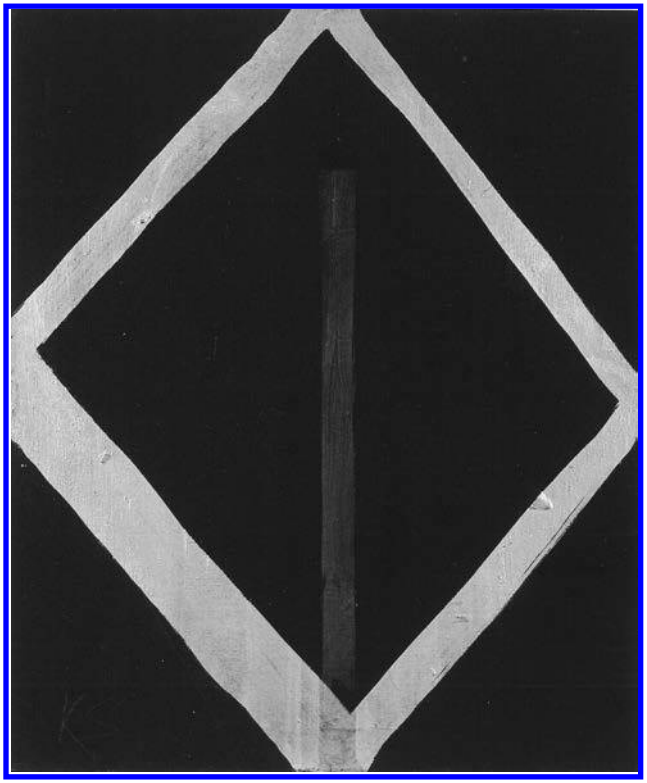
Martin Barré. 63-H. *1963.*

> from bottom or top of canvas. Or two lines (curved or not) will almost but not quite meet in the middle of the canvas. An arrow shoots across and slightly upwards from left to right, leaving the seven-eighths of the canvas below to speak for itself. There is also a series which present a line crossing from left to right with one other line which is broken toward the center. Something basic but arresting is established here: a tension between a closed and an open structure. The tension is strong and sufficient to engage one's complete attention and to hold it, if not for long.
>
> Obviously, canvases such as these raise problems for the viewer, to say nothing of the dealer and the painter himself. It is my experience that the power and impact of these works are dependent upon their being seen together; they constitute a range of variables (proportion, speed and tension) subjected to intense analysis and experimentation; yet none, perhaps, is intended to receive the close and prolonged scrutiny of the picture as conventionally defined and experienced. It is rare and salutary to see this kind of intensive effort being made in Paris today. Given the particular context of aesthetic equivocation here, Barré's fundamentalism arouses sympathy and esteem. More than anything else, it arouses curiosity about his future work.[37]

Or Kimber Smith and James Bishop:

> Of the younger Americans working in Paris, I feel Kimber Smith and James Bishop to be the most gifted, the most serious and consequential. Smith's painting, as I have already had occasion to remark, derives its particular interest from its relation to the pathos and dynamics of "abstract expressionism" which have dominated the image of American painting and of America through her painting. This image is partially predicated on a somewhat willful forgetfulness of that long and important development in quite another register and which extends, let us say, from the influences of Orphism through the importation of a Bauhaus aesthetic, the emigration of Mondrian and its consequences. Smith's painting represents, as none other to my knowledge does, an exact and fruitful fusion of these two tones, traditions, modes of sensibility. It had seemed to me for some time that the speed and strongly rhythmical freedom of gesture common to Americans of this generation were particularly well served, in his case, by the vocabulary, syntax and strategies of abstraction. The vocabulary has become increasingly

37. "Paris Letter," *Art International,* April 1964, p. 68. AM is the first American critic to have shown interest in Barré's work. She had already reviewed it, just as perceptively, in January 1958 ("Paris," *Arts Magazine,* p. 17).



Kimber Smith. Lugano V. *1961.*

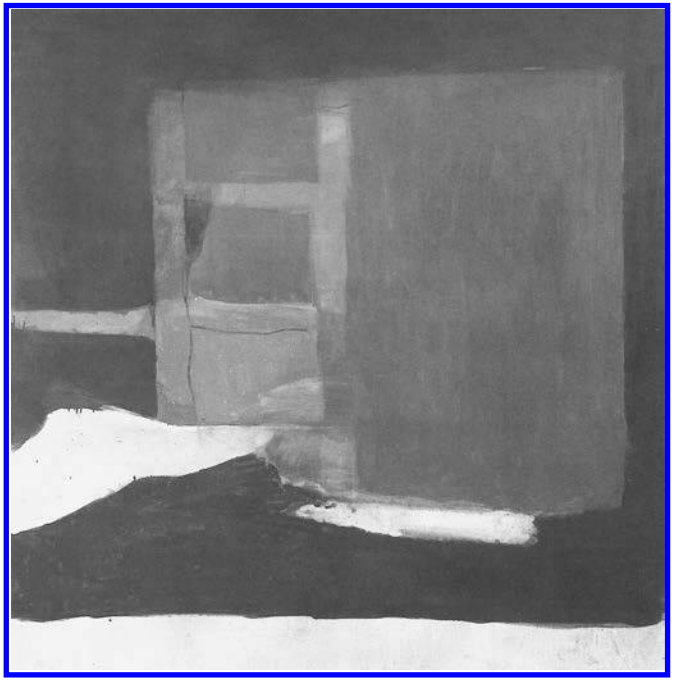
restricted these last three years or so: its linear configurations have been narrowed down to circle, square and triangle. The colours, primary for the most part plus silver—used for its stubbornly anti-natural and radically structural quality—now include black, used in increasingly larger zones and with some bravado as an active, aggressive animating element. The strategies involve the relentlessly inventive exploitation of figure-ground relationships which seem, paradoxically enough, to grow richer and more compelling as the vocabulary shrinks. Paradox, by the way, is characteristic of Smith's art. One could have claimed a few years ago that this painting was entirely one of paradox, almost painting *en creux*, a painting of "absence" in a Mallarméan sense, its structure defining, in an almost precise inversion, the "good" painting that was not there but was rendered all the more "conspicuous" (present) by its absence. A painting, then, of ironic absence. With the narrowing, focus-

ing, more direct engagement in formal preoccupations, with a tightening of form and structure, the irony has faded and the painting is less a totality of possibilities seen backwards as in a mirror than the sum—and more, of course—of all those possibilities. It no longer suggests, it is: it returns from absence to presence.

The first general effect is that of frugality which is almost immediately qualified by the series of changes and shifts released within a prolonged, single instant of vision. These are set off by the alternating roles and functions of this triangle, that series of parallel strips, those two squares which support each other in a precariously maintained tension, the scroll forms which dance a hesitation waltz before fusing into the lozenge forms, the small, yellow, or blue areas surrounding a vertical bar and which assume, alternately, the aspect of that bar's limits or its emanation.

Last year it seemed to me that this painting was almost wholly accessible to analysis, based as it was upon conscious strategies of very deliberate order. Its power and charm derived, however, from the personal tact, irony and playfulness of a master improviser using his skill with a seeming nonchalance which was baffling. The lack of concern with *facture*, the proud unconcern with exactness of contour, are themselves, however, a canny way of relaxing our overattentive and analytical response to the sweeping clarity of design. More than ever one thinks of Jazz and of Matisse and of Matisse's *Jazz*. More than ever this seems the work of a young man at the height of his power, combining the tension and joy of youth and maturity in a stunning athleticism.

James Bishop's exhibition at the Galerie Lucien Durand is his first here in three years. The most general and deep-rooted characteristic of his painting is a care and refinement independent of secondary considerations of surface texture and cuisine in general. An exactness of relationships in space which will provide range for ambiguity and multiplicity works contrapuntally against an increasing simplification of form. The rhythms, unlike Smith's, are slow, gentle, hesitant, have the inexorability of glacial displacement. Underpainting produces a luminosity which is utterly subjacent to colour, enclosed within a potential discharge only. There is everywhere a concern with the minimal animation of the coloured area, a fluidity which disturbs, modifies a stillness and gravity, never breaking them. A Bishop canvas will frequently have a lightly drawn frame within the frame, corresponding to a gently stubborn



James Bishop. A Sweet Tale. *1962.*

refusal to accept any of the *données* of the pictorial situation on their own terms and a respectful insistence upon calling attention, nevertheless, to their existence: thus, in certain recent paintings, a tiny corner or strip of white canvas is left bare.

John Ashbery, in an excellent text, has remarked that these canvases are rather like conversations, the point of which will be realized later. I should say, rather, that their prime quality is an exactness which is non-definitive. I mean by this that they convey the impression of exploration, of working out problems, and that the nature of the beholder's experience is indissolubly linked to its hesitancy, so that the painting, finally, rather than imposing itself, unfolds before us. A sharpening of focus, a quickening of rhythm are evident in *Tale*; the reconciliation and balance of difficult colours (cold blue, green, white) is obtained through an organization which is purely structural and not dependent—as in earlier canvases, *Sweet Tale*, for example—upon variation in tonality and saturation. This canvas and a very small one (three touches of siena, distributed horizontally on a reddish ground, framed again in

> sienna), which offer an exquisite refinement of rhythmic and tonal intervals, convey a notion of Bishop's seriousness and range.[38]

Needless to say, AM can be as inspired in attack as in praise. She obsesses about certain topics. One to which she often returns at great length is the mediocrity of French postwar architecture and design, with the notable exception of Jean Prouvé's work.[39] She is repeatedly scathing with regard to Zoltán Kemény, for example, to the point that when he receives the first prize for sculpture at the 1964 Venice Biennale, she simply refers to her previous detailed assessments of his work, which "maintains sculptural pretensions while refusing to assume sculptural responsibilities": no need to spill ink again on "these reliefs . . . still so tightly bound to a conservative graphic aesthetic as to invite dismissal."[40] She is indefatigable in her detestation of Gustave Moreau, who "seems irrepressibly, infallibly to have debased every source upon which he drew: Mantegna, Ingres, Delacroix, Chassériau, and even Thomas Couture. All are plundered and violated with the brutality of incompetence." She mocks in passing the pusillanimous silence of critics, curators, and historians about the "misogynous quality of the imagery" and the "idealized, androgynous treatment of the male nude," but most of all she condemns the artist for his "peculiar lovelessness *as* a painter": "The work abounds in ambitious, unfinished *machines,* abandoned once the 'inspiration,' sustained only by a compulsion to *work out* the image, had spent itself. Moreover, the ugliness of the painted surface, the vulgarity and carelessness of the *facture,* testify to an impatience, a lack of respect—or love—for painting as a medium."[41]

On the whole, however, brevity is her favorite weapon of spurning. Soulages's gouaches and lithographs: "straightforward and handsome, but certainly no more than that."[42] Georges Mathieu, "that immeasurably over-estimated figure": "The insufferable emptiness and repetitiveness of Mathieu's design-school chic, its reduction of a supposedly dynamic potential to the convention of the signature, correspond, undoubtedly, to the unresolved contradictions between a libertarian aesthetic and a reactionary nostalgia."[43] Alfred Manessier, whose winning

38. "Paris Letter," *Art International,* January 1964, p. 57. AM's previous review of Kimber Smith's work, to which she refers, appeared in the March 23, 1960, issue of the *Herald Tribune* ("American Painting and Sculpture," p. 6). She will write again on Bishop's work in the March 1965 issue of *Art International* ("Paris Letter," p. 39).

39. On Prouvé, see "Change in the City," pp. 89–90. For a hilarious diatribe against French design as compared to Scandinavian, see "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* January 1959, p. 19.

40. "The 1964 Venice Biennale," *Art International,* September 1964, p. 39. On Kemény, see "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* February 1958, p. 17; and "Swiss Sculptors at the Rodin Museum," p. 87.

41. "Moreau and Maillol," *Arts Magazine,* September 1961, pp. 47–48.

42. "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* December 1957, p. 12.

43. "Paris Letter," *Art International,* April 1965, p. 73. Previously, she had made fun of the "royalist" bed—but a royalism à la Cecil B. DeMille—that Mathieu sent as his contribution to a catastrophic exhibition at the Musée des arts décoratifs ("The Objectionable Object," pp. 22–23).

of the first prize in painting at the 1962 Venice Biennale is met with quasi-universal scorn: "[his] painting is of a mediocrity almost universally recognized (in so far as it is known at all outside France), except in precisely those official and catholic circles whose approval can be counted a kiss of death; some honors are difficult to survive."[44] Some of her comparisons must have stung her targets, as when she, unpersuaded by Dubuffet's populism, equated him with Ruskin, or when, commenting upon the nationalist impetus behind Malraux's institution of the Biennale de Paris, she saw the writer as the reincarnation of the right-wing Maurice Barrès, who in 1921 had been sentenced to death-in-effigy during a mock trial staged by the Surrealists.[45]

One of the issues in which AM is extraordinarily conversant—far more than any American art critic subsequently parked in France—is the intricacy of French cultural policy. She deciphers its absurd twists and turns with the accuracy but also ironic distance of an old-timer. Malraux's campaign of restoration of the national monuments; his nomination of Balthus as director of the Villa Medici; the architecture students' strike at the École des beaux-arts, against the "deliciously Balzacian" corruption of the Prix de Rome competition, and many other affairs.[46] None of the articles in question are easily excerptable: Though they are remarkably well-informed pieces of journalism, they are commenting on situations that are now entirely forgotten and would require too many explanatory footnotes to be fully comprehensible by any of today's readers, even a French one.

One has the feeling, however, that it is more out of a sense of duty than of real appetite that AM deals with institutional crises and cultural policy: Her passion is for the interpretation of historical facts, not their mere uncovering and condemnation. Her sense of history is best "tingled," to look back to the beginning of our junket, when she wonders about conditions of possibility or of impossibility. "Why did Sargent," she asks, "with his inordinate brilliance and security, his air of being a born painter with fabulous *métier,* the sense of quality visible in his emulation of Velasquez and Hals, not develop into a really great painter"? Response:

> I cannot but suspect . . . that an *oeuvre* which depended for its ultimate success upon that heightened sensitivity to *milieu* and attitude which underlay Sargent's sense of observation (which did, for him, the work of a vision) required ultimately a degree of detachment from its subjects and the world which they mirrored.

44. "The Venice Biennale," *Arts Magazine,* October 1962, p. 22.

45. For Dubuffet, see "Paris Letter," *Art International,* April 1965, p. 73; for Malraux/Barrès, see "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* November 1959, p. 15.

46. On the restoration campaign, see "Change in the City," p. 88; on Balthus's nomination, see "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* April 1961, pp. 22–23; on the Beaux-Arts strike, see "Paris," *Arts Magazine,* June 1959, p. 17.

> Sargent's ties with that class which constituted "an astute aristocracy of finance rather than the more complacent aristocracy of blood" were perhaps too strong, and the swagger of his style corresponds not only to a painter's security, but to that sense of identification which precluded critical detachment. That critical detachment is responsible for the quality of the late, great works of Hals in Harlem and Velasquez in Madrid: there, the sense of observation is transformed into a vision which Sargent, for all his gifts and discernment, never quite attained.[47]

One of her most perceptive intuitions, with which I'll conclude our tour, concerns the conditions of possibility of Pop Art, as well as the impossibility of a European audience's understanding it. This comes in a long and blistering review of the 1964 Venice Biennale, an institution she blasts, as she had done before, as "nothing more than an enormously effective market mechanism." After having addressed, as was mandatory, the outrage following the awarding of the painting first prize to Robert Rauschenberg (even the Vatican intervened!), she writes:

> Criticism everywhere, of course, is having a really difficult time with Pop Art. The work has not, could not, satisfy existing aesthetic criteria; yet it has generated no new ones, and critics however sympathetic are unable to adjust to the situation; adjustment, for the critic, means, after all, the ability to formulate judgement! Then, of course, the artists—and Rauschenberg is obviously the most sophisticated and graceful public performer—have encouraged the critics' intellectual insecurity by refusing to take "intellectual responsibility" for their work—refusing, that is, to define their aims or their role, refusing the burden of social comment or criticism. Rauschenberg's positively Franciscan verbal celebration of the interest and beauty inherent in all things, his colonization of the "gap between art and life," is disturbing to even the most sympathetic and flexible of critics. Mr. Alloway, for example, in his introduction to the Pop show at the Guggenheim, was concerned with finding respectable historical sources or precedents, of however marginal interest, for his exhibiting artists.
>
> Still, the artists are probably correct in refusing to assume responsibility. For the generating force of their work is ambivalence. Social criticism can never be more than latent in their work. The distance between the Pop Artist and middle-class prosperity has been qualified by his access to the general affluence, and the ambivalence of his particular attitude expresses itself in the register of "camp" and irony which constitute the entire expressive range of Pop Art. After all, it has emerged in a society whose aspiration to material well-being is on its way to general fulfillment. It seems to postulate a high level of consumption and, I'd say, of

47. "Paris Letter," *Art International,* April 1963, p. 72.

> waste. It expresses the somewhat byzantine detachment of the highly prosperous. Spanish painting, although cosmopolitan indeed, has, thus far, not turned Pop. And possibly the inadequate industrialization, low level of consumption, relative inaccessibility of standard manufactured commodities, plain poverty, are responsible for an essentially "serious" or straightforward attitude to consumption itself and to its imagery, the source of Pop style. In an economy of scarcity, reinforced by the constraints of an authoritarian political structure, the margin for detachment, for moral and intellectual ambivalence, is narrow. The younger Spanish painters are still predominantly abstract or engaged in a figurative, straightforward art of protest. The extraordinarily prosperous and permissive climate of the '50s and '60s in urban America seems to have produced an art of satiety.

There are many other themes one could bring up from this vast corpus of writing of nearly a decade. One could trace in it the embryos of what was to come forth later, in a more elaborate form, in AM's work after her return to New York (her early fascination with prehistoric art, for example, or her interest in Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropology). Or trace the arc of her gradual disenchantment with the Greenbergian model of art criticism. I chose the opposite route: that of trying to capture the specificity of her "French" discourse. But this a bountiful mine, awaiting other explorers.

Painting, Instantaneism, Cinema, America, Ballet, Illumination, Apollinaire*

ANNETTE MICHELSON

The future is a monotonous instrument.

—Francis Picabia

One spring afternoon, thirty years ago, while seated on the terrace of the Café Select, I looked up from my newspaper to see, ambling solemnly down the Boulevard du Montparnasse, a sextet of camels, led by *harkis* dressed in their traditional costume.

Camels navigating the boulevard . . . "And," one wondered, "whither bound?" To the head of a funeral procession, perhaps? Or to the Eiffel Tower? Or were they perhaps in search of lodgings? For René Clair had recounted the difficulties encountered, during the filming of *Entr'acte* (1924), in finding overnight housing accommodations for their camel, thereby opening, within the reader/spectator, the possibility of yet another cinematic diversion—that of the search throughout the city for lodgings for the noble beast.

Picabia had announced, two years before the filming of *Entr'acte*, that he would undertake to "rehabilitate" the camel, and we may say that in his cinematic collaboration with Clair he most effectively did so. And so it was that one by no means necessarily thought of the Jardin des Plantes or the military stable as its logical destination. *Entr'acte* had, for its spectators, abstracted the camel, as it were, from its natural/urban/military context, displacing it, replacing it, as Dada was with most things inclined to do. The deliberate and majestic gait of my sextet assumed the aspect of an innate, natural "slow motion," and their solemn grace called up the contrasting absurdity of the serried ranks of mourners, of those generals, dowagers, academicians, of the cortège drawn up to circle, in slow motion, the Eiffel Tower before their precipitation into the mad chase after the fleeing coffin.

Picabia's textual valorization of the camel occurs in *Fumigations*, published two years prior to the film's production:

> I should like to explore the inside of plants and of people, as one does in churches, to manage to shrink and slip into the heart of a

* First published in *Francis Picabia: Máquinas y Espaõlas* (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González; Barcelona: Fundacío Antoni Tàpies, 1996), pp. 192–95.

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> friend, sit down rest there, to get into his kidney and, with the help of a small canoe, block the urethra and start deadly floods; to climb up into the liver, roped to other excursionists, sharing the pleasures of life among bacilli of the digestive canals and of vacations on the kidney's beaches. But we have to content ourselves with camel races in the desert. I hereby proclaim the rehabilitation of the camel. This animal has never made anyone seasick; that is an invention, pure and simple, of the Navy's upper echelons.[1]

And this defense of the hardy creature we know as "the ship of the desert," published in 1922, the very year that Picabia proclaimed his break with Dada, has its place in a text whose utopian fantasies then shade into an extremity of Roussellian mechanics, to be considered below. For the moment, however, we want to note that the fantastic voyages through the body are now, of course, realizable, through an image-generating technology not at that time available.

For we do now visit the digestive and reproductive canals; we do now explore the heart, install our gaze within the kidney. In the United States, as I have elsewhere argued, a new era in the cinematic representation of the body was initiated toward the end of the Second World War in the work of collaboration between the filmmaker Willard Maas and the British poet George Barker, then resident in New York, on their film *Geography of the Body* (1943).[2] Through the succession of extreme close-ups in which skin, fold, membrane, limb, and member are transformed into plateaus, prairies, pools, caves, crags, and canyons of uncharted territory, they developed the grand metaphor of the body as landscape. Estranged, the body thus appears as an "America," a "Newfoundland," its lineaments suffused with the minatory thrill of exploration. Through close-up, magnification, and patterns of editing, this film text works to disarticulate, to reshape and transform the body into landscape. And it is cinematic microscopy that now offers entrance to the body's interior landscape, affording us passage through the canals of the reproductive and cardiovascular systems.

Picabia, however, then continues, after a paean to painting as automobile racing, to envision, in terms evocative of the mechanical extravagances of Raymond Roussel, the future of his dreams.

> I would like to find an engineer to realize my latest inventions. This invention consists in setting rings around the earth, circles rendered immobile by centripetal force; on these circles hotels that would revolve on their own axes could be built. Thus, without leaving our rooms, we could go around the world, or rather we'd see it turn within twenty-four hours.

1. See Francis Picabia, "Fumigations," in *Écrits: Textes réunis et présentés*, vol. 2, ed. Olivier Revault d'Allonnes and Bonique Bouissou (Paris: Belfond, 1978), pp. 34–35. Translations from *Écrits* are the author's unless otherwise noted.

2. Annette Michelson, "'Where Is Your Rupture?' Mass Culture and the Gesamtkunstwerk," *October* 56 (Spring 1991), pp. 47–48.

René Clair. Entr'acte. *1924.*

> Behold! Cairo, with the vision of pilgrims to Mecca, upper Egypt, then New York, Brooklyn and Riverside Drive. Here's Paris, the Seine, etc., and accompanying this amazing parade, girl pianists playing melodies by Reynaldo Hahn! There's to be no more travel, no more missed trains, no more night, and thus much less danger of catching cold. And finally, the application of my discovery offers important benefits. If ever an American engineer gets an idea from reading these lines, I'll be grateful if he writes to me so that we can discuss a possible application. Naturally, the rings' inhabitants would enjoy anti-nationality.[3]

Within thirty years of its composition, this scoptophilic fantasy was, of course, realized worldwide in the television era's generation of the spectating subject—not yet "anti-national," it is true, but constructed by the society of the "multi-national" apparatus.

It is with these proleptic visions in mind that I wish to consider, with some attentiveness to their larger context and its textually anticipatory instances, Picabia's relation to the evolving discourse of image production—not merely that of *Entr'acte*, for the film has generated a voluminous descriptive literature over the past seventy years. We are familiar with the elegant nonchalance governing the production of his scenario for *Entr'acte*—the list of objects and actions scribbled on the sheet of Maxim's notepaper. However, Picabia's interest in cinema did not stop with the production, for we have, in addition, his completed scenario for a film in three parts, *La loi d'accommodation chez les borgues* (1928),[4] and the libretto for the revue entitled *Cinésketch* (1925),[5] prepared for performance at the Théâtre des Champ-Elysées, which incorporates scenic effects derived from film technique. (I am here concerned, however, not with the film or film-related work alone, but rather with a radical impulse that informs, from an early date, Picabia's enterprise in general, that of a *temporalization* struggling, as it were, to emerge within his work. In considering the diverse manifestations of that impulse, we may discern yet another set of interrelations among the points chosen from Picabia's trajectory and reconfigured within the title of the present text.)

The temporalization is most obviously inscribed within the implied kineticism of his paintings, and within the manner in which they solicit, as it were, a release-into-motion. I shall wish, however, to consider the way in which Picabia represents one voice in a contemporary polyphony, one component of an intertextuality—that of a drive to temporalization which, in his own case, exceeds that of his restless globe-trotting and obsessive enthusiasm for automobiles and automobile racing.

Among the factors to be considered within this problematic are the following four sites of that temporalization:

3. Picabia, "Fumigations," p. 34.

4. Picabia, *Écrits*, pp. 193–206.

5. This project, described in an interview published in *L'Action*, January 1, 1925, is reprinted in Picabia, *Écrits*, pp. 175–76.

1. The many canvases that have their source in a celebration of dance or the dancer. Thus, among others, *Tarantella* (1912), *Danses à la source* (Dances by the Fountain) *I* and *II*, *Danseuse étoile sur un transatlantique* (Star Dancer on a Transatlantic) (1913), *Danseuse étoile et son cours de danse* (Star Dancer and Her Dancer Course) (1913), and *Edytaonisl* (1912), whose title Picabia identified as an anagrammatical variant of *Danseuse étoile* and conceived, presumably, as a tribute to the talented and suggestive performances of Mademoiselle Napierkowska, whom he encountered onboard the ship he took to New York. To these we add, of course, his own work in ballet form, which extends as far as the late notes for *Réveil-Matin* (Awakening) (1950).[6]

Francis Picabia. Danseuse étoile sur un transatlantique. *1913. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.*

2. The manner, already suggested above, in which the celebrated proliferation of mechanomorphic inventions solicit a release-into-movement. Thus, among so many others, *Prostitution universelle* (Universal Prostitution) (1916); *Parade amoureuse* (Amorous Display) (1917); *Le Îles Marquises* (The Marquesas Islands) (1918). These have the aspect of eroticized devices produced by Rube Goldberg or the aging Buster Keaton. Other examples would be the drawings illustrating *Fille née sans mère* (Daughter Born Without a Mother) (1918, trembling, as it were, on the edge of animation).

3. Picabia's persistent adherence to a musicalist aesthetic.

4. The manner in which, finally, a musicalist aesthetic of painting itself is allegorized as racing.

If I begin by considering, in what follows, the last two of these elements, it is because they have received somewhat less attention than preceding factors and because they are, as we shall see, significantly conjoined and conflated in the quite extraordinary text.

