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DISCLOSURE OF THE EVERYDAY:

THE UNDRAMATIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN NARRATIVE FILM

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* The stills are from photographs of video copies, except those of *Late Spring* which I have taken from Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour: Neo-Formalist Film Analysis*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, 1988. These stills are provided to clarify matters discussed in the text and to act as a reminder of the visual tone of the films. However, I include only a few stills because I do not wish the presence of illustrations to substitute for the effort of finding a vocabulary to analyse the films.

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SUMMARY

The claim providing the starting point for this thesis is that most narrative films are in an overtly dramatic, melodramatic or comic idiom. These modes seem most adept at tapping the visually expressive potentialities of the art and satisfying the needs of the audience: the narratives of most films are structured around either confrontation, or colourful events, or crisis, or periods of significant change, and they are expressed in a demonstrative visual style. This thesis is interested in the way a few films uncover profundity by structuring narrative around a range of life experiences unavailable to the melodramatic mode as it has developed in world cinema; life experiences based in the everyday, that is in the routine or repetitive, in the apparently banal or mundane, the uneventful.

The first part of the thesis discusses the nature of the achievement of these undramatic films which address the everyday: how they help us to understand the medium of film, its possibilities, and how they enhance our ways of viewing and appreciating narratives. This section also focuses on the work of Stanley Cavell, exploring the links between the everyday, film melodrama, and scepticism.

The second half of the thesis looks at the specific achievements of four films. Here, the thesis continues the expressive tradition of film scholarship which analyses the communication of meaning through the construction of *mise-en-scène*, exploring how the themes, ideas, and happenings of a film are served by their stylistic strategies, while further highlighting how such strategies may reveal significant possibilities of the medium. In doing so it follows the approach of writers such as Stanley Cavell, V.F. Perkins and George M. Wilson whilst redirecting this tradition by applying it to less obviously expressive films.

Abbreviations

The following are used in shot breakdowns:

cu	close-up
mcu	medium close-up
ecu	extreme close-up
ms	medium shot
ls	long shot
mls	medium long shot
els	extreme long shot

Introduction

In a scene from Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1958 Fr) the priest's diary is shown while we hear him say "The Countess died that night". We then hear the sound of a candle being blown out, the image becoming duller as the candle stops shedding light. Even though the Countess has been an important character, we do not see her die, and furthermore we do not see the candle being extinguished; rather it is registered as a light going out on the diary. Later in the film, the sight of the priest's dropping of his diary and his unsuccessful effort to regain it from the floor substitute for seeing *his* death.

The film presents itself with a problem by subduing its moments of crisis. It is not simply a matter of avoiding the sight of death as a focal point but rather the manner of that avoidance: in both moments described, death is filtered through the priest's regular medium of expression – his diary. By disregarding the possibilities the medium offers for *showing* events or exploiting them, the film risks diminishing the force of its significant emotional moments, or perhaps trivialising them. The claim providing the starting point for this thesis is that most narrative films are in an overtly dramatic, melodramatic or comic idiom. These modes seem most adept at tapping the visually expressive potentialities of the art and satisfying the needs of the audience: the narratives of most films ("popular" and "art" movies) are structured around either confrontation, or colourful events, or crisis, or periods of significant change, and they are expressed in a demonstrative visual style[1].

However, *Diary of a Country Priest* manages to be visually eloquent, without adopting an assertive style. In the case of the Countess' death, the darkness surrounding the diary symbolises the end of speaking for the time being, the silence here defined by the halting of writing; while the end of the priest's life is conceived as his inability to reach for his diary notebook. The film communicates that one might not be able to feel sadness or grief directly or forcefully (e.g. by sobbing or convulsing), but instead experience it as a disappearance or a lack. In these cases the manifestation of one's grief may shunt itself on to rather mundane, even banal things, in this case on to the everyday object of a diary (a diary used for recording a life, day by day). By

[1] It should be noted that a film may be slow paced but still visually emphatic, visually melodramatic so to speak. Therefore I am using a deliberately more expansive and inclusive definition of the term melodramatic than that which has traditionally been labelled 'melodrama' in film literature (see **Chapter One** for a more detailed discussion).

adopting a stylistic strategy built around the repetitions of writing a diary, the film avoids the melodramatic strategies which dominate most narrative films and which often exclude or distort a subject matter not suitable to its type of expression. This thesis is interested in the way films uncover profundity by structuring narrative around a range of life experiences unavailable to the melodramatic mode as it has developed in world cinema; life experiences based around the routine or repetitive, the apparently banal or mundane, or the uneventful.

Part One of the thesis deals with theoretical ideas concerning the everyday and the cinema. **Chapter One** elucidates the work of Stanley Cavell, unravelling his idiosyncratic and suggestive philosophy, in particular his understanding of the relationship between scepticism, the ordinary and film melodrama[2]. Cavell discusses the importance of coming to terms with the everyday, with the repetitions of our lives. 'Coming to terms with the everyday' will depend on not mistaking it for something else, and so **Chapter Two** distinguishes the everyday from a variety of 'realisms' by analysing a series of films which might be called "ordinary" but do not match my particular specification of the everyday. It is rare to see a genuine concern with the everyday in film, so **Chapter Three** discusses the nature of the achievement of the films which do address it: how they help us to understand the medium of film, its possibilities, and how they enhance our ways of viewing and appreciating film[3].

Part Two looks at the specific achievements of four films. In these chapters I am continuing the expressive tradition of film scholarship which analyses the communication of meaning through the construction of *mise-en-scène*, exploring how the themes, ideas, and happenings of a film are served by their stylistic strategies[4], while also highlighting how such strategies may reveal significant possibilities of the medium. In doing so I am following the approach of writers such as Stanley Cavell, V.F. Perkins and George M. Wilson[5] whilst redirecting this tradition by applying it to

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[2] The thesis is marbled throughout with the work of Stanley Cavell, and it is one of the central aims of the thesis to show the usefulness of his work, a usefulness still not recognised sufficiently by film scholars in Britain.

[3] An account of the methodology used in the thesis also emerged fluently from the discussions in this chapter, hence such an account does not appear in this introduction.

[4] For the best understanding of expressive criticism see Adrian Martin, '*Mise-en-Scène* is Dead', *Continuum*, Vol.5 No.2, 87-140, esp. p99-101.

[5] Cavell, Perkins and Wilson are particularly adept at allowing their rich expressive criticism to illuminate more general aspects of cinema (see **Chapter Three** for further discussion).

less obviously expressive films[6]. Maintaining that the undramatic – for example, experiencing life through the repetitions of a diary – does not equate to the unrevealing, unemotional or irrelevant, the thesis makes claims concerning the cinema's less apparent stylistic capabilities: **Chapter Four** on *Diary of a Country Priest* concentrates on cinematic techniques which subdue crisis; **Chapter Five** on *Loves of a Blonde* (Miloš Forman 1965 Cz) discusses how to represent boredom and waiting on screen, how to make uneventful lives worthy of a viewer's attention; **Chapter Six** on *Late Spring* (Yasujiro Ozu 1949 Jap) shows how the cinema does not need to be sequentially eventful because the director can construct patterns out of apparently innocuous moments or scenes, allow these patterns to accrue significance across the course of a narrative, and thus slowly uncover the interest which may lie in the routine of domestic relationships; and **Chapter Seven** on *A Tale of Springtime* (Eric Rohmer 1989 Fr) demonstrates how film narrative, by neither crystallising the purposes and directions of scenes and characters, nor adopting a momentum built around events, is able to make the viewer hesitate over what might at first seem an unimportant moment, and so unconceal the significance in the apparently obvious. In a series of comparative pieces I have explored the cinema's more familiar dramatic modes of expression. The additional pieces closely connect with the expressive concerns of a particular chapter and further illuminate the unusual stylistics of the four undramatic films (for example, *All I Desire*, a 1950s American family melodrama, is compared to *Late Spring* in terms of the representation of domestic space). In these pieces, also, I expand my investigation into the cinema's melodramatic tendency by concentrating on the way specific stylistic features might encourage the medium to be melodramatic (sound, locations, camera movement, editing).

Because these undramatic films might initially seem to have "nothing happening", so to speak, my thesis has intended to facilitate a repositioning of the spectator with regard to the narrative, each chapter illuminating the films' subtly weighted and coherent patterns of visual content; in this way I elucidate how the films *disclose* the everyday, focusing especially on the skill with which they express less vehement emotions and states of mind not obviously associated with events or crisis:

---

[6] Martin writes of how expressive critics have been drawn, not surprisingly, to overtly expressive films: they have been attracted, for example, to the virtuosity of Max Ophuls, the flamboyance of Sam Fuller or the classical beauty of Howard Hawks (Martin, ibid., p96).

feelings such as self consciousness, worry, boredom or flirtatiousness. This has been achieved by using a method of textual analysis, developing a technique which understands the films' significance by charting how apparently unnecessarily repetitive instances are in fact meaningfully patterned, developed and transformed throughout the films, shot by shot[7].

[7] I have sometimes used shot breakdowns but I have placed them within the chapters, rather than in the appendix, to make consultation easier. (I have, however, counted them as tables, and excluded them from the overall word count.) Because shot breakdowns are a rather turgid way of representing a scene, the best approach may be to peruse them at first, referring to them later for clarification when the sequence is discussed in the main body of the text.

PART ONE

IDEAS OF THE EVERYDAY

Chapter One

Moving Towards and Away from Melodrama: Stanley Cavell and the Quest for the Ordinary

Contents

Introduction

Section One – The Plight of Scepticism
A) The Avoidance of the Ordinary World
B) *Vertigo*: Accounting for Melodrama – The Sceptical Tragedy as Expressed in Film

Section Two – Scepticism and the Ontology of Film
A) Film as a Moving Image of Scepticism
B) The Camera's Characterisation

Section Three – The Willingness for the Everyday
A) *The Awful Truth*: Relatedness and Repetition
B) The Festive Everyday
C) The Undramatic Everyday

Conclusion

Introduction

The central aims of this chapter are to explore:

a) Stanley Cavell's work in both philosophy and film as it acts as a springboard to the main body of the thesis. Cavell is largely a discursive and suggestive writer so the main lines of his thought are not always immediately obvious. Therefore I have endeavoured to bring a variety of his work together along with recent commentaries to form a coherent explanation of the main strands in his writing.

b) how Cavell's very particular philosophical work on the acknowledgement of scepticism combine with his insights on the ontology of film. I then use his work to aid my own thoughts on the medium's melodramatic and comic tendencies.

c) Cavell's understanding of the sceptical dilemma as a flight from the everyday or ordinary. I illuminate the similarities and differences between our particular specifications of the everyday through an analysis of the final scene of *The Awful Truth*. This is an important film for Cavell's understanding of the everyday, but its final scene needs even closer scrutiny for my purposes.

Section One – The Plight of Scepticism

A) The Avoidance of the Ordinary World

In the process of thinking about my thesis I was faced by a challenging question: why is the cinema mainly characterised by a melodramatic (and comic) mode? The most profound discussion satisfying my queries was in the work of Stanley Cavell. Cavell understands the modern sensibility as one of constantly experiencing and coming to terms with the philosophical and psychological burden of scepticism. Correspondingly he takes cinema to be the great expression of this experience, describing the art as 'a moving image of scepticism'[1]. Therefore an appreciation of what constitutes the sceptical problem will reveal important ideas about modes of film expression.

According to Cavell, stripped of the certainties provided first by religion (the *belief* in God) and then by the state, our consciousness was and remains 'unhing[ed]...from the

[1] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Enlarged Edition), Harvard Univ. Press, London, 1979, p188.

world'[2]. One might think of this as the disappearance of a common, objective point from which to understand and feel the world; indeed, our subjectivity was interposed between us and our 'presentness' to the world. The world as it is cannot satisfy the wish for the world, our wish to have this world, to possess it, or at least to be meaningfully connected to it[3].

As a consequence, in the desire to overcome subjectivity, modern society has become obsessed with the notion of certainty. We desire to find some true way of believing in the world, of regaining an objective proof outside our own personal subjectivity. Philosophy expressed the dilemma through questions such as: how can I be sure I am not living a dream or how can I be sure of an external world outside myself? (Indeed, these questions are often based around the *certainty* provided by our senses: do I really see that table?) However, the sceptical dilemma was not one of philosophical speculation alone, but rather central to overcoming our loss of confidence in the modern world, where the rise of the power of subjectivity has made our sense of individuality feel like isolation.

Cavell's most important insights hinge on both his acceptance of scepticism as a defining concept in our precarious position in relation to the world, together with a simultaneous refusal to refute scepticism by searching for ever more certainty:

> It is not quite right to say that we *believe* the world exists (though certainly we should not conclude that we do *not* believe this, that we *fail* to believe its existence), and wrong even to say we *know* it exists (while of course it is equally wrong to say we fail to know this)...our relation to the world's existence is somehow *closer* than the ideas of believing and knowing are made to convey.[4]

Cavell argues that one's relation to the existence of the world is not captured by the notion of 'believing in' (does one *believe in* the world?) but rather by what one does or says. What one knows or believes of the world does not capture our sense of intimacy with elements of it, of 'neighbouring the world' or being 'next' to it.

Cavell replaces the sceptic's obsession with knowledge with the notion of *acknowledgement*. He suggests that the moral of scepticism is that the existence of the world and others in it is 'not a matter to be known but one to be acknowledged'[5]. More

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[2] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p22.
[3] As expressed by William Rothman. Analysis of *The World Viewed*. Unpublished.
[4] Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, Univ. of Chicago Press, London, 1992, (orig. ed. 1972), p145.
[5] Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Scepticism and Romanticism*, Univ. of Chicago Press, London, 1988, p172.

precisely, what is to be acknowledged is this existence as "separate from me". The avoidance of this acknowledgement however, the surrendering to the burden of scepticism, is nothing less than a modern tragedy. The quest for certainty is tragic not only because of our vulnerability *to* knowledge but because of the vulnerability *of* knowledge itself, of its inadequacy: we are endlessly dissatisfied with the world and we desire to bring it back to life. In wishing to escape subjectivity and metaphysical isolation, in craving to become present to the world, we transform it into something capable of satisfying this yearning[6]. Thus, paradoxically we often escape from the world, we wish to find something beyond it. Crucially, as Cavell conceives it, we need to float away from everyday life because the ordinary world does not satisfy our hunger. Indeed, this is the paradoxical tragedy of scepticism: we may find that the world vanishes exactly in the effort to make it present[7].

If this is an essential component to tragedy then it is no surprise that Cavell sees the sceptical burden as central to the workings of Shakespearean tragedy. That is, *King Lear* becomes a tragedy resulting 'not from the failure of knowledge but from horror of its success'[8]. Lear's 'longing for the world's presence – his very need to make the world appear – may conceal [an] avoidance of the world he already knows'[9]. This avoidance of the world might be expressed from its reverse perspective: as the lengths to which we may go in order to avoid being revealed ourselves, 'even to those we love and are loved by... ...[indeed] to other people it is *easy* not to be known'[10].

It is important to recognise the links in the sceptical chain: the links between too much knowledge, avoidance of what we have (Cavell thinks of this as the avoidance of our everyday lives – see below) and our inability to accept the existence of the world as separate from us, with that world also conceived as other human minds and beings. Indeed, Cavell's reading of *Othello* emphasises the tragic hero's obsession with *certainty* over Desdemona. Othello's obsessive desire for knowledge is the consequence of avoiding a genuine understanding of Desdemona, a genuine acknowledgement of her separateness from him: her existence as a flesh and blood person beyond his total command. As a result

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[6] Rothman, unpublished, op. cit..
[7] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, op. cit., p173.
[8] Michael Fischer, *Stanley Cavell and Literary Scepticism*, Univ. of Chicago Press, London, 1989, p83.
[9] Fischer, ibid., p85.
[10] Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Scribners, New York, 1969, p284 (quoted in Fischer, op.cit., p83).

he kills her and himself: he revenges against the world because of 'a self-consuming disappointment in his mortality'[11].

B) *Vertigo*: Accounting for Melodrama – The Sceptical Tragedy as Expressed in Film

The tragic form is a particular expression of the melodramatic mode. In cinema one of the greatest examples of tragic melodrama is Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958 US), existing as perhaps the exemplary film about trying to avoid the everyday world in the form of transforming it, of trying to go beyond it in order to connect with it again (see appendix for brief plot synopsis). There is a crescendo moment in *Vertigo* in which Scottie (James Stewart) has come to the critical point where he has finally recreated Judy as Madeleine (both Kim Novak). I take this moment because it crystallises Scottie's tragedy and provides the film with one of its most melodramatic moments – producing extremities of colour, of music, of movement.

The sense of the moment existing as a crescendo is important to understanding the film's melodrama. The narrations of melodrama entertain the idea of life as a series of events, with stylistic extremities both outlining and making vivid the eventfulness. Scottie has *created* this vivid event so as to bring the world alive, but this attempt is destined to fail as its vividness lies in being a projection of his own subjective fantasy. The setting is Judy's bedroom in the hotel and we see her as if from Scottie's visual point of view as she emerges transformed from the bathroom (FIG.1). This point of view finally cements Judy as the object of Scottie's private dream; for Cavell, *Vertigo* animates the 'sealing of a mind within a scorching fantasy'[12]. Indeed, the film is about the power of fantasy to cause him to forgo reality – and this moment acts as the summit of his endeavour 'to gear every instant of his energy toward a private alteration of reality'[13]. As Judy walks towards Scottie the film has scrambled what is real and what is fantasy and in turn has animated the sceptical fear that the reality of the world might rest only in the subjective. For Cavell, fantasy is not a world apart from reality: he says, '[f]antasy is precisely what reality can be confused with'[14].

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[11] Fischer, ibid., p87.
[12] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p86.
[13] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p85.
[14] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p85.

Scottie's desire to regain conviction in the world compels him to transform it, and leads to his individuality being more isolated from the world.

Suitably, therefore, Scottie's projection is vigorously *coloured.* Judy leaves the bathroom and comes forward into a green mist. This mist is objectively justified by the casting of a light from the neon sign outside the bedroom window. Yet, it also displays Judy as if she was a hazy apparition, the ghost of Madeleine and the dream-vision of Scottie. Thus the presence of the green mist and Judy/Madeleine are manifestations of the sceptical desire to be both of the world and not of the world. The colour green itself has been continuously taunted with reds throughout the film; Madeleine, Judy and Scottie exchanging them with fluid ease, mixing and matching through the greens of Scottie's sweater, her evening wear, her car and then the reds of his dressing gown which she wears, and the intense ruby walls of the restaurant against which she first glides into view. Scottie's love for Judy/Madeleine is therefore both life giving (green) and sexually threatening and destructive (red) as if what gives life to human existence is inseparable from what potentially threatens it. As V.F. Perkins has written: 'In Hitchcock's world, a man's moral and psychological integrity, even his physical existence, is threatened by precisely those desires and illusions which make life tolerable'[15].

The tragedy, exhibited in the melodrama of colour, is also embodied in the extremities of the performances. Both extremes are provided: Stewart's Scottie displays a inordinate willingness for suffering, a masochism which stems from his dissatisfaction with the world as it is. Cavell writes that the consequence of being human is the capacity to wish, maybe to wish for 'a completer identity...and that such a wish may project a complete world *opposed* to the world one so far shares with others'[16]. Scottie's tragedy is that he 'stake[s] his identity upon the power of wishing, upon the capacity and purity of [his] imagination and desire'[17]. (Scottie starts the film, after his accident, with a certain laziness of mind and nonchalance of spirit, reclining on his couch, tinkering and trifling with his walking stick. In these early moments, the film establishes him as "normal" as opposed to unhinged; this is important for the viewer's understanding of the roots of his obsessiveness,

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[15] V.F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, Penguin, London, 1972, p154.
[16] Stanley Cavell, 'What Becomes of Things on Film?' in *Themes Out of School*, Univ. of Chicago Press, London, 1984, 173-183, p181.
[17] Cavell, 'What Becomes of Things on Film?', ibid., p180.

an obsessiveness to which we might all be prone[18].) At the other extreme, at least from Scottie's viewpoint, Kim Novak's Judy/Madeleine represents the woman as blank, onto which male yearnings can be projected. As she approaches him, out of the bathroom, she moves not with human impetus or with varied gesticulations but like a 'gliding statue', passive like a 'work of art'[19]; in comparison to Scottie there is a 'featurelessness [to] her presence...[which] allow[s] full play to one's perversity...her smooth body...declaims perfect pliancy'[20].

The extremities of personality are matched in the camera's movements, specifically in the 360 degree camera circle around their passionate embrace. As Cavell states, the circling track represents the full cocooning of the couple within the man's fantasy[21], further emphasised in the transformation of the hotel room into the outhouse where he had first kissed Madeleine before her 'death'. As the camera tracks, the hotel room merges into darkness and then the outhouse emerges out of that gloom: the circling ensures smooth transitions, erasing the boundaries between the present reality and his subjective fantasy. The particular melodramatic elements here, the fanatical track and the radical move into another location, thereby permit fluent transitions: the elements, and thus the melodrama, are rooted in the inseparability of ordinary life with the human need for events of excitement.

Crucially, this excitement does not only consist of a man's fantastical wishes. For although they are enveloped in his fantasy, the circling track also cocoons them *together*, with the effect that they 'accept as final their privacy with one another'[22]. As his hands desperately shift to clutch her with more intensity, to seal her in more completely, it is also true that she accepts the sealing. She too has *fallen* in love and as Thomas Leitch observes we talk about people *falling* into love, rather than leaping or stepping or rising into love[23]. We might conceive of the desire for love as the most powerful aspiration providing

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[18] Furthermore, Scottie's obsession arises out of a mild boredom. One way of understanding the state of boredom is as an excess of imagination, failing to find stimulation enough in the ordinary aspects of life we share with others. We become bored with other people's everyday concerns, bored with what matters to them (for other, but related, expressions of boredom see **Chapter Five**).

[19] Robin Wood, 'Male Desire, Male Anxiety', in Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Pogue eds., *A Hitchcock Reader*, Iowa St. Univ. Press, Iowa, 1986, 219-230, p227.

[20] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p86.

[21] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p202.

[22] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p202.

[23] Thomas M. Leitch, *Find The Director and Other Hitchcock Games*, Univ. of Georgia Press, Georgia, 1991, p202.

conviction in the world; for some people it is the only consolation. Yet, Western society has conceived this desire as falling, as losing our steady footing. Hence the film's melodramatic vertigo, the patterns of spiralling downward representing the perverse desire to let go. The circling track here rhymes back to the falling policeman spiralling to his death; back to Scottie's quest for Madeleine's secret, each time sucked down the hills of San Francisco; or her plunging into the bay and his following; or the previous kiss where the crashing waves below nearly sucked them towards destruction. *Vertigo*'s melodrama consists of an overpowering downwardness, a magnetism enhanced by the endlessly spiralling and wandering theme tune which in this hotel scene is raised to its most intense (and loudest) levels on the soundtrack. Just as the surges of the music are never quite able to adopt a straightforward melodic line, bursting into a crescendo with the circling kiss but still surging and falling, never finding resolution, so neither character can reconcile the fear of falling with the desire to fall (in love)[24].

Scottie's all-consuming love forces him to re-*create* a woman (as Cavell implies, we might see this as man replacing God as the creator) and the stylistics of this sequence in the hotel room emphasise the *occasion* of this creation, his invention proclaimed in her ceremonial presentation. As Madeleine/Judy steps out of the green mist and advances closer to the camera (and closer to Scottie) she progresses into sharp focus (her passage is also into an area where she is brightly lit from all around) and there is a sense of her parading into definition (perhaps, after being blurred by his tears). The moment emphasises the precision with which Judy has been constructed as Madeleine, the obsessive *certainty* with which Scottie has moulded her. Here we have the tragedy of scepticism: the desire for certainty in order to connect more completely to the world, rather than accepting Judy as Judy, of acknowledging her separateness from him, somebody beyond his command.

Judy's love compels her to surrender to her re-creation: "If I let you change me, will that do it? If I do what you tell me, will you love me." Judy avoids herself for love, she dresses up, she theatricalises herself. As Leitch says, 'love is so intoxicating that it seems worth giving up one's self-control for an experience that allows one to transcend the limits of one's own appetite and will'[25]. Scottie's personality too has become theatricalised by defining himself in terms of another and '[t]he more frantically Scottie asserts his

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[24] These spiralling examples drawn from Lesley Brill, *The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films*, Princeton Univ. Press, Surrey, 1988, p202/3/4.
[25] Leitch, op.cit., p202.

independence, the more completely he defines himself in terms of his idealised vision of someone else – a person (Judy) whom he cannot love as herself but only as his ideal'[26]. Thus we can see how the melodramatic theatricalisation of character in *Vertigo* is closely connected to 'transcending the limits' of desire, and the avoidance of the everyday world and its inhabitants. For Cavell, the theatricalisation of the self is one of the key elements of melodrama; it becomes the sole proof of the self's existence and freedom in the face of the threat of scepticism.

The melodrama of the self – of making a drama of oneself – stems from an isolating privacy, of losing communication with others. As the camera tracks around the couple, magically returning 'them' to the outhouse, it is only Scottie who looks up and surveys the changed location suggesting that, rather than a mutual transcending of present time and space (Judy is also transported), the viewer is experiencing his subjectivity: here, one feels how intensely, how completely, Scottie now *travels* inside his own private world. His debilitating privacy means he does not communicate but commands; he now lacks a shared language with others[27]. Indeed, part of the sceptical predicament is the problem with words. We have become afraid of words, they do not provide enough certainty, 'specifically...[ordinary language's] power to word the world, to apply to the things we have in common'[28]. Elsewhere, Cavell expresses it as 'the depth to which an ordinary human life requires expression, and the surface of ordinary means through which that life must, if it will, express itself'[29]. Melodrama has been conceptualised in many writings as the product of an expressive gap[30] and in *Vertigo* we see many of the melodramatic elements as stemming from the distance between Scottie's desires and his ordinary communicative facilities for satisfying them.

One might say here that the man and woman do not acknowledge each other in a 'union of real responsiveness'[31]. In Cavell's writing on the melodrama of the unknown

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[26] Leitch, ibid., p223.
[27] I will discuss below how engaging in conversation and achieving equality of conversation constitute Cavell's central tasks for returning to a state of acknowledging others and rediscovering the stimulation provided by the everyday.
[28] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, op.cit., p154.
[29] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op. cit., p180.
[30] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', *Monogram* No.4, 1972, 2-15.
[31] A phrase used in a different but related context by Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p238.

woman[32] he talks of Greta Garbo and Bette Davis (among others) as lacking a shared language with men (often for good reason). Therefore these women cannot consummate a fulfilling marriage, and for Cavell marriage and living a domesticated life in marriage is one central aspect of what we might call the ordinary (see discussion of the comedies of remarriage and especially *The Awful Truth* below). Therefore these women can only achieve some integrity in isolation, they can only maintain some sense of themselves through theatricalising. Their theatricalising, their melodramatic mode, becomes a way of affirming the existence of the self in an attempt to overcome scepticism. Garbo expresses it in her 'world-changing mood[s]'[33] and as Stephen Mulhall says:

> Cavell characterises her enactment of her existence as a piece of private theatre, and its privacy amounts to a declaration of her sense of herself as separate and finite; what she enacts is her knowledge of her separateness.[34]

In Cavell's words the essential dimension to Bette Davis' power is

> its invitation to, and representation of camp; an arrogation of the rights of banality and affectation and display, of the dangerous wish for perfect personal expressiveness. *The wish, in the great stars...is a function not of their beauty, such as it may be, but of their power of privacy, of a knowing unknownness* [my italics].[35]

For both actresses the melodrama they exert is a declaration of their distinctiveness and freedom in worlds which attempt to strangle them. Yet trying to affirm the existence of the self in a modern world still results in a high personal cost: 'unending irony, enforced transcendence [and] suffering their unknownness'[36].

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[32] The nine films that Cavell takes to be the primary members of the genre are: *Blonde Venus, Stella Dallas, Showboat, Mildred Pierce, Random Harvest, The Marquise of O, Now Voyager, Gaslight* and *Letter From An Unknown Woman.*
[33] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op. cit., p 206.
[34] Mulhall, op. cit., p244.
[35] Stanley Cavell, 'Ugly Duckling, Funny Butterfly: Bette Davis and Now *Voyager*', *Critical Inquiry*, 16, 1990, 213-247, p227/8 (also quoted in Mulhall, op.cit., p244).
[36] Mulhall, ibid., p245. (For a fresh deployment of the 'unknown woman' concept see **Chapter Five.**)

Section Two – Scepticism and the Ontology of Film

A) Film as a Moving Image of Scepticism

The escape from the world of the everyday, the inability to communicate those everyday things we might have in common, the cost of theatricalisation, the power of avoidance over acknowledgement (of becoming unknown), the move into privacy and separateness, these are all recurring themes in Cavell, and I have collected his insights from all across the expanse of his work as well as seeing how they may illuminate melodramatic stylistics for my own purposes. My next step is to examine how Cavell's analysis of the ontology of film may show why the medium itself is so suited to sceptical themes and therefore to melodramatic stylistics.

Cinema's intimate relationship with scepticism begins with its roots in the photograph. Cavell calls the cinema *a projected sequence of photographic images* thereby beginning his understanding of the cinema's properties by understanding the nature of photographs[37]. Unlike paintings photographs do not present a *representation* of reality or a likeness of it but rather a transcription of it (it is inherently mechanical)[38]. It is important at this early stage to recognise Cavell's understanding of the photograph, and therefore cinema, as having the most intimate relationship to reality of all the arts. A painting does not present us with reality, a 'painting *is* a world [whereas] a photograph is *of* the world'[39]. There is always a sense of something beyond the frame of a photograph: 'the implied presence of the rest of the world'[40].

However, a key difference from reality is the singular way we stand in relationship to a photograph: crucially that the object in the photograph is 'present to us while we are not present to it'[41]. Movies *project* and *screen* reality: the screen screens the world from us; 'the projected world does not exist now'[42]. In the theatre we do share the same time as the actors, so that our absence from the theatrical world is a convention, where as our absence from the world on film is 'mechanically assured'[43]. As Mulhall says, 'it causes live human beings and real objects in actual spaces to appear to us when they are in fact not

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[37] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p16-25.
[38] Stanley Cavell, 'What Photography Calls Thinking', *Raritan*, 4, 1985, 1-21, p4 (also referenced in Mulhall ibid., p225).
[39] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p24.
[40] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p24.
[41] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p23.
[42] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p24.
[43] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p26.

there, it makes present a no-longer-existent world'[44]. And Mulhall goes on to make the important link with scepticism:

> [F]or Cavell, our relation to such an image of the world – to something which presents our senses with nothing less than reality but which is nevertheless nothing more than an image – exemplifies scepticism's understanding of our relation to the world itself; for the sceptic, what we take to be the world is but an image of it. In short, *film is a moving image of scepticism* [my italics].[45]

As Cavell says in a crucial theoretical passage from *The World Viewed*:

> Photography satisfied...the human wish, intensifying in the West since the Reformation, to escape subjectivity and...isolation – a wish for the power to reach this world, having for so long tried, at last hopelessly, to manifest fidelity to another...At some point the unhinging of our consciousness from the world interposed our subjectivity between us and our presentness to the world. Then our subjectivity became what is present to us, individuality became isolation...Photography overcame subjectivity...by *automatism*, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction.[46]

Unfortunately, '[p]hotography maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it'[47], so the price to be paid is our absence, and paradoxically the world recedes. As Mulhall emphasises, 'for the sceptic that recession of reality is the revelation of a hideous truth'[48] but it was the sceptic in the first place who deemed the overcoming of scepticism necessary for our conviction in reality. Mulhall goes on to say: 'When the role of human subjectivity is not acknowledged but denied, the human subject is transformed into an absent [or isolated] viewer of the world rather than simply one of its inhabitants'[49].

Of course to accept that film is a moving image of scepticism – making the world present to us while mechanically defeating our presence to it – we are 'accurately representing the true nature of our relation to the world of film', not necessarily accepting a model of our true relation to reality. Crucially, however, 'film manifest[s] *this aspect* of our

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[44] Mulhall, op. cit., p228.
[45] Mulhall, ibid., p228.
[46] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op. cit., p21-23.
[47] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid., p23.
[48] Mulhall, op.cit., p229.
[49] Mulhall, op. cit., p229.

experience of the world' and therefore will be the medium most profoundly able to entertain sceptical dilemmas and fantasies, to entertain the melodramatic tragedy of *Vertigo*. This may indeed account for films' 'popularity...in a culture which is permeated with scepticism'[50].