6. Picabia, *Écrits*, p. 349.

II

In the wake of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, the reorganization and consolidation of the film industries within the European economies acted as a powerful stimulus to theoretical production. This was the period in which the filmmaker, recruited largely from the intelligentsia of the European bourgeoisie, assumed the burden of legitimizing the cinematic project. In France, Jean Epstein, Louis Delluc, and Germaine Dulac; in England, the writers and filmmakers grouped about the journal *Close-Up*; in Holland, Joris Ivens; in Germany, Hans Richter and Béla Balázs; and in the Soviet Union, the representatives of the immediately postrevolutionary period worked toward constructing a theory of cinematic practice.

This work of an international cinematic avant-garde, involving differences of method, was nonetheless driven and sustained by an underlying hypothesis and by an aim, both generally shared. That Western man now disposed of a new and powerful cognitive instrument which gave him access to a clearer and fuller understanding of existence in the world: Such was the general hypothesis. For Epstein, the world was that of spatiotemporality, the categories of knowledge; for the British, it was, in large part, that of the human psyche within the social formation; for the Dutch and the Soviets, it was that of historical process.

The general aim was no less than the transformation of the human condition through a cinematic intensification of cognitive accuracy, analytic precision, and epistemological certitude. It is within this period of intensive effort, speculation, and anticipation, within this climate of a general *epistemological euphoria,* that the techniques of montage were to make their major advances.

Clearly, this project did not, could not correspond to any aspect or variant of Picabia's enterprise. And he informs us quite unequivocally in his "Instantaneist Manifesto" of 1924 of the nature of his interest in the cinema. Its superiority to the theater is like that of the automobile to the donkey, or the aeroplane to a bat. It is, moreover, the only remaining antidote to the life of banality and corruption that characterizes the present era. He sees it as modernity's essential form of spectacle, not only as the representation of individual plots but as the expression of entire cultures. And he is in agreement with the totality of the European intelligentsia in finding American cinema to be the most successful realization of the medium's potential because it is, by virtue of its directness, economy, simplicity, the most consistent with its *simultaneist* vocation.[7] With this claim, Picabia echoes the gesture of appropriation made successively by every major movement within the history of modernism—by Expressionism, Constructivism, Surrealism, etc.

Epistemological certitude, however, is not, for Picabia, by any means part of cinema's vocation. He sees it, rather, as offering distraction, another source of blissful oblivion, another "artificial paradise," an intensification of sensory experience transcending that of opiate pleasures or of aerial acrobatics.

7. See Picabia, "Cinéma," in *Écrits*, pp. 69–71.

Echoing Baudelaire's strictures of 1859 on photography,[8] he inveighs against its mimetic or analogical properties and extols an "evocative" cinema, one that aspires to a spontaneity of invention "as rapid as thought." Picabia's advocacy thus addresses, we may say, not a *cognitive* spectator but rather a *desiring* one.

"Jazz-Band," published two years earlier, testifies to Picabia's well-developed musical tastes.[9] His future collaboration with Satie is grounded in admiration for the oeuvre that will be celebrated in the "Instantaneist Manifesto," with particular praise for Satie's invention of "musical furniture and pornography." It also figures as an extension of his ongoing support of other contemporary musicians, including Antheil, Stravinsky, and the members of Les Six. . . . His acquaintance with the historical canon is demonstrated by the inclusion of tributes to Monteverdi, Wagner, Gluck, and Bach in this text, which, despite its title, contains not a word on jazz.

It is important, nonetheless, to see the way in which he endorses, at an early stage, the musicalist aesthetic that informs much reflection on painting at that time, as if in confirmation of a prevalent view of music as that "condition to which other arts aspire." He calls, as well, for another combinatorial system, another range of notes, of composition, of instruments.

> Thus, in order to get out of these old conventions, we need a total reconstruction of all systems; this could take music to the stage to which Cubism and Dadaism have brought painting, become an objective art, existing outside of objective reproduction. The rules of harmony and counterpoint being for music what the rules of trompe-l'oeil are to painting.[10]

One wants to note not merely the parallelism of these two claims but the way in which the ground of their convergence has been laid, long before, in what we must term a musicalist aesthetic as a subtext of Picabia's project.

Its preparation is well documented, for we know that as early as 1912, Apollinaire proclaimed the trend toward "an eminently new art, an art which will be, in respect to painting as it has been regarded up till now, what music is to literature," and that this development was important in the art of the time and gained Picabia's adherence. And we know, as well, that among the Puteaux group, in addition to Picabia, Henri Valensi and Kupka were especially interested in music, and that Valensi, in particular, advocated the conception of "a pure painting." "Just as music has notes, why should we not imagine that color can express the painter's thought with all its intrinsic force?"[11]

8. See especially Baudelaire, "Le public moderne et la photographie," Part II of "Salon de 1859," in Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 1031–36.

9. Picabia, *Écrits*, pp. 56–58.

10. Ibid., p. 57.

11. These statements are cited in Maria Luïsa Borràs, *Picabia* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), p. 91.

We have, moreover, several statements of Picabia's to the American press during his New York visits to the effect that he was in search of "a certain balance," through "tones of color or shades, in order to express the sensations I receive from things in the manner of a *leitmotiv* in a musical symphony."[12] And indeed, the conjunction of abstraction and subjectivity in pictorial practice is constantly evoked and defended through recourse to musical imagery and analogy. Thus, " . . . I do not paint the things my eyes see, I paint what is seen by my brain, and when I am visited by the creative spirit I improvise my painting as a musician does his music. The harmonies of my studies evolve and take shape thanks to my brushes, just as musical harmonies do thanks to the pianist's fingers."[13]

This musicalist discourse was, however, by no means confined to the theorization of painting, for it informed, as well, the earliest instances of film theory. Thus, the painter Léopold Survage in a text of 1914 published in *Les Soirées de Paris*:

> It is the mode of succession in time which establishes the analogy between sound and rhythm in music and in colored rhythm—the fulfillment of which I advocate by cinematographic means. . . . Music is always a mode of *succession* in time. A musical work is a sort of subtle language by means of which an author expresses his state of mind, his inner being.
>
> The fundamental element of my dynamic art is *colored visual form*, which plays a part analogous to that of sound in music. . . . Immobile, an abstract form still does not express very much. . . . Only by putting it in motion, transforming it and combining it with other forms, does it become capable of evoking a *feeling*. . . . Form and rhythm are bound up together inseparably.[14]

One wants, in citing this text, to emphasize not merely musicalist theory and its role but the manner in which that theory implies that a more general impulse to temporalization is at work, and the way in which, in Picabia's work (as against that of Kandinsky, for example), this will eventually be linked to an equally generalized fetishization of mobility, travel, speed. Thus, Ricciotto Canudo, a fellow traveler within Dada circles who was well known to Picabia, proclaimed, in what is generally acknowledged as the remarkable founding text of European film theory, the necessity of a new artistic practice that "imposes itself on the unquiet and scrutinous [*sic*] spirit" as a "superb conciliation of the rhythms of Space (the Plastic Arts) and the rhythms of Time (Music and Poetry)." And the "cinematograph, so vulgar in name, points the way." Canudo then proceeds to examine that "symbolic aspect of velocity" which he claims as dominant in the new medium.

12. Ibid., p. 98.

13. Ibid., p. 175.

14. Léopold Survage, "Colored Rhythm," published in *Les Soirées de Paris*, July–August 1914, reprinted in *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907–1939*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 90–92. Italics in original.

> Velocity possesses the potential for a great series of combinations, of interlocking activities combining to create a spectacle that is a series of visions and images tied together in a vibrant agglomeration, similar to a living organism. This spectacle is produced exactly by the excess of movement to be found in film, those mysterious reels impressed by life itself. The reels of the engraved celluloid unroll in front of and within the beam of light so rapidly that the presentation lasts for the shortest possible time. No theater could offer half the changes of set and location provided by the cinematograph with such vertiginous rapidity, even if equipped with the most extraordinarily modern machinery.
>
> Yet more than the motion of images and the speed of representation, what is truly symbolic in relation to velocity are the actions of the characters. We see the most tumultuous, the most inverisimilitudinous scenes unfolding with a speed that appears impossible in real life. This precipitation of movement is regulated with such mathematical and mechanical precision that it would satisfy the most fanatical runner. Who is still able to enjoy a pipe by the fire in peace these days, without . . . an irresistible desire for spaces to conquer? The cinematograph can satisfy the most impatient racer. The motorist who has just finished the craziest of races and becomes a spectator at one of these shows will certainly not feel a sense of slowness; images of life will flicker in front of him with the speed of the distances covered. . . . It is the symbolic destruction of distances by the immediate *connaissance* of the most diverse countries, similar to the real destruction of distances performed for a hundred years now by monsters of steel.[15]

The centenary of travel had, however, by the 1920s so collapsed distance that the very notion of the exotic had been relativized and a process of standardization had, to some extent, begun to obliterate it. One could, in considering the way in which the fetishization of travel and of dance might be linked in 1924,[16] claim that they bespoke a transformation of the role and signifying function of spatiotemporality as such with the thoroughgoing rationalization of modernity.

Thus it was that diversion as such became travel's goal, rather than the contemplation of the site or its artifacts, or acquaintance with its culture. Picabia, we recall, had claimed the cinema as distraction, as the one remaining and accessible antidote to the banality and corruption of existence within the social formation of

15. Ricciotto Canudo, "The Birth of the Sixth Art" (1911), *Framework* 13 (Fall 1980), p. 4.

16. This claim is developed by Siegfried Kraucauer in an essay on the relation of travel to dance in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 65–73. In a foretaste of a "theme park" such as Disneyland, Kracauer also prophesies a future in which "the romantically inclined will have to agitate for the establishment of fenced-in nature preserves, isolated fairy-tale realms that today even Calcutta is hardly able to provide."

the cash nexus. Increasingly, travel, in the view of a contemporary such as Siegfried Kracauer, was becoming the supreme mode of access to an Elsewhere beyond one's habitual location. It thereby fulfills its decisive function as a spatial transformation, as a temporary change of location, affording the illusion of an opening onto infinity.

Discussing dance, Kracauer further claimed that the expression of social relations through dance had been replaced by a "mere marking of time." Rhythmic dance, which had been a manifestation of eros and spirit, was now "a self-sufficient phenomenon that wants to rid itself of meaning." Referring implicitly to jazz, Kraucauer here suggests the kind of overly narrow and prescriptive judgment made by Adorno.[17] There is, however, a sense in which the autonomy of rhythm (frankly proclaimed in Gershwin's superb *I Got Rhythm*, a small-scale masterwork of the period) is an effect of the dance craze of the 1920s. The manner in which contemporary practice converted dance into a sport testified to its formalization of dance's temporality.

Dance and travel, we may say, join, during the decade, in the rationalizing "conquest" of space and time, with increased travel as one manifestation, and with dance contests and marathons, car racing and speed records as other extreme instances. In so doing, they represent an effort to recapture the transcendence—a sense of infinity and of a beyond now lost through the dynamics of mechanization that drive the formation of the cash nexus.

We have, I believe, established the manner in which Picabia identified painting, on the one hand, with musical composition and cinema, on the other, as distraction. We may see in the scoptophilic fantasy of a world wholly open to an immobile spectator a variation on the desire for travel, speed, and the need for distraction—for diversion from the banality of existence. It is as one voice in a polyphone or intertextual temporalization that we may consider Picabia's distinct and constant fetishization of change, of diversion.

It is, finally, in "Jazz-Band" that, addressing Cocteau, Picabia characterizes the musicians who, under the poet's sponsorship and the leadership of Satie, compose the group Les Six. Speaking of the "seeds" planted by these young composers, he insists that a closer look, as through opera glasses, would reveal the transformative flowering of those seeds (as in a rapid cinematic cut) to be a series of "road signs": "Erik Satie, 10 kilometers," "Auric, 2 kilometers," "Poulenc, 30 kilometers," "Darius Milhaud, 800 meters."[18] If music and painting have been postulated by Picabia as expressively and methodologically "alike," we may say, then, that they are finally configured and collapsed in this intensification of temporalization through the image of travel, of a race toward a future as yet unknown.

17. See "Über Jazz," in Theodor Adorno, *Musikalische Schriften IV: Moments musicaux, Impromptus*, vol. 17 of *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 74–108.

18. Picabia, *Écrits*, pp. 57–58.

Picture Planes*

DAVID BORDWELL

All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications.

—Marcel Duchamp

The concept of an avant-garde or experimental cinema often implies outright hostility to mainstream fiction film. Yet Anglo-American critics of avant-garde cinema have been no less committed to explication than their peers who address the work of Welles or Bergman. This should not surprise us, since historically the critical schools are linked. It was in *Film Culture* that Andrew Sarris published his most influential auteurist work, that many critics discussed European art cinema, and that the writings around the American avant-garde crystallized. In 1960, the journal's editor, Jonas Mekas, compared the New American Cinema movement with the French *nouvelle vague* and British Free Cinema.[1] Some critics were led to study the avant-garde by their interest in art cinema,[2] while others, such as P. Adams Sitney, wrote on both Brakhage and Bresson without changing interpretive strategies. It would not be difficult to show how the pertinence and richness of implicit meanings prized by critics of narrative cinema operate as criteria for the explicator of experimental films. According to David Curtis, for instance, Steve Dwoskin's films study "human isolation and the gestures we make

* Excerpted from David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 53–64. In this extract, David Bordwell argues that Annette Michelson's impact on film criticism was comparable to Andrew Sarris's. In unearthing the strategies or "schema" regularly used by critics to interpret avant-garde films, he shows that Michelson pioneered an innovative understanding of modernist art as being about human perception and cognition. This new interpretive paradigm proved hugely influential, Bordwell claims, in part due to Michelson's institutional roles as teacher, translator, and editor. —*Eds.*

1. Jonas Mekas, "The Cinema of the New Generation," *Film Culture* 21 (Summer 1960), pp. 1–6.

2. See Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *The Film Culture Reader* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 404–21. This is the 1966 version of an essay which Michelson was to publish in revised form in 1974.

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towards communication."[3] Another critic finds Bruce Conner's *Report* to harbor "an evocative ambiguity and painful irony."[4]

Not only the particular meanings constructed but the conception of implicit meaning itself is central to criticism in the avant-garde tradition.[5] Writing on the avant-garde relies on widely held assumptions about aesthetic practice. For the avant-garde explicator, as for critics of other stripes, the artist stands as creator or transmitter of meaning. The artist draws upon personal experience (here autobiography enters), or upon a private mythology (for example, Kenneth Anger's predilection for Aleister Crowley), or upon the art world, which passes along inherited "problems" to be solved. The critic will use the artist's writings, interviews, and recollections to support ascribed meanings. And just as Ford's or Antonioni's films add up to a unified oeuvre, so do the films of Robert Breer, Maya Deren, or Dore O. The experimental filmmaker's output must also be studied in relation to work in other media—Conner's assemblages, Michael Snow's painting and music. In Western culture, critical interpretation in any medium has long assumed that a psychological unity binds the artist's thought and behavior to the finished work. Asking Hollis Frampton to explain what he meant is not different in principle from asking Hitchcock.

The affinities of American avant-garde criticism with its mainstream counterparts are most evident in its treatment of those experimental works now seen as dominating the 1950s and early 1960s. The prevailing tendency was to interpret the films of Deren, Stan Brakhage, James Broughton, and Sidney Peterson on the analogy of narrative or poetry. Parker Tyler considered that dream, myth, and ritual provided the best models for understanding such works.[6] Insisting particularly upon symbolic meanings which "represent the fictions of the imagination,"[7] Tyler asserted that the mythic film need not be like a novel, since it can build itself shot by shot, as a poem is made word by word.[8] P. Adams Sitney, the 1960s' most influential interpreter of experimental film, likewise emphasized literary analogues, revealing "imagism" in the theme and form of *Dog Star Man* and treating *Anticipation of the Night* as a narrative possessing a protagonist, a first-person point of view, and a "language of visual metaphor" that presents "the ritual of an artist's quest for untampered vision."[9]

3. David Curtis, *Experimental Cinema: A Fifty-Year Evolution* (New York: Delta, 1971), p. 161.

4. Carl I. Beltz, "Three Films by Bruce Conner," *Film Culture* 44 (Spring 1967), pp. 58–59.

5. For an informative history of avant-garde debates, see Phillip Drummond, ed., *Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film, 1910–1975* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1979), and especially Drummond, "Notions of Avant-Garde Cinema," pp. 9–16.

6. Parker Tyler, *The Three Faces of Film*, rev. ed. (South Brunswick, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1967), pp. 63–64.

7. Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 8.

8. Ibid., p. 145.

9. P. Adams Sitney, "Imagism in Four Avant-Garde Films," in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, pp. 195–99; Sitney, "*Anticipation of the Night* and *Prelude*," *Film Culture* 26 (Winter 1962), p. 55.

Such interpretative tactics, close to those which other critics applied to the European art cinema, bear the traces of a period when avant-garde filmmaking was starting to become somewhat respectable. The Film-makers Cooperative, founded in 1962, and the Canyon Cooperative, created in 1966, were making films available. Filmmakers were beginning to receive foundation grants, and the Filmmakers Cinémathèque received a large Ford Foundation subsidy in 1968.[10] Departments of art and literature came more and more to include experimental film in their curricula. However anti-academic the motives of Mekas, Tyler, Sitney, and others might have been, treating the films as personal poetic testaments along the lines of conceptions of the art-film director's "vision" had the effect of making avant-garde films acceptable objects of study.

At the same time, critics began to position the experimental film within the fine-arts tradition. A main impetus for this maneuver came from the hyperbolic publicity attending Andy Warhol's entry into filmmaking. In 1963, just as he was becoming a successful Pop artist, Warhol made his first films, and soon critics were ascribing implicit meanings to them on the basis of concepts drawn from the modernist tradition in painting. Since these ideas became important to the history of film interpretation, I will trace them very briefly and roughly.[11]

1. *The modernist artwork courts chance.* Duchamp's willingness to embrace accident inspired John Cage, who conceived works based on the contingent and unstructured. The artist could set up a situation but need not seek complete control over what transpired. Abstract Expressionism and Happenings were only the most obvious manifestations of the principle. Warhol films such as *Sleep*, *Eat*, and *Empire*, all records of an object or process, could easily be subsumed under this schema. In Warhol's narrative films, nonprofessional actors, sketchy scripts, long takes, and the fixed camera could all be interpreted as tactics allowing chance to play a dominant role.[12] *The Chelsea Girls*, with its randomly arranged reels projected two at a time, also seemed highly Cagean.

2. *The modernist work seeks a formal and substantive purity.* The Symbolist sources of modernism linger on in this supposition, a key premise for traditions stressing abstraction and integrity of materials. Within this frame of reference, Warhol became a Minimalist: His "content-less" early films appeared "to examine cinema

10. For discussions of the institutional development of the American avant-garde, see J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), pp. 39–76, and Dominique Noguez, *Une Renaissance du cinéma: Le Cinéma "underground" américain* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1985), pp. 13–45, 75–236.

11. My schemata differ from those laid out in James Peterson, "In Warhol's Wake: Minimalism and Pop in the American Avant-Garde Film" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1986), but I am indebted to his pioneering attempt to delineate the logic underlying the critical literature of Pop and Minimalist cinema.

12. Gregory Battcock, "Four Films by Andy Warhol," in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1967), p. 251.

at its roots."[13] Shorn of plot (as in *Eat* or *Sleep*), emptied of human presence (as in *Empire*, an eight-hour film recording the Empire State Building while sunset becomes night), his films presented cinema as a medium "for experiencing time, rather than movement or event."[14] Along with presupposition 1, this "purist" schema shaped "ontological" conceptions of the modernist work.

3. *The modernist work retains overt traces of the process of its making.* This idea can be traced back to Duchamp and Cage, but the most proximate source in the American art world is the criticism arising around postwar "action painting" and Abstract Expressionism. The main concern of this art, according to one critic, was "the registration of the act of creation as a unique and dramatic event. . . . All the exhibited marks of freedom, in handling and execution, were left in visible evidence in the finished work to document the artist's dilemmas of choice and decision: whipped lines, torn shapes, emendations and erasures, and smeared color."[15] In Warhol's films, the critic could point to the inclusion of light-struck footage and flash frames, the awkwardness of performers reading their lines for the first time, and the impromptu, almost willful zoom-ins and -outs—all choices recorded ineluctably in the time-bound medium of cinema.

4. *In the modernist artwork, formal properties or specific aspects of the medium become the focus of the perceiver's experience.* For critics of the time, this commonplace was most powerfully articulated in Clement Greenberg's 1961 essay "Modernist Painting," in which he claims that unique properties of the medium become "positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly."[16] Thus modernist painting stresses the two-dimensionality of the surface, flaunting three-dimensional effects as purely optical phenomena. The perceiver becomes aware of the work in all its specificity, a process which was often seen to entail an "anti-illusionist" attitude. It was not difficult to apply this schema to such Warhol films as *Empire*, which could be said to display cinema's essential ability to record time or to present shifting gradations of black and white.[17] The film portraits, in their contrasty photography, could be said to "demand a consideration of the flat negative-positive values of the surface."[18] Even Warhol's scripted psychodramas include the reel ends and light-struck footage, while the performances and camera handling can be seen, in one of the most used phrases of the period, as making you aware you're watching a film. In this version of reflexivity lies one epistemological tenet of the modernist work.

13. Lee Heflin, "Notes on Seeing the Films of Andy Warhol," *Afterimage* 2 (Autumn 1970), p. 31.

14. Battcock, "Four Films," p. 223.

15. Sam Hunter, "New Directions in American Painting," in *The New Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 60.

16. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Arts Yearbook* 4 (1961), p. 101.

17. See Battcock, "Four Films," pp. 234–37.

18. Ibid., p. 238.

5. *The modernist work criticizes dominant theories and practices of art-making.* This presupposition gives avant-garde film criticism a historical, contextualizing dimension which auteur studies lacked. Again, Greenberg articulated the issue most forcefully: Since Kant, the essence of modernism has been "the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself."[19] Here is reflexivity in another sense. Now a painting is not only "about" paint, color, line, and flat surfaces; it is, more negatively, "about" other paintings, styles, and traditions. Thus Warhol's "static" films could be seen as denouncing narrative cinema; his sexual spectacles as unmasking Hollywood's hypocritical concupiscence; his "superstars" as parodying the star system. *Lonesome Cowboys* becomes an "anti-Western,"[20] while *Kitchen* undermines the representation of space in Renaissance art.[21]

6. *The modernist work encourages aesthetic distance.* Kant's concept of aesthetic contemplation was transformed by the Symbolists into a dispassionate conception of art which, in the twentieth century, had diverse offshoots, from the transcendent visions of Kandinsky to the parodic detachment of Joyce and Stravinsky. Likewise, Viktor Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* ("making-strange") and Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* ("estrangement-effect") stressed the alienating, nonempathic qualities of art. Greenberg implies something comparable when he claims that in modernist painting one cannot really imagine entering the depicted space.[22] The use of this concept constitutes an important break with the poetic-mythic tradition of avant-garde film criticism, since critics like Sitney had stressed the viewer's intense emotional involvement with, say, Brakhage's work.[23] Now there was Warhol's cool reticence. The fact that his silent films were slowed in projection could be said to create an annoying flicker and an uninvolving sense of time, while the refusal of his camera to enter the action could bespeak an alienated voyeurism; indifference entails distance. Here is a second sort of "anti-illusionism": a refusal to be "taken in" by the spectacle.

Framed within these presuppositions, avant-garde films were newly "readable"—and writable. Anti-illusionism and reflexivity became commonplaces of film interpretation, while Greenbergian conceptions of flatness, framing, and the act of looking set a fresh critical agenda. The force of the change is evident from Sitney's controversial 1969 discussion "Structural Film," an essay which differs significantly from his prior work. Gone are the appeals to narrative, poetic, and mythic form. A structural film, Sitney explains, is essentially about the potential of cinema. Brakhage's *Song 27* "reaffirms the space of the film

19. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," p. 101.
20. Peter Gidal, *Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), pp. 126–34.
21. Battcock, "Four Films," pp. 240–42.
22. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," p. 104.
23. See Sitney, "Imagism," p. 199.

frame."[24] George Landow is devoted to "the flat screen cinema, the moving-grain painting."[25] Owen Land's *The Film That Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter*, in its tension of surface and depth, yields "a metaphor for the relation of film itself (a two-dimensional field of illusion) and actuality."[26] Sitney's essay is typical of the period in showing how the critic could combine several modernist assumptions in order to construct implicit meaning. Now a critic could argue that Bruce Conner's attack on illusionism (the "art-is-critical" concept) depends upon using flicker to treat the screen as a physical thing (the "purism" concept) and results in a refusal to get the spectator absorbed (the "aesthetic distance" concept).[27]

It fell to another critic to propose a seventh schema that, while related to these, manifested a unique authority. In June 1971, Annette Michelson published in *Artforum* one of the most powerful exemplars within the explicatory tradition, an essay called simply "Toward Snow." Michelson rests her argument on many traditional grounds. She portrays Michael Snow's films and fine-arts work as revealing an overall unity and a logical development. She quotes his description of *Wavelength* in order to demonstrate his awareness of his goals and methods. She describes his project in Greenbergian terms: Snow transforms depth into flatness, figuration into abstraction, "illusion" into "fact." The halting zoom in *Wavelength* can be seen as criticizing at least two traditions: that of the Hollywood narrative and that of the American avant-garde's disjunctions and hypnagogic vision. Snow's films also embody the viewer's awareness of the medium; echoing many writers on Warhol, Michelson claims that *One Second in Montreal* forces upon the viewer "the consciousness of time as duration."[28] This in turn promotes a kind of reflexive aesthetic distance in which we become aware of our own awareness. But Michelson goes beyond such commonplaces to propose a new interpretive tactic for avant-garde film, the creation of an epistemological thematics.