Furthermore, the consequence of film's conjunction of presence and absence is that it allows us to see the world unseen and for Cavell this sense of invisibility is an expression of modern privacy or anonymity: film makes plain a feeling we already know – that of feeling anonymous, of being trapped within our privacy. Indeed, the desire to regain conviction in the world is also one of regaining a sense of ourselves, our self-hood. This is because our own unknownness is matched by 'our inability to know'[51], our feeling that we fail to acknowledge others. The cinema highlights hiddenness and inaction, an avoidance of the world; Fischer describes that 'silence we can cultivate outside when we watch people instead of taking part in their lives'[52]. This is Scottie's isolation and separateness and his failure to acknowledge Judy, suitably expressed in a medium that makes 'displacement appear as our natural condition'[53].

Cavell says that:

> Hitchcock films make nakedly clear the power of film to materialise and to satisfy (hence to dematerialise and thwart) human wishes that escape the satisfaction of the world as it stands...and that such a wish may project a complete world *opposed* to the world one so far shares with others...If so, it is not surprising that a filmic procedure which taps this cause is one that juxtaposes modes and moods of reality as a whole, taunts them with one another.[54]

Indeed, it is through this taunting of worlds that film shows such adeptness; it can consummately blur the distinction between fantasy, or the human desire to wish, and reality. It rests on the cinema combining an intimate relationship with reality with an ability to distort it (by using a range of procedures – editing, lighting, music and so on); as Perkins writes:

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[50] Quotes and ideas here from Mulhall, op. cit., p229.
[51] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p41.
[52] Fischer, op. cit., p96.
[53] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op. cit., p41.
[54] Cavell, 'What Becomes of Things on Film?', op. cit., p180/81.

> Instead of trying either exclusively to create or to record, the story film attempts a synthesis: it both records what has been created and creates by its manner of recording. At its most powerful it achieves a credibility which consummates the cinema's blend of actuality and fantasy.[55]

Fantasy and reality do not exist side by side, they are able to influence each other at any one moment, at any instant cinema animates the sceptical desire to be of the world and not of the world. Here we find the basis for film's tendency to be melodramatic: if in Perkins' terms its power often comes from the consummation of actuality and fantasy then it is no surprise that the medium's creations have been fascinated with the extremities of reality, perfectly satisfying the human desire to wish.

B) The Camera's Characterisation

To make more vivid this point concerning the extremities of reality we might consider a criticism often levelled at film – that the depth of its insight into character psychology is weak. Thus, against the great European novels or the finest pieces of theatre, film has insubstantial levels of character detail. Is there anything in film to set alongside the nuance of characterisation in a Henry James novel? Indeed, beside this level of depth and nuance film characters seem to be mere types (and this would also apply to the supposedly more sophisticated 'European art movie'). The cinema is full of types: the gunslinger, the gangster with a heart, the moll, the fallen woman, the bored housewife[56]. These have become famous typifications, ones which have enough repeated instances to be immediately recognisable. Our sense of them as such expresses a simplicity in characterisation, a one-dimensionality. Even Scottie in *Vertigo* could reasonably be described as a *typical* self-obsessed male who desires power over a woman. There may be more or less complex types but the nature of characterisation is absolutely different in kind to that found in the revered areas of literature[57].

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[55] Perkins, *Film as Film*, op. cit., p62. Indeed, Perkins' thesis on the cinema brought together the recording/realist aspects of the medium with its 'creative' aspects and claimed their *combination* to be the underpinning of the medium's distinctiveness.

[56] Some of these categories are listed by Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p36.

[57] Narrative film tends to be more concentrated than the novel so that film characters find themselves in more limited predicaments, which in turn circumscribes the range of possibilities for their development as characters.

We think of melodrama as enjoying this nature of characterisation (and this is partly why melodrama is sometimes used as a term of abuse), so it is important for my purposes here to draw attention to Cavell's understanding of the profound link between film's ontology and the nature of its characterisation. Because the camera films the world, characters cannot be separated from the performers. In the theatre actors step in to the characters so to speak, the characters existing prior to an actor's interpretation, but in cinema characters have no existence apart from the particular human somethings on the screen, and no life apart from the particular stars who incarnate them (Scottie *is* James Stewart, James Stewart *is* Scottie). It is here that the richness, or *individuality*, of character is found, namely in the human being's relationship with the camera. Indeed, for Cavell the scrutiny of the camera makes the human being in front of it not quite suitably described by the term 'actor', because they are also, more deeply, *subjects* of study, albeit subjects who have an active participation in the way films present them. Central here once more is the issue of acknowledgement for as Marion Keane says: 'Understanding film acting as involving selves reveals a central issue of filming human beings to be the acknowledgement of an individual's selfhood'[58]. When a camera films a human being these issues of selfhood are pushed to the fore: Who am I? How do I make myself known to the world and others? What is the nature of my privacy[59]?

When a human being is filmed, the performer encourages a process of comprehending their character which is full of indirections. Through watching their gestures, their facial movements, their movement in space, or the intonation of their voice, the viewers embark on a process of 'reading' and coming to understand character that is similar to that which they use in 'reading' people in the world around them. A novel might describe or represent these things but it does not provide a transcription of them as films do, and it does not then project them, and therefore a novel does not present that feeling of being *so* close to a physical human being but somehow not with them, not fully connected to them. The fact that film does not privilege us with the same interactive possibilities which we exploit in real life existence – asking questions of people for example – allows it to be a suitable medium for conveying the lack of acknowledgement (and the restrictions

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[58] Marion Keane, 'Dyer Straits: Theoretical Issues In Studies of Film Acting', *Postscript*, Vol.12 No. 2, 29-39, p36.
[59] Questions brought up by Keane, ibid., p31.

for acknowledging) which we all feel regardless of our apparently sophisticated interactive capabilities ("Nobody really understands me").

That sense of remaining unknown, unacknowledged by others, can be thought of as the feeling that we are being judged as a simple type ("oh he's a typically self-obsessed male") as against the complexities we personally see as constituting our selfhood, our individuality. We might say that our existence with others in the world prompts this struggle between our sense of self and the type we may seem to others. Scottie sees Madeleine/Judy as a type of female icon rather than acknowledging her as a complex human being. The ontology of film allows for this rendering of characterisation thus it tends to taunt the detail of real filmed human individualities against types, or more precisely *within* types. As William Rothman says, 'for a screen performer to be a type is for his or her individuality to project particular ways of inhabiting whatever social role she or he happens to be occupying in a particular film'[60]. Indeed, Cavell claims this to be the difference between type and stereotype: types of black human being, for example, were not created in film because they were not given individualities, particular ways of inhabiting a social role, we recognise only the role.

It is the 'ontology of film itself that denies, undermines, transcends, overcomes the distinction between type and well-rounded character – as it denies the distinction between character and actor'[61]. Because film's ontology suits an exploration of types it tends towards melodrama, and thereby urges us to critically reconceptualise what we understand to be depth of characterisation in film. Many American genre types spring to mind but types are integral to the finest European cinema too. As Cavell says:

> I would find it hard to believe that anyone admires *Grand Illusion, Rules of the Game, Zero for Conduct* and *L'Atalante* more than I, but it seems to me more accurate to their intention and effect to say that they are explorations of types rather than explorations of characters...just think of the obvious surface of their content. The figures in both of the Renoir films are insistently labelled for us: the Aristocrat, the Jew, the Officer, the Professor, the Good Guy, the Poacher, the Wronged Wife, the Impetuous Lover. The shared subjects of the films depend upon this; both are about the arbitrariness and the inevitability of labels, and thence about the equal

[60] Rothman unpublished, op. cit..
[61] Rothman, ibid..

> human need for society and the human need to escape it, and hence about human privacy and unknownness.[62]

We have seen how these last concepts are the subject of *Vertigo*, of Scottie's own theatricalisation. They also provide the sceptical melodrama of Greta Garbo and Bette Davis who attempted to prove their own self worth, their distinctiveness and freedom, by a theatricalisation of the self[63].

Section Three – The Willingness for the Everyday

A) *The Awful Truth*: Relatedness and Repetition

If so much of melodrama has at its heart the sceptical yearning (to desire something out of this world in order to connect with this world), and the ontology of film makes it a most suitable medium to entertain sceptical fantasies, then according to Cavell, the genre of comedy, and especially the comedy of remarriage, maintains the sceptical link but becomes concerned with acknowledging and living with scepticism. To acknowledge and live with scepticism means not craving for something out of this world to satisfy our sense of the world, our touch with the world; instead we must seek what is not out of the ordinary.

This is how Cavell defines the everyday – as against the human yearning for things out of the ordinary. Quelling this yearning is crucial to his understanding of the everyday: we must embark on a quest to find fascination in the parts of the world we share (not parts we create privately), even though it is exactly those shared things that might appear boring because of their obviousness and repetition, indeed because they occur each and every day. Cavell finds this dilemma to be at the heart of the comedies of remarriage where the couples have to learn to live with the repetitions of the everyday. In *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey 1937 US) (as in the other films of this genre[64]) the couple Jerry Warriner (Cary

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[62] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op. cit., p175/6.

[63] Furthermore, we can claim that the excesses of performance, this theatricalisation, also stems from the camera's insistent attentions. As Cavell says:

> Under examination by the camera, a human body becomes for its inhabitant a field of betrayal more than a ground of communication, and the camera's further power is manifested as it documents the individual's self conscious efforts to control the body each time it is conscious of the camera's attention to it (Cavell, 'What Photography Calls Thinking', op.cit., p14.)

[64] The films in the genre consist of: *The Lady Eve, It Happened One Night, Bringing Up Baby, The Philadelphia Story, His Girl Friday, Adam's Rib, The Awful Truth.*

Grant) and Lucy Warriner (Irene Dunne) start married, and the 'drive of the plot is not to get the central pair together, but to get them *back* together, together *again*'[65]. Marriage is crucially connected to any discussion of the everyday because it entails the decision to live with one person every day of one's life. The result of this decision can be terribly disappointing, leading to all those dissatisfactions with the repetitions of the world which are the plight of scepticism: the de-sexualizing (or de-romanticising) of a relationship because of the routines of domestication or the couple repelling each other even when they mean to attract. So although marriage is intended to be a ratification, it is in fact in need of constant ratification itself.

The final scene of the film is central to understanding the process of learning to live with another person each and every day. They have both ended up in a relative's house in Connecticut where they have gone upstairs to sleep in adjacent rooms (FIG.2). At midnight their divorce will become official. Luckily they are only (physically) separated by a faulty door (of which more below). When Jerry comes into Lucy's room she says, "Well, I mean if you didn't feel the way you feel, things wouldn't be the way they are, would they?" Jerry then replies, "But things are the way you made them" to which she retorts, "Oh no. They're the way you think I made them. I didn't make them that way at all. Things are just the same as they always were, only you're just the same, too, so I guess things will never be the same again." When the door opens for the third and last time later in the scene this conversation is continued with more complicated plays on the words "same" and "different". When Jerry says, "So, as long as I'm different, don't you think things could be the same again" he is finally understanding the idea, if they are to stay with each other every day, that he must analyse himself and his relation to Lucy for things to remain the *same*. This acceptance is animated through the manner in which he finally replies to her, the way that he has to face up to her words: in using her words to repent he starts to really listen to her.

They learn to play with words together and become conscious of that play (indeed, knowingness about the use of words is a significant aspect to much comedy) and for Cavell this is crucial for their mutual attunement. Thus *The Awful Truth* is centred around banter, Cavell seeing the witty and speedy dialogue as a mode of association and a form of life[66].

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[65] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Harvard Univ. Press, London, 1981, p2.
[66] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, ibid., p152.

Indeed, if both learning to live with scepticism and learning to overcome the threat to marriage (therefore the threat to the everyday) entails acknowledging others (unlike Scottie) then part of this acknowledgement is learning to speak the same language. This does not require saying the same things, in fact it might need the opposite. This recognition is part of acknowledging the partner's separateness from you.

In his more general philosophy Cavell sees the overcoming of scepticism as lying in the pursuit of ordinary language. As Michael Fischer says:

> Cavell, following Wittgenstein and Thoreau, urges us to 'cleave to the everyday', that is bring words back, or home, to the language games in which they are ordinarily used. Bringing words back to our everyday use of them in turn means letting words live, or reattaching their meaning to the flow of language.[67]

We have seen how scepticism entails a dissatisfaction with words, with not being able to express ourselves and that film has been an ideal site on which the problems with personal expression can be played out. Crucially, instead of trying to find a language that would solve everything once and for all – the sceptic's necessarily unsatisfiable and paralysing craving for clarity[68] – we should learn to determine our meaning in conversation, not once but everyday; our meaning should be found in *repeated* communication.

The only language we should desire is one rooted in day to day relatedness, with all the hesitations and insecurities that entails. Scepticism always shows a disappointment in daily life, wishing, as Fischer writes,

> to arrive at some absolute foundation for our judgements, thereby stripping 'ourselves of the responsibility we have in meaning [or in failing to mean] one thing, or one way, rather than another.' From the sceptic's point of view, repetition smacks of failure.[69]

Thus for Cavell, relatedness, language rooted in day to day conversation, is all about responsibility to others, and therefore it is not something to get over or resolve but something to acknowledge and then thrive on. As Cavell argues: 'The idea is less to defend

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[67] Fischer, op. cit., p130.
[68] Fischer, ibid., p131.
[69] Fischer, ibid., p130 (including Cavell quote from 'Being Odd, Getting Even', *In Quest of the Ordinary*, op.cit., 105-130).

our ordinary beliefs than to wean us from expressing our thoughts in ways that do not genuinely satisfy us, to stop forcing ourselves to say things we cannot fully mean'[70]. So many words in modern society are used in an empty way which is not the result of speaking meaninglessly 'but rather speaking pointlessly, as if we had nothing in mind, or *nothing at heart* to say' [my italics][71].

The use of the term 'remarriage' registers the two most impressive affirmations of human experience for Cavell – the 'acceptance of human relatedness' within an 'acceptance of repetition'[72]. Indeed, Jerry keeps returning to Lucy's room (three times), building into this final sequence an acceptance of repetition. The scene conveys the sense that they must keep coming together, keep engaging in a dialogue. Thus the decision to become married is not confirmed by a ceremony but in a mode of repetition, and genuine communication is found in this repetition. The marriage ceremony may well be a festival but true ratification of the marriage is provided from within the continuous festivity of the union itself. The festivity lies in the comic nature of repetition in this scene: fighting with the door, the wind, with silly bedclothes. The repetition here is understood as something festively comic.

However, the crucial aspect of the comedy of this scene is that it does not provide a knock out climax for the film. As Mulhall says, the film offers a 'contesting [of] the irregular outbreak of extraordinary comic events with a continuous line of comedic development, in order to suggest that the rhythmic recurrences of ordinary diurnal life provide fun and interest enough to inspire life and a commitment to its continuation'[73]. The last shot of a human in the film (the very last shot is of the clock – see below) shows Jerry looking puzzled while Lucy laughs off-screen: he is still bewildered and she still gently mocks him. There is no fade out kiss, for example, with which to seal their happiness. This is because their happiness is not sealed; the slight indeterminacy in the ending, aptly encapsulated in Jerry's facial expression, signals that they must continue in this playful vein. The film rejects tight closure: while Jerry's bemused face implies that any commitment to married life will be without certainty, similarly Lucy's giggles are not the acceptance of a character having the *last* laugh but of a continuing commitment to laughter.

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[70] Cavell, 'The Ordinary as the Uneventful', *Themes Out of School*, op. cit., 184-194, p192.
[71] Cavell, 'The Ordinary as the Uneventful', *Themes Out of School*, ibid., p191.
[72] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness* op. cit., p240/1.
[73] Mulhall op. cit., p235.

With the end of the sureties provided by Christianity and then the failure of a 'redemptive politics' or 'redemptive psychology', Cavell argues that there needs to be 'a new burden of faith in the authority of one's everyday experience, one's experience of the everyday, of earth not of heaven'[74]. Without society to provide continued affirmation, personal qualities will be needed such as 'wit, invention, good spirits, the capacity to entertain...since these are no longer to be had for the hiring'[75]. If the stylistics of melodrama are accounted for by their entertaining of sceptical fantasies then we might say that the witty and inventive stylistics of comedy are partly elucidated by this redemptive pursuit for the everyday, both characters and audience trying to accept a life of the festive, by enjoying frustrating and embarrassing repetitions (maybe this is what we mean when we say the comic helps us "get through life"; the comic moments prevent us from needing to avoid it). We might recall Laurel and Hardy desperately trying to carry the music box up the huge flight of steps only to watch them watch it, time and time again, fall all the way back down to the street. Each time the piano descends it is *another* fine mess, but the joy in these films is learning to accept the inevitability of life's repetitions; acknowledging that there is never any accounting for the slight variations that will be thrown up to complicate some mundane task. Laurel and Hardys' friendship and behaviour at its truest and deepest was never about stupidity (this is why their devotees never patronise the pair but love and respect them): they were actually an extreme rendering of the inevitable need for, and yet the difficulties of, human relatedness in the middle of the desperate endeavour to stay devoted to the world of one's life. The fact was that Stan and Ollie always lived through the music boxes to sell Christmas trees; they always showed the willingness to carry on[76].

B) The Festive Everyday

As for Stan and Ollie so for Lucy and Jerry: 'their lives are held together not by an event [say marriage] but by their attitude towards events – their capacity for adventure'[77].

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[74] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, op. cit., p240.
[75] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op. cit., p79.
[76] For an excellent dissection of the repetitions in Laurel and Hardy films see Charles Barr, *Laurel and Hardy*, Movie Paperbacks, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1967. Raymond Durgnat likens the structure of *The Music Box* (James Parrott, 1932, US) to the myth of Sisyphus (*Durgnat on Film*, Faber and Faber, London, 1976, p141). Yet the crucial difference is that Sisyphus enacted his frustrating task all alone. For more on comedy, film and its relation to the repetitions of the everyday see **Chapter Five**.
[77] Fischer, op. cit., p88.

What does this attitude consist of? Crucially here I want to emphasise how Cavell's conception of the everyday is one of eradicating the necessity of a notion of once-and-for-all events but not one of disposing of events *per se*. Although the final scene of *The Awful Truth* does not provide one knock out finale, it does have a series of little dramatic events: significantly it makes the ordinary eventful.

As Cavell's return to the everyday is constituted in the redemptive processes which undo scepticism, his conception of the everyday actually lies in a transformation of it. Nevertheless, he convincingly justifies the thematic and stylistic pertinence of the term everyday by recognising unusual dramatic devices in the film[78]. Repetition is a foundational structuring device: Jerry moving into Lucy's room on the three occasions. Furthermore, there are important concerns around the manner in which the repetitious structure is rendered, that is there are matters of pacing too. In one moment Jerry is pushing to open the dividing door so that he can be with Lucy once more, while a canny black cat presses stubbornly against the door from Lucy's room. When the cat moves, the door rather smoothly sweeps aside; it does not crash or bang open. Jerry is caught on his knees, but the movement of the door allowing his disclosure has an easy flow, and it rhymes (and repeats) with a similar movement of the dividing door at the start of the scene when he was first revealed and displayed in the large pyjamas. The relative comic restraint here illustrates that although the couple must rediscover adventure in the domestic it should be on adjusted terms. The pace of comedy illustrates that they must find a deft playfulness within the repetitious rhythms of everyday life. This is reflected in the dialogue exchanges in this scene: their 'banter' is not speedy or rushed, in fact it is quite calmly and deliberately delivered, with both a delightfully considered and relaxed dexterity over the wordplay, and an almost serene compatibility in their tone, delivery and vocabulary. The indication is that their conversations should retain their mutual attunement but lose some of their fierceness. They should forgo intense occasions of pleasure, not search for wonderful bursts outside their day to day marriage (such as their extra marital affairs), and instead recognise that they must adjust to the easygoing festive possibilities of the everyday; they must feel the everyday once again, learn to go with it[79].

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[78] Cavell does not, however, analyse this final scene in detail.

[79] For more on everyday conversation see **Chapter Four** (Section Three (B)) and especially **Chapter Seven**.

However, regardless of its easygoing tempo, there is still a festivity to be found in the moments of the everyday which characterise it as eventful, full of little events. These may not quite be events in the sense of crescendo happenings to which are attached a fairly definite importance (such as a wedding ceremony), but equally they are not felt to be only routine happenings. Indeed, that is what gives these happenings their festivity, the characters find and feel a sense of the event in areas where we might not imagine there to be such a sense. In this way the various paraphernalia of ordinary existence are transformed to convert everyday life into a series of mini-events.

The clothes of the everynight become dramatic garments facilitating the transformation of the ordinary. As the dividing door glides open Jerry is displayed in his too-big pyjamas and does a jig. The jig is a gesture to her, a certain acceptance of his ridiculousness and a giving in to the playfulness of it – rather than becoming irate at the embarrassment. The film alerts us here to the role of the comic spirit in real life. Through accepting an ironising of ourselves, in allowing ourselves to become comic, we are able to laugh at our own (self) doubts rather than be consumed by them. How often are we so wrapped up in our own problems that we fail to find jokes funny? So much of the comic spirit then seems to have this intimate relationship with the everyday; this spirit consists of a mature interaction with the everyday so that we can live with it, inhabit it (not fly from it).

Lucy's nightie is old fashioned, a huge cross strap wrapping over her chest and shoulders; it is full and heavy, covering most of her flesh. It is clearly signalled as being rather ordinary in a dowdy sort of way but the ordinary here is so excessive that the nightie becomes grotesque. Thus their clothes are not the routine clothes of every night but are transformed into the costumes of their comic courting. Their costumes theatricalise them to a point where the ordinary has to be made more vivid; it is ridiculed so that it can be brought back to life.

The night-gown is depicted as particularly desexualizing and it is a suggestive comic irony that what is ordinary must become grotesquely without sexuality in order for it to rouse their sex life. Similarly Lucy's manoeuvres with the bedsheets invest them with the erotic (FIG.3). As she lies in bed she clutches her blanket tightly up to her chin ensuring it acts as an armament in the battle of the sexes: it is not only a defence in its snug enclosure of her in a separate and private space, but also an invitation for Jerry to join her when he is up to it (so to speak). Her wriggles underneath the blanket act as a teasing taunt and an

undisclosed promise, a suggestion of feisty sexuality – albeit under the covers. Her handling of the blanket shrouds her body (makes her bodiless), and hopefully will provoke the thrill of its rediscovery. A blanket thus becomes a piece of dramatic weaponry in her sexual come-on, central to the pursuit of igniting the domestic once again.

Similarly, a faulty door may be the most ordinary piece of decor imaginable; here, however, the door becomes the centre of their courting ritual, and its influential role in the scene's choreography converts it into something magical and divine. The door acts as simultaneously what divides them and what keeps them awake, allowing them to come back to one another. In Cavell's terms we might say it forces them to acknowledge their separateness in order that they may regain their intimacy. And in acting as the strategic 'window' that, on several aptly timed occasions, reveals Jerry in a compromising position, the door demands that he face exposure rather than avoid letting himself be really known to her, that is genuinely understanding himself in relation to her. In turn, in the choreography of the scene as a whole the door, like Lucy, demands the *right sort* of attention.

The sense of magic is exacerbated by the camera's movement. In one moment its pan across from open window to the door matches the direction of the gust of wind. There is a feeling here of being taken with the fantastic forces aiding the couples regaining of intimacy. On three occasions the camera pans up, in a movement not unlike that of rising cigarette smoke or a rising snake being charmed, to the clock with the dancing figurines. The wafting rise of the camera takes us to this enchanting clock which behaves with a special affinity for the couple. The last shot of the film shows the figurine resembling Jerry following the little Lucy round into her hole instead of returning to his own, so at the moment that their divorce becomes official they have in fact started to remarry. There is something bewitching in the camera movement, setting up the clock as a teasing imagining, floating in a cartoon bubble above their heads. Time does not exist here as ordinary minutes but as something sublime, something with which they are now, comically yet appropriately, in tune.

C) The Undramatic Everyday

In Cavell's terms Lucy and Jerry have regained a sense of their time together; their experience of this time is happy, fun, playfully comic. The everyday is recaptured by experiencing it as a series of little but wonderful events. Indeed, Cavell often follows Sören

Kierkegaard in talking of the *sublime* in the everyday or quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson describing the physiognomy of the ordinary:

> The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body.[80]

There is here, in the very syntax, in the oh-so-neat balance of the clauses and its excited jumps between the various ordinary things described, a desire to turn the ordinary into something dramatic or eventful in order to find touch with it. Is it then possible to search out what is fascinating in the ordinary without romanticising it, without transforming it into something poetic, something dramatic, something full of magical events? Maybe this is the surreptitious power of scepticism: that even when we endeavour to regain touch with the world through showing a willingness to represent the everyday (rather than a yearning for something out of the ordinary) we still end up needing to romanticise it, to turn it into something else.

Cavell implies the possibilities elsewhere when he discusses that the study of history should also be 'interested...in the *uneventful*, seeking, so to speak, what is not out of the ordinary. The uneventful, so conceived, is an interpretation of the everyday, the common, the low, the near'[81]. Yet this process requires learning to see 'the near', fulfilling Emerson's wish for his readers to be wary about the significance they might attach to

> the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provencal minstrelsy...Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds.[82]

What might this 'insight into today' consist of? Cavell uses Edgar Allan Poe's story of *The Purloined Letter* where 'the narrative comes to turn on the fact that a purloined letter was hidden by being kept in plain view, as if a little too self-evident, a little too plain to notice'[83]. Indeed, many detective stories have played on what is hidden in the apparently self-evident; it was one of the recurring structuring principles of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock

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[80] Ralph Waldo Emerson quoted in Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, op. cit., p14.
[81] Cavell, 'The Ordinary As The Uneventful', *Themes Out of School*, op. cit., p193.
[82] Emerson quoted in Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, op. cit., p14.
[83] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, op. cit., p164.

Holmes' tales (when all else is exhausted, return to the investigation of the obvious)[84]. Furthermore, Cavell notes that Martin Heidegger has written of *unconcealing* the obvious and Cavell also finds this a recurrent theme in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*:

> The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and [ordinariness, everydayness]. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes.)[85]

Taking Wittgenstein and Heidegger as exceptions, Cavell sees most of philosophy as deliberately avoiding the everyday; after all this is what philosophy's tussle with scepticism has ensured. Philosophy is so often trying to find words outside ordinary language to prove the existence of the world. He says:

> It turns out to be something that the very impulse to philosophy, the impulse to take thought about our lives, inherently seeks to deny, as if what philosophy is dissatisfied by is inherently the everyday.[86]

Equally, I claim that when *films* 'take thought' about our lives they too are dissatisfied with the everyday. Indeed, as a 'moving image of scepticism' one would not be surprised that even when film shows a willingness to represent the everyday it starts taking those routes out of the ordinary[87].

However, if as Cavell discovered, a foundation of film is its ability to bring us so close to the world by transcribing it then it seems to be equally a possibility of the medium, indeed a unique possibility, that it could find interest in what is so apparent, find fascination with the ordinary without necessarily transforming it beyond recognition. Perkins has said in another context:

> The meanings I have discussed...are nether stated nor in any sense implied. *They are filmed.* Whatever else that means it means that they are not hidden in or behind the movie...*A process like story-*

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[84] I explore the detective story framework employed outside the detective story genre in **Chapter Seven**.

[85] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, point 129, quoted in Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, op. cit., p164.

[86] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, op. cit., p170/171.

[87] See **Chapter Two** for more detail.

> *making in transmitted images develops as a medium because artists explore its possibilities for 'making overt', which in large degree means its capacity to imply.* In other words, implication is a form of expression, not of concealment [my italics].[88]

I find this conceptualisation of cinema's mode of implication lying precisely in its forms of 'making overt' absolutely suited to unconcealing the obvious, of revealing what is important but hidden only because it is always – everyday – before our eyes. Moreover, this would be fascinating in itself; there would be no requirement to fly into fantasy or to express oneself melodramatically so as to be seen and heard. I have found four exceptional films which in Cavell's richly suggestive vocabulary I claim genuinely *acknowledge* the everyday; they do not need to *avoid* it or transform it. I take these films to *disclose* the everyday, finding their fascination in it by way of Cavell's formulation for undoing scepticism – 'repeatedly, unmelodramatically, uneventfully'[89]. Furthermore, I take my thesis to be concerned with illuminating those disclosures and the manner of their disclosing, discovering in the process the possibilities for the cinema both outside melodrama and for satisfying our cravings to reconnect with the world.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Cavell's understanding of scepticism, the medium of film, melodramatic and comic expression within the medium, and the repetitions of the everyday are intimately connected. The interconnections between these matters provide an important conceptual backbone to the thesis. However, Cavell's interest in the ordinary is one of turning it, in order to regain touch with it, into a site of festivity; in writers such as William Wordsworth and Waldo Emerson he has found the quest for the ordinary to be a romantic and eventful pursuit. This contrasts with my own fascination with the ordinary which is undramatic and uneventful. Acknowledging, therefore, that the everyday is a term amenable for use in varied contexts, the following chapter continues to refine my particular specification of the everyday by engaging with some significant films which might be claimed to be dealing with "ordinary life".

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[88] V.F. Perkins, 'Must We Say What They Mean?: Film Criticism and Interpretation', *Movie*, 34/35 Winter 1990, 1-6, p4.

[89] Cavell (unpublished) describing how we might undo sceptical doubts rather than answering them or submitting to them, quoted by Fischer, op. cit., p131.

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Chapter Two

The Pursuit of the Real: Dramatic Conceptions of the Ordinary

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Introduction

The quest for the ordinary cannot be expressed simply as the search for the "more real". Indeed, the discussion in **Chapter One** which posited film's relationship to scepticism suggested the search for the real would often result in a flight from the ordinary. This might explain why the pursuit of the "more real", the seeking of styles and scenarios with a more natural resemblance to life (which has taken a variety of forms), has often produced varieties of anomalous melodrama rather than led to more accurate depictions of the everyday. Naturalistic films might achieve a more authentic affinity to aspects of reality, but not necessarily with regard to those features associated with the uneventful which I have taken to be characteristic of the everyday.

However, in ordinary language we are all prone to slippage, confusing aspects of realism(s) with the everyday[1]. An example is the opening definition of realism in a dictionary of aesthetics: 'that quality of a literary text which relates it closely to everyday life'[2]. Therefore, *the central aims of this chapter are to explore:*

a) some differences between the "more real" and the everyday by examining a sample of films conventionally described as providing pictures of everyday or ordinary life, but which are all, in fact, structured around events or crisis.

b) the kitchen sequence from *Umberto D* so as to show what the everyday as uneventful might look like, and what it might disclose.

Section One – The Ordinary in Crisis

A) *Pather Panchali*: The Stylistics of Epiphany

A useful place to start might be *Pather Panchali* (Sayajit Ray 1955 Ind) which I take to concern one boy's eyes opening up to a momentous world, but which has also been described in *The Film Handbook* as enacting a series of 'everyday events'[3]. The film concerns a small boy, Apu (Subir Bannerjee), growing up with his poor family in a small

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[1] A clear distinction should be made at this stage between the pursuit for realisms (or naturalisms) and film's intimate ontological relationship with reality. Although the concept of the everyday does not necessarily coincide with the former, the medium's epistemological basis in reality is crucial to the achievements of the four films I take to be about the ordinary (as it is for the most lurid fantasy films - see **Chapter One**). This issue connects to the specific narrational opportunities provided by the nature of film's transparency (see **Chapter Three**).

[2] Crispin Sartwell, 'Realism' in David Cooper ed., *A Companion to Aesthetics*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p354.

[3] Geoff Andrew, *The Film Handbook*, Longman, Essex, 1989, p233.

Indian village. A crucial perspective for the film is signalled in an opening moment where Durga, Apu's sister (Uma Das Gupta), lifts a blanket off her brother's head and then, with the camera tight in on his face, prises his eye open. Suddenly, invigorated by a loud burst of music, he leaps up and smiles. From this early point, *awakening* is specifically linked with the characters' eyes being *opened* and the film evolves with Apu's formative comprehension of life being developing as he peers through holes in walls and trees and tunnels.