Critical writing on the avant-garde had long invoked categories of perceptual activity. To *Film Culture*, Warhol's work had seemed to cleanse vision: "We have cut our hair, we have eaten, but we have never really seen those actions."[29] With the rise of modernist interpretive schemata, a film became characterized as at once a perceptual object (for example, involving a play of flatness and depth or stasis and movement) and a cognitive enterprise. If the modernist work was self-conscious and critical, it was not anomalous to describe a film as conducting an inquiry or taking a step in a larger research program. Thus *Empire* could be an "investigation of the presence and character of film," and *Kitchen* could make the star system "the subject of scruti-

24. P. Adams Sitney, "Structural Film," in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, p. 338.

25. Ibid., p. 339.

26. Ibid., p. 341.

27. Beltz, "Three Films," p. 57.

28. Annette Michelson, "Toward Snow," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), p. 177.

29. "Sixth Independent Film Award," *Film Culture* 33 (Summer 1964), p. l.

ny."[30] As early as 1966, Michelson had raised the issue of cinema's epistemological resources, and in a 1969 essay she suggested that *2001* offers a "discourse on knowledge through perception as action, and ultimately, on the nature of the medium as 'action film,' as mode and model of cognition."[31] This concept became her major methodological contribution to avant-garde film interpretation. "Toward Snow" opens with the definitive statement of it:

> There is a metaphor recurrent in contemporary discourse on the nature of consciousness: that of cinema. And there are cinematic works which present themselves as analogues of consciousness in its constitutive and reflexive modes, as though inquiry into the nature and processes of experience had found in this century's art form a striking, a uniquely direct presentational mode. The illusionism of the new, temporal art reflects and occasions reflection upon the conditions of knowledge; it facilitates a critical focus upon the immediacy of experience in the flow of time.[32]

Michelson goes on to interpret *Wavelength* as being centrally about human perception and cognition. The film's shape parallels the psychological process of expectation; the trip across the room is a metaphor for the "horizon of expectation" subtending every subjective process.[33] The structure is a "grand metaphor" for narrative: "Its 'plot' is the tracing of spatiotemporal *données*, its 'action' the movement of the camera as the movement of consciousness."[34] If Brakhage represents closed-eye vision and Warhol offers a stare, Snow opens our eyes to the role of intentionality and temporality in experience. By finding that the unique features of the medium are not simply self-referential, Michelson makes the work reflexive in a new, "phenomenological" sense. She produces a seventh presupposition: *The modernist artwork takes as its theme some aspect of human perception or cognition.*

The move proved fruitful. This assumption could interlock with other modernist tenets, as Michelson's essay shows. It could move the critic away from Greenberg's more object-centered notion of the work toward a conception of the beholder's participation in a developing transaction. Above all, it allowed the critic to explicate a film as thematizing some aspect of human cognition. Over the next decade, Michelson and others filled in different patches of the phenomenological canvas. *Zorns Lemma*, according to Wanda Bershen, traces a development of knowledge from linguistic symbols to visual perception.[35] Ken

30. Battcock, "Four Films," pp. 237, 244.

31. Annette Michelson, "Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge," *Artforum,* February 1969, p. 57.

32. Michelson, "Toward Snow," p. 172.

33. Ibid., p. 174.

34. Ibid., p. 175.

35. Wanda Bershen, "*Zorns Lemma*," *Artforum*, September 1971, pp. 43–45.

Jacobs's *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* was seen to be "didactic" in its demonstration of the role of memory in all film viewing.[36] Brakhage's *Scenes from under Childhood* could be interpreted as capturing a child's visual perception.[37] Now Warhol could be discussed as presenting a drama of self-conscious attention and apprehension.[38] The schema was extended to Soviet modernism by showing that Eisenstein's and Vertov's styles incarnate dialectical modes of thought.[39] Sitney offered a romanticist version of this schema in his monumental *Visionary Film*, which plotted how various dimensions of subjective experience—dream, ritual, imagination, memory, vision—are manifested and examined in the works of the American avant-garde.[40] A major by-product of all this activity was writing of considerable precision; the phenomenological premise generated critical descriptions at least as minute as those seen in the best *Movie* essays.

Just as important as Michelson's insight was her institutional situation. Teaching film at New York University put her in contact with an avant-garde film community, the Manhattan art world, major publishers, and eager students. The phenomenological thematics of avant-garde film played an important role in a stream of publications: an avant-garde-film number of *Artforum* (September 1971), an Eisenstein/Brakhage issue of the same journal (January 1973), Stephen Koch's book on Warhol (1973), Sitney's *Visionary Film* (1974), Michelson's exhibit program *New Forms in Film* (1974), Sitney's collection *The Essential Cinema* (1975), the American Federation of the Arts volume *A History of the American Avant-Garde Film* (1976), the first issue of *Millennium Film Journal* (founded in 1977), Sitney's anthology *The Avant-Garde Film* (1978), and an updated edition of *Visionary Film* (1979). Many contributors to these publications were, in one way or another, affiliated with NYU.

Michelson's impact was comparable to that of Sarris and *Movie*: She showed that a serious explicatory criticism could be attractive to an intellectual public. Her contribution came as film studies was entrenching itself in the academy. Thus her philosophically informed essays helped make the study of avant-garde film part of modern art criticism and history.[41] Although experimental film was

36. Lois Mendelson and Bill Simon, "*Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*," *Artforum*, September 1971, p. 53.

37. Phoebe Cohen, "*Scenes from under Childhood*," *Artforum*, January 1973, p. 51.

38. Stephen Koch, "*The Chelsea Girls*," *Artforum*, September 1971, p. 85.

39. Rosalind Krauss, "Montage *October*: Dialectic of the Shot," *Artforum*, January 1973, pp. 61, 64; Annette Michelson, "From Magician to Epistemologist: Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*," in *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 95–111.

40. For a brief survey, see P. Adams Sitney, "The Idea of Morphology," *Film Culture* 53/54/55 (Spring 1972), pp. 1–24.

41. Mention should also be made of Standish Lawder, whose close analysis and painstaking historical research also attracted art historians to the study of avant-garde film. See his "Structuralism and Movement in Experimental Film and Modern Art, 1896–1925" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1967), and *The Cubist Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

never absorbed into the fine-arts market,[42] avant-garde-film criticism could be assimilated into the academic institution. As the 1970s writings entered the critical canon, and as NYU graduates moved into positions of college teaching and arts administration, the work of Sitney, Michelson, and others became established as the most sophisticated explications of experimental cinema.

Disputes still rage about the degree of influence of the American avant-garde upon British filmmaking, but there was in any event a considerable lag in the critical study of British avant-garde cinema. The London Film-Makers Co-op was founded in 1966, four years after its New York counterpart, and British journals devoted to experimental film tended to be even more marginal and sporadic than *Film Culture*.[43] Not until the early 1970s did well-financed arts organizations begin to support experimental cinema. The British Arts Council and the British Film Institute started to subsidize film projects and programs. In 1970, the National Film Theatre (NFT) held its first International Underground Film Festival, and followed with a 1972 program on English independent cinema and a 1973 program of films from the Co-op. In 1972, *Studio International*, the British counterpart of *Artforum*, began coverage of independent cinema, and in the same year *Art and Artists* published a special number on experimental film. It was 1975 by the time a major museum, the Tate Gallery, initiated its own program of experimental British films.[44] In 1976, the NFT presented an eighteen-program season devoted solely to "Structural/Materialist" cinema. Such exhibitions generated a considerable amount of critical writing: a special number of *Studio International* (1975), the BFI *Structural Film Anthology* (1976), Malcolm Le Grice's *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977), the British Arts Council catalog *A Perspective on the English Avant-Garde Film* (1978), and the Arts Council Hayward Gallery catalog for the *Film as Film* retrospective (1979).

In the English critical discourse, American writing often served as a target.[45] Sitney's Romanticism was often attacked as outmoded (a "theology of art," Peter Sainsbury called it).[46] Peter Gidal upbraided Michelson for her claim that Warhol's cinema was predicated upon a "stare."[47] Political critiques

42. For a discussion, see Paul Arthur, "The Last of the Last Machine? Avant-Garde Film Since 1966," *Millennium Film Journal* 16/17/18 (Fall–Winter 1986–1987), pp. 74, 78–79.

43. *Cinim*, founded in 1966, folded in 1969; *Cinemantics*, *Independent Cinema*, and *Cinema Rising* each lasted only a year. Over the long term, *Afterimage*, founded in 1970, has survived, but with an erratic publication schedule.

44. See David Curtis, "English Avant-Garde Film: An Early Chronology," in *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film*, ed. David Curtis and Deke Dusinberre (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), pp. 9–18, and Steve Dwoskin, *Film Is: The International Free Cinema* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1975), pp. 61–71.

45. For a detailed discussion of the debates on experimental cinema, see David Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

46. Peter Sainsbury, "Editorial 2," *Afterimage* 2 (Autumn 1970), p. 4.

47. "Foreword in Three Letters," *Artforum*, September l97l, p. 9.

appeared as well: Sainsbury suggested that the American avant-garde's attention to perception and structure kept it locked within asocial aesthetic categories.[48] Yet English critical writing owed a considerable debt to American film analyses and articulations of modernist theory. Despite complaints about Sitney's essay "Structuralist Film," Gidal's "structuralist/materialist" genre owes more than its name to Sitney, and is considerably influenced by Greenberg. Throughout the British writing of the period one finds nearly all the modernist schemata in place. In 1972, one critic could praise *Zorns Lemma* for its calculated integration of chance, while another could find that David Larcher's *Mare's Tail* reveals basic elements of film grain, frame, strip, projector, and light.[49] Le Grice congratulates Warhol for presenting the processes that compose the work, and he celebrates the capacity of "systemic" film to make the physical properties of the materials counteract the illusionistic image.[50] Writing about Kurt Kren, Le Grice composes a straightforward art-historical essay consisting of biographical information, apt quotations from the artist, mentions of Kren's affiliations with other artists, a list of recurrent thematic concerns, and a discussion of changes in form and style across his career.[51] Deke Dusinberre remains within a Greenbergian frame of reference when he claims that emphasizing the process of projection challenges illusionism by displaying the literal three dimensions of the viewing space.[52] Even in their most severe political assaults, the English avant-garde critics tacitly accept many of the cognitive assumptions of NYU criticism, as when Sainsbury asserts that the new political cinema of Frampton and Godard "does not seek to portray, reflect, interpret, symbolise, or allegorise—but to enquire. The new cinema is an epistemological one."[53]

The disputes between the English and their New York peers thus came to typify certain family quarrels within modernism itself. In rejecting Michelson's phenomenological thematics, English critics tried a deflationary tactic: turn an implicit meaning into a referential one. Thus, *Central Region*, according to Gidal, "is not a metaphor for consciousness. It is a form of such."[54] The film does not imply; it refers, though only to itself. This move is part of a suspicion of repre-

48. Sainsbury, "Editorial 2," p. 7.

49. Sainsbury, "Editorial," *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972), p. 5; Simon Field, "The Light of the Eye," *Art and Artists*, December 1972, p. 36.

50. Malcolm Le Grice, "Real Time/Space," *Art and Artists*, December 1972, p. 39; Le Grice, "Thoughts on Recent 'Underground' Films," *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972), pp. 80–82.

51. Malcolm Le Grice, "Kurt Kren," *Studio International*, November–December 1975, pp. 184–88.

52. Deke Dusinberre, "On Expanding Cinema," *Studio International*, November–December 1975, p. 224.

53. Sainsbury, "Editorial" (1972), p. 3.

54. Peter Gidal, "Notes on *La Région centrale*," in *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. Peter Gidal (London: British Film Institute, 1976), p. 52.

sentation in general. Le Grice in effect returns to a Greenbergian purism in demanding that the image never become overwhelmed by illusionism, and he can denounce even *Wavelength* because the manipulation of the time of the profilmic event is never explicitly stated in the film.[55] Gidal remarks that a purist return to materials is always at risk—"'Empty screen' is no less significatory than 'happy carefree smile'"[56]—unless it constitutes presentation, not representation.

The return to referential and explicit meaning—what Dusinberre calls "structural asceticism"[57]—did not stop avant-garde critics from interpreting films. We have already seen that Le Grice could ascribe meaning to Kren's proto-structuralist work. Gidal is no less orthodox in suggesting that art is full of "images of silence" (rocking chairs, blindness) or in proposing that Snow's <——> (known as *Back and Forth*) shows people making metaphor in order *itself* to make a metaphor for the inadequacy of language.[58] Gidal also finds his own preoccupation with the tyranny of ordinary cinema thematized in *Zorns Lemma*'s use of the Bay State Primer.[59] The humanist themes of auteur and art-cinema explication and the epistemological themes of Michelson's work are supplanted by art-world themes derived from avant-garde criticism itself. A film can become a demonstration of a precept already formulated by Greenberg or Beckett. No matter how "literally" ascetic structuralism sought to present the processes and materials of cinema ("In this film, grain destroys illusion"), the critic could turn them into themes ("This film is *about* grain's role in destroying illusion").

The English avant-garde's appeal to politics can also be seen as a return to a contested issue within modernism generally. Gidal, as usual, is most blunt: "The attempt at clarification of material objectivity, the *process* of awareness (of consciousness of actuality), the *attempt* to deal with the given in a dialectic manner rather than a model-oriented one, belies the tradition of romanticism to the core. If anything, a Marxist aesthetic lies behind these films, whether the filmmakers know it or not."[60] Mike Dunford links film-as-film cinema to the creation of a new consciousness: "Breaking down the illusion of transparent naturalism is an important first step, extending the critique of bourgeois imagery and the creation of a truly antagonistic film practice, a film practice that helps the people to

55. Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), p. 120.

56. Peter Gidal, "Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film," in Gidal, *Structural Film Anthology*, pp. 2–3.

57. Deke Dusinberre, "St. George in the Forest: The English Avant-Garde," *Afterimage* 6 (Summer 1976), p. 6.

58. Peter Gidal, "Beckett & Others & Art: A System," *Studio International*, November 1974, pp. 186–87; Peter Gidal, "*Back and Forth*," in Gidal, *Structural Film Anthology*, p. 47.

59. Peter Gidal, "Notes on *Zorns Lemma*," in Gidal, *Structural Film Anthology*, p. 73.

60. Gidal, "Film as Film," in Curtis and Dusinberre, *Perspectives on English Avant-Garde Film*, p. 23.

perceive their situation and to destroy the ideological chains that bind them."[61] The Marxist recasting of formal film might seem to take a long step beyond conventional modernism, but in fact the language of revolution (materiality, critique, subversion, radicality) was part of modernist discourse. Greenberg had stressed the critical function of contemporary painting, and Michelson herself had linked experimental film to radical political aspirations. In any event, such assertions as Gidal's and Dunford's did not become the basis of critical interpretation until the late 1970s, when the notion of the "contradictory text" provided a way to link signification to Freudian/Lacanian conceptions of the "split" human subject. The avant-garde's promise of political efficacy was underwritten by a theoretical discourse that saw experimental film as acknowledging contradictions (in the text, in the unconscious) which mainstream cinema repressed.

61. Mike Dunford, "Experimental/Avant-Garde/Revolutionary/Film Practice," *Afterimage* 6 (Summer 1976), p. 109.

The Kinetic Icon in the Work of Mourning*

ANNETTE MICHELSON

Opening the volume of Panofsky's lectures on funerary art, published in 1964 as *Tomb Sculpture*, I find the following introductory passage:

> An art historian can approach the subject of these lectures only with the greatest trepidation. Trespassing upon the preserve of many adjacent disciplines (classical and oriental archeology, Egyptology, the history of religion and superstition, philosophy and several others), he has to rely largely on secondary sources and often finds himself confronted with a diversity of opinions, at times about crucial points which he, as a rank outsider, cannot presume to evaluate. . . . To make things worse there is hardly any sphere of human experience where rationally incompatible beliefs so easily coexist and where pre-logical, one might also say metalogical, feelings so stubbornly survive in periods of advanced civilization as in our attitude towards the dead.[1]

As I prepare to offer a reading of *Three Songs of Lenin*, that monument of cinematic hagiography, I must adopt this apologetic stance as my own—and with, perhaps, a stronger sense of trepidation; for cinema studies, as a discipline, depends upon an even wider spectrum of established fields of inquiry (these include art history, linguistics, and psychoanalysis). And the prelogical irrationality of incompatible beliefs with respect to death is compounded by the contradictions of the fetishism inscribed within the cinematic institution.

I do now begin, however—and with a double epigraph: the first one from the text of the anti-iconoclastic doctrine promulgated by the Orthodox Council of 787: "An icon of Christ represents Him in His human nature; those who reject such icons reduce the mystery of the Incarnation to a phantom."

The second text, which has considerably greater currency within film studies, I draw from Barthes's *Camera Lucida*: "The life of someone whose existence has somewhat preceded our own encloses within its particularity the very tension of History, its division. History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it,

* First published in *October* 52 (Spring 1990), pp. 16–39.

1. Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture* (New York: Abrams, 1964), p. 9.

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only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it."[2]

Among Dziga Vertov's films, *Three Songs of Lenin* enjoys a privileged status; it is, indeed, the only film of Vertov's to which immediate, unanimous, and enduring approval was extended within the Soviet Union. Its wide distribution and prompt incorporation into the canon of officially endorsed films generated the publication, in 1962, of N. P. Abramov's slender, illustrated monograph by the press of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. It is the fact rather than the text of this publication that commands our interest, confirming our sense that the history of this film's reception is unique.

Responding in 1934 to its cordial reception, Vertov himself was, however, at pains to stress the continuity of this work with his previous production, a production contested in the Soviet Union, as we know, throughout the preceding decade. Thus he notes that "creating kinopravda about Lenin—even within the confines of a theme strictly limited by the assignment—required making use of all previous experience of kino-eye filmings, all acquired knowledge; it meant the registration and careful study of all our previous work on this theme."[3] He then proclaims that "the elimination of falsity, the achievement of that sincerity and clarity noted by critics in *Three Songs of Lenin* [and we note the prior left-handed salute of approbation inscribed in this acknowledgment] required exceptionally complex editing. In this respect the experience of *The Man with a Movie Camera, One-Sixth of the World*, of *Enthusiasm* and *The Eleventh Year* were of great help to our production group. These were, so to speak, 'films that beget films.'"[4]

The entire production of the group of Kinoki organized and administered by Vertov, as chairman of their executive Council of Three between 1924 and the moment which now engages us, was commissioned by specific agencies for specific ends. Thus, *Forward, Soviet!* (1925) had been ordered by the Moscow Soviet as a demonstration of the progress made during the immediately postrevolutionary construction of the new administrative capital of the socialist state; *One Sixth of the World* (1926) was commissioned by the Gostorg, the Bureau of Foreign Trade; *The Eleventh Year* (1928) was a tenth-anniversary celebration of advances in hydroelectric power; and *Enthusiasm* (1930), Vertov's first sound film and still, to this day, the most advanced in its use of concrete sound, celebrated the Stakhanovist acceleration of mining and agriculture in the Don basin. *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) stands alone as Vertov's wholly autonomous meta-cinematic celebration of filmmaking as a mode of production and, as I have elsewhere claimed, a mode of epistemological inquiry.[5] Of *Three Songs of*

2. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 65.

3. Dziga Vertov, "I Wish to Share My Experience" (1934), in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 120.

4. Ibid., p. 122.

5. See Annette Michelson, "'The Man with a Movie Camera': From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum*, February 1971, pp. 60–72.

Lenin, commissioned for the tenth anniversary of Lenin's death (and it was, of course, one of several such commissions), I shall offer a reading directed toward the location of its precise signification, its political function within the historical situation of the USSR in the 1930s. That effort of location will engage a number of considerations, psychoanalytically grounded, across a variety of artistic and discursive practices. I shall, of course, be bracketing the extensive descriptive task entailed in this reading. I shall want, however, to attend to some of the particulars of Vertov's own account of its production:

> Undiscovered and unpublished shots of the living Lenin had to be found. This was done with the greatest patience and persistence by my assistant, Comrade Svilova [Vertov's editor and fellow member, together with Boris Kaufman, of the Council of Three], who reported ten new film clippings of the living Lenin for the tenth anniversary of his death. For this purpose, Comrade Svilova studied over six hundred kilometers of positive and negative footage located in various cities of the Soviet Union.
>
> A search for documents on the Civil War had to be made, since our film, *History of the Civil War*, turned out to have been split up and sorted out under different titles in warehouses, and it was impossible to locate it whole anywhere.
>
> We had to transfer Lenin's actual voice [in the one extant recording] onto film. Shtro, the sound engineer [the author of the remarkable sound score of *Enthusiasm*], succeeded in doing this after a whole series of experiments.
>
> A great deal of work was involved in searching out and recording Turkish, Turkmen, and Uzbek folk songs about Lenin. Along with synchronous sound shooting, it was necessary to shoot a whole series of silent sequences in various parts of the Soviet Union, starting with the Kara-Kum desert and ending with the arrival of the Cheliuskin crew in Moscow.[6]
>
> And all of that was done only as work preliminary to the editing, to gather the essential footage.
>
> The footage then was subjected to laboratory processing in order to improve the quality of the image and sound.[7]

6. The name of a celebrated Arctic expeditionary group whose long-delayed return was an occasion for general public rejoicing.

7. Vertov, "I Wish to Share My Experience," pp. 102–21.

Here, then, is a film which, in its combination of archival material and freshly filmed footage—the latter both silent and in synchronous sound—straddles the boundary between sound and silence. Its discourse is propelled by copious intertitling as well as by music and speech. Vertov tells us, in a text entitled "Without Words,"

> More than ten thousand words of song, texts, remarks, monologues, speeches by Lenin and others were recorded on tape. After editing and the final trimming, about thirteen hundred words (1,070 in Russian and the rest in other languages) went into the film. Nevertheless, H. G. Wells declared: "Had not a single word been translated for me I should have understood the entire film from the first shot to the last. The thoughts and nuances of the film all reach me and act upon me without the help of words."[8]

Vertov makes, as we have seen, extensive use of archival material documenting Lenin's political trajectory and his funeral. This material had been shot in the immediate postrevolutionary period, between 1919 and 1924, by the working group Kinoki, headed by Vertov, Kaufman, and Svilova. The film's governing trope establishes a tripartite structure, animated by the folk tradition of the female mourner, as three songs by the women of the eastern (Muslim) and Ukrainian republics in tribute to their dead liberator, the leader and initiator of an internationally supported revolution within one country.

Three elements remain to be mentioned. The central panel of this triptych, with its funeral of Lenin, shot by Vertov and his co-workers in 1924, offers us a group portrait (composed according to the prevailing canon of 1934) of the revolutionary generation: Lunacharsky, Dzerzhinsky, Kalinin, Krupskaya, Clara Zetkin, and, of course, Stalin. And it is in this section that a series of elaborate variations of that existent material are produced through the deployment of optical devices specific to cinema: loop printing, superimposition, freeze-frame, stretch printing, slowed motion.

Vertov is the master of these processes, and he had formulated in a number of now celebrated texts the origins of his cinematic work within and through them.

> I remember my debut in cinema. It was quite odd. It involved not my filming but my jumping one-and-a-half stories from a summer house beside a grotto of no. 7, Malyi Gnezdnikovsky Lane.
>
> The cameraman was ordered to record my jump in such a way that my entire fall, my facial expression, all my thoughts, etc., would be seen. I went up to the grotto's edge, jumped off, gestured as with a veil, and went on.[9]

8. Dziga Vertov, "Without Words," in *Kino-Eye*, p. 117.

9. Dziga Vertov, "Three Songs of Lenin and Kino-Eye," in *Kino-Eye,* p. 123.

He then describes the results. What Vertov saw in that recording was fear, indecision in approach, growing resolution, the jump undertaken in apprehension, the sense of being off-balance, the minute adjustments of the body to renewed contact, the shock of impact upon hitting the ground, and a slight sense of chagrin. He saw, then, what he termed kinopravda, truth revealed by the camera eye and inaccessible hitherto. Film thus appeared to him as the radically new and crucial instrument of inquiry and analysis. In this he was not alone. There is, among his contemporaries in the period following the World War (these include Elie Faure, Sergei Eisenstein, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Epstein), a generally shared epistemological euphoria which animates the film theory and practice of that era. I cite, as one example, Epstein's view: "Take a man accused of a crime, film him in slow motion, and you will see the truth revealed upon his face."

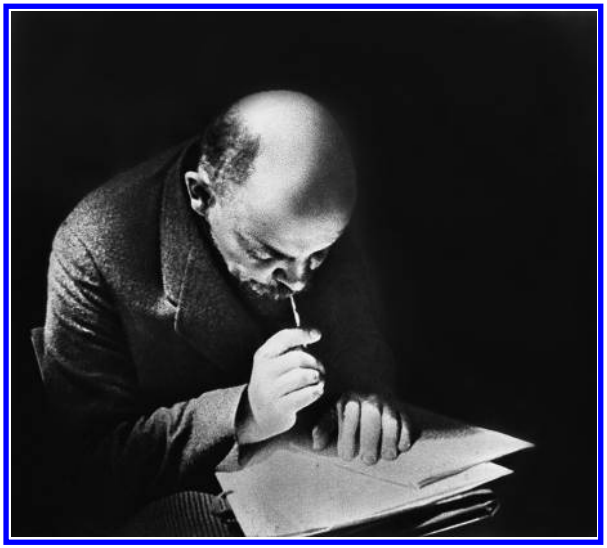
But Epstein's concern lay deeper; he claimed that little or no attention had been paid to the many unique qualities film can give to the representation of things. Hardly anyone had realized that "the cinematic image carries a warning of something monstrous, that it bears a subtle venom which could corrupt the entire rational order so painstakingly imagined in the destiny of the universe."

And the subversion of that rational order is seen as containing the development of science itself.