Apu's is also a perspective impelled and haunted by music to the point of drowning out all surrounding sounds. The force of early experiences become like musical epiphanies both uplifting (here darting up from the sheets) and all-consuming. Later, when his mother screams while lamenting her daughter's death, her yell feeds into a bellowing soundtrack while the next shot shows Apu hearing his mother far away in the woods (although they are juxtaposed, the film also suggests that he may be hearing this at some time after her scream is exhausted, as if the yelling were still ringing on in his head).

The torrent of music on the soundtrack indicates that a child's formative perspective will be dictated by emotional extremities; at this early stage, life is experienced as a series of orchestral ruptures. Moreover, the way in which the excessive musical outpouring suddenly drowns out other elements indicates the extent to which the boy's viewpoint is not yet permitted the wider view, the experience of considered judgement. The music fails even to pattern out as reprised, albeit excessive, rise and falls: its discontinuous eruptions are symptomatic of a boy's life which has yet to become habitual, familiar, repetitious.

The manner in which the film's use of sound reveals that its viewpoint should not be considered as everyday is most exemplary in a scene which depicts the explosive passing of a train. Here Sayajit Ray's consummate use of the extremities of sound is put to the most sublime ends. Apu follows his sister Durga out to the fields: a landscape of unmarred repose but for the gentle rustling of the flax blowing in the wind. For his sister particularly the landscape is an oasis of tranquillity, free from the cacophony of yelling that surrounds her family life. Yet her aspiration is not to take solace in serenity, but rather to greet a disturbance more wonderful than the ones she encounters at home.

This greeting consists of maintaining a respectful silence: when Apu calls out to her, she compels him to stay hushed, Ray muffling Apu's shouts on the soundtrack, modulating

them into faint murmurs, thus courteously harmonising the film's effect with Durga's wishes. As the train enters the scene and they run towards it, the noise becomes louder and louder on the soundtrack, its roaring destruction of placidity conveyed in its bulk ominously filling the frame with darkness. And as quickly as it came it goes, its smoke soon dispersing. It takes a fine director to earn the right to permit the soundtrack to scream and not produce easy intensity. So carefully has he patterned the varying extreme contrasts in sound throughout Apu and Durga's experiences that the deafening roar here convincingly converts the train into a visiting God of saving grace and seductive mystery.

The train's significance is not found in its ordinariness, but in its specialness; the train passing is an event and the most palpable example of a child's life characterised as a disconnected series of assaults on the senses. Part of the impulse to label *Pather Panchali* as everyday, apart from the authenticity of ethnographic detail, results from this disconnection, the way the whole film is akin to the soundtrack, telling its story in a series of bursts. The viewer is freed from the overarching dramatic compulsions and compressions of a carefully wrought plot structure: the build-ups to events and the reactions to them happen within small, self contained units (although the ramifications of every incident do seep into future occasions). However, as the train sequence illustrates, *Pather Panchali* finds it significances in an alternative form of compression and concentration.

B) *My Childhood*: The Shock of Familiar Objects

A similar form of concentration to *Pather Panchali* is used in *My Childhood* (Bill Douglas 1972 GB) where each incident in the life of young Jamie (Stephen Archibald), living in the most intense state of poverty, is enacted within intimate units. This clinically distilled structure matches the stark deprivation caused by the poverty, and provokes its own intensities of focus. The structuring principles are accurately illustrated in a vivid depiction of family interaction (FIG.1). Jamie holds a kettle in one hand and with his other hand empties a teacup containing a weedy plant (apparently to rescue the cup for its proper use). He pours the water from the kettle into the teacup but bizarrely continues to pour causing the water to overflow all over the wooden table. Picking up the teacup, he now throws the water in it away and then kneeling in front of the rocking chair of his aged and almost wholly incapacitated Granny (the only guardian for Jamie and his brother) he wraps

her hands tightly around the cup. The apparent strangeness of his actions are finally explained as Jamie's procedure for providing Granny with warmth, and so keeping her alive[4].

We often assume that films centred around poverty are more everyday and ordinary, but in fact, on closer inspection this is rarely the case. Here the necessities of poverty produce the most extraordinary occurrences, where a cheap teacup assumes far more that its standard usage (to drink tea), and becomes a matter of life or death. This sequence evolves with its own beautiful logic, running against the grain – and playing off – familiar intentions. Far from the film discovering all the significance which might emerge from the regular usage of teacups, the cup's significance lies in an improbable utilisation. The peculiar purity of the logic complements the wretched emptiness of the room, the rough spillage of the water on the table and the insistent emptying of the cup producing a focus on the object which allows it distinct dramatic resonance.

Each unit of activity is centred around objects (a teacup, a picture book, a birdcage, a bicycle, an apple): *My Childhood* is about the psychology of possessing, about the importance, and consequent strangeness, instilled in the possessions you have when you own too few. The profundity embedded in the giving and taking of gifts – who gives and who takes, when and why – is thrown into particular relief here where the currency of ordinary objects achieves a more urgent worth. This insistency is reflected in Jamie's behaviour with the teacup: the confident dexterity of his movements suggests the undertaking of a habitual action, making his early spillage all the more astonishing. Indeed, the sequence's construction rests on the shock of the unfamiliar. The viewer realises his behaviour implies the fact of regularity, but the film is not interested in the everydayness; after all, the drama of the crisis of poverty is being generated by a sudden contrast with everyday norms. The film pitches the strange against the *implied* familiar to demonstrate what the everyday might consist of in the face of such destitute conditions[5].

C) *The Southerner*: The Everyday as Saviour

The everyday is customarily used not as a subject in itself but exists in implication, a foundational scenario to initiate other explorations (inquisitions into the flights from the

[4] The sequence lasts 15 seconds.
[5] For more on everyday objects see especially **Chapter Three** (Section One (A)) and **Chapter Six**.

ordinary, or the threats to it). *The Southerner* (Jean Renoir 1945 US) concerns Sam, a farmer (Zachary Scott) who decides to go it alone and run his own farm accompanied by his family (including stubborn Granny). Along with lower class or poor urban dwellers, the term ordinary is often applied to the "simple folks who put to the land", and in this film Sam's ordinariness consists of the unsophistication which rejects the tides of modernism and the flight to the city. The film concludes with a crisis: the high quality crops Sam's family have nurtured with skill are all wiped out by a hurricane. We see Sam's legs wading through the water as he approaches the shack which constitutes their home. The shot showing his legs swamped beneath the water makes palpable his own drowned hopes and his impulse to resignation (to leave the land and finally settle in the city). As he enters the shack many possessions are destroyed but his wife (Betty Field) has already made inroads towards a recovery: she presumes their continuation by acting as if everything was a practicality.

My interest in this sequence is in the manner in which the commitment to perseverance is acknowledged. Sam's wife, with inspiring optimism, catalogues in speech which of their belongings have survived the storm, and as she lists, the camera pans across them, all lined up on the table, beginning to dry out: the family pictures, their son's vegetable jars, the calendar. *The Southerner* is another film where the necessities of surviving poverty transform the usual relevance of everyday objects into miraculous epiphanies. Although most of their livelihood is destroyed, their faith is upheld by the small things, their fragile proximity to survival ensuring that the preserving of any simplicity (such as the vegetables needed to cure their son Johnny's spring sickness) requires a urgent struggle.

Under these conditions, an ordinary washing line is transformed into a banner of faith (FIG.2). Granny, normally stubborn and unhelpful, is hanging their remaining possessions on the line (a blanket, a teddy, her fan), carrying on as if nothing momentous had happened. In the face of such assumed resilience Sam has no opportunity to air his thoughts of resignation; he is urged on by the appearance of naturalness in their actions which provide discussion enough[6]. Outside Sam says to his friend "I was plum worn out

[6] It is testimony to the subtlety of Renoir's filmmaking that it maintains an ambiguity with regard to the women's motivations in this scene, ensuring that the emotion here is generated by more than unearned euphoric assertions. Granny's out of the ordinary behaviour and the niggling feeling that Sam's wife is keeping up a necessary act (Renoir being an expert in the varieties of ways that theatre manifests itself in human existence) suggests that they have not naturally behaved in this optimistic

for a minute. I didn't seem to believe in nothing no more. But now my clothes are starting to dry I'm beginning to believe again." His perseverance and aspirations are rekindled by the thought of things drying out, and so in this sense one might say that the will to recovery is represented by the simple washing line. Earlier when the camera panned along the table, it halted on the calendar (opened at the beginning of autumn): how could Sam pack it all in when he sees the survival of this calendar, and its reminder of the continuation of days? Thus the film is about more than the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity, and more than a faithful assertion of the inevitability of God's calling, and even more than the understanding that there are no limits to the inspiration embodied in the practical deeds of those we love: the film also implies that even catastrophic events may not supersede the sight of the calendar, where the continued repetitions of a farmer's year maybe the provider of solace. Yet, this solace dramatically invigorates the everyday by being asserted through the catastrophe of an event; the everyday performs the duty of the special hope, a melodramatic saviour, somewhere out there.

D) *The Wrong Man*: Invigorating the Commonplace

Alfred Hitchcock was an especially adept director at using the everyday as a framework rather than a going concern; hence his interest in locating the sinister against a clinically established background of routine. At the beginning of *The Wrong Man* (Alfred Hitchcock 1956 US), Hitchcock himself opens the film by announcing the forthcoming action to be based on a true story; and a tale that will prove (naturally) that truth is stranger than fiction. A written caption further orientates us toward expecting the exceptional: this will be a day in the life of Christopher Emanuel Balestrero ("Manny" - Henry Fonda) which he will never forget. The opening sequence quickly establishes itself as Manny's regular morning routine, leaving the Stork Club where he plays the double bass in a band, and heading back home to his wife and kids. As he departs the club the doorman exclaims "Goodnight Manny", the first of a series of signals indicating familiarity. A few moments

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way. From all that we know of these two characters in the film it is improbable that they too have not lost faith. However, they have chosen to act like this for Sam, and moreover they have not stated their arguments for continuation in words but asserted it in the most practical of deeds, making it appear for all the world like there was no alternative. And yet Renoir has kept open the possibility that their behaviour was natural on this occasion (a deliberate performance of persuasion is not being enacted), providing another source of inspiration: there is no end to the differences of opinion between human beings over what constitutes a forgone conclusion.

later he stops in a cafe, the waiter asking him frankly "What will it be – the usual?" Similarly, Manny's behaviour has all the ease of custom: the comfortable manner in which he crosses his legs on the subway and reads his paper; the unhindered pace of his walking, somewhere between assertive and relaxed; his body and head intuitively turning towards his home as he approaches down the street; and the informal pushing of his coat aside to fetch his keys while still walking up the drive.

This early presentation of Manny as relaxed into his routine – rather than frustrated with it – is crucial to establishing his simplicity of lifestyle. When Manny is accused of a crime he did not commit, Hitchcock's concern is not that the suspense of the thriller provide the backbone to further emotional explorations (as often in his films) but rather that a series of professionalised and institutionalised procedure is pitted against Manny and his wifes' plainness, uncomplicatedness, and naiveté. Consequently, the film explores these aspects of their *innocence* against the operation of the more customary legal definition of innocence (the Balestrero's are constructed as ordinary by lacking a certain know-how into the intricate and deceptive workings of the modern world) [7].

Therefore, from the opening sequence, Manny's own routine is immediately dovetailed with the threat of invasion; his ordinariness, established in his coming home, always sidling with intimations of disruption by a crisis. As Manny turns the corner of the road, outside the club, two policemen on their regular beat just happen to follow behind him (FIG.3). Although he walks in front he occupies a central position 'between' them so the effect of the film's framing is for him to appear imprisoned by the policemen on each side. Thus, Hitchcock, in the first moments of the film, amalgamates their different routines while prefiguring Manny's future entrapment by the 'law'. The opening sequence also uses ellipses so as to establish Manny's routine concurrently with the prospect of its disturbance. For instance, Manny will be shown on the subway platform with a train approaching whereupon the film will ellipse to him just stepping onto the train. The ellipse here is so slight that the viewer is prompted to question the omission of the few seconds of

[7] Hitchcock's attempts at greater 'realism' are founded here precisely in his playing down of suspenseful elements to concentrate on the various forms of repetitive procedure. The routines that Manny and his wifes' life consist of produce a settled existence (although they have little money) which cracks under the weight of police operations (she becomes mentally unbalanced). In one sequence, the police enforce Manny to walk in and out of the burgled shops, time after time, so that his identification can be tested; Hitchcock, sacrificing possibilities of suspense, remorselessly plays on the strain generated by this repetition (for characters and audience).

intervening movement. However, because ellipses are usually deployed to miss out the moments of irrelevant routine, allowing films to skip straight to the sections of more immediate relevance, each moment of Manny's routine following an ellipse is infused with the possibility of significance, with the expectation that something strange might occur.

By filling Manny's routine with apprehension, Hitchcock taunts the everyday with the instability brought on by the eventful ("a day he would never forget"). In this sequence the apprehension felt makes even a familiar activity like unlocking one's door stand out with almost melodramatic vigour (this effect is achieved without any suspenseful music; such music does not begin until he enters the house).

E) *Kes*: The Melodrama of the Moment

This particular form of melodrama, this invigoration of the commonplace, is not singular to Hitchcock merely because he concerns himself with thriller frameworks. Operating as far from Hitchcock's territory as possible, even a British "realist" such as Ken Loach has his naturalism depend on energising the commonplace. For example, his film *Kes* (Ken Loach 1969 GB) concerns a young, deprived boy called Casper (David Bradley) living in the North of England (Barnsley) who finds solace from the unsupportive environment in his private training of a kestrel. In one scene the headmaster of the school chastises four of the schoolboys about their 'inadequate' behaviour. The scene is dominated by the pontificating headmaster ("yours is the generation that never listens", "the 1920s and 30s were hard times but they produced qualities in people that you lot will never have"). In his broad Yorkshire accent he packs his lecture with rhetorical questions ("will it stop you smoking?") while leaning forward on his desk to project his pompous declarations or strolling to peer out of the window, there replicating the self-conscious pose of a retired war leader summoning up a lifetime of experienced thought. All his actions are performed with an awkwardness, his lack of poise resembling an amateur actor going through the declamatory motions.

Loach's pursuit of the real leads into the comic melodrama of figures like the headmaster. *Kes*' realism of character and setting is achieved through familiar idioms, clichés, tics, accents, haircuts, fashions, all of which afford the viewer pleasurable jolts of recognition. It does not require all his audience to necessarily have experienced *this* headmaster, with *this* accent and *these* idioms but the specific emphasis on local colour

convinces us: "this is how it is." Furthermore, the film's realistic specificity goes hand in hand with the construction of melodramatic typage. The headmaster *plays* up to all the clichés we would expect from a melodramatic type: but Loach's conception of the real world is precisely one inhabited by institutional and familial figures who play up to type, and the injustices he unearths lie in the rigidities which stem from that typage, here the oppressive formalities which close Casper down. *Kes* is a tragi-comedy about how our roles in life can turn us into types, with the consequence of circumscribing our possibilities for communication.

Therefore, melodramatic performance in the film emerges not only as a consequence of the film camera (see **Chapter One**) but of real life social roles: for Loach the artifice of performance exists prior to fiction. He asserts this orientation by making his audience *live through the drama of the moment* as if it were happening unrehearsed in front of them, giving the illusion that the moment was not constructed for the camera: hence the clutter of off-screen sound (the boys' giggling), lost sections of speech, the flat lighting, the lack of patterned composition, and inconsistent duration of shots. In the headmaster scene the camera mixes together shots between shoulders, from behind heads, the odd close-up, providing no steady view from which to observe the scene; the camera "catches" what it can. Crucially, the way in which the camera is acknowledged by actor and audience is where the naturalistic manner of filming contrasts most tellingly to a more classical style. Here, the actor is made to appear especially unaware of the camera while the audience is especially aware of it analysing him. This contrasts to the mode of acknowledgement in classical cinema where the actors' performances are created out of a greater recognition of the camera (even though they will not often overtly draw attention to the fact of its existence) at the same time that the audience is less mindful of its constant presence[8]. The tensions achieved in *Kes* emerge from weighting the acknowledgement of the camera towards the audience.

The overpowering sense of the insistent camera means that the dramatic effect of the film lies in *short term* scrutinising. This is why his naturalistic manner is not one depicting the everyday: it remains wedded to the eventful nature of the moment. The film's manner does indeed eschew an urgent narrative momentum but this is because it depicts

[8] Hence the feature of apparent transparency – see discussion of G.M. Wilson in **Chapter Three**. Of course, the audience's precise awareness of the camera will vary with different film sequences.

character interaction as a protracted crisis of communication. The headmaster's behaviour is *so typical* but the familiarity is recognised from the depiction of a stereotyped *performance* rather than through the longer term emergence of meaning from a narrative commitment to the habitual. The film's perspective, here that the headmaster's inability to adopt a shared language is integral to keeping the kids' minds closed, is achieved through a process of exposure, the character betrayed in the humiliating attentions of the camera. Longer term strategies of points of view, developed by a less demonstrative camera, are sacrificed.

F) *Paisà*: The Limits of the Everyday

Another film centred around communication in crisis is *Paisà* (Roberto Rossellini 1946 It), made up of six separate tales[9]. In one of the stories an American soldier befriends a young Italian boy in a city scarred by the destruction of the recently finished World War. The segment is condensed into a neat story form where a slice of life is presented as an instructional fable (one might label it: "The Soldier and The Boy"). Despite their friendship established over a night, the boy takes advantage of the soldier's drunkenness and steals his shoes. Finding the boy in the city during the next day or so the indignant soldier grabs him and orders the boy to take him to where he lives. Eventually we find the boy lives in a shanty village set into some caves, and his mother and father have both been killed in the war. The soldier is horrified by the boy's predicament, and faced with the realisation of why the boy steals, he drives away shocked and confused.

The soldier realises that any rigidly ordered system of ethics is humbled by the chaotic crisis of war. This formula scenario might be trite were it not for the thoroughness with which the *whole* episode animates this final moral. Nothing characterises the segment more vividly than a medium long shot of the soldier drunkenly weaving across a bombed out site. The distance of the shot conveys his uncontrolled movement through a space which has itself lost its man made order. The whole segment forgoes ordered compositions; the camera is free to accommodate the unpredictability of movement and gestures.

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[9] Unlike *Kes*, the film manages, at least within each episode, to use a certain flexibility of camera placement without resting the majority of its drama on the viewer feeling he is *experiencing* the raw moment. In fact, Rossellini, with his developing perspective on the situations and consequences of disorder, masters the polished rendering of the unpolished.

Rossellini is fascinated with the movements emerging from disordered spaces. The segment begins with all the children rampageously rushing and circling, the bombed spaces becoming a blank onto which they project their imaginations and their crafty schemes, uncircumscribed areas free from a pre-ordained adult organisation which might set limits on the children's more unconventional formulations. The children's particular modes of communication are allowed free reign in these new spaces. Equally, in the episode's central scene, the boy leads the soldier by the hand to where they eventually sit together on the rubble of a bombed out site (FIG.4). The boy's yanking of the soldier by the hand initiates a range of uncontrolled gestural communications, replacing a more 'civilised' system disallowed by their language differences (that a uniformed American soldier should find himself on some rubble with a little Italian boy is another of the tumultuous consequences of the immediate post war). Thus the soldier drunkenly recounts his story through a series of spontaneous hand gestures which result not from a dexterity with converting words into physical signs but rather from the exuberant physical garrulousness driven by excessive drink. The boy 'replies' with the sound of his harmonica; but their communication is not tightly regulated into statement and response, erupting rather as a series of shambolic shouts and squeals. In the chaos of war Rossellini asserts a return to a more 'primitive' communication, where bodily convulsions replace purposive language as the basis for human interaction.

The whole episode is constructed out of screeching, of bustling, of stumbling, of kicking, of scraping, of leaping, of fighting, of collapsing, of dragging. It is precisely this cacophony of street noise and irregular spontaneity of movement that we might mistakenly characterise as the ordinary. However, its down-to-earth(i)ness (its in-the-earthness), its roughness, its mastery of crudity, is precisely the opposite of my particular specification of the everyday and the ordinary which is not turbulent or unruly but repetitively rigid: and the films which constitute the central examples of the thesis are marked by subdued styles dependent on an evenness of tenor[10].

When the soldier enters in to the boy's shanty town at the end of the segment a very high long shot looks down onto the shacks set into the craggy hillside: the shot suggests the merging of this post-war domesticity back into the rudimentary and primeval, everyday survival *pushed* to the limits, always threatening to collapse, leaving only the bare

[10] This aspect of undramatic style will be elucidated in the chapters to follow.

landscape. Faced by this precariousness, what the soldier learns is that stealing is an everyday fact for these kids, but it is not an everyday fact for the drama of the film. The conclusion the film arrives at is achieved by experiencing, along with the soldier, that all this is strange, abnormal and shocking. The film is interested in implying the everyday life of the boy only through representing it as a tumultuous event (the soldier screeching off in horror), dramatically crystallised through a once-and-for-all clash with a visiting American.

One aspect of style, evident in *Paisà*, and characteristic of the pursuit of the real is the rejection of blatant shows of artificial lighting. Lighting becomes, by and large, realistically motivated, varying only as locations suggest, not according to the dictates of, for example, glamour which encourages the back lighting of hair, or the side lighting of facial features. Nevertheless, the film quite dramatically plays light against dark, the light of some street scenes giving way to the dark of small interiors, the contrasts often existing between scenes (thus playing by the rules of realistic motivation) rather than within them as in the carefully constructed shadowed locations of noir melodrama (noir also has a deliberate and obsessive consciousness of characters' movements with regard to carefully arranged light sources)[11]. This play of light and dark makes vivid the presence of subterranean worlds which have evolved from the consequences of war; there is the palpable sense of overground and underground and its concomitant guerrilla behaviour. Rossellini is less concerned with the undramatic ordinary than with the stark contrasts that constitute part of the reality of some lives.

G) The Melodrama of Time

Rossellini pursues the real through the most unruly extremities of lighting, movement and gestures. He was one of the first directors to put into effect what Gilles Deleuze has discussed as characterising the limit situations of the time image. For Deleuze, cinema history divides into two broad periods, the early period which is characterised by the action image, and the later period, starting most especially with the period of neo-realism, which is characterised by the time image. The cinema became no longer so interested in action, agent and motoring but in optical and sound situations: 'This is a

[11] This contrasts with the flat lighting, largely unvaried from place to place, in *Loves of a Blonde* and which, among other things, suitably reflects the tedious uniformity of how life *looks* to the protagonist (see **Chapter Five**).

cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent'[12]. Characters therefore found themselves 'blocked' in various ways (and this might characterise all the films discussed in this chapter) in settings which no longer 'presupposes an action which discloses it, or prompts a reaction which adapts to or modifies it'[13]. This is a cinema where time is not subservient to the dictates of action but becomes a subject in itself.

Indeed, time is often pushed to the limits. In *Paisà* when the boy and the soldier gesticulate on the rubble, the scenario is based not on the furthering of plot (neither character really gets anywhere, so to speak) but on placing them in a 'disconnected space' (Deleuze's term) and pushing them to the extremities of communication. As we have seen the situation is dependent on them seeing gestures (e.g. the soldier's drunken story) and hearing sounds (e.g. the boy's harmonica), the emphasis now falling on characters' hearing and seeing. Many directors have become obsessed with limit situations (e.g. Luchino Visconti, Michaelangelo Antonioni, Jacques Rivette, Rainer Fassbinder, Chantal Ackerman) and much of their work might be generalised[14] as being fascinated with what I might call the *melodrama of time*, and what Andrei Tarkovsky has described as the way time flows in a shot, its tension, 'the pressure of time in the shot'[15].

The films by the directors mentioned are not characterised by a 'motor situation' of one event leading to another but of one big event, where a single situation is pushed to the limits. Thus time appears to be pressing in the shot, stretched and tense. The visual patterning and composition are forceful, even though the plotting is not. The characters in such films are often left to obsessively observe which allows for the films' heightened visual drama: for example, the hypnotic opulence as the composer floats around Venice in *Death in Venice* (Luchino Visconti 1971 It). In Jacques Rivette's *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991 Fr), a four hour film whose action mostly consists of a woman being painted, the model's body is stretched and contorted over time: here, bodily positions become a strenuous and erotic battle ground between painter and painted. Similarly, Michaelangelo Antonioni throughout his career was entranced by the almost abstracted patterns of people in spaces, their suspended crises in 'disconnected' locales.

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[12] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Athlone Press, London, 1989, p2.
[13] Deleuze, ibid., p5.
[14] I must emphasise that the accounts of the films in these two paragraphs are generalisations which I thought were justified at this point in the discussion. I hope that my paying lipservice to the detail and specificities of the films does not undermine the usefulness of the generalisations.
[15] Deleuze, op.cit., p42.

Section Two – Moving Away From Crisis

A) *Umberto D*: The Uneventful Kitchen

The everyday is not characterised by this melodrama of time borne from such limit situations; time does not have the same dramatic punch, or such palpability. However, the everyday can be conceptualised as the concentration on *different times*, those times that are not obviously caught up in the motor situations constructed specifically around events, or in the drama emerging from one large testing event. For Deleuze the coming of the time image also allowed the concentration on the everyday (of which he sees Yasujiro Ozu as the greatest exponent) and he offers as an example a famous scene from *Umberto D* (Vittorio De Sica 1952 It), a film which is an important prototype for this thesis:

> [I]n *Umberto D*, De Sica constructs the famous sequence...: the young maid going into the kitchen in the morning, making a series of mechanical, weary gestures, cleaning a bit, driving the ants away from a water fountain, picking up the coffee grinder, stretching out her foot to close the door with her toe. And her eyes meet her pregnant woman's belly, and it is as though all the misery in the world were going to be born. This is how, in an ordinary or everyday situation, in the course of a series of gestures...what has suddenly been brought about is a *pure optical situation* to which the little maid has no response or reaction. The eyes, the belly, that is what an encounter is...[16]

Deleuze, even while discussing everyday scenarios, tends to speak the extreme language of limit situations but I am sympathetic toward his understanding of the maid's interactions in the kitchen as a different form of 'encounters' which 'reveal connections of a new type'[17].

The maid works in the apartment where Umberto, an old man, lives and she has recently become pregnant to somebody whom we never properly see and has now gone away. One morning she enters the kitchen and first lights the stove (FIG.5). There is no frustration when the first match does not light, she just carefully repeats the procedure. Any pressures of exploitation or poverty are not reflected through an anger with her space: there is a certain respect for the kitchen as this is the time, unlike most of her life, when she is free from the interference of others. As she moves around the kitchen her delicate pace

[16] Deleuze, ibid., p1/2.
[17] Deleuze, ibid., p17.

suggests a sense of relief, almost a modest relishing of a space which allows some serene privacy[18].

Her routine in the kitchen is illustrated by the couple of attempts to light her match. She attempts to ignite them on the wall, where we see the markings of many a mornings' scratched matches: these are the engravings of the habitual. No close-up grants the markings privilege, they have a low degree of prominence in the shot appearing merely as a dark smudge on the bare walls, but accompanied by her actions on this morning they depict so much repetition. She then looks out of the window, as if she was getting a sense of her own space by peering into the world at large outside. She also looks down at herself, gently running a hand down her stomach. There is no sense that she thinks that 'all the misery in the world were going to be born': her wide-eyed expression here, her placidity of movement around the kitchen, and her almost weightless interaction with objects, suggest something less on the verge of crisis, something much more indeterminate.

This indeterminacy stems partly from her own mixed and embryonic feelings with regards to carrying a baby. Her eyes open widely after touching herself, and then as she blinks she almost manages a smile, but her face actually remains at a point where it seems to register both a satisfaction in the security her body provides for the baby, and also a blankness in the face of the baby's invisibility (this feeling not strong enough to be even characterised as apprehension, it is more a vagueness about what the future may hold). At one stage she sits on a chair, grinds the coffee against her stomach and stretches her foot out to shut the kitchen door (she touches the door closed). Her little challenge to push the door closed is like a tentative test of her body, coming to terms with her sense of herself, encouraged by this new entity inside her. Yet, the test is undramatic, almost a nonchalant gesture, taking the form of those little everyday challenges we set ourselves, those private playful provocations with which we engage, in the absence of other people. The gesture does exist as the product of a certain dreariness, but is at the same time a rescuing of something from the monotony, an attempt to achieve a little victory in her kitchen.

Her working of the coffee becomes intimate with her pregnancy (FIG.6). Her grinding it tightly against her stomach, although exhibiting the lethargic movement of a mundane task seems to also allow the complex expression of such confusion of feeling:

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[18] This delicacy of pace is clearly influenced by her not being fully awake but her morning tiredness could still have prompted an impatience with her routine.

suggesting both a winding up of the baby, like a clockwork toy, a little too impatiently into life, and a painstaking crushing, enacted innocuously, as if the baby's extinguishing might be nonchalantly achieved in the daily run of things. There is no trivialisation of her prospective childbirth in the coming together of the coffee grinder and her baby: for it is as if the daily use of the most ordinary tools, without according them stark dramatic focus, could find themselves in faithful synchronisation with her deepest feelings. As Millicent Marcus says:

> The morning scene of Maria in the kitchen serves an...interiorising function...this is Maria's personal space, which she claims as her own through a series of small ritualised gestures...[the scene does] much more than simply introduce us to the ordinary and uneventful quality of...Maria's daily routines, for they reveal the character...to us in almost embarrassing intimacy.[19]

For Marcus, Maria's kitchen serves as a stage for the 'private enactment' of her innermost self[20]: here state of mind is not revealed through confessional dialogue or confrontational encounters or expressionistic transformation of her environment, but rather through routine morning activity. Her precise interaction with her world is capable of mapping out confused and less vehement moods. Revealed here are the feelings generated outside events or obsessions.

Her engagement with the kitchen is integral to expressing her indeterminate and undemonstrative feelings in these early stages of understanding her pregnancy. Yet, the coffee grinder, for example, remains ordinary: it is not dramatically transformed as in *My Childhood*, and it constitutes no eventful focus (unlike the teacup). Here the grinder remains firmly in the context of its expected place in the routine order of things, and is accorded no special resonance. The interest lies in the apparently innocuous use of objects, a fact partly illustrated by the lack of close-ups the objects are awarded – practically the whole sequence is filmed in medium shot. Significance here is disclosed by the non-energetic arrangement of body and environment and object.

These non-energetic arrangements seem to be what André Bazin so admired in the sequence. As he writes:

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[19] Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neo-Realism*, Princeton Univ. Press, Oxford, 1986, p109/110.
[20] Marcus, ibid., p110.

> The narrative unit is not the episode, the event, the sudden turn of events...it is the succession of concrete instants of life, no one of which can be said to be more important than another, for their ontological equality destroys drama at its very basis.[21]

This 'ontological equality' celebrated by Bazin and which 'destroys drama at its very basis' is a specific and wonderful possibility offered by the medium. Stanley Cavell discovers that 'photographs are of the world, in which human beings are not ontologically favoured over the rest of nature, in which objects are not props but natural allies (or enemies) of the human character'[22], thus ensuring that '[o]n the stage, two trees may constitute a forest, and two brooms the two trees; for the screen, this would yield only two brooms'[23]. The cinema's possibilities for discovering significance in the everyday lies not necessarily in the pursuit of the real but in the medium's epistemological basis in reality. Cavell rightly attributes ontological equality as the basis for the spectacular drama of artists such as Keaton, Astaire and Chaplin[24] but for Bazin it might also 'destroy drama at its very basis' permitting the fulfilment of Cesare Zavattini's aim, summarised by Marcus, that films might 'dignif[y] the ordinary and the unexceptional by taking 'any moment of human life' and show...'how striking' it is'[25].