> Discovery always means learning that objects are not as we had believed them to be; to know more, one must first abandon the most evident certainties of established knowledge. Although not certain, it is not inconceivable that what appears to us as a strange perversity, a surprising nonconformity, as a transgression and a defect to the screen's animated images might serve to advance another step into that terrible underside of things, terrifying even to Pasteur's pragmatism. . . . Now, the cinematograph seems to be a mysterious mechanism intended to assess the false accuracy of Zeno's argument about the arrow; it is intended for the analysis of the subtle metamorphosis of stasis into mobility, of empty into solid, of discontinuous into continuous, a transformation as stupefying as the generation of life from inanimate elements.[10]

It is Vertov's sense of the revelation of truth inscribed in his slow-motion leap across a void that determines his choice of what were called the anomalies of cinematic process, synthesized in that summa of cinematic techniques and achievements of the silent era, *The Man with a Movie Camera.* It is in this film that Vertov spelled out most explicitly the strategies mobilized in the celebratory analysis of cinematic representation that had animated his theory and practice of an entire decade. To them we must add one, whose significance and significant absence from *Three Songs of Lenin* we will want to note: that of the reversal of motion deployed by Vertov as a heuristic strategy in an unequaled manner beginning with his earliest feature (*Kino-Glaz,* 1925). The

10. Jean Epstein, *Écrits sur le cinéma* (Paris: Segheurs, 1973), pp. 257–63.

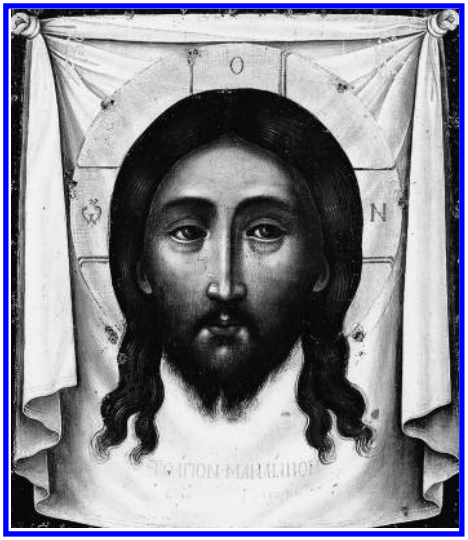


This page: Lenin at a session of the Third Congress of the Communist International in the Kremlin. June 28, 1921. Facing page, left: Simon Ushakov. Image of Christ Not Made by Human Hands. *Late 17th century. Facing page, right: Anonymous.* St. George and the Dragon. *Early 14th century.*

heady delights of the editing table (and the expanding distribution of the VCR, which has by now delivered them into the hands of a large section of our population) offer the sense of control through repetition, acceleration, deceleration, arrest in freeze-frame, release, and reversal of movement that is inseparable from the thrill of power. Roland Barthes remarked that history is divided in two, not by the invention of cinema but by that of the still photograph; one wants, rather, to say that history has been divided (and the world ended) many times, and that the advent of cinema represents one of those deep divisions: The euphoria one feels at the editing table is that of a sharpening cognitive focus and of a ludic sovereignty, grounded in that deep gratification of a fantasy of infantile omnipotence open to those who, since 1896, have played, as never before in the world's history, with the continuum of temporality and the logic of causality.

These anomalies Vertov now deployed in the construction of a cinematic monument, and at a pace which is that of the funeral rite in all its somber decorum, performed to the incantations of the female mourners and the music of nineteenth-century Romanticism: Chopin and Wagner. I shall want, then, to claim that, in its paean of praise to the "Living Liberator," in its insistent deployment of the images of the quotidian—Lenin correcting a manuscript, greeting a delegation of workers, accepting a bouquet from children, strolling and chatting in the Kremlin court (all these images have been catalogued, indexed, and republished, frame by frame, together with dates and provenance in a widely distributed volume published by the Marx-Lenin Institute)[11]—*Three Songs of Lenin* corresponds to the register and order of imagery, originating in the art of Byzantium, imported into Russia in the tenth centu-

11. Lenin, *Sobram'e fotografii i kinokadrov*, vol. 2, Kinokadryi (1918–1922) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1972).



ry, traditional in the celebration of saints and martyrs, of Savior and Paraclete. Their deployment, moreover, in a filmic triptych's central panel, flanked by the tributes of mourning survivors, the women of the socialist republics, amplifies this notion. I am, in fact, tempted further to claim that the register, order, scale, and function of *Three Songs of Lenin* make of it more than a kinetic icon; it is a veritable iconostasis.

Let us posit, to begin with, the simplest, incontestable view that the icon in the Eastern church is a representation of a sacred personage, and that the representation itself is regarded as participating in the sacred nature of its referent; the nature of that participation is still to be specified. The image, however, according to Methodius, patriarch of the Orthodox church, is honored though not adored; it is venerated, not worshipped—a nice distinction.[12] The icon, again in a provisional formation, derives not all that distantly from the Egyptian portraits of the dead, placed in mummy cases so as to be visible from within the mummy bands. The likeness, double, or *Ka* took the place in the grave of a mystic and vivifying image; it articulated the link between departed soul and deserted body preserved in the form of the mummy. (And we now have, in Nina Tumarkin's splendid—and hilarious—study of the establishment of the Lenin cult, the entire history of Lenin's mummification and its role in the formation of the cult.)[13]

At this point we might want to ask, "How does an icon differ from a portrait?"

12. "We maintain the Laws of the Church as observed by our Fathers, we make painted images, with our mouths and our hearts we venerate them . . . those of Christ and the Saints. The honor and veneration addressed to the image derives from the prototype: such is God's doctrine, which we follow, and with faith we cry unto Christi Blessed be the Lord" [author's trans], Methodius, Song 6, Canon of Matias, quoted in Egon Sendler, *L'icône: Image de l'invisible* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1981), p. 36.

13. Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

But we might first more properly ask, "How does it resemble a film?" and find part of the answer to the first question inscribed in the answer to the second.

Icons, like films, require special care in preservation, frequent restoration, and steady temperature. The Russian icon was generally designed for exhibition on a specific site, in a church or a home. The research and inquiry into the history of the icon is extremely recent, beginning only in the nineteenth century.

And although tradition has it that the finest icons are those attributable to a single hand (we recognize the shadow of a *theorie de l'auteur*), production developed toward a division of labor such that by the seventeenth century the celebrated Simon Ushakov specialized in the painting of faces. By this time, too, the narrative icon has developed out of the earlier, simpler episodes, and the portrait panel, as a more elaborate narrative form.

More interesting, and more telling perhaps, than all of this is one of the icon's salient features: the inclusion of that which is known variously as the *ozhivka* (from *ozhivat*, "to enlighten") or *dvizhka* (from *dvigat'*, "to move") or the *svetik* ("little gleam"); all of these refer to the glint in the pupil of the eye which confers light and, through light, movement, and, through both of these, the semblance of life or presence on the portrait within the icon. The formal qualities of icons involve, similarly, idealization of physical traits, solemnity, rhythmical repetition, the representation of the saint's or martyr's life in episodes, and the view of the saint in quotidian existence, together with friends, donors, children, worshippers, mourners, disciples. One wants, as well, to emphasize the role of textual support, of inscription, title, nomenclature. Thus, *Our Lady of the Burning Bush*, *The Virgin Hodegetria (She Who Shows the Way)*, *Our Lady the Cloud of Light: Lenin the Icebreaker*, *Lenin Bringer of Light* (in the process of electrification, which will complete and consummate the construction of socialism and which generates so many visual metaphors in Vertov's oeuvre).

One wants, finally, to stress the status of those icons, holiest of all and closest to the nature of the sacred relic: the acheiropoietic, which are in Russian termed *nerukotvornyi*. These are images not made by (human) hands, not painted, but allegedly created by contact with and emanation from a sacred personage—rather like those crafted by the Pencil of Nature and later, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, animated in movement by the brothers Lumière.[14] Upon the faith in a special status of the *nerukotvornyi* image in a paradigmatic instance, the shroud of Turin, André Bazin, as we know, constructed his cinematic ontology.

I am claiming that we may speak of the transformation of Christian themes of martyr and saint, of Savior and Paraclete, at the heart of a Leninist iconography constructed across the Soviet culture generally, but most immediately and forcefully articulated in Vertov's textual system. Of Lenin, as of Gregory the Great, it is declared that his "universal benefits are proclaimed everywhere and forever—caus-

14. For a discussion of the acheiropoietic image, I have relied in part upon Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," in *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies*, ed. W. Eugene Kleinbauer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

ing the dead man to live on earth." To Elizaveta Svilova, Vertov's assistant, fell the task of searching out, collecting, and preserving those fragments of film, those recordings of the living Lenin from all over the Soviet Union.

Vertov makes this quite clear in yet another text in which he pays tribute to the great patience and persistence of Svilova in the presentation of this work in which, as he says, "the image, 'Lenin is Springtime,' traverses the entire film and develops parallel to other themes."[15] Like Helena in search of the True Cross, Svilova is then lauded as she who has collected relics of the living Lenin.

In the Orthodox church the sanctuary (chancel), where the sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated, is divided from the rest of the interior (nave), where the congregation stands, by the iconostasis.[16] This consists of several tiers of icons usually forming a solid wooden screen. The iconostasis is pierced by three doors. When opened, the large center door (the Royal Door), penetrated only by priest and ruler, affords a view through to the altar. The doorway is closed by double gates, behind which hangs a curtain or veil.

The signification of each part of the Orthodox church is derived from its architectural location and its function in the course of the liturgy. The interplay between the immaterial and the sensory worlds is denoted by the sanctuary and the nave. At the same time, both these parts constitute an indivisible whole in which the immaterial serves as an example to the sensory, reminding man of his original transgression. For Saint Simeon of Thessalonika, the narthex corresponded to earth, the church to heaven, and the holy sanctuary to what is above heaven. Consequently, all the paintings in the church, especially those constituting the iconostasis, are arranged according to this symbolism.

The sanctuary screen was originally brought to Russia from Byzantium. At first, directly above the Royal Door was an icon of the Savior flanked by the Mother of God on the right side and Saint John the Baptist on the left side. These form the so-called Deesis. The Savior and the Mother of God are seen as mediators between heaven and earth and thus occupy a central position in the iconostasis. Similarly, the iconostasis is located on the boundary line between the human and the divine. It would then be—and indeed will be—the task of my more complete project to pursue an analysis of the kinetic iconostasis as boundary, of the homology proposed in relation to the architectural and pictorial models here invoked.

I will resist the temptation to pursue this homology here, however, in favor of another line of inquiry suggested by *Three Songs of Lenin*'s particularly complex convergence of the iconic and the indexical, an inquiry which I find somewhat more urgent at this point—more enticing, at any rate. Since it opens onto so large a cluster of problems, I cannot hope to do more than indicate some possibilities for further illumination of the film we are considering. I return, then, to my provi-

15. Dziga Vertov, "My Latest Experiment," in *Kino-Eye*, p. 137.

16. For the history of the iconostasis in the Russian Orthodox church, see Nathalie Labrecque-Pervouchine, *L'iconostase: Une évolution historique en Russie* (Montreal: Editions Bellarmin, 1982).

sional characterization of the icon as participating in some as yet unspecified manner in the sacred character of the personage depicted.

It is obvious that I have collapsed two senses of the iconic into the word—that which refers to the category of sign that portrays or illustrates its referent and that which we know as the highly developed genre of Byzantine and Russian painting. But this Lenin film, composed of shots made during the lifetime of the Living Liberator (and the word *zhiv* carries the meanings of "alive," "lively," "living," and "animate"), this work which proclaims his life beyond the grave, answers, at the very least, to some of the formal and thematic conventions of the *pictorial* tradition; its manner of portrayal and composition involves, as it were, a transvaluation of pictorial values into filmic ones; and surely, to cite but one example, in the long sequence of the body lying in state in the House of the Trade Unions prior to the funeral, we recognize a dormition (like that of the Virgin, whose sleep preceded her ascension).

The notion of the icon as in some way participating in the sacred presence of the figured personage is grounded in the doctrine of the Incarnation, as expressed in Paul's view: Christ is an image as well as an emanation of God. One would, then, have to say that He is the acheiropoietic or *nerukotovornyi* icon par excellence. The earliest example in recorded history of such an icon made by direct emanation is the legendary contemporary portrait of Christ supposed to have been painted for Abgar V, king of Osrhoene, found in Edessa, Mesopotamia, in 544 and taken in 944 to Constantinople. It was presumed to be a portrait made from the living model, because, unlike Veronica's veil, it had no crown of thorns. And the earliest image of the Virgin Hodegetria (She Who Shows the Way), presumably painted by St. Luke, had been blessed by the Virgin herself. These earliest of icons bear the mark of contiguity, of emanation; they are indexical.

If the history of Western church art tends, with a significant steadiness, in the direction of the illustrative function of the holy image, Gregory the Great (600) saw them as writing for the illiterate. It was the great debate within the Eastern church which produced a split within theology between the primacy of manifestation and that of representation. The iconoclasts, banning images, nevertheless decorated their architecture with enormous splendor; iconoclasm was directed at the mediation of the image as impeding access to the Real Presence. Western art develops toward a system of depictive representation, highly conventionalized, constructed; but the reality of the manifest presence of the divine is seen by the Eastern church as theoretically, spiritually prior to depiction. It is ten centuries later that the photograph once again reopens the question of the icon, of the image as both image and emanation, and it does so by offering once again the icon which is acheiropoietic, or *nerukotvornyi*, not made by hands, traced by that light of which Plotinus says that it gives life and color to all things. Modernist painting will, of course, produce a new iconoclasm through Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian, anthroposophists all. Alone among them, Malevich will grapple with the problem of cinematic representation in a debate with Eisenstein upon

Dziga Vertov. Three Songs of Lenin. *1934.*

which I have touched elsewhere.[17] The very title of Malevich's polemical text of 1925 is, of course, an expression of the contempt for what he saw as the revival of a regressive system of representation: "And Images Triumph on the Screen!"

What cannot be denied, however (and Malevich does not deny it; he merely eludes the problem), is that every still photograph is, as Barthes declared, "a certificate of presence," the ostensive declaration that "this has been." And if the photograph does exist in a realm located somewhere between the relic and the fetish object, it derives strength from its relation to its referent. Epstein had, with his extraordinary acuity, seen the epistemological interest of the place of the still photograph in film (the French word for photography being *instantané*); he had seen that the still photograph cuts into time, causing a kind of gap, bringing it to an instant of arrest, and that cinema, grounded in the persistence of vision, hypostasizes our inability to think that gap in time.

17. See Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital* (Part 2)," *October* 3 (Spring 1977), pp. 82–89.

If the still photograph is abstracted from referential time, it becomes, as Philippe Dubois has termed it in his extremely interesting study, *L'acte photographique*, a kind of "thanatography."[18] One can then say that it inserts, within our experience of lived time, the extratemporality of death. And it is this that gives to the freeze-frame and to other cinematic forms of temporal digression their particular effect of power. Within the flow of cinematic representation, that semblance of temporality itself, we can insert this arrest that figures the perpetual freezing of the image as a kind of posthumous life within the flow of the film. The image, thus released from that flow, and from that of the narrative syntagm, attains extratemporality. And if it has taken so long a time to produce an interesting theorization of the photographic, it may be that the West has been reluctant fully to confront its intimation of the thanatographic function, deferring it for a century and a half.

If we now recall *Three Songs of Lenin,* that elaborate iconic celebration of the life, works, death, ascension, and afterlife of the Living Liberator, as a work of mourning, we can easily locate the moment, the sequence which most crucially epitomizes the mourning function of the film; I will return to that sequence, but not before I have brought to bear upon this reading some more general considerations on the work—this work—of mourning.

For it is, I feel, truly necessary to pursue an investigation of the source of funerary ritual within which the role of the female mourner is inscribed. Clearly, within the ethnic communities represented in the Lenin film, the work of mourning is women's work. And Vertov draws upon the extremely rich tradition of the oral lament, which traverses the corpus of Russian literature and was, for his own generation, as extended in the lament for Lenin written and published by Mayakovsky.

The funeral ceremony and its articulation in accompanying laments derive from practices within the tribal order in which the sense of the dead—of the murdered father—is felt as a potentially powerful threat, such that it behooves the mourner to seek protection through magic. The theater of mourning and of commemorative ritual are generated by that magical action. Although they, like most aspects of social life, are, with the gradual effacement of the tribal order, transformed and undergo a process of privatization, they still retain aspects of their origins, of the rites and customs characteristic of tribal structure.[19] (We find, by the way, a clear and vivid representation of this in the ethnographic masterwork of Kalatazov and Tretyakov, *Salt for Svanetia* [1930], a film that incurred the regime's strong disapproval for its sumptuous representation of these vestiges surviving in the Caucasus during the period of the Five Year Plan.)

The elaborate funeral rites (laying out, washing, clothing the body, providing of food and drink and other presumed amenities) and their prescribed

18. Philippe Dubois, *L'acte photographique* (Paris: Nathan, 1983).

19. See Géza Róheim, *Social Anthropology* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1950), p. 358.

Lenin dead in Gorki. January 1924.

sequencing are to be seen as acts of propitiation, all informed, as Géza Róheim has pointed out, by a denial of genitality which is the price of the dead soul's accession to paradise or to immortality. Funeral and commemorative ceremonies thus anticipate the manner in which the survivors strive to honor and appease the dead, convinced of their invisible and conceivably punitive presence. (We must not forget that Lenin had been the victim of an aborted assassination attempt from which he emerged in seriously weakened condition.)

The chants, lamentations, songs, weeping, wailing, cries, and other expressions of grief were so directed. For funeral laments were integral to the Russian burial ceremony. Proficient criers, weepers, wailers, lamenters, and chanters were generally familiar with the rank or order of the company and its ceremony, for they were guided by well-established rules and traditions. As funerals were conducted with some strictness, a definite sequence of themes was observed, and members of the family were addressed or called upon in a definite order to participate in the lamentation. We know that in addition to the chants rendered by professional wailers, each in the name of a specific relation, chants were also performed by each of the kinswomen; these were traditionally a genre of women's poetry. It was a form of accomplishment

expected of women, and a comparatively easy one, since in the composition of the funeral chant a large role was played by traditional devices, appeals, and formulas, a store of which, we are told, "was inevitably lodged in the memory of everyone who lived in the even tenor of the patriarchal mode of life." We are dealing, then, with a highly coded form of literary expression.

The celebrated wailer Irina Andreyevna Fedosova, related to E. V. Barson, a collector of folklore, knew more than thirty thousand lines of wedding, funeral, and recruiting laments.[20] Maxim Gorky described Fedosova in "The Wailer," published in *The Odessa News*, when he encountered her at the Nizhny Novgorod fair in 1896. She was over ninety years old.

> But wails—the wails of a Russian woman, weeping over her bitter fate—constantly burst forth from the dry lips of the poetess; they burst forth and they awaken in the soul such poignant anguish, such pain, so close to the heart is every note of these motifs, truly Russian, sparing in their delineation, not distinguished by diversity of variations—no! But full of feeling, sincerity, power and of all that which is no more, which you do not find in the poetry of the art's practitioners and theoreticians, not in Figner and Merezhkovsky, nor Fofonov nor Mikhailov, nor any of those people who utter sounds with no content. Fedosova was imbued with the Russian lament; for about seventy years she lived by it, chanting the woe of life in the old Russian songs. . . . A Russian song is Russian history, and the illiterate old woman, Fedosova, whose memory contains thirty thousand verses, understands this far better than many very literate people.

Icon and funeral chant. Having now isolated two determinant components of this textual system, I pass to an account of its function within the given historical moment of its production, that of 1934 within the Soviet Union. It is the psychoanalytical theorization of the work of mourning that enables us to grasp its political signification. I turn, naturally, to the initiating text of Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," drafted in 1915 and completed in 1917. Its moment of production is, then, that of World War I, and it is worth noting the existence of another text of the same period, "Topics for the Times on War and Death" (1915). I shall want, however, to specify, in addition to the singular interest of the theorization of the work of mourning that followed in the ethnologically informed research of Géza Róheim, Melanie Klein's extension of Freud's analysis as a basis for the establishment of the depressive position.

Freud's central concern in his original text was the nature of neurotic melancholia. He therefore begins by proposing "to try to throw some light on the nature

20. See E. V. Barson, *Lamentations of the Northern Region*, vol. 1 (1872), vol. 2 (1882), vol. 3 (1886), Moscow. I am indebted, for knowledge of this source, to Sally Banes.

of melancholia by comparing it with the normal affect of mourning." Mourning is thus the background, the point of departure, for the analysis of melancholia.

> Although mourning involves grave departure from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition. . . . We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful. . . . Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world—in so far as it does not recall him—the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it, that this attitude does not seem to us pathological. . . .
>
> In what, now, does the work which mourning performs consist?
>
> . . . Reality testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition—it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and there is a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful-psychosis. Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried through bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect to it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.[21]

21. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957), pp. 243–58.

Kleinian theory instructs us that every object loss involves a sadistic triumph of a manic order, difficult to tolerate by the conscious subject.[22] It is the refusal or the negation of that triumph which blocks—either temporarily or definitively—the work of mourning. Guilt and remorse for aggressive fantasies explain the work of mourning. Any object loss, according to Klein, reopens the original subject of object loss, revivifying an archaic attitude or level of ego: the depressive position.

Let me now attach to a reading of these theorizing texts that of Vertov's intertitles, focusing upon those of the third and final song, chant, or lament:

72. T H I R D S O N G (hand-lettered)
73. "In Moscow . . ."
74. "Ah, in the great city of stone . . . "
75. "On the square stands a 'tent' . . . "
76. "The 'tent' where Lenin lies . . . "
77. "Go in your grief to that 'tent' . . .
78. "Look at Lenin . . . and . . . "
79. "Your sorrow will dissolve as in water . . . "
80. "Your sorrow will scatter like leaves . . . "
81. "Lenin can dissolve your grief . . . "
82. "Lenin can give you courage . . . "
83. Stalin, great pupil of the great Lenin, carries on the fight . . .
84. To build a Socialist land of mass-luxury . . .
85. Machinery is now the weapon . . .
86. DNIEPROSTROY
87. The world's largest hydro-electric dam . . .
88. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
89. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
90. "OUR OIL!"
91. "OUR COAL!"
92. "OUR METAL!"
93. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
94. "OUR MAGNITOGORSK . . .
95. "Our mighty Baltic-White Sea Canal . . . "
96. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
97. The "Chelyuskin" heroes have returned.
98. (revolving speech repeated)
99. Lenin, We go FORWARD!
100. THE END.

It is by the conjunction of theoretical text and intertitles that I want to signal

22. See Melanie Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" and "Criminal Tendencies in Normal Children," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1975), pp. 344–69 and 170–86.

Vertov. Three Songs of Lenin. *1934*.

the precise signifying function of this film, the process of historicization which transforms document into monument. The function of the monumental is not only to commemorate, but definitively to inter and block the return of the dead (the stone set over the grave to impede the corpse's resurrection). *Three Songs of Lenin,* that commissioned film warmly received within the Soviet Union, is designed both to mark and to terminate a process; it is designed to accomplish the work of mourning for the Lost Leader, elevating him to the sublime inane (the appearance of Lenin, frequently enhaloed in soft focus, and in superimposition, establishes him in a space of transcendental irrationality). Further, Vertov's deployment of the cinematic anomalies, of the optical panoply of slow motion, stretch printing, looping, freeze-frame, reverse motion, originally constituted as an arsenal in the assault upon the conditions and ideology of cinematic representation (in that progress from the magical to the epistemological function), are now deployed as an admittedly powerful instrument in the working through, in the obsessive rehearsal, of the past, in that labor of repetition, deceleration, distension, arrest, release, and fixation which characterizes the work of mourning; in the infinitely varied and deeply cathected image of the Founder and Liberator, the dead Father. And it is, moreover, in the film's instants of the freezing of the frame—that of Lenin and of the hurtling advance of the "train of history"—that we feel, within the cinematic figuration of this work, the release of Lenin into the frozen atemporality of the still photograph, which figures the acknowledgment of the loved object as dead, and therefore, as Christian Metz has put it, "one who can be loved as dead."[23]

This marking of the mourning period and its closure, this translation of Lenin into the sublime inane, defines, in fact, the space in which the Beckoning Substitute is now installed—enthroned—as Successor. It is as though Vertov, in fulfilling his assignment (an anniversary film), has seized upon the occasion for the national rehearsal of the work of mourning in the resolution, the transcending, of a depressive position, nationally conceived, for the recall, in narcissistic triumph, to the impending task, the present imperative: the construction, under the Party Leader and Secretary-General, of an industrial power and a military machine.

23. Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," *October* 34 (Fall 1985), p. 83.

Annette Michelson Remembered

Annette Michelson, cofounder of *October*, passed away on September 17, 2018, at age 95. To honor her singular legacy as a critic, teacher, translator, and editor, we asked some of those who worked with her or knew her well to pay tribute to her. We are grateful to the authors of these tributes for their generous contributions; to David Bordwell for allowing us to reprint an extract from his book *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Harvard University Press, 1989) about Annette's impact on film criticism; and to Yve-Alain Bois, for his article on Annette's early art criticism. We also thank Edward Dimendberg and the Getty Research Institute for permission to publish Edward's 2014 interview with Annette. We offer this issue as our own tribute to a colleague, mentor, and friend who is deeply missed.

—Rachel Churner and Malcolm Turvey for the Editors

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GIULIANA BRUNO

As an inventive female intellectual, Annette Michelson invented herself, with endless scholarly and artistic curiosity and a voracious passion for reading. A cultural *flâneuse*, she made imaginary voyages, perhaps even "space odysseys," à la Kubrick, traveling across film, art, dance, music, philosophy, and theory, and creating a culture of "creative geographies" in the style of her beloved Russian avant-garde. These intellectual odysseys were passed on not only through sophisticated writings but also translations and her superb work as an editor, which launched many writers into circulation. Encouraging a "radical aspiration" in both culture and humans and embracing a commitment to the public sphere, she wielded an influence that did not produce dogmatic schools of thought, in part because she transmitted her passion for the real journeys of "bodies in space," including her experience of living across cultures. Her sense of intellectual yet "carnal knowledge," her eloquence, wit, and gift for storytelling, were utterly seductive.[1]

As a mentor who became a lifelong friend, she inspired me with her expansive sense of "the life of the mind," with all its rigor, *jouissance*, and wandering pleasures. She transmitted to me her vision of moving images as both aesthetic matters and, in her words, toys "philosophical and scientific."[2] Annette engaged in theorizing film in wide-ranging, experimental ways, even incorporating the paleontology of André Leroi-Gourhan before media archaeology gained cultural currency. Yet she did not disdain certain forms of popular culture, especially the science-fiction film, a tool for unpacking the relation between science, fiction, and film. Ahead of her time because she followed her nose, not trends, she was able to creatively break disciplinary and artistic boundaries by eclectically melding the world of art with the universe of film.

Her Soho loft was a cultural salon, frequented by visitors from all corners of the world. Because she taught her seminars there, students mingled with a dazzling cosmopolitan world in this intimate setting. Over very good meals (she could cook!) and excellent wine, she introduced me to countless figures, including trailblazing women such as Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman, and Sally Potter. And although she did not write about all of them, I still remember Annette championing these and other "girls."[3] Annette wrote pioneering, influential texts about

1. The allusions and quotations in this paragraph refer to several of Michelson's texts. See her essay on Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), interestingly titled "Bodies in Space: Film as 'Carnal Knowledge,'" *Artforum*, February 1969, pp. 53–63; and "Film and the Radical Aspiration," *Film Culture* 42 (Fall 1966), pp. 34–42.

2. See Annette Michelson, "On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Facsimile and the Philosophical Toy," *October* 29 (Summer 1984), p. 3; reprinted in Michelson, *On the Eve of the Future: Selected Writings on Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), a collection of many of her landmark essays.

3. Annette did write groundbreaking essays about Rainer. See Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part One: The Dancer and the Dance," *Artforum*, January 1974, pp. 57–63; and Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part Two: *Lives of Performers*," *Artforum*, February 1974, pp. 30–35. In addition, her 1999 essay "Solving the Puzzle: Martha Rosler" is collected in *On the Eve of the Future*.

the great men of the Russian avant-garde, especially Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. And in landmark essays, she advocated for formidable male figures in experimental film, including Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow, and artists such as Andy Warhol, Robert Morris, Marcel Duchamp, and Joseph Cornell. However, when asked about women of the avant-garde in an interview I published in 1986, she cited an interest in Maya Deren but also frankly admitted to an "identification with male figures of intellectual power"—a generational limitation, as she explained it, a feeling of alienation from the postwar female model of wife and mother. Yet having "lived largely apart from the common experiences of domesticity," Annette admitted that she had become intrigued by the development "of a theory which takes a great deal of its energies and its discursive strategies from feminism."[4] She was able to sense the eve of a different, less male-identified future.

And so her interest in a girl with a pearl necklace made an appearance, in the elegant, adorned figure of the Waxen Venus. She, along with the android Hadaly, was the protagonist of Annette's "On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Facsimile and the Philosophical Toy," which lent its title to her recent book of collected essays. Hadaly was a character in Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's celebrated *L'Ève future*, the 1886 novel that foreshadows the working of the cinematic *dispositif*. She was the mechanical creation of a fictional Edison, inventor of both cinema and electricity, joined together in the electrifying history of modernity. Having been cloned in detail from the beautiful Miss Alicia and "informed with mind" as well as "spirit," this android rendering of the female body recalled to Annette the Venuses of Milo and Botticelli, fusing "the sculptural ideal of Greece with the pictorial paradigm of the Italian Renaissance." But, "searching for that moment marked by erotic art" and especially keen to understand the function that the erotic assumes in the "analytic view of the female body," she went further.[5] She paused to recall the sensory philosophy of Condillac and studied the School of Fontainebleau's double portrait of Gabrielle d'Estrées and the Duchess of Villars (c. 1594), naked in their bath, one touching the other's nipple. But not even this painterly journey was sufficient to fully grasp the mechanism of the representation, and so the Waxen Venus, the girl with a pearl necklace, enters the scene as the true progenitor of Hadaly. The latter sported an inner plastic mediator, a metallic envelope that, like flexible armor, contained her live internal system; let's say she was a "replicant" à la *Blade Runner*, a stratified "skin job." In this epidermic fashion, Annette claims, she recalled "the anatomical models with layered articulations of nervous, digestive, and circulatory systems," and especially "the technical prowess of Clemente Susini, which produced, in an era increasingly bent on the scrutiny of the female body, the Waxen Venus."[6]

This wax anatomical model, erotically accoutred with a pearl necklace, lay naked, open to investigative cutting. Dissected by an analytical eye, she became

4. Giuliana Bruno, "Women in Avant-Garde Film: An Interview with Annette Michelson," *Millennium Film Journal* 16/17/18 (Fall/Winter 1986–87), pp. 144, 142–43.

5. Michelson, "On the Eve of the Future," p. 8.

6. Ibid., p. 11.

identified as a proto-cinematic object, along with the electric automaton Hadaly. Pondering the female body, Annette recognized that it "comes into focus as the very site of cinema's invention," and thus, "in an effect of stereoscopic fusion," we may consider "the philosophical toy we know as cinema as marked in the very moment of its invention by the inscription of desire."[7] These words stayed with me and encouraged me to think further of the anatomy lesson, via Rembrandt's choral representation, as the theatrical scene that generates the public architecture of cinema: That amphitheater exposing the body to analytic view indeed *is* the film theater, with its own dissective display of "cuts."

Years later now, and only a few months after Annette's passing, as I think retrospectively of the bejeweled Waxen Venus lying sternly yet elegantly in her death pose, the enduring force of that adorned "analytical" female body takes on yet another meaning. I smile as I think of how Annette herself cultivated an erotic composure and liked to augment the effect of her well-coiffed blonde hair with scarves and jewelry. Perhaps she was at heart a girl with a pearl necklace. After all, only she would have the spunk, at age 94, to publish as an author photo for her final book, *On the Eve of the Future*, a stunning portrait of a blue-eyed blonde beauty, taken circa 1966. As she approached her passing and knew that the eve of her future too would be a silent stillness, this forceful female intellectual startled us again, making us reflect on female beauty and self-imaging and also offering us a wax model to remember her by. It is with that defiant, gorgeous portrait by Peter Hujar, stilled in time, that I wish to remember her for the future.

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7. Ibid., p. 20.

SCOTT BUKATMAN

Studies in the Analysis of Movement. That was the name of the first course that I took with Annette Michelson in 1980 as a green MA student in NYU's Cinema Studies program. It could also, it turns out, serve as the subtitle for the whole of my subsequent scholarly career.

I had tried Columbia's program for a year, but nothing there—apart from the wondrous John Belton—really spoke to me. I'm not sure why I thought NYU would be different; I certainly had no idea who this "Annette Michelson" was. But by the time I began I'd heard that she was one of the first to write positively about *2001*, which was the first film I saw by myself and which changed me forever—so that was something.

I no longer remember anything of the structure of the course, but in my memory it reshaped my expectations of the medium, like, *immediately*. I was already friendly with narrative and experimental and art cinemas—I grew up in New York City, after all—but I'm pretty sure I kept them in separate boxes (as I just did). Studies in the Analysis of Movement jumbled them all together in the most productive *mélange* imaginable.

I recall Buster Keaton's *College*. There was structural film by (at least) Snow and Gehr. Deren and *Vertigo* and probably Antonioni. By the time Annette showed *Chinese Connection*, with Bruce Lee *ahem* engaging students from a rival school of kung fu, I was hers.

Despite the "Analysis" of the title, my conversion experience resulted from what was a new, at least to me, emphasis on the *experiential* aspects of film. Effectively (and, we would now say, affectively) movies . . . moved. This simple shift in phenomenological emphasis, it turned out, opened onto the full heterogeneity of the cinema: across time, genre, geography, tradition. And there were bleeds between and among the categories: Non-narrative attractions (though we didn't call them that then) lurked within the narrative film, and narrational structures were hardly absent from the avant-garde, no matter how *avant*.

That the "analytic" portion actually mattered will surprise no one—this was a Michelson seminar, after all. She emphasized works that did more than move, that took cinematic movement as their subject. I refer you to any number of her essays for more. I was fascinated; entranced, really. But it was mostly this simple (?) reframing of the cinema through the lens of motion that shaped my intellectual trajectory (which sounds too pompous for whatever it was I've had).

My final paper was a shot-by-shot analysis of the first Road Runner cartoon ("Fast and Furry-ous," from 1949, if you're keeping score). It seemed to me that the meticulousness of Chuck Jones deserved a place in the pantheon. Happily for my purposes, animation had not figured into Annette's explorations (perhaps *Trade Tattoo*?). The project required that I rent both the film and a projector (these were different times), which lived for a week right smack in the middle of my studio apartment.

From there, for me, it was on to the metamorphic and kinetic properties of Jerry Lewis, cyberspace, musicals, superheroes, Winsor McCay, and—continuingly, abidingly—Looney Tunes. Annette directed my dissertation, and for a time we were (her word) "pals." We went to Clint Eastwood movies together, she saw me through a difficult breakup, I tried and failed to teach her WordPerfect, I even sherpa-ed her across Mexico. We drifted apart, but she never didn't matter to me.

Decades later, with the advent of the digital, cinema studies faced a crisis of sorts (don't worry, it was just an *academic* crisis) around the loss of indexicality instantiated by this new mode that privileged generated over recorded imagery. When Tom Gunning, another NYU alum who by that time had given us that cinema of attractions, proposed that *movement*, rather than indexicality, was perhaps the sine qua non of the cinema, a smile of familiarity stole across my face . . .

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ENRICO CAMPORESI

"I am really sorry, but you cannot look into those boxes, the people from the Getty have already been here. . . . " It was spring 2014 and I had traveled to New York to interview Annette Michelson on her time spent in Paris in the mid-1970s. I was trying to get ahold of the notes from a conference she supposedly delivered in Paris, at the Cinémathèque française, on February 5, 1976. The conference was entitled "L'écran vide."

"Ah, the empty screen," Annette remembered. "I wrote a text, which was not exactly the conference but perhaps the *preparation* for the conference."

Her memory projected this effective syntagm onto a pragmatic surface. But the "empty screen" was not only a training ground for an upcoming talk. It was likely more than a preparation for a conference; rather, it was the first posing of a fundamental question. Or maybe it was both. There was, in fact, an empty screen, the result of a very mundane problem: choosing a catalogue cover.

> Before on a table, I had recently a problem to which, with a sense of familiarity shading into dread, I would obsessively return and from which, upon each brief reviewal, in malaise I would turn, thrashing as in light, uneasy sleep. My problem, white and squarish, called for an image to resolve itself into an exhibition catalogue's cover, something at once iconic and emblematic of *New Form* [*sic*] *in Film*, the very general description I had given to my choices in a decade's most significant work.
>
> My discomfort was, of course, a vertigo induced by embarrassment of riches, by accelerated evocation and superimposition of those thousands of frames and shots and sequences from which I was all too free to choose. I faltered, while my printer waited, in this way until a friend in softest perfidy suggested, "And why not an empty film frame, its shape and composition that of the screen itself?"[1]

In the following sentence, Michelson could not help but ask, in turn, "Whose frame or screen is it to be? To which film-maker do I go, to Brakhage, Snow, Jacobs or Frampton? To Breer, Mekas, Kubelka, Sharits?"

The empty screen may be iconic, but it is far from being a unique object, especially to the connoisseur. Indeed, it immediately raised an issue of attribution—*whose* empty screen? Curiously enough, this painstaking interrogation for the catalogue cover of *New Forms in Film*, the survey of North American independent filmmaking that Michelson conceived for Montreux, Switzerland, in 1974, did not lead to an empty screen on the front cover. Instead, on this occasion she

1. Annette Michelson, "Paul Sharits and the Critique of Illusionism: An Introduction," in *Projected Images* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1974). I quote from the essay as published in *Film Culture* 65–66 (1978), pp. 83–84.

turned to a blown-up 16mm frame from Ken Jacobs's *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* (1969).[2] The image is highly contrasted, almost pulverizing the human figure, though not quite an "empty" screen. The "white and squarish" problem remained, unresolved.

It was still there in Paris in 1976, when the catalogue *Une histoire du cinéma* was printed. The conference that triggered my inquiry was delivered in this context: the founding of the Centre Pompidou film collection. It all started with a series of screenings, largely based on her Montreux program, which took place a year before the actual opening of the new museum.[3] This time, though, the filmmaker Peter Kubelka completed Michelson's first selection and subsequently signed the publication as the sole editor. On the cover he picked an empty screen that was unmistakably his own: two stills from the 35mm strip of *Arnulf Rainer* (1959–1960), displaying bits of an empty optical soundtrack and a saturated one, and one black frame (as a background for the featured artists' names) below a completely transparent one (with the inscription of the title). A hiatus lies in this publishing venture: The eidetic image was Michelson's, but the actual, sensible carrier was Kubelka's.

The conceptual implications of the empty screen merged inevitably in the mid-1970s with Michelson's ongoing research on Soviet avant-garde cinema. Thus, in between the lines on the "*dialogue de sourds*" between Eisenstein and Malevich that she retraced, one can easily sense the lurking of the empty screen as the most eloquent image to announce the dissolution of "the scene of the action and its objects."[4] But the long run of the empty screen continued and probably achieved its paradigmatic status in a retrospective text published over two decades later. It is not by chance that her essay "Gnosis and Iconoclasm," through a meticulous recrafting of entire sections of earlier publications, sought to bridge, conceptually, the 1920s debate on the mimetic nature of the photographic image with the American postwar independent film's solutions to "complete and intensify the iconoclastic ascesis introduced by *emptying the screen*."[5]

The article opened with Theodor Adorno's famous apothegm "I love going to the movies. What I hate are the images on the screen." In this publication Michelson referred to it as an excerpt from "Transparencies on Film," a 1966 text

2. Although it was also from Jacobs's *Tom Tom*, the 16mm film still selected for the Montreux catalogue was not the same one used for the front cover of the September 1971 *Artforum* special issue on film that Michelson edited.

3. See *Une histoire du cinéma*, ed. Peter Kubelka (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1976). I retrace in detail the history of the event in "A History of Cinema according to Peter Kubelka (and Annette Michelson)," in *Early Video Art and Experimental Film Networks*, ed. François Bovier (Lausanne: ECAL, 2017), pp. 231–36.

4. Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital* (Part 2)," *October* 3 (Spring 1977), p. 83.

5. Annette Michelson, "Gnosis and Iconoclasm: A Case Study of Cinephilia," *October* 83 (Winter 1998), p. 18 (emphasis added).

translated into English by Thomas Levin in the early 1980s. The quote, however, is nowhere to be found in the text. The two sentences are attributed to Adorno by Alexander Kluge and quoted in turn by Miriam Hansen as an introduction to the English translation of Adorno's text on film.[6]

This understandable misattribution (corrected, albeit partially, in her 2017 anthology[7]) unveils another, unconscious layer of the *empty screen*. Its 1974 occurrence, and the sleepless nights it triggered, had already hinted at a peculiar form of obsession, but there is more. In the 1998 publication, the "white and squarish" surface returned, though this time it appeared not only under the form of a restless questioning but also as a space for projecting fantasies and reveries. In this case it became a metaphorical site for producing a fruitful intellectual encounter, namely, one between the artists that she defended and investigated and a theorist, however distant he may be from her critical standpoint, whose texts she would engage with.

I sense a peculiar sympathy to this speculative attempt, for it is also a matter of affection. After all, it may not be that different from my own archival interrogation. What was I looking for in this quest for a French version of the *empty screen*? A missing theoretical link, an unexpected variation on a theme—but now, in 2019, after weeks of archival investigations in her papers at the Getty, I still have nothing more than the title—"L'écran vide"—onto which I can project my own longing.

ENRICO CAMPORESI oversees the research activities of the Centre Pompidou film department. His *Futurs de l'obsolescence* (Mimésis, 2018) is about restoring artists' films.

6. Miriam Hansen, "Introduction to Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film' (1966)," *New German Critique* 24–25 (Fall 1981–Winter 1982), p. 194.

7. Annette Michelson, *On the Eve of the Future: Selected Writings on Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), p. 55.

EDWARD DIMENDBERG

Going to the movies with Annette often was an adventure. Her appetite for cinema was as voracious as her tastes were unpredictable. My friend Richard Sieburth and I once saw *The Mother and the Whore* (Jean Eustache, 1973) at the Bleecker Street Cinema with her, probably not long before the theater closed in 1991. A young man in the audience was so taken with Annette's persona that he followed us uninvited to our table at a bar around the corner. She was not amused. On another occasion, my wife, Lynne, and I joined Annette at a 70mm projection of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) in a cinema off Times Square large enough to fit several space stations and so empty that I still wonder whether she rented it for a private screening.

Yet there we were in December 2013 at Film Forum, about to watch *The New Rijksmuseum* (Oeke Hoogendijk, 2013), a rather good documentary. We took our seats and Lynne found herself behind a man whose head completely blocked her view of the screen. She meekly tapped on his shoulder to ask whether he would mind moving over a seat, at which point the woman sitting next to Lynne implored him to remain where he was, so as not to block *her* view. "Shall I give you the telephone number of my mother so that you can call and complain about my being too tall?" queried our not so jolly giant. "This is starting to become a movie," Lynne observed. "An Italian movie," Annette declaimed, never at a loss for *le mot juste*.

Although the filmmakers she is most associated with generally fall into the camps of the auteurs (Bresson, Renoir, Kubrick, Godard, Buñuel, Duras, Vertov, Eisenstein) or the international avant-garde (Snow, Duchamp, Epstein, Brakhage, Frampton, Warhol, Sharits), these names scarcely exhaust the range of her cinematic interests. Alongside the summits of film art, Annette viewed and thought about a wider range of films and genres than anyone I have known. If occasionally she took a perverse glee in extolling the virtues of a gladiator film such as *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006), she eventually led me to understand that her travels through the precincts of popular cinema had nothing to do with cultural slumming but were rather, like everything Annette undertook, part of a systematic undertaking, a project.

My first hint of this came when I met Annette around 1985 as a graduate student in the seminar on Russian-formalist film theory she taught in the Department of Cinema Studies at New York University. One of the core readings in the seminar was Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. She required each participant to analyze a Russian folktale employing the Proppian vocabulary of functions. To claim it was a challenging assignment would be an understatement. After poring over the minutiae of a tale, several fellow students and I presented our results in class. Annette listened attentively and commented merely that we had chosen a difficult example.

Years later, I understood her response as particularly apposite (to employ a word of which she was fond) in the domain of cultural analysis, where only the crudest misstatements of fact can be falsified and much hinges upon enriching the framework of interpretation and formulating speculative questions. More important, as

Claude Lévi-Strauss (a thinker she revered) argued in his essay on the analysis of myth, a single instance reveals little, and the anthropologist requires a large corpus within which patterns and invariant features can be identified. The bad comedies, gritty neorealist tales of daily life, or labored investigations of alienation that I associated with Italian movies probably bore little relation to the *combinatoire* (another of her favorite words) of elements generating human thought and culture that she sought in these films.

Annette was among the first scholars in the United States to employ the insights of structuralism and semiotics in the study of cinema and art. She robustly appropriated a European theoretical vocabulary that throughout the twentieth century generally had been utilized to study language, literature, and anthropological objects, and she took it in a new direction, one that granted equal weight to the image. Today, such an approach appears ubiquitous in the humanities. An early example is the lecture she delivered in 1969 at the Guggenheim, published a year later under the title "Art and the Structuralist Perspective" in a book entitled *On the Future of Art*, in which her work appears among the improbable cast of Arnold Toynbee, Louis Kahn, B. F. Skinner, Jack Burnham, and Herbert Marcuse.

Film receives less attention than visual art in her essay, which is largely devoted to introducing the ideas of Lévi-Strauss (whose books began to appear in English translation in 1963) and Charles Sanders Peirce. Yet Annette is keenly aware of the fecundity of semiotic and structuralist analysis for the analysis of the moving image, an understanding that would inflect her subsequent scholarship and remake the field in the 1970s. Writing of Kandinsky and Mondrian, she describes them as "iconographers of the rational" and notes, "It is, then, the business of structuralist analysis to reveal the extraordinary propensity of the human mind to organize, through its symbolic sign systems, its experience of the world."

André Bazin, whose ideas Annette did so much to promote, often has been called the Aristotle of cinema. When the history of the still evolving discipline of film studies is one day written, Annette Michelson may well be recognized as its Immanuel Kant, the most rationalist of investigators into the principles, rules, and immanent mental faculties through which cinema transforms nature into culture. I cannot believe this judgment would not have pleased her and inspired more fieldwork at the movies.

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JEAN-MICHEL FRODON

I met her before I met her work. As everyone knows, arrogant French intellectuals don't read enough from abroad, including from the United States—it was even more true then, almost twenty years ago, than now. So I confess I did not know who she was when I met her in June 2001, when both of us, like many others, were taking part in the "Forever Godard" symposium organized at the Tate Modern in London by Michael Temple and Michael Witt. I can't remember what I talked about onstage, nor if she also spoke. But I certainly remember our encounter. Annette was incredibly kind about what I had said, but more strikingly, she was extremely precise about details and demanded to discuss them extensively. This is rarely a situation one encounters when meeting unknown persons in academic symposiums, as far as I can tell—usually the exchange remains on a rather vague and general level. It was the end of the morning, so we went to have lunch together in order to keep talking. I assumed, later, that she believed I knew who she was, like most of the participants of this colloquium probably did, and I'm a bit ashamed of my ignorance, but it probably helped us have a more open discussion. She was mostly asking questions about the perception of Godard in France now (then) and about the situation of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Precisely because I was used to discussing this during my trips out of France, I could feel very clearly the accuracy of Annette's approach: Not only did she know so much about the past and present of cinema, film criticism, and film studies in France, but her questions and comments were always free of the usual clichés about such topics. I am pretty sure she enjoyed talking with me (what happened afterward: a long friendship, rekindled every time I traveled to the US or when she came to Paris), thanks to, among other things, the fact that I did not know whom I was speaking with. When I later mentioned my encounter with her to French or American friends, most of them spoke of her as a very impressive person, spreading a kind of fear around her, intimidating whomever she would talk with. During the next years—for instance, when she came to attend a symposium dedicated to Serge Daney at Harvard organized by Tom Conley and Bill Krohn, or when she asked me to teach at the seminars she organized at her New York apartment after having officially retired—I had a few occasions to witness how she could crush someone she considered lazy or irrelevant. I was lucky enough to maintain through the years the same cordial relationship with her, which did help in discussing an incredibly vast variety of topics—except once. We were, as on several occasions, speaking about Soviet cinema, and probably about the exceptional work accomplished in Moscow by Naum Kleiman, when I happened to mention Tarkovsky. She brutally dismissed him: "I never liked Tarkovsky. I've never understood why people pay so much attention to him. I don't want to speak about his work." Of course, I disagreed with her, but I did not care to discuss the topic further, and I still disagree with her, meaning I was probably wrong not to push it a bit. But I now think of this moment not only with tenderness but also with respect for the way of thinking of

someone who had been so consistent in the construction of her set of ideas, of her understanding not only about cinema but about the reality of this world, that she would in no way accept what she felt like flaws in it. Of course, in between I had started to read her texts, and discovered the extent and the sharpness of her vision of cinema. We had a project together about the work of Amos Gitai that never managed to reach the light of day, but about which we talked a lot. It was a perfect occasion to discuss aesthetic dimensions of political issues, the situation in the Middle East, as well as the dialogue between fiction and documentary, cinema and architecture, history and archeology. Yes, these were, in the best meaning of the word, conversations—but I always had the feeling I was the one who was learning thanks to them. Thanks to her.

JEAN-MICHEL FRODON, a former editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the author of twenty books, now writes for Slate.fr and teaches at Sciences Po Paris and St. Andrews.

AMOS GITAI

As an homage to the many wonderful moments spent with Annette over the last thirty-seven years, I chose to quote part of a dialogue that was recorded in New York nearly twenty years ago. Reading it again, I can hear the sound of Annette's voice, the warm rigor with which she conducted our conversation. Annette was interrogative; she wanted to interpret and to learn more about our first rencontre*, the stormy day in the Jerusalem Cinematheque when I presented* Field Diary *to a mostly hostile audience. This would be the beginning of a great friendship.*

Annette Michelson: I first became acquainted with your work under very particular circumstances. Having come since then to know most of your films, I now think they may have been the most appropriate circumstances possible. During my first visit to Israel in 1982, I was present at the first screening in the Jerusalem Cinematheque of *Field Diary*, your film on the war in Lebanon. That evening I witnessed an extraordinarily intense reaction to the film—a demonstration of shock and hostility, largely on the part of the many young men who were in from the front, their weapons slung over their shoulders—something one sees of course all the time there, although the visitor may never quite become used to it. That demonstration was, I imagine, somewhat emblematic of your position within not only Israeli film culture but perhaps within Israeli culture and politics more generally considered.

Amos Gitai: This is a very good point of departure, as you're one of the few outside witnesses to the event that was *Field Diary*'s premiere. To be honest, I came somewhat prepared for the reaction. *Field Diary* is the third film of a trilogy. I had already done *House* and *Wadi*. I had already sensed a certain hostility—as well as its opposite—in reactions to the first two parts of this trilogy, through which I wanted to propose the manner in which the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians can be viewed through limited, microcosmic elements. Each of the first two films involves a small piece of territory, and this can be as small as a single house or a *wadi* (valley), or it can be, as in *Field Diary*, which is quite different, a field or fields. The idea was to suggest that the conflict really exists on all these levels.

Field Diary takes another form, that of a diary, so that there was also the desire to register an evolution of the situation in time, and to suggest that this diary, written in cinematic language, presents each section as a single element, the whole forming a sequence of locations suggesting a temporal continuity. . . . But to present a film like *Field Diary* to a public such as you have described, during or immediately after the Lebanon war, with soldiers bringing their toys and instruments into a public space—that's an extremely sensitive kind of context. But it may be the ideal situation for this presentation, for context is, after all, an integral factor in the making of works of art, of cinema, video, literature, theater, and this hostile reaction was completely understandable. I even remember

Amos Gitai. Field Diary. *1982.*

the presentation made by Lia Van Leer, who directs the Jerusalem Cinematheque, who played a major role in its creation and in the formation of an Israeli film archive. I sensed the ambiguity of her situation. I remember that someone rose and in a state of great excitement asked why this film was being shown and if the military censor had seen it. This person appeared almost threatened by it, and addressed the same question to me. And I responded, saying, as I remember, that I thought that in a place that calls itself a democracy, one must decide if one is a director of a cinematheque and therefore committed to showing a broad range of films, or whether one merely runs a screening room subject to military censorship. I do think the serious issues raised by my work touched an exposed nerve within Israeli society.

Actually it had begun as a project by a very young filmmaker who was uncertain, at that stage, about work in film. I had invited a number of other filmmakers to do a joint project and suggested we call it *Territories.* And I started to shoot my film, *Field Diary*, on the West Bank. My colleagues formed a kind of committee, and they started to give me good advice, good brotherly advice, on which shots I should not include, asking why *Field Diary* does not include the good Israeli, suggesting that the film should be more balanced, etc. Having originated the project, I now dropped out, wandered about with the negative, and eventually managed to put it together as a film.

Michelson: My question was directed not only to the past but also to the present. That evening in Jerusalem, I witnessed a situation in a language I could not understand, but its essential dynamics seemed clear, and it certainly impelled me to

see some of your other films, those which were at the time available here. *Esther*, the next one that I did see, is, I understand, part of another series, a triptych, if I'm not mistaken. I'm therefore led to think that not only are you working as an engaged filmmaker, but you're thinking in large blocks of interrelated projects—this one including, as well, *Berlin-Jerusalem* and *Spirit of Exile*—and that this continues as you pass from documentary through these films, which represent an intermediate mode or genre, to the making of feature fiction films, which is now at the center of your preoccupations. The triadic interrelation of theme appears fairly constant, and I find it interesting.