In taking advantage of the cinema's distinct possibilities for ontological equality, the consequent destruction of drama for Bazin lay in the concentration on the relationships between humans and their environment which were normally excluded by ellipses; ellipses traditionally 'organis[ing] the facts in accord with the general dramatic direction to which it forces them to submit'[26]. As George M. Wilson encapsulates it: 'The alternative style that Bazin envisages would respect the continuity and complexity of the spatio-temporal integration of a field of action while being willing to leave the causal and psychological/teleological integration of the action less articulated'[27]. We can see how Deleuze's more pertinent analyses of modern cinema are clearly indebted to Bazin, the

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[21] André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 2*, Univ. of California Press, London, 1971, p81.
[22] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Enlarged Edition), Harvard Univ. Press, London, 1979, p37.
[23] Cavell, ibid., p199.
[24] Ontological equality permitted Chaplin's 'relationships with Murphy beds and flights of stairs and with vases on runners on tables on rollers: the heroism of momentary survival' (Cavell, ibid., p37).
[25] Marcus, op.cit., p101.
[26] Bazin, op.cit., p81.
[27] George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light: Cinematic Studies in Point of View*, John Hopkins Univ. Press, London, p90/91.

alternatives to the 'action image' and 'movement image' allowing the restoration of the lost parts, 'everything that has been removed to make it 'interesting''[28].

Conclusion

The restoration of lost parts allows that unconcealing of the obvious to which I have referred in **Chapter One**; once again significance emerges from learning to see and hear those features that have 'disappeared' (or been banished away in the ellipses) only because they are always before our eyes. Here is Deleuze's understanding of a cinema based on seeing and hearing rather than on teleological action. All the characters in the films of this thesis are somewhat exempt from action: a priest's immobility in the face of an uncomprehending parish, unable to escape unexciting rhythms even in the midst of events such as death, living a life committed to the writing of 'trivial secrets' in a colourless diary (*Diary of a Country Priest*); a young factory worker's boredom, resulting in a lack of self-scrutiny which encourages an infinite movement, a floating, which destroys any dramatic convulsion (*Loves of a Blonde*); a young woman's inability to halt the slide into a marriage she does not desire (*Late Spring*); and a group of highly educated young adults whose immense creative urges are redirected from possible energetic embodiment, all of them consumed in perpetual conversations which still do not allow them to say what they mean (*A Tale of Springtime*). In a variety of ways they are fated to see and listen, not to *do*, so to speak, with any strength: this chimes with Deleuze's words used in reference to characters from other films that they are 'given over to something intolerable which is simply their everdayness itself'[29]. His use of 'intolerable' is typically too strong, too rhetorical, too *dramatic*; so it remains to be seen what 'given over' to 'their everydayness' might specifically entail.

[28] Deleuze, op.cit., p21.
[29] Deleuze, ibid., p41.

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Chapter Three

The Artistry of the Everyday

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Introduction

The central aims of this chapter are to explore:

a) what a study of undramatic films about the everyday, those not organised around the eventful, reveals about the possibilities for film narrative and composition.

b) what this undramatic film style reveals about directorial point of view, and therefore about matters of intention and achievement.

Section One - Modes of Absorption

A) The Organisation of the Familiar in Vermeer's *Woman Pouring Milk*

FIG.1

At the close of **Chapter Two,** I described the achievement of the kitchen sequence in *Umberto D* as lying in the non-energetic arrangement of body and environment and object. If the viewer is to be absorbed in the sequence he or she must re-orientate themselves to a series of arrangements which do not rely on eventful narrative or dramatic structures. The type of engagement required while viewing some paintings, those whose compositions are not dictated by eventful scenarios, might provide us with some insight into the mode of absorption necessary for an appreciation of undramatic film sequences. Exemplary in this regard is Jan Vermeer's *Woman Pouring Milk* (FIG.1), another depiction of a woman interacting with domestic objects in a kitchen area.

It is indeed the case that an observer's absorption in this painting might be because of the painting's visual prominence, its vivid rendering of uneventful domestic objects, food, clothing and decor. So an observer may be struck by the delicacy with which the daylight from the window falls on the right side of the woman's face; or wallow in the rich blocks of colour, especially highlighted through their bold contrasts; or equally, one may appreciate the dextrous textural verisimilitude of the bread which allows it to come magically alive. However, these declamatory artistic pleasures fail to do justice to the overall tone of the painting which rests in the rejection of any apparent energy. Paradoxically, the painting stands calmly aloof from its whole array of overtly pronounced effects.

Therefore, these disparate appreciative comments will not account satisfactorily for the painting's achievement of calmness. Much of the painting's content and concern seems so familiar, so without surprise, that the observer needs to enact the task that Stanley Cavell discovered to be central to the desires of Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein: unconcealing the obvious and searching out 'the aspects of [those] things that are most important for us...hidden because of their simplicity and [ordinariness, everydayness]'[1]. Edward Snow says:

> The line that slopes from the absorbed expression on the woman's face, down across her tightly laced bodice, through the jug held open in her hands, to the basin into which the milk trickles (up and over the jug's lip, as if of its own accord), suggests...continuity, even

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* point 129, quoted in Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Scepticism and Romanticism*, Univ. of Chicago Press, London, 1988, p164.

> generative flow – as if the bread, milk and open vessels were extensions of the woman herself...All the painting's vectors seem to meet at the open jug, where opposing aspects again seem reconciled: the woman cradles it with maternal tenderness (we take its place, we feel what it is like to be held like this, to have our heaviness made light).[2]

In this analysis Snow penetrates the complexity lying in a mundane moment, especially in his understanding of the configuration of human and objects, that is the relationships between them. Furthermore, the core of Vermeer's achievement is the *unemphatic* manner in which all the elements are related, a set of relations whose interest is not derived from energetic, urgent or impassioned interactions:

> [I]t is through a subtle kinesis that we relate...it is like a moment of ontological elation, with all opposing torques in perfect equilibrium, embedded in the midst of something totally mundane and everyday.[3]

Snow delineates this elation by being meticulous about the physical equations: for example, he contrasts the pitcher's position at 'the heart of a domesticated world' with the footwarmer in the right hand corner of the painting, which

> rests outside that world's boundaries...support[ing] the luminous expanse of emptiness that rises from it columnlike, just beyond the realm of things and tasks...a necessary counterweight to the accumulation of "world" which piles up [to the left of the painting].[4]

Snow continues to reveal how Vermeer's discoveries are engendered by the undramatic deployment of objects:

> Note the elaborately contrasted images of things open and closed (the brass and the wicker basket, the pitcher and the standing jug, the whole and the broken loaf), full and empty (the basket on the table and those fastened to the wall, the blue overskirt and the cloth hanging from the table, the dense bread and the cavernous jug); and of interiors disclosed and concealed (the lifted overskirt and the covered table, the pitcher and the standing jug again...)...These

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[2] Edward Snow, *A Study of Vermeer*, Univ. of California Press, Oxford, 1994, p63-64.
[3] Snow ibid., p154/5.
[4] Snow ibid., p171.

> counterpointed objects are like facets of a meditation on both the woman's presence and the "worldness" of the world.[5]

This use of the term "worldness" is reminiscent of Stanley Cavell's discussions of Heidegger and the 'worldhood of the world'. Indeed, *Woman Pouring Milk* is an exemplary artistic depiction of Cavell's interpretation of Heidegger's ideas. As Cavell discusses:

> In the third chapter of *Being and Time*...[Heidegger] makes Being-in-the-World first visible...by drawing out, in his way, the implications of our ability to carry on certain simple forms of work, using simple tools in an environment defined by those tools (he calls it a work-world)...It is upon the disturbing or disruption of such carryings on – say by a tool's breaking or by finding something material missing – above all in the disturbing of the kind of perception or absorption that these activities require (something that is at once like attention and like inattention) that...a particular form of awareness is called forth...What this supervening awareness turns out to be *of* is the worldhood of the world – or, slightly more accurately, *it is an awareness that that prior absorption was already directed toward a totality with which...the world announces itself* [my italics].[6]

The recognition of Vermeer's configurations, which draw us deeper into the picture, create something like Heidegger's 'totality' and in doing so let the familiar and mundane world 'announce' itself[7]; moreover, through this, Heidegger (like Wittgenstein) demanded a return to appreciating everyday life and consequently a return to human thinking (as opposed to the obsession with all-consuming scepticism, where as Cavell frames it, 'the world is not humanly knowable, or sharable'[8]).

Michael Fried (comparing the paintings of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Greuze in France in 1750s and 1760s[9]) says that absorption in Chardin's paintings

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[5] Snow ibid., p12.

[6] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Harvard Film Studies, Harvard Univ. Press, London, 1981, p271/272.

[7] Cavell has also written of the way '[f]ilm returns to us and extends our first fascination with objects, with their inner and fixed lives' (Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Enlarged Edition), Harvard Univ. Press, London, 1979, p43).

[8] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, op. cit., p271.

[9] For more details on these artists and their paintings see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1980.

(where figures are shown involved in uneventful scenarios in the manner of the woman in Vermeer's *Woman Pouring Milk*) 'strikes us not only as an ordinary, everyday condition but as the condition which, more than any other, characterises ordinary everyday experience: as the hallmark or *sine qua non* of the everyday as such'[10]. However, frequently the figure or character's absorption in an uneventful act is not undivided. Indeed, Cavell's understanding of absorption which is 'something that is at once like attention and like inattention' matches Snow's description of the woman in the painting: 'The expression on her face is...multiple. Concentrated and diffuse, focused on a task and lost in thought, conveying at the same time rapture, contentment, and measured detachment'[11]. This in turn is similar to the maid's state of mind in *Umberto D*, both attending to the grinding of the coffee (focused on a task) while absorbed in considerations concerning her baby (lost in thought). It is because the maid's absorption in the coffee grinding is not total that close observation of the manner in which she enacts her activity might reveal something significant about her state of mind.

Fried charts the fundamental change in French painting in the 1760s from showing figures who are absorbed in everyday activities (blowing soap bubbles, building card castles, playing knucklebones) to scenarios where 'deliberate and extraordinary measures came to be required in order to persuade contemporary audiences of the absorption of a figure or group of figures in the world of the painting...sentimentalism, emotionalism, moralism, exploitation of sexuality, and invention of narrative-dramatic structures'[12]. The ontological and historical context for the particular deployment of narrative-dramatic structures in painting and film are different, but Fried's division of subject matter in French painting is similar to the division used in this thesis. His adjectives ('sentimentalism, emotionalism...') would be fitting to describe the narrative-dramatic structures of much film melodrama whereas this thesis is interested in four films where it might be said that the characters' absorption in their activity does not depend, for example, on the exploitation of sexuality or on the sentiment generated by crisis, or the eventful, or significant moments of change. Instead the viewer is faced with scenarios such as the writing of a day to day diary,

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[10] Fried, ibid., p61.
[11] Snow, op. cit., p12.
[12] Fried says that in the 1760s 'the everyday as such was in an important sense lost to pictorial representation...The latter was a momentous event, one of the first in the series of losses that together constitute the ontological basis of modern art' (op. cit. p61).

the biding of time at a dance hall, the daily train trip into the city from the suburbs and the chatting of friends in a country cottage.

A viewer needs special persuasion to become absorbed in a film or painting where the character or figure are themselves absorbed in uneventful activity. Most films are organised around eventful change, therefore these undramatic films have been forced to find new ways of persuasively organising their subject matter. We can see now that the calmness in the Vermeer painting stems, not, say, from the sublime restfulness of a landscape, but from the precise *arrangement* of everyday objects, the insight into the everyday being 'announced' through a triumph of composition and perspective.

Visual achievements in painting or film may discover their virtue in the sophistication with which their characters interact with their world; the delicacy of composition in the Vermeer painting creates this woman's capacity even though she is *only* pouring milk. This sophistication ensures that the Vermeer painting does not complacently represent a woman as delighted to be serving in a kitchen (whatever her particular social role) but rather, for Snow, discovers dignity through a woman's typical circumstance. As is the case with the maid in *Umberto D*, I would emphasise that the painting enhances our responsiveness to the woman while remaining wedded to her ordinary experience. In both cases, our consciousness is heightened by becoming alive to their experience even within mundane scenarios[13].

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[13] Alternatively, an expansion of our consciousness might be achieved by the artwork reaching out and placing her in another world. It is a perennial area of controversy in film studies: should criticism 'settle' for the world depicted in the artwork? The question is whether the terms of that world are themselves inherently circumscribing to their characters and therefore 'ideologically unsound', thus forcing the director, if he wishes to be successful, to imagine alternative role-expanding worlds for its inhabitants. The issue arose fascinatingly in a discussion (turned argument) in the pages of *Movie* magazine between Andrew Britton and V.F. Perkins over the film *Lola Montes* (Max Ophuls 1955 Fr/W.Ger). Perkins' statement on this issue was apposite, acclaiming the film as

> about the human condition, about which it is a lot of the time awfully telling. And that in no way undermines its acuteness in the analysis of social roles or structural positions, though it does mean that it doesn't perform that analysis against the background of a Utopian or even a 'Progressivist' vision of what life could be. Ophuls certainly never presents an alternative social world...Ophuls is presenting the world out of a particular knowledge and a particular experience – it isn't every *possible* human society. He is addressing an audience which could be expected to recognise patterns of aspiration, achievement and failure...as built in to the structure and texture of its civilisation – as part of that audience's unavoidable inheritance (*Movie*, Ophuls issue, 29/30, Summer 1982, 109-121, p121.).

Perkins here recognises the range of insight to be found in the artwork accepting certain social givens and the multiplicity of detail which it may find in common scenarios. Our feelings towards the 'ideological integrity' of the work (although I sense that this phrase in itself possibly circumscribes

We might say the painting frees the woman pouring milk in the most undramatic manner, so delicately unromantic is its 'ontological elation'. Particularly, the painting's reluctance to flaunt its emblematic qualities, or rely complacently on piecemeal symbolism, ensure that the strength of its meaning depends on seeing the arrangement of the objects in their 'totality'. As far as it is possible to assert such a point, the painting's meaning resides in a stylistic realm: we have discovered its effectiveness by penetrating further into its balances; picking out separate objects alone in order to decipher meaning would not match the richness of its 'hermetic inwardness'[14].

B) Characterising Undramatic Narratives

The four undramatic films do throw up the question of how they can remain absorbing while they avoid plots centred around events, refuse an assertive visual style and concentrate on the ordinary. The films reject an obvious cause and effect chain and yet still seem to have successful narrative frameworks. So on what ground might the success of their narratives rest? Furthermore, if the stories of these undramatic films are told differently, what might the films reveal about some of the less apparent characteristics of film storytelling?

As all four films are not products of the Classical Hollywood system, it might appear that Hollywood had its own distinctive methods of narrating based on cause and effect mechanisms which prohibited the sort of undramatic explorations of the ordinary shown by the films in question. Consequently at first glance it appears as though an analysis such as that provided by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson (together and separately) might provide some early clues into the sort of narrative framework *not* utilised by these four films[15]. Bordwell *et al* characterise the Classical Hollywood cinema as a style where film technique is subordinate to the construction of the plot. This is described by Bordwell:

> Here in brief is the premise of the Hollywood story construction: causality, consequence, psychological motivations, the drive towards

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responses) will depend on the eloquence of the particular work, especially its sensitivity with regard to the 'givens' in question.

[14] Snow op. cit., p150.

[15] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Routledge, London, 1985. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Routledge, London, 1988. Kristin Thompson, *Breaking The Glass Armour*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, 1988.

> overcoming obstacles and achieving goals. Character-centred – i.e. personal or psychological – causality is the armature of the classical story.[16]

In Classical Hollywood, style is dictated by this framework so that spatial and temporal structures are subordinated to the logic of causality: space, for example, is presented so as not to distract attention from the dominant actions (space is 'used up' by the presentation of important settings in the narrative, or other causal agents) and classical editing aims at 'making each shot the logical outcome of its predecessor and at re-orientating the spectator through repeated setups'[17].

The important matter here is to recognise how narrative is being conceptualised: style is something that can be separated from film narrative so that spatial and temporal structures are taken as subordinate to it. Narrative is being defined as something akin to the plot and/or story. Continuing with this logic Bordwell *et al* then see Yasujiro Ozu's films as generating spatial structures which are not motivated by the cause/effect chain of narrative. Therefore, Ozu's use of space lacks 'compositional' motivation (i.e. motivation according to narrative economy). Narrative supremacy is contested with style becoming *parametric*: style has its own interest separate from the furthering of the narrative.

In this scenario empty rooms in *Late Spring* (see **Chapter Six**) are seen as spaces between points of the narrative action and objects become 'hypersituated', standing apart from the narrative, almost as still life compositions. Similarly, visual configurations take on a major structuring role where the logic of the cut is almost wholly graphic, divorced from the causal structure of the narrative[18]. However, there is a fundamental problem here with conflating film narrative with the plot's cause and effect chain. Film tells stories in pictures and even an empty room might add to the narrative development. Equally, in Classical Hollywood the presence of overt plotting around events should not disguise the multitude of stylistic ways a coherent plot can be expressed. When the dividing door opened to reveal Jerry in his pyjamas in the final scene of *The Awful Truth* we saw that the speed at which the door opened made a difference to the meaning of the scene, as did the nature of Jerry's response, as did Lucy's particular movements with the bed covers and so on. One can

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[16] Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, op. cit., p13.
[17] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, op.cit., p163.
[18] See especially David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, 'Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu', *Screen*, Vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer), 1976. For a more detailed discussion of empty rooms and objects in the film see **Chapter Six**.

imagine a range of ways that broadly the same plot might have been presented in this scene, each instant providing a different presentation and hence a different perspective.

Bordwell *et al* make a mistaken distinction between style and narrative. A preferable conceptual discrimination might be employed: between a conventional plot-orientated viewing and one responsive to the more distinct, oblique perspective central to the narration of good films. The notion that style is subordinate to plot causality in Hollywood films is a confusion caused by understanding the organisation of these films to be primarily determined by their plots; consequently some analyses of Hollywood films have invested features of the classical cinema such as reliability, transparency, and explanatory closure with too much weight. George M. Wilson argues that these features often mask the totality of a film's narrational structure:

> Perhaps it is the confused idea that film is the most "direct and immediate" way of narrating a story which has led most viewers, professional and otherwise, to suppose that the requirements of plot exposition confine a film's significance to the dramatic progression of the action...Viewers dispose their attention toward the "focus" of the stories' ultimate resolution. They are perceptually set to follow the evolution of those plot conflicts that are marked out to be the subject of an audience's most immediate and engaged regard. Indeed, it is the normal goal of narrative strategies to make this temptation effectively irresistible.[19]

However, Wilson then continues to explain how a film's style, far from surrendering itself to plot, actually provides a perspective on those actions because

> there are narrative films...in which central aspects of their significance bear only an *oblique* relationship to the forms of dramatic closure they employ...That is, various factors that appear on the screen... peripheral to the strict development of the basic tale may be assigned a weight in the narration in such a way that the chief issues raised by the drama come to be modified, displaced, or otherwise reappraised. It is not too much to say that when this counternarrative weighting is apprehended, the whole gestalt of the film seems to shift...Unfortunately...it is quite probable that the subtly weighted patterns of visual content which ought to qualify or subvert the linear dynamics of plot will be experienced in a fragmentary way...The problem for the viewer of such a film is to locate a "centred position"

[19] George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light: Cinematic Studies in Point of View*, John Hopkins Univ. Press, Baltimore and London, 1986, p10.

> from which the oblique strands of narrational strategy can come together in a configuration that reorganises his or her perception and comprehension of the fictional events.[20]

Thus, in the *Umberto D* kitchen scene, we should not ask "when will the maid *do* something or when will someone interrupt her?" or "when will the narrative be propelled by a disruption?" Instead, the viewer must find a new 'centred position', a position where the 'subtly weighted patterns' of the maid's interaction with objects, activities which lack a forward motion, disclose her state of mind.

There are many important consequences of Wilson's analysis but in common with both Cavell and V.F. Perkins, he conceives of cinema's unique contribution to forms of narrative as lying in the most subtle combination of objectivity and subjectivity. First there is the apparent objectivity, or realist transparency of movies: the direct perceptual access that film gives to the items and events of the visual world[21]. Secondly, there is the variety of stylistic decisions such as editing which 'permit an analytical fracturing of the action that *at the same time* sustains the viewer's natural sense of spatial and temporal relationships [my italics]'[22]. Therefore, even a world as fantastic as Oz can take place in a network of quite standard causal processes: Wilson claims that in the creation of Oz '[m]ost of what we all believe about the more commonplace inhabitants and operations of the actual world is always shown to have been sufficiently held constant that our basic categories and schemata of objective reference and prediction have untroubled application'[23].

It would be helpful at this point to take a characteristic example from Perkins' criticism on Max Ophuls' *Caught* (1948 US). Ophuls uses

> three different coats to depict the options open to the indecisive heroine: the extravagant mink of a Long Island hostess; a plastic mac for the poor but honest nurse; and a 'sensible' cloth coat, warm and becoming but not showy, for the unassuming loyal doctor's wife. The use of dress here goes beyond working as a simple but effective

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[20] Wilson, ibid., p10/11.

[21] Wilson, ibid., p197. Wilson says 'the projected screen image contains a vast wealth of diversified visual information within a two-dimensional surface that is apparently "unworked" and relatively untextured. Viewing a comparably realistic painting of the same scene, a viewer's attention tends to oscillate between an inspection of the items pictured and a scrutiny of the handling of the paint upon the canvas. The painting's *facture* is the ever-present mark of the agency that produced it. In the standard photographic image, the visible facture is either eliminated or reduced to a minimum. The items photographed appear transparently' (Wilson, ibid., p56, 57).

[22] Wilson, ibid., p56.

[23] Wilson, ibid., p56.

> visual presentation of changing circumstances. *It helps also to define an attitude to those changes.* What is important is that none of the garments represents the heroine's 'natural' character. Each of them gives her a role which she will try, or be forced, to live in [my italics].[24]

Implicit in this critical analysis is a split between the visual presentation of plot and the 'attitude' towards the plot. Yet, the perspective here, carried in the change of clothes, is embedded precisely in the 'visual presentation of changing circumstances.' Perkins' understanding of the role played by the heroine's clothes in being a crucial part of the narration of the film would not be possible for a Bordwellian analysis which would, in subordinating style to plot, logically see the clothes as *merely* the register of those 'changing circumstances.' Bordwell's analysis misses the subtlety of films' – and especially Classical Hollywood's – particular method of narration which allows film style simultaneously to provide the visual presentation of plot *and* a self-effacing point of view on that plot.

Film allows extraordinarily refined methods of narration, ironically often overlooked precisely because of the roots of that refinement: the medium's direct and immediate manner of communication. It is a fascinating paradox that the possibility of subtlety in film's authorial narration depends on embracing the medium's blatancy. Wilson argues that the unique perceptual access which film provides crucially also allows it all manner of leeway for credibly 'limiting' perceptual access, where the limiting process encourages an organised and focused understanding of events. Wilson quotes Perkins:

> In the fiction movie, reality becomes malleable but remains (or continues to seem) solid. The world is shaped by the film-maker to reveal an order beyond chronology, in a system of time and space which is both natural and synthetic. The movie offers its reality in a sequence of privileged moments during which actions achieve a clarity and intensity seldom found in everyday life. Motive and gesture, action and reaction, cause and effect, are brought into a more immediate, dynamic, and revealing relationship. The film-maker fashions a world more concentrated and shaped than that of our usual experience.[25]

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[24] V.F. Perkins, 'Moments of Choice', in Anne Lloyd ed., *Movies of the 1950s*, Orbis, London, 1982, 209-213, p211.

[25] Wilson, op.cit., p83. Originally from V.F. Perkins, *Film As Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, London, Penguin, 1972, p69.

Another way of understanding film's mode of discrete authorial narration is through recognising film's tendency to condense material. What is fascinating about the four undramatic films is that they do not exhibit this condensing with regard to the organisation of plot because it is precisely their aim to avoid that 'intensity' which Perkins recognises as 'seldom found in everyday life.' All the four films conform to transparency principles, obeying a spatial and temporal fluidity and continuity, but they are not tight and condensed with regard to events and actions. The presence of clear continuity prevents us from bracketing them as non-narrative films, or categorising them as not interested in narrating any story at all. In **Chapter Two,** I mentioned how Wilson referred in passing to the desire of Bazin to see films which 'respect the continuity and complexity of the spatio-temporal integration of a field of action while being willing to leave the causal and psychological/teleological integration of the action less articulated'[26].

The respecting of spatial and temporal continuity but not causal or teleological integration encourages one to conclude that nothing is happening, or matters are not developing apace. However, this to overlook the 'more complete visual field' which is an integral part of film's narration, thereby missing the broader sense in which films are narrated and needing more urgently than ever to be re-oriented to the 'oblique strands of narrational strategy.' The *Umberto D* kitchen scene, despite its lack of teleological momentum or eventful focus, still *narrates* through the 'complete visual field' which is the maid's interaction with the matches, the kitchen door and the coffee grinder. The crucial observation here is that the narrative procedures of the bedroom scene in *The Awful Truth* and the kitchen scene in *Umberto D* are not conceptually different; both films become absorbing due to the perspicacity of their narration with regards to the content of their stories. However, because of the lack of an eventful focus, we may overlook the fact that the organisation of the kitchen scene is as suited to film narration as the bedroom scene.

By re-orientating ourselves to these more oblique visual patterns we might start to 'unconceal the obvious', to find, as Wittgenstein suggested, 'the aspects of things that are most important to us...hidden because of their simplicity.' The significance of the objects usage in the kitchen might be missed, not because of their obscure complexity but because of the opposite, that like Poe's purloined letter which Cavell discusses, they are 'a little too

[26] Wilson, ibid., p91/92.

self-evident, a little too plain to notice'[27]. Thus, under this conceptualisation of narrative, film's important foundation in transparency does not entail a viewer who is passively locked into a film's procedures, nor does it create an active one left only to cognitively hypothesise about the causal chain of action. Instead, it allows a viewer to re-orientate their viewing, learning to see what their habitual acts of perception are keeping hidden. The fascinations which might lie in the familiar usage of kitchen objects constitute the sort of observations into the everyday which are ideally suited for sophisticated film narration.

Equally the notion of narrative patterning, of repeated occurrences throughout the film[28], revealingly matches this thesis' understanding of the undramatic everyday: full of repetitions with only tiny, but crucial, variations. For example, in *Late Spring* there are repeated instances where the protagonist Noriko bows her head. A viewer may at first consider this gesture to be unnecessarily repetitive, but in fact, once re-oriented the viewer may see that Noriko's bows are meaningfully patterned, developed and transformed throughout the film[29]. The uncovering of film's less immediately telling patterns are not an artistic contrivance enjoyed by filmmaker and critic. Patterns of behaviour have psychological significance but often in real life we are not, as Wilson says, 'situated to follow the unfolding patterns through their full extent. The embodiment of the mental in human action is something we perceive only in a scattered, piecemeal, and erratic way'[30]. He continues:

> Writers such as Perkins...stress our ability to construct on film a visual reintegration of explanatory patterns...Film gives us the ability to pick out from the complicated and obscuring blur of experience those aspects of phenomena that constitute such a pattern and to reassemble for the screen the latent unity that the limitations of ordinary experience would disguise...Narrative film is...a form that makes global coherence visually *surveyable*, the subject of a continuous, conscious, and contemplative apprehension. It is in this sense, particularly, that film is thought of as extending the meaningful perceptual experience of human observers.[31]

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[27] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, op.cit., p164 (see Chapter One).
[28] The patterning I have drawn attention to in *Umberto D* occurs within the narration of the one scene rather than over the whole film (it therefore provides a more localised example of undramatic narrating than that found in the four main films discussed in Section Two of the thesis).
[29] Hence the necessity in this thesis for close textual analysis, delineating the films' *moment by moment* economy of stylistic and thematic modulation, in order to understand the films' significance.
[30] Wilson, op.cit., p84.
[31] Wilson, ibid., p84.

Here again we can see how film narrative may unconceal the ordinary. At the conclusion of his book Wilson announces there is no art other than the cinema that can 'explicate the possible modes of perceiving a localised slice of human history as an evolving field of visible significance'[32]. His use of the term 'visible' as opposed to simply visual chimes with a observation made by Cavell when he suggests that 'film's interest in the visual can be understood as a fascination with the fact of the visible'[33]. The films in this thesis illustrate that cinema's unique narrational possibilities for combining photographic realism and analytic patterning allow for an absorbing uncovering of the 'fact of the visible' without relying on events, crisis, or fundamental narrative change as organising features. Their modes of absorption precisely do not depend on the causal and teleological integration of the action which have structured the majority of good films.

Section Two – The Directorial Achievements of Undramatic Style

A) Exploring Directorial Point of View Through Undramatic Style

Failing to recognise 'oblique visual patterns' is not likely to destroy a viewer's absorption in most films. There are plenty of other things to watch, so to speak. Although many films risk playing down plot elements or reject pockets of causal interest, they often substitute them with *eventful* visual interest: spectacular landscapes, arresting soundtracks, glamorous actors or the countless other visual excitements or effects the cinema can provide. In these cases the demonstrative visuals may supersede our desire for causality built around events. However, the oblique global strategies of narration in the four undramatic films are essential to their significance. An inability to orientate ourselves in these cases leaves a gaping hole.

Therefore, a study of undramatic films expands our conception of film style. They alert us to the fact that style should not be equated with visual prominence or 'stylishness', and that 'having a style' is not merely possessing an individual, distinctive or original manner but rather the ability to provide salience to the multitude of visual information

[32] Wilson, ibid., p207.

[33] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, op.cit., p40. Interestingly, Cavell was setting the 'fact of the visible' against the baroque visual drama exhibited in a film like *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles 1941 US): he says, 'It seems to me that what is being called art in that work is showmanship and what is good in the film may not depend on its overt showmanship'(Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, ibid., p40).

provided, precisely to put in place the patterns which will guide the viewer's attention through the significant elements of a work. As Perkins discusses:

> A movie directed by, say, Michael Curtiz would be neither more nor less than the sum of its carefully blended ingredients...it is probably fair to claim that Curtiz's best films achieve a dramatically effective *manner* rather than a style. The various elements of the film are harnessed only to a reliable judgement of what will make the story work. More is possible...with no sacrifice of movie-craft, the director can bind the movie together in a design that offers a more detailed conception of the story's significance, embodying an experience of the world and a viewpoint both considered and felt. At this point, manner becomes style.[34]

Interestingly, therefore, what gives style to the classic melodramas of Hollywood, to the films of Douglas Sirk or Nicholas Ray or Max Ophuls, is not their prominent visual excess or even the personal distinctiveness of their visuals but the ability of the *mise-en-scène* to provide what Barret Hodsdon calls 'a directorial vantage point'[35]. Here we understand point of view in film as not only constructed by, perhaps, multiple breakdowns of viewpoint based on camera direction, image perspective or character look but also by the global and coherent viewpoint ('considered and felt') provided by the whole range of visual patterns that constitute a director's style in any particular film.

In these terms an understanding of style is inseparable from the workings of film narration which is equally indissoluble from the activity of intelligent authorship. Hodsdon argues, in reference to the famous Hollywood directors, that '[t]he control of *mise-en-scène* was correlated with the exercise of an authorial systemic'[36]. Hollywood melodrama, however, is susceptible to an alternative understanding of style, not as something expressive but as something *excessive*. Adrian Martin quotes Sam Rohdie as understanding the work of Douglas Sirk as 'not represent[ing] the function of *doing* or *communication*...but rather a function of *being* (Martin's emphasis)'[37]. Here, the film is not an intelligently controlled

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[34] Perkins, 'Moments of Choice', op.cit., p213.
[35] Barret Hodsdon, 'The Mystique of *Mise-en-Scène* Revisited', *Continuum*, Vol. 5 No.2, 68-86, p80.
[36] Hodsdon, ibid., p75.
[37] Adrian Martin, '*Mise-en-Scène* is Dead', *Continuum*, Vol. 5 No.2, 87-140, p109. He continues: 'Where expressive critics assume that the medium can be controlled by a sufficiently skilled artist, and that perfectly organic works of art are possible, textual critics stress the multi-valencies of a signifying instrument that is out of control – just as, for radical psychoanalysis, language and identity are out of

or articulately expressed artwork but more like an unruly body (Martin uses the words 'hysterical' and 'convulsing'). Rather than structuring and organising a film, the director is merely the cypher for a cultural unconscious: in this conception the patterns occurring in the film are akin to the periodic return of the repressed which ensures the re-occurrence of unintended visual configurations (the hysterical women, the repressed male figure, phallic symbolism and sexual colour coding would be some straightforward examples in classic melodrama).