Gitai: I think that's true. As an architect, I know that a triangle is a relatively stable structure, and I am really interested in investigating interrelations within groups of films. I want to remind myself as well that no "reality," whatever that may mean, can be represented in summary fashion. This entails a theory of angles or viewpoints, and since each has come to exist in its own territory, within its very limited situation, the geometry described within a given point, whether in *Wadi*, *Esther*, or *Kadosh,* is that of a given angle, and the larger structure or tissue of what is called Israel is a composite of these series of points. And perhaps, little by little, we can gradually map this larger territory, composing the whole from elements that represent historical points seen in contemporary fashion.

AMOS GITAI has won the Rossellini and the Robert Bresson Prizes, among others, for his many films on the Middle East and Israeli society.

VIVIAN GORNICK

Annette and I were the unlikeliest of friends: for forty years and more. She was all European cultivation and aesthetic theory, I all American earnestness motivated by direct experience. What we both were, however, was what used to be called "difficult women"—that is, women whose personalities were characterized by strong opinions and even stronger styles. In fact, "confrontational" is the word for the style that Annette and I shared; a style that made each of us capable of exasperating ourselves, one another, and everyone we knew. In this respect we were perfectly matched, and more often than not recognized ourselves in one another to our mutual advantage but at times to our somewhat wounding disadvantage. Over the years I repeatedly exploded on one occasion or another, declaring the friendship over; most often to the saintly Stuart who would let me rave on—"Do you know what she just said to me? That's it, I'm finished"—only to have Stuart observe quietly, "Yes, yes, everything you say is true, she does say things like that, she's been saying them forever." Then he'd take a breath and, as time wore on, observe even more calmly, "But I see you're still here."

And indeed I was still there. I was still there because, throughout the decades that I knew her, I continued to admire and value Annette more than I ever felt compelled to act on that which divided us. It was my impression that life often inflicted on her periods of unwanted solitude, or a sense of intellectual isolation, or the low spirits of ill health, but she never complained—for this I admired her—and she never stopped reading—for this I valued her. I remember visiting one day in early autumn when Annette was in her eighties, after what I knew had been a particularly lonely summer. When I came in, her face was haggard and she seemed genuinely worn down. I asked her what she'd been doing and she said, "I've been reading Roman military history." I nodded—what else would she be reading?—and then her face cleared, her voice grew strong, her blue eyes even bluer, and she gave me a rich, lively mini-course on Roman military history. That day I admired and loved her.

She considered it her moral obligation to keep her mind alive—she welcomed conversation with an eagerness that always astonished me—and to hold herself in readiness for delight. In a wheelchair, she still went regularly to movies and concerts, bought the books whose reviews attracted her, and in her last years, although she had always loved dance, developed a particular interest in the ballet that made her leave behind enough books and DVDs on the subject to furnish a course syllabus. She is one of those of whom it can truly be said, we will not see her like again anytime soon.

VIVIAN GORNICK is a critic, journalist, essayist, and memoirist.

KEN JACOBS

A few of Annette's ex-students have told me she was tough. But consider the odds she faced: Each limited term, and despite every sort of pull on their attention, students were to be moved into the realms of art. Among other enigmas they had to confront was my *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*. Seeing it recently, I had to wonder how she, and Jonas, could champion such an obsessive and heedless work (*That's Entertainment* it ain't). And of course that was the attraction; one person, one sensibility takes a plunge and thereby opens still another realm of experiential actuality. Studying art, craters open on every side, and the seemingly understandable gives way to unbounded actuality.

Annette managed to complete a new book a few months before dying. *On the Eve of the Future* is a sad title; we think of the future as pure morning. Annette certainly didn't think the innovative was coming to an end. I think, rather, that she was referring to her own departure, as someone so thoroughly dedicated to the new. Her goodbye to the future. Farewell, stylish lady.

KEN JACOBS is the director of *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (1969) and *Star Spangled to Death* (2004), among other films.

GERTRUD KOCH

Annette Michelson was, despite her energetic and sometimes intimidating insistence on her own arguments and observations, one of the least dogmatic thinkers in the field of cinema studies I have encountered. She was curious to learn from intellectual positions from different "camps," and she invited scholars from all over the world and from many intellectual corners to argue with her. At the basis of this was an ongoing wish to find something new, something for herself. It could be a shot from a film, a book that hadn't been translated, or a thought of unknown origin. The tone of the debate was not solely determined by sharp questioning about the validity and legitimacy of the argument in a given frame, or about philological and historical accuracy; instead it reflected the open eyes and ears of an explorer who travels through the landscapes of thought to look for novelties. Like most critics, she tended to open a conversation with a question.

One could see Annette as a person who was deeply rooted in the temporality of contemporaneity—not in the sense of "modernity" but in the sense of a relationship to the world that has to be grasped in its actual state. This is the mode of a critic who tries to read the portrait of a time in its objects and things, and through the theories and thoughts that accompany them. To look in this way at the material world within it is to construct in the present a possible future and a meaningful past of "our time." Contemporaneity is the critic's task because it scans the multitude of facts and objects in search of the formation of something new that would shed a light on the past and point to the future.

There are two temporal modes in which we think about art: One is the time of its origin, its age, and the other the time of its perception. The time of perception is always based on a concept of contemporaneity in the sense of a present in which this encounter takes place—whatever the age of the art object, we always ascribe to it the virtue to establish a presentness in our perception. Even if we assume the age of an object as ancient and no longer graspable in its significance for its original contemporaries, we do so through present thought and affect. Contemporaneity is the mode in which we experience our own being in time. As such, does it differ from other affective time experiences, such as nostalgia, melancholia, boredom, etc.?

One can consider contemporaneity as the general concept of time experience regarding one own's time—the emphasis is on being present. Contemporaneity would thus be the feeling of being in synchronicity with actuality. That means more than fashion—even though it might be hard to differentiate it from such—and in this regard contemporaneity is the diagnostic value of judging a time experience as an index of a kairotic constellation (in the sense of the Greek *kairos*). It makes out of contemporaneity a kind of prophecy, and I guess this makes it into a normative concept with an implicit truth claim. Insofar as art can have been contemporary, it would be considered as a quality in its relation to time. Art, to paraphrase Hegel's famous line "Philosophie ist ihre Zeit in

Gedanken erfasst" (philosophy is its own time apprehended in thoughts), brings its time into signs and symbols. And it is there where art can make truth claims. In German there is a proverbial saying: "Am Puls der Zeit sein," which means to be with the heartbeat of time, to have one's finger on the pulse of time. "Contemporaneity" in this sense is part of a diagnostic time measurement in which the quality and characteristics of the historical future of the present time present are evaluated.

Annette Michelson was in this sense a contemporary critical thinker whose work spanned nearly the whole of the "short century" (Hobsbawm) as well as two continents and two cities, New York and Paris. In her thinking she traversed many more linguistic and filmic sites than just those places where she lived. In her introduction to *October* 128 on "Postwar Italian Cinema: New Studies," we find, apart from her most influential and canonical essays, a stunning exemplum of her way of thinking in the words with which she concludes: "The theorization of color . . . unique in its wit and depth, reinforces our view that the time has come for the publication of the totality of these texts."[1] To know when the time has come to bring to the fore positions that stand queer in their times was both the aesthetic and the political wit of Annette Michelson's criticism.

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1. Annette Michelson, "Introduction," *October* 128 (Spring 2009), p. 5.

ANTONIA LANT*

Over the spring and summer of 1995, Annette Michelson and I designed "The Archive," a course we would co-teach in the fall.[1] With hindsight, we can understand this course as another—though hidden, and hence my decision to write on it—of Annette's innovations: It amounted to the first curricular building block of what would become, a few years later, our department's first new degree program in decades. As our class announcement promised when we offered the course for a second and final time in fall 2001: "The course will constitute a core element in the department's new MA in Moving Image Archiving and Preservation." In between, in fall 1998, I became faculty director of the planned new degree, with the first students arriving in 2004, while Annette herself was to retire in the summer before they arrived.[2] The course has been required for students training for the degree ever since; teachers have changed, content has been updated, but the seminar's core goals have remained: to study why and how humans collect (taking frameworks from psychoanalysis, anthropology, and social history); and to interrogate the rise of film-archiving institutions through their ancestry in museums and in private collections, and their role in shaping the making and reception of moving-image media.

This short essay reflects on Annette's reasons for devising such a course with me. She was regularly disdainful of the historical turn in cinema studies: For her it was an under-theorized amassing of small facts—dug out of trade newspapers and, yes, archives—to tell small pieces of history. New York City was the hub of this activity in the early 1990s: Eileen Bowser, Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Richard Koszarski, and Charles Musser were all, concurrently, writing their revisionist books on early cinema there. Perhaps more galling, three were alumni of the department. Annette's jibes seemed intended to get a rise out of me, but also expressed an impatience to investigate and diagnose the scholarly industry. Her pique and its remedy are perceptible in our 1995 course blurb: "With this seminar, the department initiates an inquiry into the history of film collection with a view towards its theorization." Annette was channeling her contradictory, ambivalent stance into a productive context through which to share knowledge and generate dialogue—and making a bridge toward the film historian.

We sketched out details of the syllabus via fax, for Annette was visiting the Getty Research Institute in the summer of 1995 and I was teaching at the University of Vienna. There would be weeks on "The Museum as Model" for the founding of cinematheques. We would compare contrasting efforts to assemble film collections: Henri

* This essay was originally titled "The Archive Seminar."

1. Students who took the class in 1995 included Alice Black, Peter Decherney, Roger Hallas, James Latham, Heather MacGibbon, Lisa Malcolm, Gabrielle Murray, Augusta Palmer, Brian Price, John David Rhodes, Kim Tomadjoglou, and Xiaoming Zhang. In 2001: Saul Austerlitz, Aparna Frank, Minah Jeong, Tatullari Laukkanen, Sachiko Mizuno, and Christine Sanchez.

2. Graduates of the master of arts degree program in Moving Image Archiving and Preservation have since been working in leadership positions in institutions all over the world. Howard Besser took over the directorship in 2002.

Langlois and Jonas Mekas/Peter Kubelka, with additional reference to Jacques Ledoux. Another section, "Cinema and Ethnography," would examine the sacralization and desacralization of the object, with reference to readings from *Documents* by Georges Bataille and the Malraux-Duthuit debate. "Privacy and/of the Collector" would be a further unit, and "The Spoils of War" another. Here, Annette's love of classical material made an entry. Our notes read: "post-war negotiations over art treasures (Schliemann, treasures of Troy); the Elgin Marbles as traumatic museological event, discussions of ownership constantly renewed and never resolved."[3] We arranged for David Francis, chief of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress, to visit the class in his dual roles as private collector and leader of motion-picture-preservation policy in the United States. Slowly, theatrically, he unpacked a suitcase of objects from his vast magic-lantern collection that he'd brought up from Washington, D.C.[4]

Annette often recalled her own inexperience when arriving in the classroom at NYU in 1966—she would draw, she reassured herself, on the multiple screenings she had attended and on the intellectual force of her work as a writer and editor. Her course topics were not mainstream, their titles sui generis. "Studies in the Analysis of Movement" included recordings of dance, works by Maya Deren, but also scientific films, including the experimental anthropological film *Microcultural Incidents in Ten Zoos* by Ray L. Birdwhistell. With her course title, "French Cinema from Delluc to the Death of Jean Vigo," Annette strode across the coming-of-sound boundary, a primal punctuation for film historians, for Vigo died half a decade later, in 1934.

What attracted Annette to "The Archive"? Firstly, 1995 was the year of film's centennial, a time of acknowledging its antiquity and pondering the safety of its future. Annette wanted students to understand "the history of collecting in relation to the museum: from kammerschatz to Beaubourg."[5] A landmark work of archival reflection, Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'archive: Une impression freudienne*, appeared that very year—perhaps not a coincidence. Secondly, there was Annette's fascination with film collector William K. Everson, her longtime colleague at NYU.[6] She desired to understand the life of someone who had amassed bootleg movies from dumpsters behind television studios, and who had moved from the United Kingdom to the US as a young man in 1950 precisely to avoid the restrictions (set by the UK's Cinematograph Exhibitors Association) that impeded his ability to collect. Our semi-

3. Student reports in fall 2001 included one on the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and another on the Office of Alien Property Custodian in the Library of Congress, through which Japanese and German films confiscated during World War II entered the Library's collection.

4. Francis had recently formed the National Film Preservation Board, which was followed by the approval by Congress of the National Film Preservation Act of 1996 and the creation of the National Film Preservation Foundation (a fund-raising body) in 1997.

5. Fax from Annette Michelson to Antonia Lant, August 28, 1995. Miramar Sheraton Hotel, Santa Monica.

6. At the time, Everson owned upwards of 3,000 feature films and an equivalent number of documentaries, serials, newsreels, and other shorts. Approximately half of his collection was in his Upper West Side apartment.

nar visited Bill in his apartment in September 1995, squeezing along entry corridors lined with film cans with nesting cats in their lids, and settling in movie seats (the living-room furniture). Annette began the interview: "We've really been, in a sense, involved in trying to consider, to construct, the relation of the private collector to the archive, to the museum, to the cinematheque, and to see, eventually, if cinémathèques and archives follow the models of other kinds of collections."[7] Everson described to us a childhood of collecting runs of *Boy's Cinema* before he could read them, and of filmgoing as a practice initiated through his mother.[8] "You would go with your mother," Annette underlined, in psychoanalytic mode. This was because, Everson continued, "the films I wanted to see the other children didn't want to see. I mean, when I was about four years old and wanted to see *The Hatchet Man* with Edward G. Robinson, it was difficult to find other kids to see it with me." Annette swooped in with an opaque and precise query tinged with analytic menace: "At four it was Edward G. Robinson you wanted to see? Or *The Hatchet Man*? Or both . . . ?"

In leading the interview, Annette was teaching students of the enfolding of psychoanalytic life into collecting. In the words of Jean Baudrillard, whose 1968 essay was on the syllabus, "it is invariably oneself that one collects." Annette consistently explored explanations for collecting offered in psychology, drawing, for example, on Baudrillard's observation of the correlation between periods of sexual transition and collecting—on collecting as a compensation for active genital sexuality—for which Everson's *Boy's Cinema* run would be exemplary. As our course description advertised: "Preliminary readings and discussions will focus on the subjective and political dynamics of collecting. Bearing in mind that Freud was himself a steady and accomplished collector, discussions will center as well on texts by Benjamin, Woolf, and Foucault."

A third reason for Annette's interest in teaching the class, one unmentioned during the planning process and a reason that fully emerged later, was her own experience of collecting and losing libraries. In the context of her final move, to 63rd Street in June 2014, she recalled to many of us the libraries that she had lost: the first, in departing for France in the early 1950s; the second, on returning from France fifteen years later, in 1966; and the third, in her move to 63rd Street, during which most of her books departed. Through returning to, and sharing, the writings of Benjamin, Bataille, and André Malraux on the matter of assembled objects, in "The Archive," she could enter the patterns of her own collecting.

A key image for the seminar was that of Malraux preparing his Imaginary Museum. He stands at home among pictures for his forthcoming book; Walter Grasskamp has termed the approach, "the Book on the Floor." Suggested in the photograph is the importance of spatialization to the grasping of ideas as well as the knowledge generated in the juxtaposition of images. Annette acted out these

7. Transcript of WKE interview, September 28, 1995. George Amberg Study Center, Department of Cinema Studies, New York University.

8. Everson described losing the collection upon crossing the Atlantic on the Queen Mary in 1950 as "one of the big tragedies of my life." Transcript of WKE interview.

thoughts one last time as she settled in to her last home on the Upper East Side in June 2014. My son, Caspar Lant, just finishing high school, assisted her over two days in installing the remains of her library following the recent giant triage at 30th Street. She aggregated this reduced collection, as its predecessor, into distinct categories: psychoanalysis; film (miniature now, on account of the recent Getty acquisition of that section); Russian history and criticism; French literature and philosophy; astrophysics and books of popular science (Hawkins); Antarctica; fiction; medieval art; the Greek and Latin area; musicology; and an outsized swath of poetry, including a large section of French poetry. Caspar and Annette would discuss the destiny of individual books, but the meatiest talk concerned the placement of subject matter. Vertical tranches of distinct topics descended around Annette's desk on three sides. Poetry she located directly behind and to her right, the most easily accessible zone. Across her desk, behind visitors, would be the sections on psychoanalysis.

Walter Benjamin describes his physical, tactile connection to his books as he carefully unpacks each one, stacking piles of volumes, discarded torn paper covering the floor. Of moving among the crates he writes: "The chaos of memories," "the springtide of memories" suffuse the room like "the air saturated with the dust of wood." Annette's love of his essay resided in part in her own close attachment to books, and in her understanding of the connection between intellectual control and spatial control. She copiously marked up essays she was editing and emphasized key passages in books with Post-it notes. But cranial grasp of a volume's contents resided also in the spatialization of her library and in the relations these spatial dynamics expressed for her. We know from her writing of the central importance of motion through space in shaping her description of meaning: her essay on Snow's *Wavelength*; her essay on Kubrick's *2001*. For me her silver Möbius-strip bracelet, always there on her wrist in her library, part of the furniture of the room, was an index of this matter. A physicalization of the abstraction of mathematics, its beaten, curving form moved simultaneously both toward and away from her arm. It appeared uncomfortable—its outside was its inside. It was her talisman because it captured the intricacy of the possibility that the space of thought had material form. Its structure and position echoed her intimacy with her books, their exteriors and interiors arranged around her mind and the lamp of her desk.

The innovative nature of Annette's scholarship and editorial practice has been abundantly acknowledged and will be the subject of many essays and symposia to come, following her departure from us. There are so many things I have to thank Annette for, but this story is the one for which I have, as colleague and co-teacher, a distinctive perspective for documentation. It provides a record of the generation of curriculum and training in the perpetuation of one of the media she loved, and an elucidation of how her editorial practice and her passion for books as objects intertwined with her teaching.

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STUART LIEBMAN

Perhaps like many of you who may read these brief reflections about Annette Michelson, I find myself a *bissel verklempt*, as my late mother and her mother and her mother's mother—and Annette's mother, too, for that matter—back into the dark history of Ashkenaz would have said. For those of you unfamiliar with the domestic patois of East European Jewish households in the United States, these words simply mean that I feel rather choked up as memories of Annette emerge, seeking articulation and some kind of release as I mourn her death. Others may prefer to remember her by focusing on her contributions to the field of cinema studies and, more generally, to the intellectual discourse of her time. That is not my purpose. I will only glance at her work as a backdrop for my appreciation of Annette as a person, teacher, and friend.

It was Annette's example that encouraged me to become engaged in a new academic discipline called cinema studies then in formation a half-century ago. Like many others of my generation, I first encountered Annette through her writings in the pages of *Artforum* at the end of the 1960s. At a moment when the critical appreciation of movies in the United States was defined by Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris, she set a wholly different, indeed an impossibly high, bar for understanding what was interesting, let alone important, to say about films. That she was an implacable modernist was obvious; she insisted that the movies that mattered necessarily constituted a unique art form, radical in the manner in which they probed, indeed reinvented, the roots—philosophical, formal, and political—of the cinema. On behalf of a privileged number of films and filmmakers in whom she believed, she brought to bear her exacting eye and a sovereign command of an extraordinary range of critical perspectives. Her prose style was equally challenging. The sinuous, admittedly sometimes congested shape of her sentences recalled the marked influence of Henry James—certainly one of her favorite authors—a fact she later only half-apologetically acknowledged in a letter to the critic Leo Steinberg. To read her essays was simultaneously to be immensely stimulated and intimidated in equal measure.

I was unprepared for the fact that her somewhat convoluted prose style was also an essential dimension of her manner of speaking. I first heard her voice at a large conference on avant-garde cinema held at Yale's Whitney Humanities Center in the spring of 1972. I could not see her very well as she came to the podium to speak about someone virtually unknown at the time and bearing an unlikely name: Dziga Vertov. I was already familiar with the way in which Annette had established his seminal work, *Man with a Movie Camera*, as one of the key films of Soviet cinema. As she rehearsed her argument that day, her long, curling sentences—certainly not the best vehicle for conveying ideas in a public lecture—were intoned with an unusual accent that married crisp consonants with plummy, sometimes orotund vowels. There was in her elocution an air of theatricality that lent itself to caricature, and certain wags—I recall that there were many back then—characterized

her enunciative style not as the King's English but as that peculiar Brooklyn variant, Kings *County* English, spoken by aspiring intellectuals with a taste for Lawrence Olivier. In any case, her manner of speaking was an essential dimension of her carefully constructed public presentation of self. She continued to speak to audiences in this distinctive way for her entire career.

Annette was incredibly, one might even say *enthusiastically*, erudite, and she remained so to the very end of her days. It was enough to visit her loft on Wooster Street, or later her gloomy, rambling loft on East 30th Street, and even later still her "bourgeois" apartment on East 63rd Street (whose light and relatively bourgeois *luxe* she both embraced and scorned). Their wall-high bookshelves packed with dog-eared copies of French, Russian, and Italian books, not to mention the piles and piles of polyglot picture books, journals, and catalogues on the floor, which were a common feature of the décor in all her apartments, provided ready confirmation of her voracious appetite for learning. Any skepticism or doubt about how many of her books she had actually read did not last very long. She was a reading prodigy and would often proudly announce that she had been one since she was a child. I think she very much liked to wow visitors like me by the sheer bulk and breadth of her library, which I can report totaled well over eleven thousand volumes at its peak. It was a treat just to peek at them. More consequentially, they sparked my curiosity, stoked a certain intellectual envy, and pushed me onward toward broader horizons.

From the earliest moments of our acquaintance, Annette got into my head. I sometimes felt like a figure in one of Harry Smith's animations, as if her extraordinarily exacting ways had been injected into my still developing superego. I am sure I am not the only one who responded this way. She asked nothing less than precision in the way we, her students, looked at films. We learned to look at cinema in close-up, so to speak. A filmmaker's strategies, as she liked to call them, and more generally the form of a film as a whole, had to become significant, bearing meanings beyond the stories conveyed. It was from this fundamental tenet that complementary insights could be gleaned from the broader cultural and historical realms in which each film was created. These were her explicit lessons in every course she taught, every seminar she led.

She was a most demanding teacher, especially in seminars. Her occasionally overly aggressive manner of interrogating students created a special kind of high anxiety when, after presenting the results of one's research, one had to respond to her questions. She suffered badly those who were inadequately prepared or tongue-tied. There are many others besides myself, certainly, who can report firsthand on this aspect of her—dare I say bracing?—pedagogy. Her inquisitorial manner also extended beyond the classroom. I recall all too well conference speakers who stood at their podiums, frozen and rather aghast, after she had launched a devastating broadside against their misconceptions of Bazin or Surrealism or—you name it! She was a fierce, feared commentator.

Annette always seemed astoundingly au courant with the novel European critical and theoretical trends that regularly washed over the still relatively intellectually

flat landscape of cinema studies during its first decades. Indeed, she was certainly among the first to introduce sophisticated historical and theoretical materials into film seminars: Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* and Rudolf Jaensch's book on eidetic images for her New American Cinema course; Lev Vygotsky's treatise *Thought and Language* in the Eisenstein seminar; Georges Bataille in "French Cinema from Louis Feuillade to the Death of Jean Vigo"; and Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* for her introductory course about what she called "the heroic period of Soviet cinema." Merleau-Ponty, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and many others became familiar names thanks to her assignments. In the early 1970s, they afforded students like me a kind of intellectual excitement, a sense of being on the cutting edge of the humanities. Requiring such readings did much to develop our self-regard as young scholars at the beginning of our struggle to enter the academy.

Annette, however, never slavishly embraced theoretical fads and fashions in her lectures and essays. While some began to ride critical hobbyhorses that over time curdled into dogmatic pronouncements, she instead selected only certain ideas from these new discourses and used them very much in her own often striking way. Who, other than Annette, would have taken on the broad question of the representation of the female body in films through the work of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, the School of Fontainebleau, and Condillac without once mentioning the work of her friend Laura Mulvey? Moreover, she often integrated these novel notions with her *marxisant* interest in the cinema's imbrication in economic and political discourses and events, a carryover, perhaps, from her youthful flirtation with Trotskyism. But even in this regard, she was in no respect orthodox. Whether in her essays about Eisenstein or Vertov, or in her general conceptualization of the work of the American avant-garde, her approach might be described as a carefully curated eclecticism unconstrained by any narrow insistence on a purportedly master address to the problems and possibilities cinema posed.

For all who studied with her, Annette was and will remain a hard act to follow. With all due regard for the limitations of analogy, one might borrow a well-known idea from Walter Benjamin, one of the authors she continued to read until the last months before her death, to evoke Annette's presence in my life. Annette possessed an aura, a uniqueness, that, for a long time, commanded a certain distance that one sensed had to be respected. Yet breaking through that personal distance and getting to know her more intimately did happen over time. Such an opening to her friendship carried with it unexpected dividends, surprises, and pleasures: trips to the opera, shared visits to museums, extended discussions about films seen or books read along with tips about what to read or see. I was fortunate to have had this opportunity, this privilege. I will miss the vigor of her conversation, the extraordinary wealth of her knowledge and insights, the rigor of her thinking, and—not least—the inspiration of her example.

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BABETTE MANGOLTE

Babette Mangolte. Annette and Friends in Connecticut
One Day in November. *1970.*
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ANNA McCARTHY

Reaction GIFs are small, looped snippets of prerecorded footage, easily shared as image files on social media. People engaging in online conversation sometimes use them as a form of commentary or reply: Rapper Ice Cube giving the "side eye." Actor Nathan Fillion gesturing out of speechlessness. Oprah releasing a swarm of bees.

There is undoubtedly a certain skill at work in the deployment of reaction GIFs, a deft manipulation of the social-media stream in a kind of improvisational montage. Nevertheless, when in 2014 the Museum of the Moving Image mounted an exhibition entitled *The Reaction GIF: Moving Image as Gesture*, the show's curatorial statement assured the visitor that the GIFs selected for the exhibition were "used not for artistic expression but as an element of nonverbal communication, as performed language."[1]

It may be that this emphasis on linguistic over "artistic" expression made a distinction between the two in order to stay on the right side of copyright law. Or possibly it was an attempt to place some distance between the gestural, salty visuals exchanged by Tumblr and Twitter users and the kinds of cinematic achievement showcased in the museum's regular screenings. Or—the least persuasive explanation—perhaps the intent of the distinction was to suggest that reaction GIFs have little to add to aesthetic discourse. As if, despite their instant legibility and continual evolution, reaction GIFs have nothing to do with the archeo-modernist promise of a universal pictographic language. As if, despite each one unmistakably expressing a particular emotion or attitude, they do nothing to refute mechanized ideas about the operations of the close-up in montage's experimental and experiential field (for example the so-called Kuleshov effect).