The problem here, however, is not that these patterns do not exist, but rather they tend to be inexact precisely because of the unruly manner in which they are generated. These hysterical patterns do not, by their nature, contain the deliberate, detailed and nuanced vantage point that artworks can provide, the controlled perspective which endeavours to give significance to precisely those areas of existence which may seem initially beyond the reach of our understanding. If we discard the possibilities for authorial vantage point and the eloquent salience which films can deliver, the unconscious patterns remain something of a blur.

It might be fair to argue that the undramatic stylistics of the films in this thesis reflect a further unconscious response to aspects of sexual repression in our culture (especially in *Loves of a Blonde* and *A Tale of Springtime*), ones where the repressions do not emerge in the unruly extremities of *mise-en-scène* but remain wholly repressed at every level. However, this assessment would not do justice to the subtle and coherently developing perspectives on themes such as inhibition provided by the films' organisation. The presence of authorship is affirmed in the way these films' exhibit a scalpel precision with regard to a set of undramatic scenarios which *require* a director's analytical intelligence to establish them as in any way viably interesting propositions: themes of disconnectedness (in *Diary of a Country Priest* – this being not nearly as dramatically forthcoming as alienation), or boredom (in *Loves of a Blonde*).

In *A Tale of Springtime* the lead character Jeanne is shown at the start of the film taking carefully folded clothes from a wardrobe; later in the film she pulls out a shoe box from another wardrobe accidentally, thus making it fall from the top of the wardrobe on to the floor. By using a wardrobe as the site of both her tidiness and her clumsiness, Eric

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any individual's control. Film's are always 'spilling over', in excess of themselves, and any position fixed for a theme, a character, or a spectator is inexorably going to slip, slide and mutate'(p111/112).

Rohmer connects these traits, and shows them, in this case, to be different sides of the same coin. Rohmer illuminates Jeanne's clumsiness, presenting it as a by-product of her desire for order. Thus, because of Rohmer's salient arrangement, a wardrobe, folded clothes and a dropping shoe box are made to be revealing without the film seeming to give them emphasis (see **Chapter Seven**).

Furthermore, as Martin continues, non-authorial analyses of melodrama also mean

> [n]o doubt because of the place of psychoanalysis within it,...[that] there is an unmistakably gothic orientation to its taste. It favours those genres (*film noir*, horror, romance, melodrama) that trade in what I would call eyeball subjectivity – heightened, expressionistic, individualised states of fear, desire, hallucination, paranoia. It is far less interested in film styles marked by a certain everydayness...and subject matters centred on less fraught modes of *sociality*.[38]

The non-authorial analyses are unable to encompass a wider range of themes and their animation. The achievement of the four undramatic films is to find a visual style and credible metaphorical scenarios to express less vehement emotions and states of mind, those not obviously associated with events or crisis. For example, *Late Spring* is adept at finding stylistic methods to convey the worried states of characters not given to proclaiming their vacillations[39]. Thus these films animate psychological states, like worry, boredom or flirtation which have until recently not been part of the psychoanalytic vocabulary (because of its 'gothic orientation')[40]. As Adam Phillips expresses the point: 'Compared with the extraordinary invention of the dream, the ordinary worry seems drab. As remote as possible from the forbidden, the worry...is part of the routine, the predictability of everyday

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[38] Martin, ibid., p120.

[39] The literary critic Richard Poirier has celebrated the vagueness of written language, precisely its inability to make itself clear on one single occasion. Poirier argues for the interest of vague words such as 'thing' or 'natural' or 'perhaps' (to name only a few) as having resonant meaning in certain specified contexts. He would presumably see (although he does not necessarily state this explicitly) the vagueness of some vocabulary as essential to the expression of certain human feelings which are not crystallised but which remain confused, unresolved and uncertain, or essential to the expression of provisional, transitional states of being such as hesitation, drift, waiting or bewilderment (for more on this topic see Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism*, Faber and Faber, London, 1992 esp. the chapter entitled 'The Reinstatement of the Vague', 129-168). This thesis is interested in the possibilities for film language to express such states.

[40] This is despite the title of Sigmund Freud's book *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (in James Strachey ed. and trans. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-1974). Rohmer's exploration into order and clumsiness in *A Tale of Springtime* animate some of the implications of Freud's examples and ideas in this book (for a fuller discussion see **Chapter Seven**).

life...*Anxiety*, of course, immediately found a place in the language of psychoanalysis, while *worrying* still has not'[41].

B) Stanley Cavell and Psychoanalysis:

The Intentions of the Authorial Unconscious

Wittgenstein's claim that the aspects of things most important to us are often hidden because of their ordinariness infers something about our unconscious, precisely the sense of things 'hidden', and these films concerning the everyday may bring back to us what we have ignored. Strangely, the films about the everyday allow us to see what psychological significance might lie in apparently innocuous behaviour such as folding clothes, enabling us to experience what Cavell has labelled in other contexts as the 'uncanniness of the familiar'[42]. We do not uncover neurosis which has remained hidden in the depths through fear, but rather we 'unconceal the obvious' which has disappeared through not proclaiming its import, its significance buried in the habitual. The undramatic films in this thesis recover something in ourselves; the aspects of life with which we have become too familiar. These films find interest in, for example, a character who repeatedly tidies up, or in the manner in which a character slices some meat; the films carefully unconceal the body language during friendly conversations, or find significance in the placement of some mundane household chairs.

Cavell emphasises the possibility of recovery, tempting us to re-consider definitions of the unconscious which categorise it either as a bermuda triangle, with aspects lost and gone forever for the director and the viewer, or emerging as only unintended, unruly spasms. Cavell reminds us of this recovery aspect of Sigmund Freud's work and it provides a useful analogy for the processes of the film experience. In the absence of 'therapy' (and the therapeutic process may be triggered by many things) Stephen Mulhall says, 'most of us most of the time do not enact our existence...individuals exist only as ghosts and haunt their own lives'[43]. Crucially though, as Karen Hanson proclaims,

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[41] Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life*, Faber and Faber, London, p55/53.
[42] Cavell, *In Quest of The Ordinary*, op.cit., various.
[43] Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, ibid., p218.

'psychoanalysis...offers a compelling hope. Mind may be unknown...but this does not mean that it is fixed unknowable'[44].

This gives us a flexible definition of the unconscious, which we need to match with a sense of 'therapy' as something ongoing, something repeated, rather than as an eventful curing. If, as Mulhall and Hanson claim, psychoanalysis 'does not prove that the [mind] exists as unknowable' it does presuppose that 'it will never exist as fully or completely known, known once and for all'[45]; so we have a useful alternative to the neurosis that is finally cured in therapy, once and for all. We have instead the possibilities for continual interactions with our unconscious. The rejection of a 'once and for all' approach to psychoanalysis means that we no longer have a crisis (or repeated crisis) from earlier life which must now be eventfully expunged. Here we are interested in matters which are neither repressed in the mind because of a crisis, nor discovered in a moment of revelation.

For a director, the making of the film might unearth elements of his or her unconscious, an ongoing process which itself may or may not be entirely conscious; the activity of making a film providing some manner of therapy. I find this a particularly suggestive idea for understanding film direction: the way in which the whole collaborative process of filmmaking stimulates a director's mind, the artistry of the film not residing in a pre-formed original conception that is realised perfectly on the set, but in the discoveries that stem from 'the expert juggling and balancing of the given elements (from the set to the actors), each of which have their own volatility, possibilities and 'monumentality' to be reckoned with'[46]. In this conception the depths of mind are unearthed in practical circumstances, and during a continuing process.

Despite such processes, the readings of the films in this thesis are based in the evidence provided by the films; I choose not to pursue aspects of historical context or biographical and production detail[47]. This is because the thesis is interested in pursuing

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[44] Karen Hanson, 'Being Doubted, Being Assured' in Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan eds. *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, John Hopkins Univ. Press, London, 1987, 187-201, p192.

[45] Mulhall, op.cit., p218.

[46] Martin, op.cit., p130. This links to what Perkins has written: 'authorship of movies may be achieved not despite but in and through collaboration...it must allow for the possibilities that a movie may be enriched, rather than impaired, by changes in the original concept' (Perkins, 'Film Authorship: The Premature Burial', *CineAction!*, Summer/Fall, 1990, 57-64, p61/62).

[47] The two contexts 'outside' the films which I choose to concentrate on are, firstly, the pertinence of the films for my own personal context – that is, their connection to my feelings about routine, repetition and so on (see note 50) – and, secondly, the films' relationship to the history of their own art. The films were realised in the current of cinema's dominant melodramatic tendency (see note

those aspects of the director's intention which will *only* be revealed by the film[48]. For example, if I wish to know what a director meant I cannot necessarily verify it by asking him, because he might not fully know what he meant. Cavell gives the analogy of the baseball player Babe Ruth, where someone noticed that the quality of his batting was due to him bending his knees slightly before swinging at a pitch. Cavell explains:

> Obviously he may not be aware that he does this, but does it follow that it is not done intentionally? If there is a reason to believe that bending his knees is an essential part of what makes him good at batting – an explanation of how he does it – I find I want to say he does it intentionally; he means to.[49]

A director may intend all manner of sophisticated things, but not necessarily be conscious of them at the time, and not conscious of their continued ramifications over time; his intentions are therefore not necessarily discovered 'once and for all'. As the activity of filmmaking may be a dynamic mechanism for expressing things which are not obvious to the director, the viewer may enact a discovery; the director's achievements can be discovered, as it were, in the process of viewing. Cavell continues:

> To say that works of art are intentional objects is not to say that each bit of them, as it were is separately intended; any more than to say a human action is intentional is to say that each physical concomitant of it is separately intended...the noise, the grass crushed where I have stood, the branch broken by the bullet, my sharp intake of breath before the shot, and the eye-blink after. But all these things I have done, and any may become relevant...In all, I may use terms to describe what someone has done which he himself may not use, or may not know...Whether what I say he has done is just or not just is something that will require justification, by further penetration into what has happened, what is there. What counts is what is *there*, says

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below) and the directors' achievements are, in part, to have discovered alternative stylistic choices so as to depict certain everyday themes. These 'alternative choices' need not be fed by the modernist urge and although arguments have been put forward for both Bresson and Ozu as being explicitly modernist I have understood them as showing confidence in the language of traditional film communication. They are thereby respecting the continuity and complexity of the spatio-temporal integration of a field of action – rather than disrupting it. These films respect, despite their originality of voice, 'classical' methods of narration; they are similar to strategies in Classical Hollywood cinema as far as they employ that directorial vantage point which produces a detailed and sensitive understanding of the narrative incidents (see Section Two (A) above).

[48] I recognise that many aspects of intention will not be revealed by the film alone, but these are not ones I choose to concentrate on in this thesis (see note below).

[49] Cavell, 'A Matter of Meaning It', in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Scribners, New York, 1979, 213-237, p235.

> the philosopher who distrusts appeals to intention. Yes, but everything that is there is something a man has *done*.[50]

Cavell's statement that 'any [thing] may become relevant' is useful for interpretative approaches which wish to locate directorial achievement away from the *event* of their origin. For example, in *Loves of a Blonde* Miloš Forman avoids both extremes of striking decor (those provided by rich and poor milieus). One of his intentions seems to be to create the sort of numb environment fostered by regimented socialist planning (Czechoslovakia being under such a regime at the time of the film's production). However, the placement and behaviour of his characters is such that a viewer receives a more profound meaning: how so many habitual locations, even those outside socialist regimes, fail to impress on those who inhabit them. The relevance of this interpretation has perhaps now more tendency to emerge as the film is viewed outside the *occasion* of its original context[51].

A woman's relationship to a milk jug, or to a wardrobe, or to a coffee grinder: the expression of these situations has been judged by the eloquence with which they unconcealed aspects of human relations not related to crisis, or the eventful, or urgent change. The impulses of scholarship sometimes encourage a dissatisfaction with the detail of everyday existence (which in turn can make us insensitive to the detailed acquaintance of the works themselves), maybe because at first sight it seems too 'obvious' (not technical or

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[50] Cavell, 'A Matter of Meaning It', ibid., p236.

[51] See **Chapter Five** for more detail on decor. We might say further that the original context of a regimented socialist regime provides the film with a credible or suitable metaphorical scenario to explore more universal aspects concerning the inhabitation of social space. The reason I choose not to *concentrate* on, or pursue, the original historical and cultural context of the films (although I accept that I do not operate in a vacuum of knowledge in this regard) is because I am interested in interpretations whose significance is derived from my own present context. Indeed, it is fascinating that the films' constructions are sophisticated enough to enable them to re-acquaint themselves effectively over time; fascinating how they are *repeatedly*, with different inflections, able to communicate to different cultures and generations.

Because I have chosen not to concentrate on original contexts, this has enabled the thesis to have an idiosyncratic flexibility with regard to enlightening 'sources'. In this thesis I have compared the four undramatic films with a variety of melodramas from different time periods and countries. They are not sources in the sense of necessarily acting as direct and conscious influences but they exemplify dominant melodramatic tendencies (more like a 'sea' than a 'source' [Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, op.cit., p25]) from which the four films emerged and stood apart. Rather than constructing precise lines of descent I allowed the four films to suggest to me what might make illuminating comparisons. So, for example, a comparison of *Late Spring*, made in Japan in 1949, with *All I Desire*, a Hollywood film made four years *later*, allows us to see *Late Spring*'s distinct avoidance of melodrama in, for example, its use of domestic space to represent loss. I have chosen to concentrate on the manner in which the art of cinema, and the extending of its possibilities – as opposed to national or historical determinants – has motivated the directors I have analysed.

specialised enough); or maybe because the mundane does not declare its social importance in more directly *objective* public language (as political or ideological discourse aims to do); or maybe because matters of the everyday are *too* close to home, the avoidance of the everyday being due to the difficulty of establishing the distance, the separateness, which enables it to be acknowledged in significant or rewarding ways[52]. Therefore, these four films about the everyday might help us find the methods of discussing the subject, presenting ways in which the everyday might be felt and understood; moreover, it is a claim of this thesis that the medium, allowing us both the necessary separateness and intimacy, allowing both transparency and analytical fracturing, might be especially adept at unconcealing the relevance we had too easily expected to discover in big events. In this regard, it is fitting that Cavell should provide both a conclusion and a starting point:

> If it is part of the grain of film to magnify the feeling and meaning of a moment, it is equally a part of it to counter this tendency, and

[52] It is worth pointing out here that academic studies which purport to be interested in the everyday tend, whatever their other merits, to be disappointing on this subject. For example, Erving Goffman has written a book entitled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Penguin, London, 1990, first printed 1959) in which he 'consider[s]the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them'(p9). Thus Goffman's book does indeed look at forms of performance outside more expected eventful situations of display, but is a wide-ranging study of the interactions of individuals rather than the feelings and states of mind generated by the mundane parts of life which exist outside crisis. Another example is Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (tr. Steven Rendall, University of California Press, London, 1992) which in the words of Jeremy Ahearne (*Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and its Other*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995) aims 'to affirm the resilience and inventiveness of 'ordinary men and women' against the analyses which present them as entirely informed or crushed by the economic and cultural apparatuses which set the terms of social life'(p185). Certeau's book does indeed make claims for the interest that may be found in daily conversation or in cooking practices but because it is written within a discourse of analysing power arrangements in society (he does not adopt an ordinary language approach himself) the book tends to generalise about everyday experience. Thus, in the following extract Certeau is discussing, as Ahearne summarises, that 'against the varying odds, urban inhabitants thread their complex and makeshift ways through places which others have constructed'(Ahearne op.cit., p183):

> Bringing together movements and footsteps, opening up meanings and directions, these words operate through an emptying-out and wearing-away of their primary role. They thereby become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, through a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography of literal, forbidden or permitted meaning. They insinuate other routes into the functionalist and historical order of urban movement (Certeau, op.cit., p105).

Because of his mode and vocabulary of analysis Certeau tends to ignore the precise detail of everyday feelings, or the concrete routine *practice* of life – such as waiting, or boredom, or writing a diary, or chatting at home, or taking a commuter train into town. Both the books mentioned here reject an analysis of everyday rhythms as *felt*.

instead to acknowledge the fateful fact of a human life that the significance of its moments is ordinarily not given with the moments as they are lived, so that to determine the significant crossroads of a life may be the work of a lifetime. It is as if an inherent *concealment* of significance, as much as its revelation, were part of the governing force of what we mean by film acting and film directing and film viewing.[53]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the significance that may be found in those aspects of life, art, and criticism, which are not organised around the eventful; that is, the significance to be found in: a painting's calm arrangement of a woman and a milk jug within a kitchen; the *oblique* patterns of visual content in film narrative; conceptions of style not based on prominent visual excess; the expression of states of mind outside states of crisis; the ongoing interactions with our unconscious; the uncovering of the secrets buried in the habitual; and the locating of directorial achievement away from the occasion of a film's origin. The next four chapters bring to life the ideas discussed more abstractly in this chapter by making 'personal, intimate, detailed acquaintance' with the four undramatic films themselves[54].

[53] Stanley Cavell, 'The Thought of Movies' in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes*, Univ. Of Chicago Press, London, 1988, 3-26, p11.

[54] Quoting from Karen Hanson who suggests that any theorising about film should stem from a personal, intimate, detailed acquaintance with a film ('Provocations and Justifications of Film ' in Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas E. Wartenberg eds., *Philosophy and Film*, Routledge, London, ibid., p46). See conclusion for further discussion of this matter.

PART TWO

FILMS OF THE EVERYDAY

Chapter Four

Stasis in the Face of Events in Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*

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Introduction

The central aims of the chapter are to explore:

a) the significance of a narrational perspective which is structured around a day to day diary.

b) the stylistics by which the film subdues moments of crisis. Most of the films discussed at length in this thesis avoid any focus around events, but *Diary of a Country Priest* does include quite significant moments of crisis (e.g. blackmail, suicide, death). However, the film avoids treating these occasions melodramatically.

c) the possibilities for depicting abiding (daily), but non-vehement, personality traits, such as reticence and self-consciousness, in a film.

Section One – Aspects of Narration: From a Day to Day Point of View

A) A Restrained Subjectivity

Note the shot breakdown of the opening sequence:

1. (cu) Opening credits clear to show exercise book lying on table, move closer to the exercise book (slow track to ecu), pages are turned, blotting paper removed, handwriting of current entry revealed, a voice reads out entry (dissolve).
2. (cu) Street sign of Ambricourt. Off-screen noise of cars speeding past (no establishing shot of the parish area) (dissolve).
3. (cu) Face of man in black cloak (looking past camera).

A couple kissing catch sight of him; unclear whether he sees them; he wheels his bike away.

4. (ms) The man wheels his bike up to side of a building, (track to cu), he unpacks his box at back of bike, track-in soon prevents us seeing his arms doing the unpacking (simply see neck and face). Whistling on the soundtrack and the off-screen noise of horse and carts, looking out he says "My parish, my first parish".

The opening movement of the film (1) announces the priest's (Claude Laydu) subjectivity as the overarching viewpoint of the fiction, here indicated by the passage *through* his diary, his subjectivity's most faithful vehicle. Moreover, the film opens with three close-ups, each in turn linked by dissolves – the book, the street sign and the priest's face (1-3, also FIGS.1-3). Throughout the film, on the completion of a sentence (in both voice-over and in writing), there are dissolves from the diary page

into the next scene in the narrative. The subjective address is further reiterated by the speed of the dissolves: the words of the diary retained for a few seconds, merging, before disappearing, into the next image. Furthermore, the addition of the priest's voice-over, reading his diary, assists the continuity of the transition. The outside world will be depicted mainly via the priest's diary, here locked between exercise book and face. The viewpoint established is one of particular single-mindedness, hence only the *sign* of Ambricourt (2).

The diary becomes the recurring mode of communication through which the film dwells on the priest's subdued state of mind. From these first close-up images of the diary the film is locked into his restrained form of privacy. The sound of the traffic in this opening is a indication of the *activity* of a public world excluded from our sight (2,4). As Dudley Andrew has discussed, Robert Bresson cut down the public action of the novel and drove straight to the centre of the priest:

> No establishing shots situate the world around him. Although few subjective first-person shots imitate his optical perspective, the displacement of the images through the diary allows us to consider even the frontal shots of the [priest] as belonging to his perspective... We seldom see the [priest] from a human perspective other than his own...Bresson...lets us look out with the [priest] on his fragments of the world, but when we look back at him it is only to peer more deeply inward, to watch him reflect on his more limited experience...We remain within the [priest's] point of view or, better, within his point of reflection.[1]

The nature of the off-screen noises obliquely characterises the priest's subjectivity. The soundtrack again indicates an exclusion after he has unpacked his bag (4): the voice-over says "My parish, my first parish" but as he looms over the camera, staring out, we hear but do not see the activity of the parish. The off-screen noises throughout the film are often literally the sound of transport, and nearly always the reminders of *energetic life and movement*: Olivier's speeding motorbike; the exuberant cry of the morning cockerel; the vibrancy of the church bell ringing. These noises are amplified on the soundtrack, and at first consideration they seem too loud when one considers their distance from the locations where they are heard. However,

[1] Dudley Andrew, *Film in the Aura of Art*, Princeton University Press, Surrey, 1984, p128.

there will often be a window in shot as these outside noises enter the interiors (the noises emphasising the life *outside* the priest). Despite their distinctive presence, the sounds are not haunting, crowding or insistent for the priest but rather matter of fact, just somewhere "out there". The film emphasises the subliminal effect on the priest by not letting the noises occupy his immediate attention. The priest is too absorbed in conversation, or in his own thoughts, and does not react to them. Therefore, the film acknowledges the urgency of the sounds, but withholds their arresting connection with the character. The noises are brought up, therefore, only to be played down.

It is precisely the priest's exclusion from an urgent connection with anything energetic, locked into his restrained form of privacy, which ensures his life remains ordinary. The character of the diary exemplifies this ordinariness. "I do not do wrong" he says in his first entry "in frankly recording here the trivial secrets of a life about which there is no mystery" and the diary itself is written in quite simple handwriting: some letters joined, others separated; sometimes straight, other times slanted. The diary encapsulates the reticent nature of the priest's sensibility; it is not exploited to provide a more florid, vivid or verbose version of events. The diary's utilisation is not to enhance the narrative with rhetoric; its prosaic language refuses to enrich the story.

B) The Quiet Tenor of Desperation[2]

If the simple language of the diary refrains from rhetorical advantage, it is not averse to making extreme statements ("As I closed my eyes sadness overwhelmed me", "a desperation that filled my heart with anguish"). However, the empathetic achievement of the film is that it earns the right for these words to be accepted free from the boost of hyperbole. Furthermore, no matter how extreme the statement, it is always delivered in a measured pace and with a quiet evenness of tenor. This is also true of the priest's accompanying facial expression. On one of his first nights in the parish, he is lying in bed and we are shown a close-up of his head resting on the pillow. Although the voice-over states "As I closed my eyes, sadness overwhelmed me", his expression exhibits an earnestness at most. This calmness of face and voice severely

[2] This title is derived from Henry David Thoreau's observation that 'The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation' (*Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Dover Thrift Publications, London, 1995 (orig. ed. 1854).

reduces the vehemence of expression, and there is a profundity discovered in this depiction: interior passions may live under an undemonstrative exterior. By setting up a discrepancy between the words of the narration and their muted mode of delivery, the film is able to establish the distinction between interior feelings and exterior display.

Claude Laydu's performance is not satisfactorily described as non-acting, or even underplaying, for these descriptions, apart from their vagueness, tend to imply a performative contrivance. A performance cannot be said to be underplayed if there is a suitable matching between the actor's expression and the accurate rendering of a recognisable emotional state. The film's distinction here is in finding a technique of performance which can encompass those ardent feelings, experienced with regularity, but which do not, and cannot, forcibly display themselves in terms of crisis.

During the course of the film the priest's face does show varying emotions but these are never extreme displays. His face does not, as has been suggested, remain unchanged, allowing only a Kuleshov effect. The priest's expressions move within a hampered range but the viewer needs to be alert to the way circumscribed facial movements may depict large interior feelings. After Doctor Delbende's death the voice-over says "I had never suffered so, and probably never would again, even in dying" and this extremity of the priest's suffering is publicly manifested only in his head dropping slowly and his eyes closing restfully. The film's measured discipline indicates his gestures to be significant movements while still maintaining them as contained announcements of suffering[3].

C) A Day by Day Narration

The plight of the priest lies in his unavoidable commitment to the writing of "trivial secrets" in a colourless diary, every single day. The narrative of the film is constructed around a narrated format that concentrates on the day to day, the process of living and recording the everyday. Avrom Fleishman has noted that a distinct achievement of the film is that the narration, rather than informing us of what has happened, relates what *is* happening, the priest reporting the story 'to the moment'.

[3] For a more sustained discussion on making small gestures significant see **Chapter Six** on *Late Spring*.

Fleishman says that Bresson exploits one potentiality of diaries to the fullest in this film: a writing activity that often takes place in close relation to the ongoing narrative[4]. The film commences with the priest entering a new parish and the opening shots have the sense of a new chapter of the diary just beginning. The first page of the diary is already written as he reads it, but thereafter the film always comes to the diary writing in mid-flow, with the priest in the process of completing a sentence. The present tense of the first lines "I *do* not do wrong" avoid the "I *did* not..." of a man reflecting from an end point.

The regular returns to the priest's writing sustain the feeling of an ongoing process. This is not a film that begins with a letter being read and concludes with the completion of its reading: there is not a finished story being relayed but rather a life in the process of being written[5]. The recurrent shots of him actually in the course of writing ensure that the diary format is not only a method of narration but part of the day to day development of the story[6]: the cumulative effect of the narrating adding to the priest's burden within the narrative. If the film does concern the 'drama of writing'[7], then this 'drama' might be more accurately understood as the priest being 'condemned' to exist within the most unexciting rhythms. The burden of such repetitions of writing, in such plain style, becomes the most uncharacteristic site for drama.

Fleishman has also argued that the diary format, allowing for a more concurrent narration, paradoxically keeps much of the narrative at a slight distance. He suggests that this is how the film plays down the drama of moments of crisis. He says:

> Near the opening when we hear [the priest] say, "My parish, my first parish", and see him look around at his new surroundings, we may be initially inclined to take the voice-over as emanating from the figure we see and expressing his immediate responses. Since the exclamatory words are of the written text, however we

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[4] Avrom Fleishman, *Narrated Films: Storytelling Situations in Cinema History*, John Hopkins Univ. Press, London, p163.

[5] Interestingly, however, the film does finish with a letter being read: the letter written by Dufrety chronicling the priest's last hours and read out by Torcy. However, the letter narrates the story in only the last 30 seconds of the film, from the time of the end of the diary (that is at the end of the priest's days). Therefore, the period of its reading does not change the point of view of the whole film. It signals a shift in viewpoint but only from the moment of the priest's death. The importance of this change of perspective in the last seconds of the film is discussed in **Section Three** (B) below.

[6] Fleishman, op.cit., p168.

[7] Fleishman, ibid., p168.

> learn to take them...as a later summary...[E]ven when diary narrations employ the present tense, they stand at a remove from their stories. Though lacking the temporal distance for a rounded perspective on the past, they maintain an irreducible distinctness from the events themselves.[8]

However, the film's reticent relationship to dramatic events is not well established by a notion of distance, this 'stand[ing] at a remove'. Rather than any distance conferred by an already written text, this relationship is better explained by the consequences of the priest's particular state of mind, the diary narration providing a consistent reminder of the subdued perspective from which the scenes are visually written.

With the film's construction so consumed by the priest's chastened sensibility, the effect of the narration at a point such as "My parish, my first parish" is created more by the nature of his interior perspective than with the tense of the narration; his state of mind, which the diary words express, being of greater significance than the fact that those words may be part of a written text. Indeed, there is no evidence that we learn to take the 'exclamatory words' as a 'later summary' because the words of the diary are so intertwined with the priest's mode of thought at any moment. For instance, when the priest is speaking to the Countess he recoils into himself and announces: "Backed against the wall by this imperious woman I seemed like a sinner trying to justify myself". These words may still be a piece of diary narration but their placement also suggest a feeling being experienced at that moment. In this way, the voice-overs which are not accompanied by shots of writing achieve something more like the spirit of the diary narration; and narrated distance is avoided by subtly merging the diary's tone into the moment by moment development of the narrative. By not absolutely demarcating those pieces of voice-over that might only be separate thoughts (separate from the diary), the priest's sensibility, at any instant, is shown to be wrapped up in the diary's reflective idiom.

The diary is written within the current of each passing day, but on some occasions, at first glance, the writing close-ups do assert the sense of a mini-flashback. For instance, immediately before dissolving into the scene where Séraphita taunts the priest at the religious class, the entry in the diary announces that "My hopes were raised by the catechism class." Although it is possible to assess the scene as a

[8] Fleishman, ibid., p165.

flashback (written and read at the end of the day), such an assessment would not be helpful in characterising a viewer's emotional involvement in the scene. The placement of the diary entry sets up a positive emotional register against which the scene then plays; the audience feels the deflation caused by Séraphita's behaviour as the priest feels it. This scene is not experienced as a 'later summary' (encouraging that once-removedness), instead it is representative of the way in which the viewer is carried along, throughout the film, with the day to day experiences of the priest.

The "raised hope" comment could, of course, express a prospective feeling from the night before or it could be part of the priest's later writings where he transcribes his emotions as they were at the start of the day. Either way, we are situated at such a point to experience the events as they happen rather than as they happened. Any reflectiveness existing in the film is a consequence of the priest's self-consciousness which prevents assertiveness. Therefore, the film uses the diary narration to keep us near to the incidents as they happen, precisely because it wishes to understand the paradoxes lying in the methods by which humans try to engage with life: through the priest's close connection with the diary he endeavours to become more involved with the everyday run of things, and yet his absorption in such a task only encourages his tendencies towards self-consciousness, and hence towards restraint.

D) The Immobilising Effects of Self-Consciousness

Through the voice-overs the film presents its narrative as burdened by the weight of self-consciousness, and the depiction of events is dampened by the prevalence of this emotion. One of the film's distinct achievements is to depict the immobilising effects of non-vehement, and yet sustained and influential, feelings of self-consciousness. Here, we find a pattern of emotional behaviour which resists exhibition during a once-and-for-all heightened instance of crisis.

The priest's self-consciousness circumvents potential moments of conflict. Near the beginning of the film the priest wishes to warn the town clerk about the danger of his "wild" parties. There comes a moment of silence, the precise time when the priest is faced with the opportunity to raise the issue, but he refrains. As the clerk then moves to leave the room, the camera pans across to focus on the face of the

priest, while his voice-over states that "the simplest tasks are not the easiest ones". The recoiling camera movement depicts the retreat from even the mildest form of confrontation and is also the motion which renders the withdrawal into his private thoughts. This camera movement contributes to a familiar pattern: the camera often ends up staring at the priest's face at the moments when he fails to assert himself.

The sense of deflation triggered by the priest's self-conscious interjections undermine even energetic events. The motorcycle ride to the railway station which the priest accepts from Olivier is the most dynamic activity the priest undertakes in the film. The stylistics of the moment emphasise the rare noisy exertion and its dangerous vitality by allowing both greater extremities of cutting, and by loosening the rigidity of the camera's restraining hold on the actors. There is a shot from directly behind the motorbike facilitating the ease and exhilaration of movement within their environment as they roar away into the distance.

There is also rapid cutting coupled with radical changes in angles, punching out a staccato effect: for example, from a profile two-shot on the motorcycle the film cuts to a longer shot of them roaring away at increased throttle, this cut itself heightened because it follows Olivier's shout of "Attention!". There is then a unique close-up of the priest smiling with glee (while holding on to his cap). However, his commentary then undercuts the fullness of the moment: he says, "I felt God wanted me to take that risk, just sufficiently perhaps so that when my time came my sacrifice might be total." At the instance of speech the smile drops away, and the exhilaration is chastened: the language of loss now redefines the sequence in terms, not of fullness, but of emptiness – the sense of addition transformed into sacrifice. No matter how positively the priest conceives of the notion of sacrifice, the effect here, set against the momentum initially asserted, is one of shrinking.

Furthermore, this shrinking would provide the viewer with the sensation of an abrupt come down were it not for the familiar entry into the priest's restraining state of mind. The effect achieved by the film, therefore, is one of the deflation of occasion rather than the devastation incurred by the flight into the mind.