All casuistry aside, what links the work of the humble GIF maker to artistic praxis is the process of craft. Reaction GIFs may not be "art," but they are certainly artful. And, moreover, the genesis of their artfulness lies in a genealogy of peering in which the conceptual work of art-making, the calculations involved in artisanal practice, and the obsessions of fandom have long been mixed. This genealogy includes "found footage" films, such as Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936), as well as still and animated works classified as photomontage.

To deny the artfulness of the reaction GIF is, in part, to deny the nature of the work that goes into its making. If this labor is easy to overlook, it is because reaction GIFs acquire meaning only in circulation, in the "sharing" through which one user speaks to another. The actual *maker* of the GIF remains an anonymous practitioner, a gleaner who moves rhythmically through the giant archive of moving images online, pausing only to isolate the perfect facial expression or ineffably apt gesture and release it, looped and pasted, into the digital ether.

1. See http://www.movingimage.us/exhibitions/2014/03/12/detail/the-reaction-gif-moving-image-as-gesture/.

It is this orientation toward craft, as much as or perhaps more than the use of prerecorded footage, that connects the labors of the GIF maker to the work of artists such as Joseph Cornell. Both are forms of praxis that demand detailed looking. When Annette Michelson met Joseph Cornell, he did not share any thoughts on his film work, but there is no doubt that it involved a lot of peering.[2] In the case of *Rose Hobart*, edited initially for the benefit of a known audience—Cornell and his disabled brother—Cornell must have spent hours squinting frame-by-frame at the face of Rose Hobart in the 1931 film *East of Borneo*.

GIFs have no authors: we may never know who made the miniature movie of Michael Jackson eating popcorn, or Kayode Ewumi tapping his head and smile-nodding. Still, we know that whoever it was must have spent time peering closely at the face in the frame, determining where to cut. This kind of peering, subjecting a piece of prerecorded material to a form of looking it was never supposed to endure, is a bodily attitude that all who work with prerecorded footage have in common. Like Cornell, GIF makers are part of an artisanal approach to mass culture founded upon the process of staring hard.

With its associative and undecidable sequencing, its blue tint, its slowed projection speed, and its disjunctive soundtrack (to say nothing of its original and subsequent audiences), *Rose Hobart* exists in a different conceptual universe from that inhabited by the reaction GIF's visual one-liners (although GIFs taken from *Rose Hobart* can, like everything else, be found online). What GIFs share with Cornell's work is an assertive, copulative approach to editing, applying techniques of cutting learned in the sticky labors of collage and assemblage to the experiment of montage.[3]

Cornell's montage, Michelson notes, "provides a tension, a special sort of suspense—that of the expectation of intelligibility."[4] And of course, it is an expectation that Cornell consistently thwarts. Makers of reaction GIFs, on the other hand, are reaching for intelligibility—the intelligibility of the reaction's being expressed. Yet in each case the practice is the same. Like Cornell, GIF makers isolate motion in the form of gestures, half-smiles, and inscrutable gazes off-screen. Similarly, they reposition these movements in a fragmented, collectivized narrative.

In each case, staring is part of the process. A long, hard looking practice necessarily precedes the found-footage practitioner's efforts to reanimate the labor of prior artisans, trade workers, and craftspersons. The GIF maker excising a reaction shot stares at a screen made of pixels, one possibly small enough to fit into a back pocket, whereas the staring of Cornell required strong light, splicing tape, and razor blades. Yet for each, the act of assembling and reassembling reproduces the

2. Annette Michelson, "*Rose Hobart* and *Monsieur Phot*: Early Films from Utopia Parkway," in Michelson, *On the Eve of the Future: Selected Writings on Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), p. 138.

3. Ibid., p. 152.

4. Ibid., p. 156.

craft of making for its own ends. (In *Rose Hobart*, think of the film's careful use of eyeline matches, central to continuity editing, at some points to establish narrative expectations, at others to frustrate any drive towards coherence.)

GIF-making does not only reproduce the craft of the narrative-film editor, however. It requires additional know-how, also born of physical practice—a certain way of handling the touch screen, for instance. The iPhone's Magic Eraser app allows you to erase backgrounds with your finger, demanding a delicate, daubing touch. Other kinds of know-how come into play when making a GIF for uploading to Tumblr, a social-media site with an active GIF-making culture. Because your GIF must be under two megabytes in size, you must draw on a repertoire of self-tested techniques to meet this load requirement—tapping on every other frame to delete it, for example. Such processes extend the cognitive dimensions of human touch into the digital ether; Cornell, led by the same impulse to put touch onscreen, transformed the precise assembly work of collage into the painstaking, razor-slicing practice of montage.

In *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*, woodworker David Pye offers a suggestive model for thinking about what GIF-making shares with the looking and handling that produced *Rose Hobart*. For Pye, craft is the mastery of two distinct forms of work: the workmanship of certainty and the workmanship of risk. Mechanization, automation, all the varied forms of machine tooling, make up the apparatus of certainty; materials and their qualities, intuition, and experience are among the many aspects of risk that are essential to craft.

This dialectic of workmanship is fully present in the GIF maker's labors. GIFs are composed of frames, and over the course of making one, you inevitably produce numerous iterations of the basic loop, trimming frames or adding them back in with the hope of achieving a balance between readability and file size. This process of artful trimming and scrupulous scrutiny can take some time. The additional work of image processing, manipulating the interdependent variables of picture size, file size, frame rate, and the loop's temporal duration superimposes another layer of craft. This highly variable second layer obeys no rules of continuity, and the result is that when you look for a particular GIF in an online search engine, you discover numerous variations of the same image loop, all with their own degree of resolution and their own color palette (some entirely blue), and of highly varying frame size. The marks left by each digital artisan bear witness to successive acts of peering.

When I started writing this essay, I thought I would talk about Marcel Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs*: circular abstractions, designed to spin, that formed the graphic material in his 1926 film *Anemic Cinema*. They have since been made into GIFs and circulate freely online. Given Duchamp's persistent concern with movement, a concern much noted by Annette Michelson, this new way of setting the *Rotoreliefs* into motion seemed a perfect thing to explore while honoring Annette's habits of thought. But something else kept buzzing in my head, and instead, this essay turned out to be about the labor of peering. When I reflect upon this intel-

lectual rerouting, the only explanation to hand comes in the form of an image-memory of Annette. The last time I saw her watch something onscreen was in the spring of the year she died. She was peering, without glasses, at something on her Macintosh computer. It turned out to be a YouTube video of an opera. The scene was some sort of sexy seduction, and I, being nosy, peered curiously over her shoulder, hoping to identify the work that had so intensely captured her interest. Annette closed the window too quickly, and now I will never know.

ANNA McCARTHY edits *Social Text* Online and displays her GIFs at dwGIFfith.org.

TONY PIPOLO

Apart from her lectures and publications, Annette Michelson's singular intellect and impact were felt directly and indirectly through her interactions, professional and social, with her students. Often, these had the most lasting effects. I met Annette in what I believe was the first film-criticism class she taught at NYU, in 1968. Like fellow classmates Noël Carroll and Paul Arthur, I was unprepared for what transpired. In what was to become her signature style, Annette performed a dazzling *explication du texte* with an aplomb, critical intelligence, and theatrical flair few of us had ever seen the likes of in a classroom. The text was a single essay by André Bazin from volume one of *What Is Cinema?,* which had recently been translated into English. The explication, which consumed several classes, did not go beyond the first few sentences on this first day, if memory serves. The detailed attention to and parsing of this text, as well as its autobiographical, historical, and political context, were like nothing I could have imagined, much less experienced. They left an indelible mark on my thinking about film and literature over subsequent decades. I would study with Annette in other courses—Soviet Cinema and New American Cinema—but the tour de force of that first class was burned into my brain. Thoroughly infectious as it was, the idea of "close reading"—of films and texts—became, in one way or another, *la règle du jeu* for me, the manner in which I would continue to study and write about films and teach them in the classroom. In a very real sense, it helped to determine the shape of the dissertation I would write on Carl Dreyer's *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, a subject encouraged by P. Adams Sitney (who was also at NYU at the time), who had suggested I compare the varying extant prints of that film. The result was a fortuitous convergence of historiography and close analysis that pleased both parties, I am happy to recall.

I never imagined at the time that Annette and I would develop a friendship that would last nearly fifty years, sharing multiple lunches, dinners, concerts, operas—even a few movies—along the way. It will be hard to forget her restless impatience with *The Godfather III,* which my wife and I took her to see one New Year's Eve, only to be more fascinated by what came out of her handbag than anything going on in the movie. Nor will I ever forget when, during the old, impecunious production of *Boris Godunov* at the Metropolitan Opera, I asked her, at the sight of six people standing onstage to hear the tsar's latest declaration, where all the Russian people were. Annette leaned over and whispered, "They're all in *Bohème.*"

Though many of my interests in film were not in sync with her own, she never failed to encourage me to pursue them. When I drove her to Middlebury College in Vermont, where she was spending a semester, she harangued me most of the way about why I was still at City University of New York and not applying for other teaching jobs. But it was my interest in Hollywood cinema and its influence abroad that prompted her to ask me to write the introductory essay for the *October* issue devoted to Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Needless to say, I was enormously flat-

tered. During one afternoon when we sat in her apartment listening to a brand-new recording of Alban Berg's *Lulu*, she used every minute it took to change discs to pressure me to stop wasting time on mediocre movies so I could complete the book I kept promising to write on Robert Bresson. Sharing intriguing personal details of her visits with Bresson was no small part of her taunting strategy. Few people I've known were as adept at scolding with the best of intentions.

The range of Annette's interests was extraordinary. Her ability to recall legendary stage performances and opera recitals from decades earlier was perhaps not surprising. But her awareness of Hollywood films, many seen in her youth, was not something she bragged about or that many people knew. More than once, when I took her to see a revival or gave her a video of a golden oldie, she relished these as forbidden pleasures, confessing boundless admiration for actors—e.g., James Cagney—one would not have thought struck her fancy. During the last few months of her life, in a number of visits, Annette asked what I was working on and I told her about two projects—one on American avant-garde cinema and one on Hollywood cinema. "Hollywood?" "Yes," I said, "it will be a study of loss and mourning and will cover some well-known films and some less familiar ones." "Like what?" she shouted from her bed. "Well, there's one film," I began, "called *Three Comrades*, made in 1938 . . . ," but before I could finish she raised her arm and pointed her finger at me and said with glee, "With Margaret Sullavan!" It was encouraging to realize that her memory could still be stirred to bracing effect. Nor did she stop there. She went on about Sullavan, nailing the delicacy of the features of her face, her voice, and her acting with nuanced appreciations I found remarkable—for it was clear she had not seen this film in decades.

On my last visit, about a week before her death, I held Annette's hand while she began to speak to me in French. While I held back the sad suspicion that she did not know who I was, I now choose to think that, to the end, she had continued to teach.

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ROBERT POLIDORI

Instant Karma's gonna get you,

Gonna knock you right on the head.

—John Lennon

In 1969, I was a freshman at the University of South Florida.

It was a fairly liberal environment, offering a varied academic menu.

I attended an evening class given by the English Department that was popular with the local "stoners" at the school. It featured a charismatic professor playing live piano accompaniment to screenings of D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* and *Birth of a Nation*, which he projected in 8mm at five or six frames per second in a large hall meant to accommodate some three hundred students.

It was one of those classes that students took for an "easy credit" since the professor graded his students solely on how long they stayed in the class paying attention to the movie. Nonetheless, some students did actually fail the class since sustained concentration is not, I am afraid, destined to be part of everyone's skill set.

I mention this event as prerequisite preparation for what was to happen next.

The Art Department, fully aware of the public controversy and interest spawned by this class, and not wanting to be outdone by the English Department, decided to stage *une riposte* as part of an ongoing interdepartmental rivalry.

Printed posters appeared on campus announcing that the Art Department would be featuring a visit by Professor Annette Michelson of New York University, who would be presenting a series of screenings of masterpieces of European and American avant-garde cinema to be scheduled over the course of three evenings.

I was curious, and so I went.

The first evening was dedicated to European cinema.

Among other films, Annette screened Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*.

This and the other films interested me, but I have to admit that her manner of presentation almost overshadowed the films themselves.

I (and almost all the other audience members) simply did not know what to make of her.

At first impression she seemed a most curious person.

She ad-libbed from written notes with what I considered, at the time, to be quite long-winded and meandering verbal introductions.

I also noticed her use of French words, speckled and dispersed throughout the body of her monologue. French being my first language, I could not help but grasp that she spoke it fluently. Her accent was such that it showed an inti-

macy of usage—she didn't run over the French words like roadkill the way most Americans would.

In fact, I initially thought she had some sort of accent even in English.

(*Where is she from?* I thought. And speaking of her accents . . . some months later, as she was confiding to me that she had once been briefly married to a southern gentleman in an improbable union that had ended in a quick annulment, she delivered this surprising admission in the most believable Dixie southern-belle accent. And furthermore, in the same conversation, she also told me that her favorite actress was Greta Garbo, whose scenes would bring tears to her eyes, and it is my belief that her personal style and manner were somehow influenced by Garbo's persona. We should not forget that Annette publicly stated many times that initially she always wanted to be an actress, and by logical extension her didactic presentations and speaking style can be seen as a kind of performance art.)

In a manner reminiscent of Joan of Arc, she cleverly taunted and solicited questions from the members of the audience, and in answering them she was serene and fearless.

Macho fools in the audience were duped into challenging her, and they paid the price.

She could skillfully and effectively (as penned in the lyrics of Bob Dylan, lifted from Vergil's *Aeneid*) "tame the proud."

The third night I found myself apprehensively sitting in the last row.

Uncharacteristically, Annette introduced the film she was about to present very simply in a cryptic paragraph or two, urging members of the audience to suspend coming to any judgment as they watched the film so as to be open to what they were about to experience.

Wavelength by Michael Snow was of course the film she projected.

And, like "instant karma," the path of my life was forever and irrevocably changed.

In recent conversations with Annette, reminiscing about the response to the film at that time, she used the word "conversion" to characterize the effect it had on her and others.

She went on to explain that by the word "conversion" she meant that after going through such a very intense experience, one is simply incapable of returning to one's prior existential state.

(I think that most people who knew Annette would not think of her as being a mystic, but in a conversation with her shortly before her death she reminded me that the first book she ever gave me was *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, and she asked if I had ever read it.)

After the questions, when everyone else was gone, I walked down to speak with her.

I told her that I thought the film was amazing but nonetheless had some minor criticisms, which I briefly touched on.

She replied that she had heard all those objections before but assured me that after repeated viewings of the film I would recognize those perceived shortcomings as being strengths.

I told her—in French—that I would like to come to live in New York, and I asked if I could stay at her house.

She responded, "*On fera mieux en commençant par des correspondences.*"

Which we did.

As was the fashion then, I dropped out of college, and a few months later I did end up sleeping on her couch at 101 West 80th Street.

Just a year before, I had graduated from Cocoa Beach High School, the only high school in the culturally barren context of the Kennedy Space Center, and suddenly I found myself cohabitating with a noted scholar in the nexus of the avant-garde cultural elite.

As naive as I was, I was still aware of the improbability of our living situation.

I'm not totally sure what it looked like to the many people who attended her frequent evening salon gatherings, but the overall impression was that my presence was perceived as being that of an *enfant sauvage* in residence.

Of the many guests, only Barbara Rose was openly brave enough to laugh at the spectacle we presented—a sublimely ironical situation comedy.

Our days together were altogether another thing.

It was just the two of us trying our best not to be noticed in our routine mutual observation. At the outset I would openly stare at her in the process of writing, but I soon realized that it bothered her, so I learned to mask my behavior a bit, like pretending that I was reading a book or was preoccupied with my private thoughts.

Like a trouper, Annette could read and write all day long.

She had taught me to make Café Bustelo just the way she liked it—and she would regularly have five or six in the course of the day.

These were the "coffee breaks," and often during these times she would have me look for her glasses, which she had misplaced.

I actually enjoyed this task since it was a way for me to examine more closely the many temporary and permanent placement schemes she would preserve and alter over the day. Most often I would find her glasses lying by a dead potted plant situated between a window and her library shelves.

She would ask me to leave when she was about to receive important daytime visitors.

I learned to wait in the elevator and to not press any floor destination—in this way the elevator would be called to the ground floor of the building by the expected visitor. By this method I first saw the living faces of Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka, and Hollis Frampton as we crossed each other entering and exiting the elevator.

By sending me out to get something or other, Annette devised another way to recapture her privacy.

One day she asked me to go get some chicken-salad sandwiches for our lunch. She suggested Zabar's as a good nearby place to go and get them.

She gave me the address and directions, and upon arriving there I could not help but stare and contemplate a sign affixed to the window.

I went in, ordered the sandwiches, and returned to the apartment.

After some time, I asked her, "Annette, why do these charcuterie places sell liquid oxygen . . . And how can they sell it by the pound?"

She stopped whatever she was doing and looked at me: "Robert, what on earth are you talking about? Tell me, what was it that you saw?"

"Well, Annette, I went to that place you sent me, Zabar's . . . And right on the window there's a big sign that says LOX, $4.99 A POUND."

She was silent for some seconds and then came to stand in front of me and spoke in a schoolteacher tone of voice: "Well, for starters, you're not in Cape Canaveral anymore. . . . And here in New York, lox is smoked salmon and not liquid oxygen. . . . Secondly, Zabar's is not '*une charcuterie*,' as you say, but a deli, a Jewish delicatessen. *Les charcuteries vendent des produits de viandes de porc. Les pratiquants du culte juif sont interdits de sa consommation. N'est-ce pas?*"

The slightest hint of an ironic smile came to her lips as she walked back to her desk. Having long ago forgotten this incident, I was reminded of it some years ago when I saw a sign in a Berlin shopwindow advertising LACHS, KALTGERÄUCHERT, 100G 6,50€.

Finally—I instantly realized the etymology of the word *lox*.

There were so many other episodes and events whose plots all revolve around the simultaneity of adjacent yet different cultural worlds.

Such as the time I brought her to vouch for me at a business meeting at 55 West 55th Street attended by Frank Zappa, his business partner Neil Reshen, and Bleecker Bob.

When she told Frank that his voice had the same intonation and rhythm as Robert Morris's, all three men looked at each other with that "Who's he?" look in their faces, with Frank looking especially stressed, not knowing whether he was being complimented or put down.

Or the time when she brought me to the Ziegfeld to see a Cinerama widescreen screening of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Fate would have it that the infamous Yippies Abby Hoffman and Jerry Rubin were sitting in the audience two seats in front of us, acting up and making noise for the near totality of the screening.

After some polite requests from Annette, she ended up shouting at them to "sit down and shut the fuck up."

The last of the incidents I want to mention here was the night Annette brought me to a loft in Tribeca to see what would be the premiere of Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*. It was attended by nearly all the members of the "Chambers Street Group" as well as Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney. When the projection came to its end and the lights went up, the audience was uncharacteristically silent. Foolishly, I was the first to ask Hollis a question: "Eh . . . Hollis . . . What are those integer things in the last shot?"

Everyone just looked at everyone else with a quizzical silent expression, until P. Adams burst out laughing and said: "Robert . . . Those integer things . . . as you call them . . . are called a fence."

Of course, everyone else also started to laugh.

Well, okay, I had again said the stupid thing.

The truth was that I had actually misperceived the shot of a row of fence posts across a snowy field as being a reproduction of hand-drawn lead-pencil lines on a white sheet of paper. The only consequence of lasting value that came out of this incident was that Jonas found my error so funny and endearing that he offered me the job of assistant theater manager of the Anthology Film Archives, which he was now in the process of opening.

Not really knowing what was involved, but being broke, I of course immediately accepted this offer, and this started the process of my slowly but surely moving away from Annette's world.

I was soon able to rent my own apartment and began to gravitate to friends closer to my own age.

Time moved us apart in other ways as well, and somehow, like many others who had known her, I also began to grow in her active disfavor.

I would occasionally hear her voice lecturing from behind doors and catch glimpses of her at the Anthology Film Archives, where she held some of her classes.

Yet if we would come face-to-face, our greetings lacked the warmth and camaraderie we shared in the past.

I think the conscious root of this was that she had found me insufficiently enthusiastic about handing out anti–Vietnam War pamphlets in Washington Square. (I was not in her eyes sufficiently politically committed.)

But probably the real emotional reason was that she felt I had abandoned her.

And it's true, in a way, I did.

It's an impossible task for a twenty-year-old to sit as an equal next to an erudite intellectual nearly thirty years his senior. No matter what, it seemed I would always be a child in her eyes.

Time passed, a decade in fact, and then I moved to Paris, where I lived for the better part of fifteen years.

Our communications grew sparse and increasingly testy.

I once flew to Toronto to see her present, along with P. Adams and Michael Snow, a new print of *Wavelength*. I went up to greet her before the presentation and she told me to go back to my seat and sit down.

Owing to prior commitments, I missed attending her ninetieth-birthday party.

The next time our paths crossed she gave me a tongue-lashing over it.

I didn't enjoy it, but frankly I was more shocked and disconcerted by her appearance.

She had aged considerably, and she looked ill and in pain.

I had now forgotten all about what had started our disharmony and who did what to whom and when. It now seemed stupid and pointless to carry on a vendetta.

Robert Polidori. Video interview with Annette Michelson. 2018.

It was some time later, after my daughter was born and, off in my beautiful exile in California, I had time to think and put things into perspective.

The simple truth of the matter is that the trajectory of my life would have been completely different had I never met her when I went to that screening in 1969. I am sure that many people who knew her will share their variants of the same theme and agree that Annette Michelson had the capacity to convert and transform people's thinking, and subsequently their lives.

So I began to contact her more frequently and to come chat with her at her last apartment, on 63rd Street, whenever I came to New York. Somehow, just like the old days, we were able to reengage in delightful free-form conversations where we felt comfortable enough to speak openly about whatever subject matter crossed our minds.

And for a while her health seemed to be holding out, so I convinced her to let me make a video record—an interview about her life. By the time the logistics were worked out, she was residing at the Langone Rehabilitation Center, and after some pleading they gave me a conference room to interview her in. The most curious detail about the decor of this room was that one of the walls was covered by a giant printed panoramic view of Central Park looking west, with the twin towers of the Beresford plainly visible in the center. Annette's old apartment on 80th Street was no more than a minute by foot from there. How fitting for a background icon, I thought.

She gave a nearly seventy-five-minute stream-of-consciousness monologue, which I occasionally prompted with some directional coaxing. I was mainly inter-

ested in hearing about her youth and early-adult years in Paris leading to the years at the Anthology Film Archives in New York. She followed my plan as much as she could but also took some detours to suit her mood. (It's a well-known fact that it is impossible to tell Annette what to do.)

After the one-hour mark I did not want to push her any more.

As my crew was packing up the equipment, I came and pulled up a chair in front of her and sat down. We began reminiscing about when we first met and the time I spent living with her at her apartment on 80th Street.

It seemed to be all so hilarious, then we both commented:

"Boy, are we far from 'All You Need Is Love' or 'Give Peace a Chance.'"

We agreed that in comparison the present context seemed so very noxious.

As the crew was about done packing up and Annette sensed my imminent departure, she removed her glasses, placed them on a small table next to her wheelchair, and, turning her eyes in my direction but looking off into a deeper space, said: "You know, about the time I met you, I had a plant that died. . . . I loved and cared for it. . . . I watered it as one should . . . but nonetheless it just simply died. . . . Years later, I realized that you had replaced that plant."

That was the last time I saw Annette alive.

ROBERT POLIDORI is an artist iconographer whose camera-generated works are preoccupied with themes of temporality and human habitat.

YVONNE RAINER

Writing the monologues for Annette Michelson in *Journeys From Berlin/1971* took place during one of the most creative periods of my life. The role of the analysand, whom Annette was to embody, was the only one I ever conceived for which I had a particular actor in mind during the entire period of the writing. I must have worked on the script for almost a year. I had collected hundreds of 3 x 5 cards with quotations culled from all over, including my own writing. True to a collagist's sensibility, I knew that the monologues were going to be structured in short disjunctive bursts of prose that, in many instances, would defy the rules of proper syntax and that I hoped would, in their utterance, ricochet off each other like billiard balls on a pool table. The actor would have to land and take off on a dime, so to speak. I had a keen sense that Annette could do it if she decided to put her mind to it.

The process of putting the fragments together was physically labor-intensive. This was 1978, long before word processing had appeared on my horizon. For days on end I sat on the floor, surrounded by my 3 x 5s and myriad scraps of paper, arranging them in piles according to topics: political violence, family life, Russian nihilists, Baader-Meinhof, architecture, aesthetics, food/the body, German history, archaeology, autobiography, cultural history, political theory, jokes, dreams, etc. Annette's image was never far removed from the fantasy life that fueled this process. Though I had infrequent contact with her during this period, like a muse in my mind's eye, doubling as superego, her avatar egged me on to greater exertions toward making sense of unlikely pairings of the public and private, fantasy and reality. At times I became downright ecstatic over my syntactical inventions and the anticipation of their delivery by Annette.

By the fall of 1978 she had read the script and accepted the part. We started to work, rehearsing twice a week for six months in the fall/winter of 1978–79. Her memory, as I had predicted, was phenomenal. And to say her act of submitting to the minutiae of my dictatorial direction was generous is the understatement of the year. I literally directed her from head to toe, reining in her accustomed expressive hand gestures and demanding an endless succession of precisely counted pauses and changes in focus and direction of gaze. Without undue modesty I can say now that Annette achieved a performance that is a tour de force of rhetorical style, somehow eluding the classifiable tropes of declamation and quotidian speech. Flitting and darting from one pyrotechnical mode of address to another, she travels, in high surrealist non sequiturs, the gamut of regret, rant, tirade, invective, whine, social criticism, confrontation, outrage, emotional exhaustion, introspection, rationalization, plea, confession, and historical lament. In its unpredictable ebb and flow, alternating between the

Yvonne Rainer. Journeys From Berlin/1971. *1980.*

poignant and sardonically comic, the role has a cumulative power. I can't imagine anyone else having pulled it off. I am sure it was one of the more challenging experiences of Annette's life, as it was of mine.