Any possible extremities are also reduced by the nature of the movements into the priest's face. In the above example, the camera cut to the priest's face, but it will often start from a medium shot or medium close-up (knees or waist up), and then

move in, until his face fills the screen. This is the technique used for locking us into the non-optical point of view of the priest: the experience of moving in closer expresses the passage from the world to a mind. Relative to the unobtrusive techniques employed throughout the film, the tracks into the priest's face are relatively strenuous. However, the slight erratic shake of the camera means that representation of his move into private thoughts is never quite so urgent as a leap: the passage into his thoughts is depicted as a stumbling which ensures its wearisome effect (on priest and viewer). Moreover, because the tracks are used repetitively throughout the film, the burden of the priest's self-consciousness is not established through the overpowering force of any single movement. Instead, any strain is achieved cumulatively, expressing the sustained ache of his consciousness.

E) Held Back By Heaviness

The film adeptly shifts its interest from eventful moments *per se* to concentrate on the less momentary emotional state of the priest, precisely situating its perspective (and its relationship to events) in accord with those persistently present but undemonstrative states of mind which may determine one's relationship to moments of crisis. The film conveys the priest's burdened perspective by instilling the film's actions with a heaviness, and this contributes to the film's torpid rhythms. The priest's predicament is not stated accurately enough in terms of a 'struggle', such a description is too physically energetic. He is not so much pushing against, as weighed down[9].

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[9] One irony which weaves through the film is that the priest's desire to be selfless actually increases his self-consciousness, that is his attention to himself. Although he wishes to help others, he is consumed by guilt over his methods. My own interpretation privileging the importance of self-consciousness in the film is a secular variation on Susan Sontag's discussion of the physics of souls which she discusses in relation to the film (Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 1964 p188/189). She draws on Simone Weil's book *Gravity and Grace*: 'All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to physical gravity...Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void' (p188). Thus, Sontag discusses the quest for spiritual lightness; some souls are heavy, others are light. The true fight against oneself is against one's heaviness, one's gravity. And the instrument of this fight is the idea of work, a project, a task. Through the 'project' one overcomes the gravity that weighs down the spirit; the 'project' absorbs the energies that would be otherwise spent on the self. It effaces personality, in the sense of what is idiosyncratic in each human being, the limit inside which we are locked. Consciousness of self is the gravity that burdens the spirit; the surpassing of the consciousness of self is 'grace' or spiritual lightness (p189). In this case, however, the priest's daily tasks do not bring lightness.

Instead of cutting to the following interior scene at the end of conversations, the film often prefers to show the priest wheeling his bike to and from locations (if he is not walking). Therefore the direct continuation of the story is repeatedly reigned back, this retardation aptly realised in the weight of the pushing of the bike itself (the priest is shown actually riding the bike only on a couple of occasions and then sluggishly with a ponderous pedalling motion). These segments achieve a similar effect to all the dissolves and the fades to black, avoiding the alert transitions which straight cutting would enforce. The opening shots of the film immediately set up the relationship between the priest's perspective, his diary and the world, all three crucially linked together via dissolves. The use of dissolves burden the visual *telling* of the whole film: with the last image often remaining well into the start of the next shot, the dissolves are the visual method of conveying the effort of communicating the next part of the tale, the exertion required to move to the next image, the labour inherent in shaking off the stranglehold of the last one.

The fades to black also slow down the story, but they perform as unsuccessful dissolves: the fading of one shot that has not quite managed to reach the next. They act as the fainting of the picture, especially as the already grey images seem so anxious to be swallowed by complete darkness; it is a film that is in a state of dusk, at any moment about to become night. Indeed, dusk is poised between light and dark, neither one nor the other, and so provides a befitting visual metaphor for the priest's suspension and hesitancy. Eschewing the high contrast, distinct monochrome of some black and white film stock, here all the whites and blacks are merging into greys. The blackness of the fades is a cessation of communication, or at least an admission that a break is greatly needed before the emergence into the next image. These are akin to those moments when the priest drops his pen, or when we see all the crossings out in the notebook. In this way the dissolves and fades are intimately connected to his diary narration.

Section Two – The Inability to Assert the Self

A) Stasis

When the film dissolves from the priest's body or face into the next shot of a new location, the slowness of the transition seems to suspend him between locales.

Furthermore, because there are often dissolves from a shot of the priest's face into iron gates (especially at the chateau and the church – the two locations between which he primarily moves), in those seconds of suspension, while both of the images are superimposed, the effect is to trap his disconsolate face behind bars. The frequency of such dissolves – the film recurrently merging into these superimpositions – guarantees that his internment is never a terrifying event. Crucially, his imprisonment is not announced in one declamatory piece of *mise-en-scène*: by having the bars apparently emerging out of his head, the film suggests his imprisonment to be a lingering state a mind.

Far from his confinement producing a shock in the viewer, this lingering instills the film with a sleepy rhythm. The suspension of the dissolves is not dissimilar to the movements into his private state of mind where the surrounding voice of other characters and sounds are reduced on the soundtrack to be replaced by the priest's foregrounded, but nonetheless whispery voice-over. The soporific effect on the viewer is like falling into a slumber in a warm room, whereupon the noise of surrounding activity recedes into a subdued murmur. Much of the film is conducted in a whisper, the characters keeping a reverent hush, not only in the church, but also in the chateau, as if all of their lives were haunted by eavesdroppers. *Diary of a Country Priest* is a film about not speaking up (in all senses) and the inability to assert one's voice[10].

The suspension of the dissolves reigns back any narrative propulsion, as do all the 'crossings' in the film. There is always a space to be crossed, a staircase to go up or come down, corridors to be walked along, bikes to be wheeled on approaches or retreats, gates to be opened – and then closed[11]. The recurrent opening and closing of gates gives one a sense of spaces closed off, of the characters' confinement and their difficulties in overtly connecting with each other (see Section Four below). On one occasion when the priest approaches the chateau, the viewer's realisation that he is watching him through the glass door is delayed until he gets near the camera. Initially, the viewer is deceived by the transparency of the door and it appears as though the camera is outside with the priest. As the frames of the glass door emerge into view,

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[10] See accompanying section on *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*.

[11] Amedée Ayfre has talked of the 'cells' in Bresson's films, spaces shut off from one another (Amedée Ayfre, 'The Universe of Robert Bresson' in Ian Cameron ed., *The Films of Robert Bresson*, November Books, England, 1970, 8-24, p17).

there is a new barrier to be crossed but significantly the gradual manner of the door's emergence is indicative of the unhurried pace with which division is established. Separation in the film, is not asserted, for example, through the slamming of doors. Indeed, as the priest enters the hallway an inside door is eased shut, presumably by Chantal. The pace of the door's closure conveys the calm and aloof manner in which she rejects him.

The priest's restriction in moving between spaces is not caused only by physical barriers (doors, windows, gates) but by his imprisoned state of mind. In the same sequence, as the priest comes through the doorway the camera stays close-up to his upper body. The priest says that "the servant only took a moment" but the door seems to open of its own accord, and the viewer catches only a fleeting glimpse of the back of the servant's head as he walks away. In this way, the priest's entry is visualised in terms of his withdrawn consciousness: the camera's stubborn proximity refuses the viewer a wider view of the surrounding activity and geography, and so makes palpable the priest's own detachment from the space around him.

The priest is frequently hemmed in by window frames, especially the small one resembling a garret skylight at the top of his living quarters: his face framed in the centre of the shot, surrounded by blocks of black wood. His exclusion from any physical interaction is sealed the morning after the revelries as he leans out of the window. He moves his eyes and pokes his head forward in search of a friendly voice. The few off-screen noises encourage the desire for a cutaway shot of someone looking back at the priest, but such expectancies are not satisfied: the shot remains with the priest. Often, however, his staring out of the window is not characterised by anything so strong as wishing, but is more indicative of stasis. These occasions show the priest lost in inaction, having just come to a stop; they are periods of glazed vagueness. The film therefore depicts a piece of human behaviour which is frequent but mystifying in its remoteness and indeterminacy; the behaviour is not easily situated with regard to happenings and is rarely filmed. Near the end of the film, when the priest tells of his "fear of dying" he is just staring out of a window. His fear is not exhibited by shows of terror, nor anything so sudden as him seizing up. His behaviour could not even be described as being stilled into contemplation (too determinate and too focused). Instead, it joins a long line of interludes characterised by inertia.

B) The Inability to Assert Agency

Note the shot breakdown of the sequence where the priest goes to see the countess's corpse after hearing of her death:

The priest has been sitting at his desk, and has just blown out his table candle.

1. (cu) Diary sits on table in gloomy light. Sound of (but no sight of) priest moving away from the table where he has been sitting, his footsteps become quieter, then sound of feet descending some steps.
2. (mls) Chateau gates, priest opens them, he jogs towards camera.
3. (ls) Priest runs across grounds away from camera.
4. (mls) Chateau interior. Camera moves back and pans to accommodate the priest as he moves through hall.
5. (mls) Bottom of stairs and hallway (camera situated mid-way up the stairs), priest walks up stairs (into mcu), camera pans to show priest walking up the remaining stairs and away from camera. Count and another man come down stairs while priest continues to walk up, they ignore him.
6. (ms) Inside bedroom, Priest mentions that the Countess was not smiling. Camera pans around slightly to follow priest moving right, Louise moves behind him to the left, he kneels at foot of bed and says "blessing her my arm was leaden"(fade).

Priest returns again to the Chateau later that day.

7. (ms) Inside bedroom, flowers and candles and more people present, priest moves right as in (6) and then around the bed while two men move in the opposite direction behind him. He moves close to camera (becomes cu), kneels by Countess's head, raises veil, says a few words, moves around bed and exits.
8. (ms) Top of stairway as priest exits bedroom, he goes down as Chantal and friends come up. After passing him they turn and look at him with suspicion while they mutter quietly.

This sequence illustrates how the film denies the priest any energy, even in a period of urgency for him. In this instance, the stylistics play down the energetic; a sequence which possibly contained the potential for him to display an assured engagement with his environment, instead shows the burdensome nature of his agency. On the news of the Countess's death, by keeping the camera fixed on his diary instead of showing his rise into 'action' we are prevented from experiencing any urgent movement (1). This potential surge of tension is diffused through the diary, and again we are privileged only with the sound of movement.

In depicting the priest's difficulties with being at one with his environment, Bresson's handling deftly avoids both the possible extremes. The sequence refrains from either showing his movement as a desperate exertion or as a detached floating:

the one being too forceful and the other conveying too much ease. These extremes are avoided by setting the other character's movements against the grain of the priest's direction (6,7) but not so as to grate, or glance. Instead, because these other characters do not hurry to avoid the priest (5,8), an aloof formality arises out of their antithetical movements. Thus, Bresson presents the movement around the priest as a wearisome counter-current to him rather than as something abrasively antagonistic.

The studied containment of the characters' behaviour constitutes a particularly detached method of exhibiting their animosity. Furthermore, by presenting the separateness between the priest and the other characters in this rather cool manner, the film is also able to establish his feelings of exclusion as something like a perpetual *consciousness of his difference*. Consequently, the film avoids dramatic modes of character exclusion: it conveys the priest's feelings as something less strident than isolation, and more prosaic than alienation.

The priest's consciousness prevents him having confidence with regard to his agency. This ensures that his travelling does not bring relief: by enacting a second return to the chateau, he is propelled to travel to the countess, but he receives no release in the journeying (7). Because the camera mostly does not follow him from behind, or assume his optical point of view – the priest mostly moves towards a camera already waiting for him in a room – any sense of him dynamically cutting through space is avoided, so his movement through the spaces seems laboured.

Such laboured progression is primarily achieved by having the camera mostly facing the priest, and typically having his face come toward it (esp.5,7); the film thereby maintains its pattern of attaching itself to the burdened experiential viewpoint of the priest (as opposed to an optical viewpoint). Similarly, the film does not allow the viewer the relief of the engagement which a shot/reverse shot, from priest to countess, may provide (6,7). He expresses his disappointment that she is not smiling, but Bresson abstains from matching the priest's comment with the reassurance of the expected visual confirmation. The film prefers instead to remain on his own face: all this travelling only to arrive firmly locked back into his stare, hearing him express his private thoughts. Indeed, the fact that the weight burdening the priest's travels is intimately connected to his state of mind is suitably indicated when the news of his leaden arm is relayed not so much through his gesture but through voice-over.

C) The Unsettling of Stable Composition

Bresson uses off-screen space to unsettle the balance of whatever is on-screen. The film refrains from violent disruption yet it never permits the priest's life to settle into a satisfying equilibrium[12]. The example of the film's refusal to allow the balancing shot of the countess's face is indicative of those periods when the camera sticks close to the priest instead of providing a more generous cutaway or less clinging medium shot. However, the refusal of such shots is persistently undermining rather than overpowering. After being diagnosed as terminally ill, the priest enters a church, walks a little way in, stops and then walks back out again ("my will was helpless"); all this occurring within one take. The priest fills most of the image throughout, the single take maintaining the nagging connection with him. The film refrains from cutting or from significantly changing camera distance thus preventing the interior of the church becoming a definable environment in itself. The decision not to cut or to change the distance of shooting limits the expansion of viewpoint and places a stress on the image we do see.

However, any pressure on the image is never at the level of the extreme exertion suggested by the priest's words: "Never had I known my physical resistance to prayer so violent". Consequently, this film depicts a less physically demonstrative type of resistance than one is accustomed to seeing in films. Furthermore, even the priest's psychological dilemmas are not palpable (for example, no expelling of the devil is ever at issue). He is indeed worried about God's abandonment of him but the film represents his problem in less inspirational manifestations. Indeed, the steady avoidance of melodrama is due to the way the priest's troubles are never matched by scenarios of suitably anguished fervour. Finding himself anchored to those unexciting rhythms, there is nothing conventional to fight against, or be tormented by: as he says earlier "there is no hope of forcing the barrier; there is no barrier, nothing." By abstaining from dramatic forms of resistance, the film is able to explore causes of inaction which are not easily or straightforwardly communicated (by priest or film).

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[12] We have seen how the camera will remain with the priest as he crosses a threshold or goes to meet another character and we have also seen that their motions are often counter to the priest. Dudley Andrew notes that only rarely are two characters framed in stable composition (Andrew, op.cit., p128).

The camera's connection, in the above sequence in the church, is better described as nagging than oppressive or even claustrophobic, and the off-screen space is niggling rather than shoving. This is partly because we learn to bear the camera's closeness as a customary perspective, and although it never loses its worrying proximity, like worry, we learn to live with it, so to speak. The camera hugs him, rather than towering or looming over him; it is truly attached to him (carrying both the positive and negative connotations of attachment). Once again therefore, the film's precise visual consistency enables it to reveal less vehement states: here, Bresson finds a style which shows the priest to have something like a routinely disproportional sense of himself. This style ensures that he is not *quite* in balance with his environment[13]; the imbalanced ratios of proportion are never excessive.

So rare are settled states for the priest, that any disturbance to a balanced *mise-en-scène* constitutes a violent intrusion. Some sense of relief comes from unburdening his heaviness after his conversation with Torcy, when he says that he was not tempted to mention the generous letter from the countess in his own defence. "I felt a great weight lifted from me" he claims: he does not need to defend himself which in turn means he does not feel so much sense of himself ("Almost joyously I realised I had nothing to say"). As he speaks these words we see him picking up a pan and putting it on the stove: suggesting that while speaking about feeling lighter there is the possibility of him eating more substantially. The composition here is distinct: as he sits contented with his wine bottle to the left, on the table, and the stove and pan to the right there is, for once, a harmonious balance of food and drink, matched in the symmetry of the *mise-en-scène*. For one tranquil moment he is in balance with his own environment – his own body not taking all the weight. However, this moment of lightness is soon disturbed by the off-screen sound of footsteps. The footsteps turn out to belong to Torcy, and he has come to check on the priest's welfare; there is little that is violent in his visit, but in the context of this settled moment for the priest, the footsteps represent a shocking intrusion: the sound of another person upsetting his private, balanced space.

[13] He has a disproportional weight, while his surroundings often seem concomitantly weightless ("no barrier, nothing").

Standing up in alarm the priest is disproportionately asserted in the frame once more and the equilibrium is disturbed[14].

Section Three – An Oblique Orientation to Crisis

A) The Illness Beneath

The priest's weariness is partly explained by his sickly state, but there is a significance in the film which lies in a reverse explanation. Factually, it is suggested that his cancer has emerged from a hereditary alcoholism, but the film does not show much conviction in the subject of fate. The emotionally resonant explanation lies in the insistent sense that his self-conscious worry has slowly eaten him up, precisely because it has been so bottled up. Furthermore, cancer becomes an apt disease for Bresson to utilise: a deadly power which is both gradual and methodical, and proceeds beneath the surface. For the priest, the most horrifying external effect of the disease is a pallid complexion.

Fascinated with those dramas which fail to rise to the surface[15], Bresson similarly transfers the potency of unhealthy public activity into the smallest of human gestures. When the priest returns the satchel, Séraphita's mother drops her eyes and fails to re-engage eye contact with the priest. She does not wish to be associated with him and her gesture signals both disapproval and shame. Séraphita's mother has not met the priest before, so her eye movement stands in for the spread of diseased gossip in the parish (out of the priest's sight). The film avoids a direct presentation of the variety of village chatter, and instead the forcefulness of social exclusion is all there in

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[14] The most telling moment of balance comes when Séraphita rescues the priest. As he lies on the ground the camera gently pulls back letting Séraphita enter the shot in a hospitable manner. Their comfort with regards to each other is matched a few images later in a medium two-shot that shows them walking to the road, hand in hand. Their movement together would not be distinctive in another context, but their walking in harmony, and in the same frame, and with both characters in knowledge of their togetherness is a rare experience in the film. This level of stability is allowed because it is removed from the priest's day to day routines and rhythms; this sequence is a strange hallucinatory limbo zone, precisely *released from (self-)consciousness*, where the two characters are freed to communicate.

[15] The film's guiding philosophy is encapsulated by the priest in reply to Chantal when she asks "What do you think of me. You have eyes and ears like everyone else". He says "They tell me little about you" and his answer chimes with his earlier comment addressed to the Countess: "Who knows what poisons others breath from our hidden sins...if God let us see what binds us together in good and evil, indeed we could not love."

the drop of an eye. For Bresson, such force is not experienced directly but encountered in the restraint of bodily movements.

B) The Absent Presentation of Death

So many of the encounters in the film suggest a melodramatic treatment because they are situated around human dilemmas with high stakes (the possibility of suicide, saving of souls before death, adultery, blackmail). However, the film proposes melodramatic scenarios only to show how they may play out in unexciting and wearisome ways. The film therefore suggests that an often disregarded feature of some crises is that they are not suitably emphatic; they are not experienced at the heightened level one might anticipate (or hope for, or need).

Most characteristic of the film's adherence to this insight is its oblique treatment of death. On the night of the Countess's death the camera tracks down from a clock to the diary with the commentary stating "The Countess died that night." We do not witness her death, and we are presented with it in an apparently impersonal manner. We hear a candle being blown out, and the image becomes duller as the candle stops shedding light. Therefore, even the extinguished candle is not seen itself but registered instead as a light going out on the diary. Not only is the Countess's death filtered through the priest's regular medium of expression but the diary's appearance here constitutes a particularly muted depiction of the event: the darkness surrounding the diary symbolising the end of speaking for the time being; here is a death immediately conveyed through absence and silence (silence defined by the halting of writing).

Note the shot breakdown of these two sequences concerning the priest's death:

1. (cu) Gold-plated sign: DR. LAVIGNE (dissolve).
2. (ms) Priest comes out of a door, staring straight in front of himself. Suitcase is put in his hand by an indistinct figure from behind, door is closed after him, priest walks away from door (camera also moving away from him but slower than his approach towards it, so camera and priest are soon close together) (dissolve).
3. (cu) Priest walking away from the camera (at first his cloak fills bulk of frame), trams noisily cross his path, he remains rather oblivious to them.

Enters a church but finds prayer too difficult. Stops to write and have a drink at a public house. Goes to see Dufrety, a colleague from the seminary, spends some time there, talks to Dufrety's exploited wife.

4. (cu) Shot of open diary with barely legible words.
5. (mcu) Priest huddled in a blanket, drops the diary, hear it off screen hit the ground, seconds later drops pencil as well, camera pans down with his arm and hand, clutches diary but in his feeble state he cannot hold on, camera slowly pans up again, he gets up slowly, and moves towards window (off-screen sound of footsteps from exterior), sits on chair near window, camera moves to ecu of face (fade to black).
6. (cu) Envelope addressed to Torcy, sent by Dufrety (his address printed in corner) (dissolve).
7. (cu) Typed letter. Voice-over of Torcy reading it (dissolve).
8. (cu) Dark, smudgy cross on a grey screen. Torcy continues reading letter, claims that the priest's expression "indicated distress" and the "dying man expressed a desire for his rosary." Priest's final words are reported as "What does it matter? All is grace."

The film's oblique treatment of the priest's last days allows it to illuminate perspectives on the nature of death which are not adequately encompassed within a melodramatic mode, a mode which would tend to convey death as an urgent and physical crisis. In the sequence, the close-up of the gold-plated sign substitutes for not seeing the actual doctor *close-up* (1). The viewer suspects that it is he who hands the priest the suitcase (2) and the manner of his gesture communicates to a viewer much of what needs to be known about the imminent finality of his illness: the doctor's motion carries that "the least I can do is hand you your suitcase" feel, a gesture of formal politeness woefully insufficient against the gravity of the situation. The sense of distance in this formality is enhanced because it is all we see of the doctor; the handing of the suitcase speaking for a whole scene having passed without our active involvement. What the viewer receives is a fleeting glimpse of professional etiquette to indicate the ephemeral significance of death when seen in terms of those people for whom a stranger's demise is not of emotional consequence.

The priest's walk across the line of the trams shows his trance-like obliviousness to the bustle (3). His disregard for his surroundings here illustrates the way a tangible engagement with a crisis can spiral out of reach, the priest only feeling a numbness towards his environment which the finality of death creates. It is precisely a strength of feeling which dissipates. No breakdown in tears, no screams for help, no uncontrollable convulsions, no expressionistic hallucinations; instead a few moments later he simply says "I frowned as if over a knotty problem". Excluding dead-pan comedies, few films have the courage to frown in the face of their moments of crisis.

As with the Countess the viewer does not see the death of the priest. The dropping of his diary and then his pencil, and his effort to regain them, substitute for facing the event head-on (5). The film has earned the right for the dropping of his diary to stand in for his death, and the mundane rustle of papers as they slide against the ground here represents the full weight of a life. This would be a less successful moment, trite almost, had the diary not been so fully and meticulously integrated into both narration and narrative throughout. His death is conceived as his incapacity to reach for his diary notebook; thus the film characterises death, not in terms of its suddenness or its finality but in terms of the priest being unable to continue with the routine things. The priest's death is understood as the point when he can no longer position himself to note down the "trivial secrets" which constituted his day.

The final moments of the film where Torcy reads the letter written by Dufrety (7) before the image of the cross closes the story, expresses the loss of death through the ache which arises when a person simply disappears rather than conveying it through emotional upheaval. The effect of death is seen in terms of the inadequacy of any behaviour or language by those still living to compensate for the absence. Throughout, the film is concerned with the expressive limitations in the face of crisis (see especially Section Four below) and although the priest always had problems expressing himself, through his diary he maintained a sincere effort. Now the film achieves its sense of loss through setting the final letter (typed) against the weight of all the diary writing preceding it (handwritten), all those methodical returns to the notebook which tapped out the repetitive rhythm of his life. We learn of the priest's death through words, but that only emphasises the loss of the personal address of his diary, a personal address situated within each passing day. Dufrety's description of the priest's death is rigidly formal, as if he were writing an official report: a colleague and friend in the priesthood has merely become "a dying man". For the first time in the film, the priest is spoken for, and at twice remove: a letter written by Dufrety and read by Torcy. The film insinuates a sense of the priest's everyday language denied.

Presenting the priest's death through the cessation of *his* language, the language of the diary, means that the viewer understands his death in day to day terms. Faced with the death of others, we often feel that what we miss most of all is the *continuing* conversation. Conversations are ongoing affairs, not overridingly goal

orientated, and, by their nature, do not have a global inclination towards finality ("I'll phone you next week", "speak to you tomorrow"). It is often said when experiencing someone's death that "I had so much I wanted to say", but the sensation of leaving so much unsaid is not only one of having failed to stress something important to them. It is also that we miss the conversation each day, that inevitably there was much more to discuss: there was still *everything* to say.

Furthermore, the film's visual language, at the close, inadequately distills the daily patterns of the priest's life (8). The dark cross has been assessed by writers as representing the ultimate absence: for them, this is the film's only way of conveying the priest's final achievement of grace because nothing in the material world is able to do justice to his deliverance. Fleishman, in contrast, sees the cross in terms of a betrayal. He says:

> The gradual appearance of the cross...suggests the emergence of another source of signs, an authorial will that has chosen this symbol as the visual fulfillment of his theme. Bresson's self-effacing strategy, which has raised a character to be not merely the narrator but the consistent perspective on his own story, institutes at the close a new and implicitly higher perspective. One may find this a betrayal of previous narrational commitments.[16]

The *whole* film has been both from the priest's perspective *and* from Bresson's so it is misleading to assert only this image as a sudden move to 'authorial will'[17]. However, it is the case that the ending is no longer predominantly from the priest's perspective. More precisely, the cross represents the sort of inadequate symbolising and summarising of his life to which Dufrety, and perhaps Torcy, might succumb. Indeed, André Bazin has written that the cross is 'as awkwardly drawn as on the average memorial card'[18]. Shifting from being intimate with the day to day, the narration is now detached, formal and symbolic (Dufrety, Torcy, the cross).

The sense of disappointment is, as Fleishman suggests correctly, because of

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[16] Fleishman, op.cit., p171.
[17] See discussion of G. M. Wilson's theories in **Chapter Three**.
[18] André Bazin, '*Diary of a Country Priest*', in Cameron ed., op.cit., p65.

> the emergence of the cross representing a shift in the film's mode of presentation, from written narration to a discourse of graphic symbols. Everything we have seen up to this point has...enact[ed] a relatively prosaic narration. In the epilogue, the mundane world...gives way before a numinous symbolic apparition.[19]

However, Fleishman also says:

> As a visual complement of the priest's last words and of the life he has lived, it is unimpeachable: he has aspired to Christ's innocence and self-sacrifice, has lived under their sign (a crucifix is prominent in his room) and so his death is appropriately narrated in the visible presence of his chosen symbol.[20]

Yet, I question the evidence for assuming the cross to be the priest's 'chosen symbol': in fact, for a film committed to a devoted priest, the cross is given minimal emphasis, and plays almost no central role in the patterns of the film. Indeed, any emotional engagement by the film with the traditional iconography of the church is rare[21]. The cross does not even symbolise an unequivocal achievement of grace because of the record of his final words which accompany it (8): "What does it matter?" expresses a note of disappointment, something akin to "I really tried...but what does it matter?" These words do not entail a smooth transition to a state of grace; instead, the confident assertion, "All is grace", is characteristically deflated with doubt.

Section Four – Rendering the Expressive Gap Without Extremity

A) The Expressive Gap

Stanley Cavell says in *The World Viewed*:

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[19] Fleishman, op.cit., p171.

[20] Fleishman, ibid., p170/171.

[21] Nevertheless, I do not deny that the film may be interpreted from a more theological point of view. Clearly, the use of the bread and wine and the sacramental significance of the writing (see Keith Reader in 'The Sacrament of Writing: Robert Bresson's Le Journal d'un cure de campagne' in Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau eds., *French Film: Text and Contexts*, Routledge, London, 1990), the struggle between the transcendental and material (see Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*, Univ. of California Press, London, 1972), flesh and spirit, and so on are important strands in the film. However, interpretations paying attention to these aspects tend to be unsophisticated with regard to the film's metaphorical capacity, and I felt the need for an understanding of the film that brought out its secular significance, a significance facilitated by the credibility of its religious scenario.

> It is not merely that we occupy certain roles in society, play certain parts or hold certain offices, but that we are set apart or singled out for sometimes incomprehensible reasons, for rewards or punishments out of all proportion to anything we recognise ourselves as doing or being, as though our lives are the enactments of some tale whose words continuously escape us. The mismatch...[is]...exemplified by...*Diary of a Country Priest,* in which the mismatch appears as the distance between the depth to which an ordinary human life requires expression, and the surface of ordinary means through which that life must, if it will, express itself. One may call such forms secular mysteries.[22]

Melodramatic depiction arises from an expressive gap (see especially **Chapter One**), where what cannot be expressed through words emerges in flamboyant *mise-en-scène*. The priest's problems in expressing himself are not, however, discharged along melodramatic channels. The distinction in Bresson's handling of the theme is to find stylistic devices which speak eloquently, but quietly, for the unsaid. His depiction of the channels by which the characters disclose themselves is persistently undemonstrative. In this respect, the film wishes to remain faithful to a life that can not find any mode of expression which will rise to drama. Indeed, the priest is constantly encountering the mundane disappointments, the meagre facilitating capacities, of the 'ordinary means' about which Cavell speaks.

By shifting even its less apparent channels of disclosure away from melodramatic treatment, the film readjusts our understanding of the range of possibilities within the general theme concerning inexpressiveness. Late on, Olivier says to the priest "My father says you have no social sense" but the film is sympathetic towards those who are debilitated by the prospect of formal or informal modes of public conversation (freed from the guidance of the more limited rules that regulate formal engagement, the informal is frequently more daunting). Melodrama has tended to root its characters' expressive problems in repressions (often sexual) but *Diary of a Country Priest* focuses on less tyrannical afflictions such as *social inhibition.* These inhibitions emerge out of the day to day inevitability of interacting with different personalities in society, and are not as deviously mysterious as repressive traumas

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[22] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Enlarged Edition), Harvard Univ. Press, London, 1979, p180. It is interesting that Cavell also understands the film to concern a 'secular' mystery, rather than a transcendental one (see note above).

which surreptitiously maintain a determining grip. Furthermore, the film's concentration on the priest's inhibited state precludes it from sustaining a fulfilling narrative drive and closure: the priest does not provide the film with any focused psychological disorder to cure.

The film develops an oblique pattern of behaviour which, if engaged with sensitively, does not encourage the frustrations that might well up in the viewer during those periods of the priest's social inhibition. When Torcy accuses the priest of "pure folly" with the Countess, the viewer might be desperate for the priest to fight back at the injustice of the verdict. Instead, he says calmly, "I could present the matter differently", and refrains from revealing the letter in his defence. Throughout the film, the priest retains his calm demeanour in the face of much criticism. His continual refusal to counter the criticisms ceases to cause frustrations on the part of the viewer once they become attuned to the film's less physically forceful pattern of character engagement; within this pattern any violent resistance by the priest is out of place, and would in itself be dissatisfying.

Through oblique means, but without purposeful strategy, the priest develops close relationships with the main women in the film. The film enacts a togetherness, whilst refraining from physical closeness. The withholding of any obviously seductive body language or physical displays of affection is maintained throughout the film. This might not seem startling in a film centred around a priest where even affectionate relationships would be characterised by a certain distance. However, having a country priest as a central character provides the film with a credible basis for scenarios which explore less effusive demonstrations of attachment. At one point, the priest chastises Dufrety: "If I had broken my vows I'd rather it was for the love of a woman than for what you call your intellectual evolution". The bonds between the priest and the women throughout the film ensure that his statement here is not simply a detached (albeit sincere) pronouncement of Christian loving: through the priest's behaviour, the film strives to embody the restrained disengagement that is the mask of intense connection. Consequently, the film has the patience to unravel the discreet unpredictability of love's devotions.

B) Engagement Refracted Through Objects

Note the shot breakdown of the catechism class scene:
The priest asks the question in class, "How did Jesus conceive of the Sacrament", one girl answers it wrongly, priest turns to look at Séraphita.

1. (cu) Séraphita. Camera pans up with her as she stands up.
2. (mcu) Priest, standing at head of class, moves to the right of frame to collect a gold star for Séraphita.
3. (ms) Séraphita at left of frame, other children rise and then move off to the right, Séraphita remains and she moves forward, closer to the camera and closer to the priest.
4. (cu) Priest's face (staring down at Séraphita), he says: "Do you long for your first communion".
5. (cu) Séraphita's face (staring up at Priest): "no".
6. (cu) Priest's face: "Why not".
7. (cu) Séraphita's face: "There's time enough".
8. (cu) Priest's face: "But you are so attentive".
9. (cu) Séraphita's face: "Because of your lovely eyes". Off-screen giggles.
10. (cu) Priest still staring
11. (ms) Priest and Séraphita. Séraphita scurries to join her friends huddled at the doorway, he is left immobilised in the same position.

Note also the shot breakdown in a later scene:

1b. (ms) Priest approaches Séraphita on bicycle.
2b. (mcu) Séraphita standing on mud bank. Priest enters frame, camera tracks back slightly, Séraphita jumps away, off bank and out of shot, priest turn his head to see her.
3b. (ms) Séraphita runs away from the priest, throws her satchel over her head back towards him.
4b. (cu) Satchel lying on muddy ground.
5b. (mls) Séraphita still running away.
6b. (cu) Satchel lying on the floor (as shot 4b), wheel of priest's bike then enters from off-screen left, camera pans up the body of the priest as he picks satchel up (camera stays close up), pan stops on priest's upper body, priest's head looks towards Séraphita running away.

Most melodrama stages its confrontations with focused clarity (regardless of any specific intricacy), but in *Diary of a Country Priest* there is an avoidance of physically direct and fluent engagement. Throughout the film there are meetings full of friction between the priest and the members of the parish (especially those at the chateau) but they never break out into overtly manifested conflict. The film instead constructs the priest's relationship with other characters as a permanent 'lack of fit'. By cutting between the priest's own face and Séraphita's (3-9), the film conveys a sense of straightforward togetherness between them. Equally, the opposing movement

of the other children leaving the room further emphasises the singularity of the priest's ties with the one girl (3). However, any straightforward connection is soon undercut by setting Séraphita's humiliating departure from the classroom tangentially against the direction of the priest's insistent focus (10,11). She has left him behind, while he remains locked into the intimacy of their previous stares. Once again, the mismatch between the priest's point of view and the world outside him is depicted not through sustained conflict, but through contradictory directional flows.

At first, in the later scene, Séraphita's throwing of the satchel appears simply to be a cruel ploy by her to enforce the priest to make a useless journey by provocatively exploiting his generosity. Yet, at the moment she physically separates from him the satchel maintains a covert link with the priest (3b) and the object continues to resonate with this connection. The close-up of the satchel affirms its importance (4b): yet the shot seems out of place in a film which characteristically refuses to utilise editing as a means of pointing the viewer through each plotted moment. Its highlighting makes sense, however, if the viewer readjusts to recognise the less obvious purpose of the object. The satchel acts as Séraphita's fragile tie to the priest, even at the moment she asserts physical separation.

Furthermore, the pan up the priest's body as he fetches the satchel changes the nature of the relationship between the priest and object; the pan draws attention to the satchel's collection but does so by conveying a sensation of it becoming part of him (6b). A cut to his face here, rather than a pan, would convey information followed by emotional reaction. The pan keeps the satchel in tight proximity, making it not merely an object to react to (the cut to his face would be enough) but like a piece of Séraphita travelling through him. In the next scene, when Séraphita's mother ungratefully removes the satchel from the visitor, the sadness we feel is not in the more apparent conflict between mother and priest but in the less tangible severing of the tentative link between the priest and Séraphita. The film has little conviction in deploying objects to encourage suspenseful questions that might heighten the drama or in using them to construct eventful moments of direct physical or verbal conflict.

The use of short but smooth panning camera movements mute potential moments of tension by embedding an alleviating rhythm which calms any prolonged resistance between characters. In a later moment with Chantal, when the priest senses

that she has written a suicide note (letters representing a displaced form of communication in the film, human contact removed from physical interaction), the close-in camera pans down from her face, down her body, whereupon her hand pulls out the note. His hand then comes into shot (he takes the note) and the camera pans up to his head. This peaceful movement is a visual expression of the priest's voice-over at this moment: "she did not attempt to resist". When required to hand over the letter, one might have expected a petulant response from Chantal, but the movement of the object passing down one body and up through another is the visualisation of a serene animating force. The camera movement readjusts the focal purpose of the suicide note: the note shifts from asserting an extreme pronouncement of human separation to become the heart of a tranquil intimacy.

Here, the close camera work in the film paradoxically contributes to the playing down of intensity. Bresson is a master of the camera kept in tight proximity to characters because he abstains from the expected intensity that closeness frequently produces. Many films which bring their camera face to face (or upper body) with characters would be striving after demonstrative emphasis (which need not be knee-jerk or unearned). However, the closer Bresson's camera goes to his characters the more the vehemence is subdued (consider all the close-in shots of the priest's face which constitute a perpetual withdrawal from action into restraint); the closer it goes, the more any emotional effect generated *depends* on a lack of fervency.

C) The Sterility of the Everyday

Note the shot breakdown of the long conversion scene between priest and countess:

Priest walks through chateau grounds (dissolve)

1. (cu) Arm raking the fire, camera pans along it (arm belongs to Countess), pan continues out to the priest standing behind her (becomes ms of them both). They express disagreements over the pressures facing Chantal, Countess stands against the fireplace, not looking at the priest, in a particularly formal stance.
2. (mls) Both Countess and Priest from *outside* window. Off-screen sound of raking from the garden, Countess moves towards the window and closes it, she walks away from the window with her back towards the camera.
3. (cu) Countess moves in front of large wall mirror over fireplace, her full face is reflected in the mirror, she turns her head halfway towards the priest (at this point she does not face him directly).

They discuss the Countess's dead son, her husband's infidelity, and her treatment of Chantal. The priest tells her to resign herself, she tells him she already is resigned.

4. (mcu) Countess turns to look at pictures of her dead son on mantelpiece over fireplace as she talks about being "resigned" (she is on the right of the frame looking towards the photograph in the middle of the frame while her reflection in the mirror is on the left of the frame).

They continue to talk about her attitude to God, the raking sound returns, she eventually relaxes, they join in a mutual sharing of the Lord's Prayer.

5. (mcu) Countess lifts her head, stares at priest, she says "may that Kingdom come then".
6. (ecu) Priest closing eyes.
7. (mcu) Through window to garden, Chantal looking in through window, she soon withdraws, gardener's raking is left as the sole object of attention, the sound of his action heightened.
8. (ms) Countess clutching locket to her chest (contains picture of her son), slow track in to her, she says how priest has disturbed everything.
9. (mcu) Priest.
10. (As 8)
11. (As 9)
12. (As 8 and 10) Countess makes sharp hand movement and throws locket into fire
13. (As 9) Priest moves to rescue locket.
14. (cu) Fireplace, priest's hands move scorched wood slowly aside, carefully rescues locket, camera pans and pulls out into ms of both of them, Countess comes off her chair, kneels on floor to be blessed (music starts to swell), priest turns towards her in order to finally bless her.
15. (mcu) Priest looking down, slow track in to cu, pan down his arm to the hand which blesses her.

The encounter between the Countess and the priest is indicative of the manner by which the film resists violent confrontations even in decisive scenes. The scene expertly explores a human tendency to deliberately reduce the drama of situations (the Countess actually says 'Let's not dramatise") for fear of *facing the consequences* of what may emerge from energetic confrontation. The characters' behaviour masks the critical by acting as if it were routine, that is, as if it were not urgent. They exhibit the sort of disengaged demeanour one might expect if they were managing a mundane task.

Throughout, their movements proceed with a careful rhythm, enacting the scene together at a stately pace: the priest's solemn and muted delivery are matched by the Countess's quite lofty, formal decorum. For much of the scene, their behaviour within the room is constituted by a consistent pattern of movements where the characters avoid direct engagement. The Countess has built a wall around herself,

partly as a defence mechanism to protect her from the hurt of her husband's infidelities, but mainly because she has been unable to escape from the memory of her son's death. Her defence mechanism takes the form of a proud defiance to live out her days as if she were dead. Once again, as with the priest's endeavour to feel life through his attention to a daily diary, the film understands the Countess's personality in terms of a remorselessly constructed formality with regards to each passing day.

At one point, rather than looking at the priest, the Countess faces the mirror in front of her (3). She talks to herself rather than making eye-contact with the priest. Later she is arranged in relation to the mirror so as to depict her whole predicament (4): the Countess imagines that she is only looking at the picture of her son but her morbid dwelling ensures that she only looks back at herself, and speaks only to herself. Her failure to take notice of the reflection facing her indicates an unawareness of how locked away she has become, how dead she is to the world around her. The reflection in the mirror visualises how the Countess is trapped in a self-protective discourse. Talking about her husband's relationship with Louise, she says that he may have been "over-attentive". Her understatement here is the product of not wishing to display emotional weakness in front of another, now and over a number of years, and so illustrates the hardening of a protective language into a form of communication which is stale and inadequate. We might think of her understatement as showing the dangers of not allowing enough drama for the things which matter in life, not according them their deserved amount of dramatic emphasis[23].

The inability of the dialogue to match the occasion has its own way of casting new perspectives on what constitutes a crisis. The priest, too, uses a form of understatement exemplified in the simplicity of his reproaches. When the Countess wishes the same unhappiness on her daughter as she has had to bear, the priest responds "take care Madame" as if the Countess were about to step into a small puddle. At one point she says to him: "You mean my son would hate me" to which he replies, "he simply would not know you": here the regular sense of "knowing" carries more force than the extreme emotion of "hate". The possibility of a son not

[23] For more detail on the possibilities for using mirrors non-melodramatically (mirrors being a traditionally favourite piece of furniture in melodrama) see **Chapter Six** on *Late Spring*.

recognising his mother trivialises the melodrama of hate and it reconceptualises the crisis in terms of absence.

Faced with the prospect of both the locket and his hand burning, the priest's action is without the urgency one might expect (14). He is caught up in a more serene pace than the necessity of the rescuing dictates. However, the pace of his movement is in accord with the scene's less apparent course which has proceeded by its own gentle momentum. This path has been developing a more concealed level of intimacy between the two characters. Once again it is a pan and a slight track back which links his rescue of the locket to the Countess as she settles into a position to be blessed (14)[24]. This, in turn, rhymes back to the similar pan at the start of the scene where it is first suggested that the characters are tied together (1).

This oblique strand of gentle momentum is constituted by gestures (or sometimes changes in camera placement) which come at significant moments of their developing intimacy. Such gestures and placements often mark the stages in the relaxation of the Countess, but their significance is masked under the characters' more apparent separateness and distance. Moreover, the characters' inability to express closeness is revealed only by understated gestures.

For instance, the Countess's mindful closure of the window encapsulates the dual strands of separateness and closeness in the scene (2). The raking of leaves constitutes more than a jokey aside – albeit a theological one – on the 'raking' of souls. As we have seen the presence of exterior noise is often a reminder of the active life of the world outside the central characters[25]. At this stage in the scene the Countess is not ready to become invigorated by the possibilities of interaction (not ready, some might say, to accept the necessity of the raking of her own soul) and so her action appears as yet another piece of despondent private enclosure. However, her smothering of the outside noise is also an indication of her tentative willingness to pay serious attention to the priest, while the orderly calm of her gesture signals her positive

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[24] It is worth recognising that music swells on the soundtrack at this point. Music is occasionally used melodramatically in the film, that is, it heightens the emotional vigour of some moments. The use of music is the only stylistic feature in the film which could not reasonably be described as undramatic. Nevertheless, in most periods of the film, the music often swirls quietly (for example, beneath the priest's voice-over) with a low degree of prominence. Indeed, when the music is used in this manner it tends to contribute to the floating, sleepy rhythms of the film.

[25] Andrew has stated that the film's use of noise at such moments offsets the interior and solipsistic nature of the drama by emphasising a wider world (Andrew, op.cit., p129).

reflection on his words. Significantly, her action also enables the frame of the window, and the 'bar' between them, to be carefully eased aside (2). When the Countess later begins to find peace, the sound of the raking returns to represent the return of the outside world (5,6,7). Similarly, the appearance of Chantal at the same moment outside the room, indicates the 'return' of another casualty of the Countess's previous deadness to the surrounding world[26]. In this film the viewer needs to recognise that the commonplace closing of a window and the repetitive sounds of a gardener's raking motion, from somewhere in the distance, speak for crucial changes of heart.

D) The 'Ordinary Means'

Despite the priest's problems he does not give up his patient desire to find the suitable 'ordinary means' with which to express himself. In this desire he matches the stylistic commitment of the film. After speaking to Dufrety's partner the priest realises the extent of the denigrating relationship of servitude that has evolved for her. The priest therefore attempts to broach the problem with Dufrety. The priest lies on Dufrety's bed, knowing he has only a few hours left to live, and says to him "I must talk to you". Bresson does not achieve the emotional effect here by foregrounding the humility of the priest. The effect is not only dependent on the priest's demonstration of selflessness which is that even in his dying hours he would rather help another. The priest's wish, despite the finality of the moment, is just to "talk" – not to "urge" or "order" or even "tell". Bresson's undramatic achievement is to convince the viewer that a soul might be saved by a willingness to engage in ordinary conversation.

Conclusion

The subdued, undramatic style of *Diary of a Country Priest* is well exemplified by the film's use of the daily diary. The diary format is more than another way of narrating a film, because the writing of the diary is integrated into the development of

[26] The cut to show Chantal listening in outside the window also allows the film to establish the source of gossip surrounding the priest's encounter with the Countess, although there is no evidence, that the revelation of Chantal's presence substantially alters the meaning of this particular scene. In general, however, Chantal's momentary appearance and her ghostly slide away from the window indicate how something so fleeting and discreet as eavesdropping can have significant effects on characters.

the film itself: the telling of the film is part of the narrative as well as the narration in a more sustained and coherent manner than is often the case in narrated films. This integration of the diary allows the film to render events such as death in an unusual manner, providing a perspective on them which is not melodramatic: for example, death is conceived as the halting of everyday writing. Thus, stylistic devices such as off-screen space, voice-over, and dissolves are deployed to integrate the diary into the whole tone of the film: for example, the fades to black convey the burden of the diary's writing in the film's visual patterns. Moreover, the priest's spoken communication with the rest of his world, his conversation with it, is practically dictated by the idiom of the diary. The quiet privacy of the diary carries over into the priest's public communication with other characters, so below I compare *Diary of a Country Priest* to *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (Frank Capra US 1939) especially with regard to the protagonist's style of communication.

Dramatic Contrast – Actor, Space and the Public Voice: Vocal Persuasion in *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*

A) The Persuasiveness of a Voice

The persuasive power of many Hollywood movies is intimately derived from prominent instances of characters delivering convincing speeches within the fiction. As Charles Affron says, *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington* contains 'obsessive enactments of persuasion', specifically through 'the persuasive narrativity of voice' which 'helps power the film's narrative thrust'[27]; in this way the film's tight grip on audiences is achieved verbally as well as visually (FIG.4). In the film Jefferson Smith must persuade a cynical and corrupt Washington of the essential truths of community and democracy (see appendix for plot summary). However, as Affron himself analyses, Capra manages *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*'s persuasive power through the use of the actor/star (James Stewart) projecting his voice in space. The country priest would dearly love to execute such powers of persuasion; indeed, he endeavours to convince the parish community of his worth. Yet, Bresson's radically contrasting use of his

[27] Charles Affron, *Cinema and Sentiment*, Univ. of Chicago Press, London, 1982, p116. This section is indebted to Affron's discussion of the film. I have endeavoured to combine his insights with my own analysis of *Diary of a Country Priest.*

actor's voice in space crucially alters the 'enactments of persuasion' within the narrative.

B) *Exhibiting* a State of Mind

Stanley Cavell uses the concept of unknownness in reference to Claude Laydu's priest in *Diary of a Country Priest.* His deployment of the term draws attention not only to the performer's lack of stardom but to the fact that his face conveys privacy. Cavell claims in turn that a 'natural reason for a director's requirement of this quality is that his film is itself about unknownness, about the fact and cause of separateness or isolation'[28]. Laydu's face has precisely this unknownness: he remains locked into his private thoughts, consequently exacerbating his *separation* from the parish. In *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington,* Stewart's face is open and readable, conveying a knownness which allows him to engage with the public world outside himself; he thereby avoids separation because his face communicates with other characters.

Stewart's knownness as Jeff Smith is explained by his public transparency (he is not locked into his private self); he allows himself to be fully known through a public display and articulation of his beliefs. Through an avoidance of tightly matching reaction shots, Laydu's face rarely connects to other faces in the film; his engagement with the other characters proceeds by indirections. The priest cannot confidently project his looks across space and bind with others: indeed, shots of his face take us further inwards, towards himself, not outwards to fulfilling associations. During *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington,* in the Senate House sequence, Jeff is endeavouring to persuade the senate of the endemic corruption preventing democracy. Capra carefully bonds Jeff through a triangle of close-up glances consisting of the sympathetic President of the House, and the adoring Saunders (Jean Arthur); through this triangle Capra layers the sentiment and increases audience captivation by entwining institutional persuasion with romantic love. In contrast, a special achievement of *Diary of a Country Priest* is to set up a pathetic figure and a potentially highly melodramatic scenario, but then depict character engagement so as to avoid a forceful sentimentality. Because the film's use of space matches the priest's problems in

[28] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p181.

engaging, it is also without the methods of persuasion which would blatantly tie the audience into its fiction.

The fact of star performance encourages a knownness: even the mysterious persona of Greta Garbo conveys this sense through her alarmingly frank, public displays of her private feelings. As Cavell says of Garbo she has no secrets because 'her secrets are the world's'[29]. In the cinema the illumination of a genuine privacy in characterisation is rare and I take this to be another unusual characteristic of *Diary of a Country Priest*. In *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, after the "Taylor made" baskets of public opinion have been carried into the Senate, there is a close up of Jeff's face; he clearly exhibits in public his intense doubt which at this moment constitutes his state of mind. Moreover, because his face also looks towards the President there is a sense of private thoughts shared and communicated, and so Jeff's state of mind becomes a point of intimacy. As Raymond Carney has stated the film concerns 'the translation...of private states of feeling across vast, public institutional distances...[where] intimacy is all in this act of translation, of imaginatively reaching out across the distance to attempt to bridge it'[30].

The priest can not reach out to display his state of mind across public spaces as his thoughts are locked into the solitary writing of his day to day diary and in pushing his bike *away* from public places. *Diary of a Country Priest*'s distinction also lies in choosing to depict a character's state of mind which can not rise to drama. Thus, the film counteracts the cinema's habit of turning private spaces into arenas characterised by more public modes of behaviour. The concentration on the priest's subjectivity does not result in expressionism or an opening out of the mind in the form of spectacle[31].

The dullness of repeated sites of *Diary of a Country Priest* (the chateau, the parish estate, all the in-betweens where he wheels his bike) epitomise the nature of the priest's inhibited connection with his environment. This dullness is achieved by the use

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[29] Cavell, ibid., p207.

[30] Raymond Carney, *American Vision: The Films of Frank Capra*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1986, p338.

[31] The state of mind of a character is only one type of human privacy but all four films in my study disclose states of privacy in a manner unusual to the cinema: private modes outside the parameters of spectacular display. Dramatic depictions of privacy go beyond American cinema: directors such as Bergman, Visconti, Dreyer, Antonioni, Fellini, Fassbinder and Godard have all frequently depicted private state of minds with a rapturous, vivid and picturesque intensity.

of subdued lighting and by the recurrent use of the same shooting angle to film locations. Barbara Bowman claims that the sites of *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington* are reflections of Jeff's subjective, but in this case, uninhibited state of mind[32]. In contrast to the priest's unvaried experiences, the sites in *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington* become the developing register of Jeff's imaginative energy: so there is the move from the idealised view of the Washington monuments early in the story to the shadowy outer edge of the pillars of the Lincoln memorial during the later periods of doubt (note the expressionistic depiction of subjectivity). The Senate House itself alters in line with Jeff's development from a place of adoration to the location of his most severe test of character; it is an arena varying with the complexity of the protagonist's self-image and hence his assertive powers to transform it. The locations inhabited by the priest do not undergo a developing transformation as he never manages to assert his self within those spaces.

C) Voice Projection In the Cinema

The spatial configurations of *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington* are defined so as to facilitate such assertions of self. In the Senate House Capra clearly conveys the Senate's geography: the press and public galleries (where Saunders sits), the President's chair, the floor of the house and Jeff's podium. Frequently, the film will cut to a long shot of the whole House from a high position, reminding us of the relationship these individual locations have to the whole and emphasising, as Bowman says, the isolation of Jeff's figure by giving the impression of a deepening of space[33]. Such shots provide a reminder of Jeff's voice projected across a public space. If it is a truism of the cinema that the camera has the ability to move and cut dynamically around an area, it is stated less frequently that this dynamism extends to the flow of voices across space. Capra's fictions lay bare this fact, but it is true of much cinema. Significantly, Jeff's voice is interspersed with reaction shots of the galleries applauding, Saunder's desperate grimaces and the President's knowing grins; the cutting around the space animates the reception of his voice and cements a vocal power[34].

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[32] Barbara Bowman, *Master Space: Film Images of Capra, Lubitsch, Sternberg, and Wyler*, Greenwood Press, New York and London, 1992, p56.
[33] Bowman, ibid., p59.
[34] Ideas concerning reception of voice derived from Affron, op.cit..

A movie performer, unlike the theatre actor, need not consider propelling his voice out towards the audience: he or she directs their voice completely within the film's spatial world, often unerringly to another character. However, the film performer still projects. Clearly, Stewart is compelled to transmit within the Senate arena, but again Capra only makes explicit and exploits a general tendency for the film performer, regardless of the lack of theatre audience, to project his voice. This urge might connect with the actors' desire to become fully known, in Cavell's sense, via a 'performance' and hence the cinema's habit, to which I referred earlier, of turning even private spaces into arenas characterised by more public modes of behaviour[35].

The power of projected cinema voices is enhanced by their electronic projection via loudspeakers. Capra's use of the Senate arena, a space with magnified voices directed assertively to others across a room, taps the cinema's facility for voice projection within a contained space while simultaneously drawing on its ability to amplify. In contrast, Bresson rejects the blatantly persuasive powers of the cinema voice: the priest's interior thoughts are expressed as a whispering voice-over and he has an inability in parish company to talk emphatically so as to be heard. The measured tones of Laydu's voice are actually quite soporific, possessing none of the rhetorical tics or musicality of a voice like James Stewart's. Paradoxically, Bresson taps the cinema's amplification possibilities in a more unique manner by depicting the undramatic possibilities around a weakened, whispering voice: never would such a voice as the priest's, and the undemonstrative solitude it conveys, be possible under the necessities of voice projection in the theatre.

Outside the senate arena, Capra extends the possibilities of editing to emphasise the dynamic power of voice by cutting, with an increasing pace, between a series of competing voices. Saunders and Taylor fight in Washington to influence the public opinion back at Jeff's home state; the film cuts between their anxious phone calls and the activity in that state where the publicity machine of Taylor competes (with dirty tricks) against the boy scouts. Edited into the sequence is also the voice of a radio broadcaster reporting the continuing news of Jeff's filibuster to the nation. The

[35] For more discussion on this subject see **Chapter Six** below on Barbara Stanwyck's theatricalising – so as to integrate into the family home – in *All I Desire.*

emotional power of the sequence relies on a remarkable layering of effects all crucially sustained by editing between different voices in different spaces:

1) The sequence constructs a battle of vocal strength to persuade those in faraway spaces. Taylor and Saunders send messages by telephone to their respective 'teams', the increasing pace of the montage conveying the strength of the communication of the Taylor machine and the giddy, heart-warming, communal support of the scouts. The Taylor machine endeavours to *silence* the scouts: as one boy shouts up in a public meeting to defend his mentor Jeff, a hand covers his mouth.

2) The insistent deployment of a whole range of vocal aids such as telephones and microphones to transmit raised and projected voices, heightening emotive associations. Saunders and Jeff's mother form a bond over the telephone even though they have never met, Saunders softening her previous crackling, snappish vocal bite while responding to the mother's use of her first name – Clarissa – by addressing her as "mother" (the gradual softening of Arthur's voice, coming more in line with Stewart's, is another one of the film's persuasive vocal strategies which give conviction to the final unities). The CBS broadcaster injects a rush to the nation's adrenaline with *March of Time* style rhetorical patterns: overseas leaders seeing "what they cannot see at home - DEMOCRACY IN ACTION".

3) The excessive mounting spectacle of voices through montage and the deluge of vocal paraphernalia provide a comic scrutiny of the pervasive and persuasive power of vocal rhetoric in American life; this in turn gives the sequence enough intelligent wit to ensure the increased persuasiveness of the sentimental flow.

4) The sheer frantic pace itself hypnotises and as Gerald Mast has claimed 'fundamentally incredible action gains conviction when played so quickly that no one has the time to realise that the action is incredible'[36]. Indeed, Preston Sturges and The Marx Brothers understood the effect of controlled yet frantic speed in powering dialogue. More precisely, I would claim that even allowing for a realisation of incredibility we are delighted to be carried away because of its manic assurance.

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[36] Gerald Mast, *Film/Cinema/Movie: A Theory of Experience*, Univ. of Chicago Press, London, 1993, p85.

All this contrasts with *Diary of a Country Priest* where there is a rejection of crisp editing; instead the film's fragile transitions (dissolves and fades) reflect the priest's lack of urgency and energy in *voicing* the next part of the tale.

D) James Stewart as Mr. Ordinary

Capra's pace of voices across space persuades us of the incredible, performs a sleight of hand, and magically transforms the ordinary into the eventful. By contrasting the honed institutional rhetoric of Claude Rain's Senator Paine with Stewart's vocal tics (his slight stutter and drawl), Jeff is constructed as Mr. Ordinary, the common man, fighting to be heard with plain language. Both Jeff and the priest are endeavouring to translate their states of mind into ordinary language; both films have as a central concern that expressive gap. However, whereas the priest's frailty in speech represents a sustained weakness of voice, Jeff's dips into an exhausted husky timbre enact one aspect of his carefully controlled vocal fluctuations, these amounting to an absorbing rhythm of address. Stewart's delivery always suggests an inability to complete a sentence, but it is a possibility never realised; his drawl, his pauses and his changes in pitch make the audience hang on every word, so achieving his own form of effective public rhetoric. Laydu, in contrast, his voice often monotone, lacking urgency, energy and confidence has no 'ordinary' rhetoric with which to engage in public performance.

Capra's films are frequently characterised as dramatising the fight of the ordinary man and the eventual triumph of his plain speaking. Preparing for the long battle ahead, Jeff pulls out his flask of coffee and fruit and places them on his podium. The laugh from the galleries, prompted by the refreshing incongruity of his behaviour, suggests a particularly performative display of ordinariness. Achieving an emotional resonance from a driving desire to cut through all the complications and eventually tie the community together, ordinariness and plain speaking here are closely associated with giving a performance. The link between plain speaking and its removal from locations of undemonstrative communication in fact make Jeff's display on the Senate floor extraordinary. Far from the reticent enunciation of the priest in *Diary of a Country Priest*, *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington* provides an extreme indication of the

emotional capital generated by the cinema's propensity to avoid those uneventful secrets which hide within the confines of withdrawn expression.

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Chapter Five

Delays Around Events in Miloš Forman's *Loves of a Blonde*

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Introduction

The central aims of the chapter are to explore:

a) *Loves of a Blonde*'s undramatic presentation of an unknown woman and its depictions of a character (and a state of mind) seemingly unsuitable for representation in a visual medium.

b) the unusual consequences for narrative, in a film which both concentrates on lives which have become numbed by boredom and structures its scenes around delays rather than occasions.

c) the film's achievements in composition, having chosen to depict both a world which does not display itself and characters who have no appetite for engagement (with their environment or each other).

Section One – The Undramatic Characteristics of an Unknown Woman

A) An Unknownness in Performance

At the end of the last chapter I introduced, in relation to *Diary of a Country Priest* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington,* Stanley Cavell's concept of unknownness. I wish to expand the discussion of the concept so as to understand the undramatic characteristics of *Loves of a Blonde.* Cavell says that

> sometimes a film director, some film directors in particular, require physiognomies for their subjects which not merely happen to be unknown but whose point, whose essence, is *that* they are unknown. Not just any unknown face will do; it must be one which, when screened, conveys unknownness; and this first of all means it conveys privacy – an individual soul's aliveness or deadness to itself. A natural reason for a director's requirement of this quality is that his film is in itself about unknownness, about the fact and causes of separateness or isolation or integrity or outlawry.[1]

[1] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Enlarged Edition), Harvard Univ. Press, London, 1979, p181.

Throughout the film, Andula's (Hana Brejchova) face conveys (as do many of the other characters in the film) a sense of unknownness. The feeling that she remains unknown arises from her facial blankness: her lack of expressive range has been caused by her face being caught, and then hardening, somewhere in limbo between expectancy and disappointment. She has learnt not to feel either too deeply, floating instead between the possibilities of both. In Cavell's terms her soul has become dead to itself, and her facial expressions are the outward show of that inner inactivity.

In the opening scene, Andula is shown discussing her relationships with her girlfriend, and the film draws attention to Andula's mind, to the outward show of her inner consciousness, by concentrating on the head to head intimacy of the two women (see Section One (C)). In this way her state of mind becomes a focus for attention but the film's attentiveness only suggests what is missing: some type of active thinking is absent from Andula: hers is a consciousness which floats between manufactured but felt intensities. This is the opposite of the priest in *Diary of a Country Priest,* whose intense self-scrutiny was immobilising and mortifying. Here, Andula's seeming lack of self-scrutiny allows her a flexibility of movement which destroys dramatic emphasis and leads to its own form of emotional immobilisation for the character. The fact that the film does not overtly convey her state of mind in the manner of *Diary of a Country Priest* makes her seem more elusive than the priest, but we can infer aspects of consciousness from faces, gestures, movements and conversations and these reveal a mind which is not in the process of active or decisive decision-making.

Andula, however, is a different type of unknown woman from those to which Cavell draws attention elsewhere in his work. In his writing on the unknown woman (see **Chapter One**) he discusses the characters played by Greta Garbo and Bette Davis (among others) as lacking a shared language with men. This is true for Andula; and the relationships between women and men in the film remain mutually uncomprehending. However, the film does not allow Andula, faced with this separation, to rescue a sense of herself through theatricalising; she has no melodramatic mode with which to affirm the existence of her self. If we remind ourselves of Stephen Mulhall's explanation of Cavell we will see how relevant it is to our understanding of the avoidance of melodrama in *Loves of a Blonde*:

> Cavell characterises [Garbo's] enactment of her existence as a piece of private theatre, and its privacy amounts to a declaration of her sense of herself as separate and finite; what she enacts is her knowledge of her separateness.[2]

Andula is not in a position to 'enact' this '*knowledge* of her separateness' [my italics]. Cavell further says that 'The wish, in the great stars...is a function not of their beauty, such as that may be, but of their power of privacy, of a knowing unknownness.'[3] Andula is not accorded the power which might come from an acceptance of her isolation; she is unable, unlike Garbo and Davis, to declare her distinctiveness because she lacks sophistication with regard to her separateness. Her unknownness is not 'knowing'.

As the women amble very slowly in medium shot against a drab background while waiting for the soldiers to arrive off the train, the limbo state between expectancy and disappointment is conveyed both in their movement and their faces: there is some tiny residue of expectancy in their demeanours (after all, in some sense, this 'event' breaks the monotony), but their shuffling approach betrays their underlying feelings of resignation, and no appetite is registered on their dour faces. The same type of expression is caught later at the social dance. A boredom towards their environment has led to a dislocation from it, the facial expressions of the women waiting for the train indicating the numbness of their trapped lives: they are inescapably *there*, but not fully *involved*. Cavell goes on to say in his discussion of unknownness:

> The force of this declaration is to be measured against the use of known faces, as known, to the same effect, which generally means placing them in unanticipated environments...[It is]a tendency of film...to discover at any moment the endless contingency of the individual human's placement in the world, as though nothing could be more unanticipated than one's existence itself, always in placement.[4]

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[2] Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994, p244.
[3] Stanley Cavell, 'Ugly Duckling, Funny Butterfly: Bette Davis and *Now, Voyager*', *Critical Inquiry*, 16, Winter 1990, p228.
[4] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p181.