For some people *Journeys From Berlin* is their favorite of all of my films. In point of fact, having finished in 1996 what, for me, was yet another leviathan, and thinking about teaching a course in performance, or "the performative," I am returning to Annette's work in *Journeys From Berlin* as to a kind of lodestone.[1]

YVONNE RAINER is a choreographer, filmmaker, and writer.

1. This text was originally written in 1998.

ETHAN TAUBES

As with many of her close friends, my relationship with Annette was multi-layered and complex. It did not, however, come about in typical fashion. We didn't meet through mutual friends or share professional interests, and I was never a student or colleague of hers. Our lifelong bond sprang, rather, from an unusual family connection going back to the year 1948, when Annette first met my father, Jacob Taubes (a young European gnostic rabbi and antinomian philosopher). Soon afterward, she was invited to my parents' wedding, after which she cultivated and maintained an independent friendship with both of them. The rest, so to say, is history.

A better grasp of Annette's singular role in our family romance requires a brief snapshot of how my sister and I were brought up. Our parents were both Jewish European refugees who survived the Holocaust. They also happened to be intellectual bohemians who were equipped with few practical parenting skills. And although we often spent vacations with them, we were mostly brought up, when we weren't attending eccentric boarding schools, by an odd mixture of unevenly skilled nannies and—here is where Annette enters our story—an assortment of close friends who would be asked to intervene and act as surrogates in various crises, especially after our mother's untimely death when we were teenagers.

Annette was one of these close friends. I first met her in the early 1960s, after my mother moved us to Paris when we were still young children—this was during Annette's "Parisian phase." My earliest memorable encounter with Annette, during which she artfully assumed this peculiar role of "surrogate parent," occurred in Paris more than half a century ago, when I was twelve. While I was on vacation from my boarding school in southern France, Annette became my caretaker and companion—both my parents having mysteriously vanished from the scene. For the next week or so, she proceeded to regale me with a magical mystery tour of Paris, which included daily film-noir sessions (my favorite film genre at the time) at various revival houses; visits to the Musée Grévin (where I received graphic highlights from the lives of all the main characters of the French Revolution), the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume (where she gave a guided tour of Impressionist paintings), and the Père Lachaise cemetery (where she showed me where all the famous dead bodies were buried); and which culminated with a daylong visit to Versailles.

During that enchanted week I also got to feast at her favorite brasseries, hang out at cafés, sip rosé wine like a grown-up, play pinball machines, and travel, to my delight, by cab, which to Annette's dying day remained a categorical imperative. I suspect her taste for taxis even rivaled her passion for collecting rare art books and sparing no expense to attend every theatrical, dance, or musical performance that happened to catch her eye.

Many years later, she confessed that it was during this, our "first Paris adventure," that she had "developed"—as she delicately put it with her characteristic diplomatic charm—an "exceeding fondness" for me because, aside from her find-

ing me to be a more or less precocious twelve-year-old, I had given her a great compliment for a woman already in her early forties, one she had never forgotten. And what was that? I asked. "You told me that I was as beautiful as Sylvie Vartan," she smiled, blushing. Vartan—for those of you who might be in the dark—was a blonde, French teenage idol of the 1960s (still alive, I believe) who'd been my favorite pop star at the time.

Annette would assume this peculiar role of surrogate parent or quasi–fairy godmother often in my life. Here are just a few highlights that come spontaneously to mind. In 1971, when I was eighteen and had just graduated high school in the States, I stopped off in Paris for a couple of weeks to meet my father before going on to Berlin with him to study there for the next two years. Annette also happened to be spending that summer in Paris, doing film research at the Cinémathèque française. Before long, my father and I had a bitter falling out (just another episode in our endless cycle of Oedipal warfare), and Annette immediately intervened by taking me under her protective wing for the rest of my trip.

We spent the next fortnight marooned in the cinémathèque, watching old movies together, where Annette not only introduced me to the seminal works of her beloved early Russian masters Eisenstein, Vertov, and Pudovkin but also had me see the amazing silent-film series *Fantômas* by the French filmmaker Louis Feuillade. We capped off our cinematic saturnalia in "Plato's cave" with a Bresson and Dryer retrospective, followed by a two-day showing of the remastered-sound version of Abel Gance's epic extravaganza *Napoléon*—a movie that changed my life. But that's another story.

A few years later, when in my early twenties, after I'd moved back to New York to start my adult life as a struggling artist, I was going through an extremely painful breakup with a close friend. Annette insisted on spending the day with me and invited me to dinner, where she gave me the following terse advice worthy of La Rouchefoucauld or La Bruyère, which I have always cherished: "In friendship it's not people's strengths we need to guard against but their weaknesses."

That same year, when I was looking for acting work, Annette showed the same generous solicitude by arranging for her friend Richard Foreman (whose work she knew I admired) to hire me as an actor in one of his "Rhoda in Potato Land" metaphysical burlesques—although, I must confess, being moved around the stage like a mannequin and forced to freeze for hours in excruciating postures was more than a classically trained actor like myself could long endure. And although I left after a week, I was still grateful to Annette for trying to help me out.

Over the years, Annette faithfully maintained this role of cautious advisor and parental guide, introducing me to artist friends, inviting me to concerts, art openings, theatrical performances, and experimental films she thought might expand my intellectual horizons. Following my marriage to my wife, Sally, in 1986, Annette remained a vital presence in both of our lives. She adopted Sally in the same generous fashion as she had me, often inviting us to dinner or taking us out to her favored neighborhood restaurants, introducing us to artist friends whose

company and friendship she thought we would enjoy. This generosity of spirit was on exceptional display when it came to inviting us to see choice exhibits or theatrical productions; she always insisted on covering the cost, even when she was too ill to accompany us and share the experience herself.

Equally meaningful were Annette's own insatiable appetite for knowledge and her unbounded intellectual curiosity. She wasn't only a voracious reader and subtle exegete, but her capacity to be genuinely moved and inspired by new artistic encounters, even into her nineties, was astonishing. I recall her sharing with genuine excitement her late discovery of the Austrian writer Joseph Roth, and pouring effusive praise on *The Radetzky March*. Annette was also a remarkable interlocutor. Every time I would visit her, our conversations freely ranged across the most variegated themes and subjects: In one session it could go from discussing lessons to be learned from Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* to exchanging views on Saint-Simon and the Court of Louis the XIV or why Pauline Kael's views on Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* were historically skewed. She was continually recommending and lending me books—"Have you read Alexander Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*?" she'd eagerly inquire. Or urge: "You will enjoy Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." On my next visit she would insist that I acquaint myself with Georges Bataille's *L'Érotisme* and read the Japanese author Tanizaki. On another occasion she'd foist on me her favorite John Le Carré spy novels and add Richard Holmes's two-volume biography of Coleridge to my reading list.

In short, both the breadth of her knowledge and range of her interests in all the arts—from musicology and architecture to literature, criticism, and intellectual history—were not only wonderfully heterodox and erudite but breathtaking. And all the while, she would continue to show an equal interest in and concern for my personal life, inquire about my professional challenges as a human-rights lawyer, or give me patient feedback when I shared with her some of my own fledgling literary writings.

In this strange sense, Annette—who was never known for her maternal instinct and who professed to never wanting, or even really much liking, children—nevertheless graciously assumed this role of "surrogate parent," first adopting my sister and me, and then Sally after our marriage, into her care in her own unique, singular, and often moving way. She not only expressed cautious solicitude and concern for our welfare and progress, but always did so with a touch of humor and a refreshing mix of amused empathy and discretion—very much like a concerned parent wanting to offer advice and see us flourish as human beings, but always without being intrusive or overbearing. No small feat.

What was especially poignant about the Annette I came to know in her more spontaneous, unguarded moments was that sometimes, in assuming this surrogate "parental" role, she would inadvertently allow that daunting grande dame persona and formidable social mask to slip. At those moments, that prickly layer of protective character armor she had so arduously refined over a lifetime of professional hardship and struggle would vanish to reveal glimpses of a wonderfully sensitive, genuine, and often endearingly vulnerable human being.

Many of us who were familiar with this grande dame persona knew how she could at times suddenly lash out in anger or disapproval, startling even her most loyal admirers. Many of us experienced how she could come off as haughty or trenchant, imperious and wounding, and even, on occasion, be vexingly contemptuous or dismissive of others' perspectives, especially when—rightly or wrongly—she believed she was denouncing ignorance, exposing fallacious arguments, or defending the world, or her favorite hobbyhorse "modernism," against what she felt was every type of intellectual fraud or philistinism.

But the wonder of it was that just seconds later, this very same person could not only disarm us with her refined sensibility or jeux d'esprit but also impress us with her keen moral courage and intellectual grace reminiscent—at least for me—of Madame de Staël or Rahel Varnhagen, self-made women who inspired the salons of the early nineteenth century. I'm convinced Annette would have felt completely at home in these rich "Enlightenment" settings.

As she grew older, I would catch more and more fugitive glimpses of this much kinder, more vulnerable and sensitive soul concealed beneath the carefully cultivated social persona Annette so meticulously confected throughout her professional life. I was especially touched when, on my many visits to the various ICUs, hospital wards, and/or rehab centers she frequented, Annette began to introduce me as her "godson" to hospital staff and visiting friends. With time, I began to realize that this designation was more than just an assigned role or form of flattery, that in fact Annette genuinely considered Tania, Sally, and myself to be part of her family. This revelation became progressively clearer to me in the last years of her life as her health declined and when, after a long visit, the moment came for me to leave and Annette would press my hand and say: "You are the only real family I have."

About a week before her death, I went to see Annette. Chelin—her indispensable caretaker and companion, whom Annette not only relied upon but truly loved—greeted me at the door. I spent the next couple of hours sitting at Annette's bedside holding her hand, softly singing some of the spirituals that she had so welcomed and enjoyed when the visiting choir of women had sung them to her a month before. At one point, as I had just finished singing the lyrics "I looked over Jordan," Annette opened her eyes and, with great strain and difficulty, whispered the word "family" several times before losing consciousness again. Whether she actually recognized me, I have no way of really knowing. But it left me wondering how little we really know about or fully grasp the complexity of the human heart.

Many of us who knew Annette intimately often marveled at her remarkable stoicism and courage in the face of excruciating pain. We were equally impressed by the dry irony and humor she could still muster when having to contend with all the indignities that illness and old age can impose on the mind and body. Even in her last year, Annette was still able to take her failing health and diminishing prospects—as the aged Freud is reputed to have done—with mostly grace and

courage, while always showing an indomitable will not only to survive but to remain intellectually lucid and socially engaged, a goal she heroically pursued and succeeded in accomplishing almost to the very end.

My dear Annette, I know that my sister Tania, Sally, and I will not only miss but cherish your spirit, your presence, and, most of all, your love.

Here is a brief portion of a poem that I know Annette would have appreciated and that, I believe, honors her memory and spirit. It is from the last passage of Tennyson's *Ulysses*, and it would have delighted Annette because it was quoted in *Skyfall,* a recent James Bond movie, by Judi Dench, an actress she admired:

> Come, my friends,
> 'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
> Push off, and sitting well in order smite
> The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
> Of all the western stars, until I die.
> It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
> It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
> And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
> Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

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ALLEN S. WEISS

The last time I saw Annette, my mentor and dear friend of over a quarter-century, the evening began inauspiciously. We had a dinner date, and as I rang the bell, the tone of the response did not bode well: "Yes?" "It's Allen." "Allen? Were we supposed to meet?" "Yes, for dinner." "Oh, well, please come up then." She opened the door to her loft, somewhat disheveled, a glass of whisky in her hand. "Excuse me, I must have forgotten. Let me go and get ready. Would you like a whisky?" Everything up to this point, especially the proposition of a whisky, suggested that this would not be the most joyful of evenings. For in the decades we had known each other, this most subtle hostess and dedicated gourmet well knew that as an apéritif I never touch anything stronger than white wine or champagne. I excused her, and while she prepared, I rummaged through her library, as I was wont to do, though exceptionally libationless. I had just published *Le livre bouffon*, and discreetly left on the coffee table a copy of this ode to Baudelaire and the Paris we both loved. It would be difficult to overestimate the depth of my friendship with Annette, or the complexity of our intellectual—and, for that matter, culinary—interactions. She was one of the few people whose thought often nuanced, if not outright transformed, my own. Each meeting was an adventure that swept me into an expanding arc of modernist aesthetics.

Annette soon returned her usual elegant self, though the name of the restaurant given to the taxi driver was an additional ill omen. The restaurant she had chosen was, for approximately its first month, one of the best fusion establishments in the city, but it soon degenerated into a boisterous hangout for the young, rich, and all-too-beautiful people who care more about what is in their mirror than what is on their plate. To make matters worse, we seemed to have been thrust into the acoustic hot spot of the room. The service was poor, the food awful, and the noise such that we had to shout at each other. But this was Manhattan, and one puts up with such minor inconveniences in order to dine.

Annette was born in the same year as my mother, which makes us one generation apart, but we had always felt as if we were contemporaries, given our shared love of a certain art, literature, cinema, and cuisine. Never was this more true than during those times we first met in Paris well over a quarter-century ago, and there most fervently when dining together. But this evening in New York seemed doomed, and I was anxious to hasten its end, all the more so as it was the eve of my departure to Paris. The noise was unbearable, and I was resigned to an awful meal without even the recompense of lively conversation. At a loss for words, I mentioned my imminent departure, and the discussion—what little there was of it up until then—veered to the City of Light. All of a sudden, as the grimoire opened to the word "Paris," there was magic! Paris became once again, as Hemingway so beautifully put it, "a moveable feast." We were surrounded by a protective bubble of memory within which the noise abated, the glitterati receded, and the food even seemed palatable. We traveled decades back in time to our first dinner in

Paris, transported to a favorite restaurant in Les Halles, chez Vattier, and sat before two plates of *raie au beurre noir* and a bottle of Muscadet. We spoke of all those things we had in common in that city we loved—friends and enemies, poets and philosophers, museums and restaurants—but at a certain moment I realized, as with the shock of recognizing for the first time an essential principle of human life, that we were speaking of the very same people, places, and things *as they existed twenty years apart!* Until my recent reunion with my Teddy Bear—whose autobiography I am in the process of ghostwriting—I had only once experienced such a chronological jolt (certain passages in Proust aside): the moment I realized that the time that separated me from Walter Benjamin as I labored in the Bibliothèque nationale de France on *Le livre bouffon*—recounting Baudelaire's ill-fated attempt to enter the Académie française—equaled that which separated Benjamin from Baudelaire as the former worked on his equally ill-fated *Arcades Project.* As I held in my hands the very same books consulted by Benjamin, the magic of reading—what we call identification or association—collapsed the time of a life into the portable space of a book. I couldn't have been more astounded, or more pleased.

Vattier exists no more, supplanted by a series of fast-food joints; skate with black butter has disappeared from French menus, a victim of stringent European food regulations that would save us from the evils of unhealthful food, burnt butter included. Immediately after that dinner I had sensed a profound connection between us, expressed by the palimpsest of our Parisian memories. But as soon as the magic spell was analyzed, it was broken. How is it possible that we were once contemporaries, yet had drifted so far apart? What I had felt as a bond was in fact the first tug preceding an ineluctable moment of rupture, a time that no longer flowed, a rift, a generation gap. A decade passed. I never saw Annette again. I still long for *raie au beurre noir*, the imagined black butter covering the imagined skate being thaumaturgic, a culinary poultice to treat time's wounds, to attenuate the pain of friendship lost, to assuage the melancholy of a desired yet perpetually deferred homecoming that we call nostalgia.

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FEDERICO WINDHAUSEN

Over a time span of more than two decades, I have found myself repeatedly reflecting upon the language through which Annette Michelson conveyed and elaborated her views on art and film. In retrospect, I wish I had asked her, during our many long conversations about her life and career, much more about the development of her writing style. I do not doubt that she herself had considered the issue at length.

In a letter to Noël Carroll from August 1979, for example, Annette commented that she was "fascinated these days by the manner in which both Borges and Waugh maintain a laconic clarity."[1] Her phrasing suggests that the nature of her interest was directed at their achievement as fellow writers, at their sustained use of devices and techniques that allowed them to "maintain" a particular quality of prose. Later that same year, writing to Leo Steinberg, she avowed her "secret love of the short Anglo-Saxon forms and the rhythms they engender," while also describing herself as being "of a generation whose style is forever marked by the James revival."[2] She also lamented, probably too harshly, her "academicization" as a writer and the "congealing of [her] style away from spoken English."

To this reader's ear, Annette's singularly engaging texts combine her Anglo-Saxon and Latinate influences, often within sentences strongly reliant upon suspended syntax. Her keen and consistent attention to emphasis and pacing, cadence and flow, is present in some of her earliest published writing from Paris, and by the late 1960s it seems as if each subordinate clause and sentential adverb has been designed to set her ideas to the tempi of readerly expectation, anticipation, and questioning. If, stylistically, she can be characterized as a writer of subtly modulating rhythms, it is notable that in the substance of her writing she frequently explored the experience of temporality in the arts.

The most representative examples of Annette's authorial tone and voice can be readily located in the canonical literature. I would prefer to cite here the opening to a little-known review of the 1962 Venice Biennial that she wrote for *Arts Magazine*. In addition to demonstrating some typical features of her literary style, it also exemplifies an aspect of her sensibility and worldview perhaps best articulated in her remark, in the letter to Carroll, that laughter was "the gift I value, at this point in any case, above all." It was a gift offered and renewed by Annette, for very many of us, on countless occasions.

> I remember reading, some years ago, an article on the Venice Biennale which seemed to me a model of its kind. It began with a gen-

1. "Annette Michelson writing to Noël Carroll after having acted in Yvonne Rainer's *Journeys From Berlin*," *Idiolects* 13 (1983), p. 74.

2. Annette Michelson, letter to Leo Steinberg, October 22, 1979, box 9, folder 4, Leo Steinberg research papers, 1945–1996 (bulk 1950–1993), Getty Research Institute, Research Library, accession no. 930046.

eral, meditative view of Venice, continued with a slow, gradual, preparatory meander through the Grand Canal, until the reader found himself, eventually, transported on an even tide of well-bred prose (this article was published by *Horizon*), delivered as if by the sure and silent progress of a gondola, delivered to the exhibition gardens. I've not reread the piece since, but have a vivid, admiring recollection of it, all the more so as it contradicts entirely everything I felt and saw at this last, my first, Biennale.

If men may be divided into two categories, Venetians and Florentines, I count myself Venetian. I arrived this year, after an absence of seven, and walked out of the train station. The landscape erupted before me; the force set off a chain of inner reactions which did not cease until long after my departure. The idea of this city serving as background or décor for anything else at all seems absurd. (On the other hand, of course, the absurd and glorious location is the stroke of genius behind the entire affair.) The Biennale seems, however, to the visitor, an intrusion, a phenomenon of another order of reality, whatever its quality, a fact to be faced, and never quite assimilated. I cannot, then, proceed to convey you smoothly, painlessly to the gardens.

Then, again, the prospect of a Salon and of the Salon review has always made me recoil, set up a resistance. I tend, before sitting down to the task, to reach for Baudelaire, or Diderot, or Apollinaire, looking for some sort of clue to a possible method. I rarely get that; I get instead some mild comfort from the reminder, after a few pages read, that this sort of thing is a difficult, painful chore to the best of men, to the liveliest and most creative intelligence—although some have had the good sense to treat it with more humor than I command.

One wants, above all, to avoid the tone and manner of the professor distributing final grades: a "B-" to X, a "C" to Y who is expected to "do better, much better, next term." Here, however, is Apollinaire at the Indépendants in 1911: "Lacoste's three large panels have beauty. This artist has grown. I liked very much Claude Chérau's drawings, inspired by Isadora Duncan's dances. Picart le Doux is exhibiting a portrait of Jules Romains. Stuckgold's exhibition should be considered as a case of a special kind. He is in the process of finding himself, in a voluptuous frenzy. I liked his *Study for Venus and Psyche* and his portraits . . . Urbain's entry has delicacy, and that of Terrus is very attractive. Madame Follot-Vendel's landscapes show a fine sensitivity. I also liked

extremely Bausil's Catalonian landscapes . . ." Etc., etc. And this is worse than the professorial tone; it is the very accent of that Mère Ubu of our present critical scene, our shame and scandal, Madame Claude Rivière, of *Combat*![3]

Then, again, one is not certain that a specifically critical article on that outsized Salon which is the Biennale makes any particular sense. For a magazine which has, moreover, instituted a policy of limiting its reviews to the useful, the interesting, extending them, from time to time, perhaps, to that ultimate, desperate category of the "relevant," the idea of a really detailed account of the Biennale would involve contradiction, if not absurdity. By this I mean to say right off and rather gently that the general level of quality of the Biennale exhibits is appalling. Once that *has* been said, and allowances for a few subordinately interesting retrospectives made, one concludes that the Biennale is really material for the sociologist, the journalist, the novelist; it affords little play to a critical eye, *engages* specifically critical attention hardly at all. To be present, moreover, at an opening in Venice is to be impressed—traumatically—with the terrible, fascinating fact of the "value" of the art object; nowhere is that alchemy which transubstantiates the work of art into a commercial value so powerfully and nakedly at work—not even, I imagine, in Pittsburgh. History, moreover, bears this out. The Biennale Committee, in a reminiscent mood this year, organized a retrospective exhibition of painting and sculpture by award winners since 1948. Seeing this was rather like reading through a library composed of Nobel Prize winners; one plowed through Pearl Buck *and* T. S. Eliot, Sully Prudhomme *and* Gide. It explained much, not only a conservatism and timid provincialism generally apparent (Braque received his award in 1948, Matisse in 1950, and Miró was given a prize for graphic work in 1954), but the particularly scandalous character of the award this particular year, of the first prize for painting to Manessier. Happily enough, the sense of outrage—even in hardened old-timers—was general, unanimous in fact; one cannot imagine either the artist or his gallery really deriving much future prestige from a victory which elicited a hostility so intense and unqualified. It

3. Claude Rivière was known for posing the question "Is there a School of Nice?" The critic's answer: "We could believe it, because there are many painters living in Nice. Arman, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Laubiès, Jean-Pierre Mirouze, Sacha Sosnovsky, and many others. They are full of ardor and audacity." According to Rosemary O'Neill, Rivière's preferred artists possessed "a deep suspicion of modernity while at the same time acknowledging the value of the art and visual culture of the French Riviera." Claude Rivière, "La charge solaire de l'artiste," *Combat*, August 22, 1960, p. 9; Rosemary O'Neill, *Art and Visual Culture on the French Riviera, 1956–1971: The École de Nice* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 76–77.

seems to me, however, even less likely that the Biennale's prestige will suffer particularly from this kind of whopping critical blunder. Once one begins to understand this institution as, more than anything else, an elaborate mechanism regulating market relationships, questions of prestige fade away into irrelevancy; those who fear for its future may rest assured that the Biennale will continue undisturbed and unimpaired; it is needed, if at all (and that is the great question), for its faults and venalities. As for Manessier's painting, it is of a mediocrity almost universally recognized (in so far as it is known at all outside France), except in precisely those official and Catholic circles whose approval can be counted a kiss of death; some honors are difficult to survive. But shall we get on with the tour of the pavilions?[4]

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4. Annette Michelson, "The Venice Biennale," *Arts Magazine* 37 (October 1962), pp. 20, 22.

Handprints in a cave in Gargas, France.

Beginnings

ROSALIND KRAUSS

If this starts a bit like a travelogue, it is in fact a tribute to Annette's indefatigable curiosity and voracious appetite for new realms of experience. Her discovery of André Leroi-Gourhan's structural paleontology was one of these, leading to Annette's translation of two chapters of his magisterial book *Prehistory of Western Art,* for publication in issue 37 of our ten-year-old magazine, *October*—an issue overseen by our brilliant managing editor at the time, Douglas Crimp. Founding the magazine together was the gift Annette and I gave each other. It was her translation that opened the paleontological world of the caves to me, and she naturally suggested that we visit them together, in the summer of 1986.

We planned our trip around the itinerary suggested by Leroi-Gourhan, and our base of operations was Les Eyzies, in the Dordogne, because of its proximity to the unapproachable Lascaux. Fittingly enough, we chose as home base the Hotel Cro Magnon—named after the first humanoids and close to Ruffignac, Les Combarelles, and, a short drive away, Cahors and Pech Merle.

I've been calling Leroi-Gourhan a structuralist, and I'd like to telegraph to you what made him so. The common-sense explanation of the cave paintings turned on sympathetic magic—a way of luring animals into the reach of these tribes of hunters. Leroi-Gourhan did not believe a bit of this. His examination of the caves assured him of the invariable grouping of the animals in pairs. Sorting the animals themselves into male and female, he designated the relatively bloated bison as female, the elongated bodies of horses and reindeer or elk as male. The consistency of this pairing could not, he thought, be accidental; his conclusion, therefore, was that the paintings were conceived as a site of species reproduction, making the cave itself a kind of giant, darkened womb.

Pech Merle and Les Combarelles reveal another dispute between Leroi-Gourhan and the traditionalists. The peculiar feature of the frequent palm prints stenciled onto the cave walls by blowing powdered pigment over the outstretched palm is that many of the fingers are missing one digit. The traditional explanation was that the prints recorded the result of a form of tribal circumcision. Leroi-Gourhan dismissed this as fatuous nonsense. No population dependent on hunting would maim one of its members, he insisted. Survival was his clue. Success in hunting depends on silence; so the theory he developed was that

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the shorter fingers were merely folded back as if to mimic the sign language the hunters had to use.

I deeply regret that I have no pictures of Annette from this trip, but the darkness of the caves and the prohibition of flashes discouraged me from bringing a camera. What I did bring, however, was a pair of French canvas summer hiking boots, in anticipation of the uneven, rocky floors of the caves. In this I had not counted on the French Ministry of Culture, which, in its allergy to liability suits, had built boardwalks throughout the grottoes' chambers. One could have traversed the entire cave in stiletto heels! Annette also prepared for the terrain and was dressed in the goofiest pair of sneakers I had ever seen.

Gargas—in Spain—was too far for us to go, so we had to be content with Niaux, located in Auche. As it happened, Georges Bataille signed his pornographic novel *L'histoire de l'oeil* "Lord Auch." At dinner, Annette and I concluded our journey by toasting Bataille. Our journey together celebrated our ten-year-long assembly of the greatest creative minds of our generation and a journal of surpassing interest for a large and growing audience. I can only raise my glass to that and thank Annette from my heart.

Annette's Soho Loft

Babette Mangolte. Annette on the Phone in Her Soho Loft on October 31. *1978.*
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Mangolte. Annette's View of Her Soho Loft That She Will Leave Behind on November 2nd. *2004.*
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