Cavell here refers to famous actors in a variety of generic settings, but the observation is inapplicable for unknown faces, for these women waiting for the train or a dance. On the contrary, they are dulled to their environment because it is wholly anticipated and there is nothing contingent about their placement. Cavell's understanding of contingency allows an almost uncanny tension between self and environment, but the faces of these women suggest no such relationship.

B) The Performative Depiction of Boredom

As the women walk towards the train their pace is slow. Huddled together for warmth, there is a hardened formality to their demeanours; they exhibit no characteristics of eagerness. By lacking energy these women convey the repetitious nature of the everyday; the 'every' of everyday takes the weight. Here, as in the dance hall scene, the film's intention is not only to convey the characters' looks of blankness, but also the repetitive gestures lived out day after day that in many cases have hardened into their primary mode of expression: one woman makes a table out of her arms, on which she then rests her chin, as if her head did not have enough life with which to support itself; another man repeatedly turns his cigarette lighter. In this context the burden of the everyday is depicted through gestures that have become tired mannerisms, sapped of life by the loss of hope and appetite.

Similarly, characters betray a tired formality in their limited range of gestures of social performance. Later in the dance hall scene one of the guards leans back on his chair while waiting for Andula and her friends to reappear after their conference in the toilet; he puffs on his big cigar and makes an exaggerated gesture, in front of his companions, of looking at his watch (as if he is about to time a race). His performance with the watch is intended to announce his control over his decision-making (something along the lines of "I want everyone to know that I'll be quite prepared to leave if they don't get back soon") and the overstated puffing on his cigar wishes to proclaim an indifference to the return of the girls, his way of looking cool and composed. In fact, in straining for effect these gestures make him appear not so much in control as controlled by caricature: his personality is cramped by the formulaic.

C) The Narrational Depiction of Boredom

Note this shot breakdown at the beginning of the film, after the credits:

1. (ms) Pan across room, people in beds, guitar lying on table.
2. (cu) Wrist and hand against a darkened background, another hand comes into shot to remove a ring, a third hand enters which helps with the procedure. Women's voices whispering intensely (shot of the hands is from their point of view, as if looking up at their arms raised in front of them).

One of the young women (Andula) announces that her boyfriend (called Tonda) has given her a real diamond ring but then qualifies this statement by announcing that he said it was real.

3. (cu) Two young women, lying in a bed together, looking at their hands, foreheads touching. Andula pulls out a photograph, they look at it.
4. (cu) Photograph of young man, Andula says she doesn't know colour of his eyes. Andula's friend sits up.

They continue talking.

5. (cu) Andula with photo against cheek
6. (mcu) Arm drooping off the side of the bed.
7. (cu) (Similar to 5) Andula places photograph of her boyfriend in her mouth, she plays with it against her bottom lip.
8. (ms) Pan across snowy Forest, one tree trunk has necktie tied around it.

Burly guard/soldier looks on, Andula walks over to tree in front of guard/soldier, he tries to seduce her with deer impersonations.

9. (ecu) The two women in bed, heads together, continue their exchange. Andula tells of her affair with the guard where he has convinced her of the sincerity of a relationship modelled on animal behaviour: the partners need meet only to mate!

The point of view shot of the women's hands conveys the intensity of their focus (2). A viewer greeted with this shot immediately after the credits might fairly think the film was to be a tense and claustrophobic one. However, the obsessive seriousness of their point of view shot is soon undermined by Andula's words when she reveals with a naiveté that she has no independent knowledge of the ring's value. The film quickly therefore establishes an ironic attitude towards any intensity of focus.

However, it is Miloš Forman's achievement that he avoids a directorial perspective of cynical distance with regard to life's intensities, or the characters' credulousness; instead he understands their behaviour to be symptoms of boredom. The remainder of the scene sets an engrossed *mise-en-scène*, reflecting Andula's sincere preoccupations, against her remarkable ability to undercut her own beliefs in the telling of her love life. She notes how she can not remember the colour of Tonda's eyes and has not thought of giving him a present in return for the ring. This indicates

that her obsession with him is not manifested in her actual relationship; she hangs on to the idea of having him rather than being with him. Her optimistic self-deception seems to be a consequence of the fact that he never sees her.

In the light of Andula's words the shot of her hands becomes a more mundane centre of attention. Furthermore, the women's touching foreheads give a clue to the location where their possible ecstasies are *contained* – in both senses of the word (3). The film represents Andula's 'loves' through the lazy whisperings of the two women head to head on a bed rather than narrating it directly. Thus the photograph of Tonda replaces the real person as the focus for the women's constructions (4). The aura of deflation is confirmed with the shot of the drooping arm (6): the viewer is watching a slumbery conversation in the middle of the night where the level of their excitement is summarised by a flaccid arm.

There are no real dramas for Andula, merely constructed ones summoned up with a subdued sincerity – subdued because it lacks conviction. When Andula plays with the photograph against her bottom lip her state of mind is revealed to be one of vague childish musing (7). Such behaviour is a consequence of boredom. Adam Phillips summarises what he feels characterises the state of boredom for a child:

> In ordinary states of boredom the child returns to the possibility of his own desire. That boredom is actually a precarious process in which the child is, as it were, both waiting for something and looking for something, in which hope is being secretly negotiated; and in this sense boredom is akin to free-floating attention.[5]

Phillips understands boredom as periods where we wait for a desire; he continues by saying that

> the paradox of the waiting that goes on in boredom is that the individual does not know what he was waiting for until he finds it, and that often he does not know that he is waiting...With his set of approximations the bored individual is clueless and mildly resentful, involved in a halfhearted, despondent search for something to do that will make a difference.[6]

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[5] Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life*, Faber and Faber, London, 1993, p72.
[6] Phillips, ibid., p82.

Phillips sees periods of boredom as a necessary and useful part of a child's development but '[t]he more common risk for the adult – less attended to, *more set in his ways*, than the child – is that the boredom will turn into waiting' [my italics][7]. Andula is waiting for something that will transform her life, without quite knowing what it might be. By presenting a protagonist occupied in such a way, the film discards its main opportunity for focusing on a set of narrative goals. Furthermore, the goals which are introduced in the film lack conviction. The characters engage with life in a half-hearted fashion, because they are not sure what they might be waiting for. The film holds back from defining clearly why the characters behave as they do, thus the narrative does not narrow itself down; it is not driven by a well-defined set of channelled objectives. The motto of the film's narrative might indeed be the 'despondent search for something to do that will make a difference' and because this state of being differs from the thwarted desire for a particular object, the depiction of such a state will be unlikely to prompt an urgent narrative.

However, the frustration felt by characters and audience, engendered by a reduction in narrative urgency, is not concentrated and therefore not adamant. Boredom has been described as 'the primitive anger of unfulfilled entitlement'[8], but if boredom is about anger, it is precisely not a demonstrative anger. Because of the vagueness of focus which characterises boredom the feeling is better described, as it is by Phillips, as 'mild resentment'.

It is a mistake therefore to understand Andula as stupid, for her cluelessness stems from boredom rather than, for example, innate unintelligence. Susan Eilenberg has said of boredom that it 'devours significance...[it is] a breakdown in our conversation with the world...[it] destroys the language of intimacy'[9]. Characters will make odd comments, they will talk *at* other people, or tell people things, but there are few engaged conversations in the film. The characters' despondent cluelessness limits their capacity for intimate engagement and their lack of fluent conversation inhibits their mutual attunement. Such attunement was a central aspect for Cavell in the

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[7] Phillips, ibid., p82.
[8] Susan Eilenberg, 'Wakey Wakey', *London Review of Books*, 19th October 1995, 14-15, p15 (quoting Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind*, Chicago, 1996).
[9] Eilenberg, ibid., p14.

process of sustaining interest with those people we lived with every day (see **Chapter One**). *The Awful Truth,* for example, was centred around banter, and Cavell saw the witty and speedy dialogue as a 'mode of association, a form of life'[10]. Cavell also talks of a 'capacity, say a thirst, for talk'[11] and it is such a *thirst* that is absent here.

Andula has the 'free-floating consciousness' about which Phillips writes and the narrative is constructed in accord with such a sensibility. When, in the scene under discussion, there is a move to the snowy forest it is difficult to ascertain whether this is a genuine flashback or possibly a visualisation of Andula's imaginative musings (8). The cut to the snowy forest alerts one to a vagueness of character identity and placement *per se*. For example, the viewer never learns of the precise location of the girls in bed (although it seems to be some kind of factory dormitory) (1). The opening pan across the room does not constitute a revealing sequence of establishing images. This narrative disregard for context is a feature of the whole film and not merely a consequence of the early moments. The film is characterised by a looseness of articulation with regard to both environmental and biographical background. Even the sketchiest details of Andula's life prior to the narrative's commencement are rare.

Abstaining from filling in such details allows the film to render the 'default state of consciousness'[12] which characterises boredom; the visual narrative moves along with the unemphatic movement of Andula's changes of heart. As I have said, the precise whereabouts of the snowy forest or its orientation in the scheme of things is unclear. The viewer's comprehension of Andula's behaviour is similarly uncertain. The necktie *might* represent the absent Tonda, and her gesture of tying it around the tree *might* be to construct a pseudo-shrine for a missing partner. The tie returns later in the film, when Mila's mother finds it inside Andula's suitcase, suggesting that it represents an emotional point of focus. Yet, the denial of narrative information with regard to the tie undermines the developing resonance it might carry with it. This refusal to clarify meaning allows the tie to shift emotional context, from Tonda here to Mila there. Similarly, the snowy landscape provides an ideally unspecific location; it is a blank for Andula's easily fluctuating romantic projections. There is also a blankness

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[10] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Harvard University Press, London, England, 1981, p152.
[11] Cavell, ibid., p152.
[12] Eilenberg, ibid., p15.

to her face as she moves from infatuation with Tonda to accepting the formulaic seductions of the guard. If there is something almost wilful in Andula's gullibility, it is not so much a willingness to be deceived, it is more an acceptance of simply going with the flow.

The visual narrative also floats with the flow but the transition from bed to forest and back again, and Andula's move from Tonda to guard, is not marked by a surreal randomness; any striking obscurity in the associations would demarcate transitions too clearly. There is a strangeness in the film's associations but such strangeness stems from Andula's tendency to make abrupt shifts without emotional upheaval. The film presents the guard's seduction as unalluring, indicating how easily Andula is lulled towards the unerotic: the viewer is shown his burly frame against the multitude of straight tree trunks, his heavy overcoat tight up to his neck and chin; and then his matter-of-fact move from his unanimated deer impersonation (no doubt dulled after many years of using it "on all the girls") to requesting a date in the same official monotone voice, stripped of any hint of excitement or anticipation. The lack of convulsion is further conveyed by the fact that the film soon moves back to a shot of the girls in bed (9).

For Forman the state of boredom produces some rather fantastic leaps which are deflated by their banality. The women's boredom prompts the film's central and rather extreme plot situation whereby the soldiers are brought into town to provide some exciting male company for the female workers. However, Forman's execution of even unconventional developments remains unemphatic, like something wild said deadpan.

D) The Humorous Stylistics of Unknownness

The scene of arrival of the soldiers is a fine example of how the film renders, in deadpan manner, the routine disappointment that accompanies even a potential event in these women's lives. The sequence's primary strategy is to separate three broad areas of activity:

(a) the women walking through the open spaces and then watching on indifferently;

(b) the soldiers coming off the train and re-grouping;

(c) and the foreman exuberantly conducting the makeshift local brass band.

The arrangement and content of the shots in the sequence have the effect of 'keeping separate', thus the film adopts a style that, in boredom's fashion, 'destroys the language of intimacy'. Even though all three groups are broadly in the same vicinity, they fail to bond together. Using Cavell's terms, we might say that the stylistics depict a humorous scenario where the characters fail to find ways of acknowledging each other; they remain unknown to each other.

1) The three groupings are rarely shown in the same shot, they are kept spatially distinct. The cutting procedure conveys how mutually uncomprehending the groups actually are. The foreman endeavours to create a sense of occasion while conducting the band. Despite this, the women are then shown looking bored, while the shot of the soldiers getting off the train depicts these veterans as well within themselves, oblivious to any sense of 'event'.

2) The film's cutting procedure between the individual soldiers reduces the sense of 'event' by presenting the soldiers as without glamour. While the band plays on the soundtrack, the camera cuts quickly between different members of the army, from various angles and often in a crowded close-up, the total effect conveying the general disorganisation of these veteran soldiers, their non-military sloppiness. The sense of disappointment, the dampening of the communal event, is achieved by showing the soldiers' arrival as the women would view it, an event with no focal point of male sexual promise, just a blurred array of indistinct veterans.

3) Paradoxically, the use of music within the fiction 'links' together all the shots only in order to suggest the separation of the disparate units (women, foreman, soldiers). The amateurish sound of the brass band (off key, rhythmically unsure) plays over the arrival and regrouping of the soldiers on the platform. This off-screen sound produces a deflating lack of fit between the foreman's attempt at producing pomp and ceremony and the actual small town unprofessionalism of the band which accompanies the army's lack of glamour and the women's blank faces.

4) More generally the diffusion of drama is created by the gap between the possible classical formality of the soldiers and their actual informality, and the possible excited informality of the women and their actual depressed formality. And in between both

groups is the misplaced exuberance of the foreman, the inappropriateness of his behaviour undercutting any sense of occasion he might provide.

Section Two – Delays Around Events

A) Strategies of Separation

Summary of the dance hall scene: After some disparate shots of people in the dance hall, the scene concentrates on a table of three soldiers endeavouring to link up with three women, one of whom is Andula, on another table. The soldiers order a bottle of wine for the women which, to the soldiers' eventual embarrassment, the waiter takes to an adjacent table of women. The soldiers insist that the wine is removed and given to the intended women. Meanwhile, Andula and her friends seem more interested in the pianist playing at the dance than in the attentions of the soldiers. Eventually two of the soldiers get up to dance with Andula and her friends while the third stays behind. He tries to remove his wedding ring but in doing so he drops it and it rolls under the same women's table who wrongly received the wine. He ends up on all fours under their table fumbling to get at his ring amongst their feet. The soldiers and the women dance together but without much pleasure because of distractions and incompatibility. There is an ellipse at this point to a later time when most of the crowd have disappeared. The three soldiers are endeavouring to get Andula and her friends drunk so that they can have sex with them. The women go off to the toilets to make a decision about what they should do. They are gone a long time, and on their return one of the soldiers, tired of all the waiting, decides to go to bed. All the soldiers' seduction techniques have come to nothing. Andula spots Mila, the pianist on the steps in the hallway outside the main dance room and goes upstairs to his room. (Indicating the uselessness of the best laid plans, the film suggests that one of the soldiers actually ends up sleeping with one of the women from the adjacent table who has been disconsolately left skulking about the empty hall.)

Forman's most adept use of stylistic strategies of separation is in the film's centrepiece scene set in the dance hall. The event has been arranged to bring the visiting soldiers and factory women harmoniously together, but the opposite is achieved. The scene uses a sequence of three different stylistic modes, each mode characterised by a changed relationship between shots, and each mode adding to the process of deflating any possible excitement; in this way an atmosphere of disappointment is sustained, but by varied means. The three units are characterised by three broad types of shot which might be described as: a) 'neutral'; b) experiential; and c) optical (and whose definitions will become clear in the proceeding analysis).

a) 'Neutral' shots

After the opening shots of disparate characters in the dance hall, the scene moves into a stage of greater focus where it sets up the link between the three soldiers on one side of the dance floor and Andula and her two friends on the other side. However, the camera positions from which both groups are filmed show them as discrete units; the camera watches from the dance floor, often through the dancers, and this remains the location from which the camera shoots right or left to view the two tables. For example, as the dancers move out of shot the three women are revealed: they are caught in an 'off the cuff', informal, slightly clumsy manner as the dancers move away (whereupon their bemused behaviour is then dwelt on). The shot sequence, with regard to Andula and her friends, is as follows:

1. *Distance* – After the shot of the guards, Andula and her friends (in a three shot) are revealed as the dancers move away.
   Direction – The edge of the dance floor, just to the front, and to the right, of their table.
2. *Distance* – When we next return to the women (after a shot of the soldiers), the film now shows Andula and her friend to her right (two shot), the camera having been re-positioned closer.
   Direction – From the left of the position of shot 1.
3. *Distance* – On the next return, all three women are filmed again (three shot).
   Direction – The camera has been re-positioned once more, much further to the right, filming all three women from a sharper diagonal of 45 degrees. (The same sort of variations, in direction and distance, are used to film the soldiers.)

Although the two groups are eyeing each other up (especially the men to the women) the film does not use optical point of view shots to link them tightly together. The positions from the edge of the dance floor contrast to the possibility of shooting each table head on: the camera never shoots from a direction or distance which might imply that the shot is the perspective of the table from the other side. The characters do not view, they are viewed; unable to connect with each other, they are disparate entities, worlds unto themselves.

It is also significant that the precise location on the edge of the dance floor from which the direction of the shot is taken varies, as does the distance of the shot (it will vary from a frame filled three shot to a single head close-up). These fluctuating shot placements abstract the characters' situations from any interaction, and they show

no particular progression: the film thereby seems to dwell on the characters for longer than 'necessary' (the actual shots are not held for an especially long period). This sense of lingering on the characters precisely conveys their own sense of waiting around, bemused about the nature of the next step in their lives. They are suspended, as it were, between situations of direct interaction with each other, ones which would actively motivate their behaviour.

A viewer is more conscious of the independent presence of the camera than is the case during other sequences in the film, partly because the camera's placement here is less dictated by narrative necessities driven by characters; the camera is not tied to a coherent or developing situation within the fiction. Not needing to determine the next moment of an unfolding narrative, the camera has a greater range of options at that moment. Equally, by not settling into a characters' consistent point of view, the film is constructed so that the characters do not seem to be in control of the narrative movement, to be influencing it from the centre so to speak.

b) Experiential shots

The film's use of 'neutral' shots soon develops into shots which more directly reflect specific experiences of the characters. These shots are usually of characters' faces on occasions when the viewer has a heightened sense of a character's experience at that moment. Such shots will normally have a more intimate link to previous shots as they often show a character reacting. Although the linkage of shots is thereby more engaged, the stylistic paradox is that they depict the characters going further within themselves. These shots thereby achieve a further dampening of the *social* event.

After sending the drinks to the wrong table of women, the men become particularly self conscious, especially as they feel these women looking on. There are several close-up shots of each of the three soldiers, from the angle of the women's table, but not the distance; they alternate between cowering and nodding politely to the women, their flustered state caused by the sudden uninvited attention (hence shooting from the perspective of the women). This closeness of the shot reflects their feelings of withdrawal and their sense of themselves; they are still unable to engage with the table at which Andula and her friends sit.

Similarly, as the waiter removes the glasses and bottle from the wrong women's table, the camera shows the face of one of the women close-up (with just enough space left in the shot to detect the waiter's actions), thus conveying the experience of 'something being stolen from right under your nose'. Like the previous shots of the cowering soldiers, this shot conveys her feelings of being close to herself in a moment of embarrassment.

c) Optical shots

Because there is no effort to lock the main two tables together through reciprocated point of view, it becomes crucial to notice when optical point of view shots are used. Optical point of view arrangements consist of the tightest juxtaposition of shots. The 'neutral' and experiential types of shot are two ways in which the film sustains forms of disengagement but the optical viewpoints, more unexpectedly, allow another stylistic strategy for conveying modes of disconnection. The shots which indicate a character's optical perspective are infused with deflation. In this technique we see Forman's most paradoxical method of reducing any sense of event: the most engaged shot structures actually convey forms of emotional separation.

The technique is well illustrated in the sequence of shots where the soldiers order a bottle to be taken to Andula's table. In long shot, across the crowded room, the waiter travels with the drink and this is linked with shots of the soldier's bobbing up from their seats to follow his journey. The significant fact is that the waiter's journey is shown from the soldiers' optical point of view; indeed the film suggests that the waiter will act as the point of contact between the two tables. However, when the waiter takes the drink to the adjacent table by mistake no such connection is achieved. A medium long shot from the soldier's optical perspective (conveying the actual distance between the two tables) shows the three *wrong* women staring at them. It is the sort of engaged perspective (in distance and direction) that the soldiers were never granted of their desired table but, of course, it is unwanted and therefore tainted with disappointment.

The stylistic pattern is capped when the viewer experiences two of the soldiers marching off to meet the women from the perspective of the soldier left behind at the table. His endeavours to peer across the crowded dance floor indicate his eagerness to

sight what he is missing out on. There is (1) a medium long shot of him standing looking over the dancers on the dance floor, followed by (2) another medium long shot, which reflects his optical viewpoint, of the two other soldiers walking in the background obscured by the dancers and then (3) a return to a shot similar to (1). Therefore, as the pair of soldiers ask two of the women on Andula's table to dance we watch the moment of engagement from the position of someone left behind, the soldier frustrated in his isolation; it is a moment of engagement transcribed from a perspective of physical and emotional separation.

When the same soldier removes his wedding ring and then rubs at his fingers to dispose of the indentation on his skin, his actions are shot from the direction of the women (accompanied by the other two soldiers) coming towards him across the dance floor (the film also shows him looking out towards them)[13]. By shooting the separated soldier's movements from their perspective, the film makes his hunched forward shoulders, his invisible hands under the table, and his slightly vibrating body (accompanied by the bouncy rumba music) look masturbatory. Thus the attempt to remove the stigma of the ring takes its place within a routine of humiliation.

B) The Points of Audience Connection in a Narrative of Delays

Superficially, there are narrative questions at the heart of the scene such as 'Will the soldiers get it together with the women?' However, a question such as this will not provide a captivating reason for continuing to pay attention to the scene. Any satisfactory engagement between the women and the soldiers is endlessly delayed in the scene. We are alerted to the impossibility of bonding from an early stage (because of the social ineptitude of the soldiers and the blankness of the women), and the scene's actual purpose lies in depicting the perennial lack of excitement for the characters. Therefore, viewers need to redirect their interest from the possible suspense provided by plot questions and instead re-orientate themselves to the scene's alternative structuring patterns. The insight in the film will be unlocked by the viewer being attuned to its scrutiny of prevarications.

[13] Although it should be noted that this is not an exact optical point of view shot because the camera is not moving closer in accord with the women's approach.

An understanding of the unusual achievements of the film relies on the audience rejecting identification with a sequence of suspenseful delay. The dance hall scene is built around the significance lying in the inconsequentiality which fills these characters' days and so it avoids strategies of narrative anxiety and resolution. If we take the soldiers' moves on the women to be merely the scene's superficial narrative 'drive', we see that the scene in fact exerts a consistently centrifugal drift, nudging the characters away from fulfilled connections. This becomes the more oblique pattern towards which the viewer needs to re-orientate. The sequence of the ring 'chase' exemplifies this narrative strategy. The dance hall scene presents the seemingly marginal as a new focal point and any excitement from the fulfilment or *anticipation* of romantic encounters remains forestalled.

The film's use of optical viewpoint exemplifies that its narrative concerns lie at the margins. At one point, Andula is shot for the first time in extreme profile, looking out of the corner of her eye. This is then followed by a medium shot of the pianist Mila and it is, in angle and distance, a shot from Andula's optical point of view. The film returns to Andula, this time from the front of the table, but with her head slightly tilted and her eyes reaching towards Mila. (FIG.1 – She rests her chin on one arm with her fingers inserted into her mouth, a gesture which typically conveys both a pensive consideration of the possibilities – the reaching eyes – and a nonchalant air of ease – the passive slump of the head nestled into the hand and relaxing on the arm. This nonchalance goes beyond the scheming front of reticence which frequently accompanies such early sexual communication. It indicates instead Andula's usual state of mind, a state pitched between the committed and non-committed.) The next shot shows Mila turning around, catching sight of Andula and smiling. This is the scene's first shot/reverse shot engagement of two characters, but the irony is that the engagement takes place over Andula's left shoulder, on the margins of what is supposed to be the narrative's centre of activity between the two tables. The humour in this de-centralised situation is extended in the next shot which returns to a close-up of the tall soldier enforcing the move on the girls ("How about it boys?"), oblivious that the women's attentions lie with the pianist on the periphery of the 'action'.

The scene poignantly establishes a view of life as a series of unbeguiling distractions. Later in the scene, after all the delays, when one of the soldiers finally

gets to dance with Andula's friend he just stares out blankly over her shoulder (FIG.2). The film then cuts to the woman, around whose feet the soldier earlier fumbled with the ring, moving tearfully towards the comforting foreman. The woman seems to be the object of the soldier's attention at this point, but we see how his staring face registers nothing more definite than a blank numbness verging on muted embarrassment and yet again indicates the drift away from the centre to the periphery (he is supposed to be enjoying his dance). Once more he is unable to develop his relationship with Andula's friend, this time because he is drawn away towards this other woman. The inevitability of such distractions – the inevitability of being distracted – is stressed by making the distractions of no particular allure.

The scene's construction animates the fact that life's possible epiphanies may be denied by perpetual postponement. An understanding of the lack of any obvious narrative propulsion might be found in an analysis of the unique possibilities of comedy. As Andrew Horton states:

> The comic has always depended on a special relationship between creator and viewer...a bond described as "a state of *conspiratorial irony.*"[14]

This conspiracy allows a different mode of audience engagement to that which is involved in the process of questions, anxiety and resolution situated with regard to events or crisis. As Horton goes on to say,

> tragedy (and other non-comic forms) seeks to isolate or at least reduce the number of 'discourses' in order to imply a sense of 'fate' and inevitability as opposed to an awareness of... 'unfinalizedness' (Mikhail Bakhtin's term).[15]

Leaving aside the simplification of the characteristics of the non-comic forms, there is an important observation here around the 'unfinalized' narrative strategies of comedy. In *Loves of a Blonde* this 'unfinalized' system is achieved by the centrifugal patterns which here illuminate aspects of endless delay (comedy need not be put to this aim).

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[14] Andrew Horton, 'Introduction' in Andrew Horton ed., *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, Univ. of California Press, Oxford, 1991, 1-21, p9.
[15] Horton, ibid., p9.

Charles Eidsvik in an essay on 'The Comedy of Futility in Eastern Europe'[16] (in relation to Krystof Kieslowski's comic strategies in the *Decalogue* (*The Ten Commandments* – Pol 1988) talks of

> the film-maker's rejection of a unitary or linear conceptual structure of serious modes of discourse, putting in their place multiple and incongruous realities, perspectives, or modes of interpretation (Mulkay). In serious films a unitary mode translates to a situation in which one aspect of character dominates and one plot problem 'drives' the main story (although, of course, secondary, sometimes comic, subplots can abound).[17]

C) The Workings of Gags

It is important to see the processes by which *Loves of a Blonde*'s particular narrative strategies animate insights about the everyday. Horton draws attention to Arthur Koestler's concept of 'biosociation'[18]. Koestler observes that comedy (verbal and physical) involves the joining of two or more independent and self contained 'logical chains' which creates biosociation: a 'flash' (release) of emotional tension upon their intersection in the viewer's mind. Horton goes on to write that biosociation helps differentiate comic from non-comic forms. No flash occurs in tragic and melodramatic structures. Instead, the narrative is constructed to involve the audience's concern (anticipation/emotion) throughout. Comedy, however, is constructed to suggest several logical chains.

Jerry Palmer has used a similar analysis. Horton links Palmer's analysis to Koestler's: a joke/gag arises when a pair of syllogisms lead to a contradictory conclusion[19]. The fact that a joke or gag is concerned with two syllogisms has to do with the intersection of the plausible and the implausible. Horton uses a Woody Allen gag to elucidate the point: "I believe that there is an intelligent spirit that controls the

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[16] Charles Eidsvik, 'Mock Realism: The Comedy of Futility in Eastern Europe' in Horton ed., ibid., 91-105. This piece discusses Forman's comedy in relation to *The Fireman's Ball* but in little textual detail.

[17] Eidsvik, in Horton ed., ibid., p94 (reference to Michael Mulkay, *On Humour: Its Nature and Place In Modern Society*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988, p214).

[18] Horton, op. cit., p5 (from Arthur Koestler, *Insight and Outlook*, Univ. Of Nabraska Press, Lincoln, 1949, p30).

[19] Horton ibid., p6 (from Jerry Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy*, British Film Institute, London, 1988, p42).

universe, except in certain parts of New Jersey." So in this example the syllogisms would be:

1. "Do you believe in God?" is a common theological question (major premise)
2. Allen's concluding phrase "except certain parts of New Jersey" (minor premise) appears to run contrary to any concept of an omnipotent being.
3. CONCLUSION: the answer is implausible because of its apparent contradiction.

And yet, Horton continues, we are simultaneously aware of a second set of possibilities:

1. New Jersey is viewed as something of an industrial and cultural wasteland, particularly by staunch New Yorkers.
2. An intelligent spirit, particularly one housed in a New Yorker's body, might indeed choose not to associate with New Jersey.
3. Therefore the answer has an element of plausibility.[20]

So we can see how the existence of an implausible structure in fact throws light on something that might be true about New Jersey. As Horton says:

> Therefore, as both Koestler and Palmer suggest, an understanding of the 'double vision' of jokes and gags is inseparable from an appreciation of the structure...of comedy in general... It is this flash of awareness in Koestler's terms, or the appreciation of the simultaneously plausible and implausible syllogisms in Palmer's view, that helps explain how by trying to 'make sense' we are suddenly thrown into a third level of insight.[21]

We might apply this analysis to the sequence where the soldier goes after his wayward ring. In this situation the implausible aspect might be that the soldier spends so long having to chase after his ring that it prevents him from dancing with one of the young women. The implausibility arises not from his desire to reclaim his wedding ring but rather its disappearance at a peculiarly inopportune moment ("Oh my god, how could it possibly happen now?"). However the plausible strand is created by a realisation that this narrative detour throws up a truthful observation: that such delays around events, such postponements, may constitute the primary activity of many lives.

[20] This example in Horton, ibid., p7 (I have used most of his vocabulary).
[21] Horton, ibid., p7.

Yet, it needs the implausible narrative strand, playing with our expectations, to illuminate the observation.

In this case the realisation does not so much hit us as a 'flash' (in Koestler's terms); it is not at all like the sudden 'punch' which the revelation of Allen's gag induces (and might make us laugh out loud). In *Loves of a Blonde* there exists a *constant* 'appreciation of the plausible and implausible' narrative possibilities which creates something less instantly forceful than the 'flash' of a punchline accompanying much verbal and physical humour. Because the soldier's distraction fits into a pattern maintained across the scene, the viewer becomes accustomed to understanding the implausible strand as commonplace. This is one of the reasons why the prolonged mission after the ring does not produce the sudden laughs of hellraising slapstick.

Moreover, the undefined consequences of the loss of the wedding ring (e.g. we have no knowledge of the wife and their circumstances as a couple), detaching its retrieval from any clarified potential outcomes, strips the soldier's pursuit of any urgency or conviction for the viewer (this is not, however, the only reason for the lack of conviction – see below for the manner in which he rescues the ring). With the retrieval emptied of any distinct emotional anxiety, the soldier's guilt, and consequently his chase, seem driven by force of habit. Thus by presenting the pursuit of the ring in this manner, the film represents those aspects of life which are prompted by routine; indeed, *Loves of a Blonde* concerns itself with the comings and goings which people execute regardless of their limited prospects for fulfilling conclusions. Moreover, the film's depiction presents even life's more implausible or awkward occasions as propelled by mechanical motives.

D) The Time and Space for Detours

The detours, such as the soldier's chase for his ring, claim dominance by being awarded so much unexpected time. In the dance hall scene the allocation of time is not given to the 'important' social moments which might characterise a more propelled narrative: perhaps the precise excitements of seduction or making love. The expected areas of narrative interest, what we might *at first* consider the important concerns of life and drama, do not structure the film.

The whole dance hall scene is particularly extended: there is a repudiation of the concentration and condensation that might characterise such a sequence. All the detours and denials are presented extensively, thereby giving weight precisely to those moments which might normally be edited away (in fact, the first ellipse of consequence is not until 12 minutes into the scene). Thus a scene that occupies a large part of the total film time in fact offers very little in plot development. In this sense the long scene is paradoxically like a frozen moment; it circles around the point, rather than moving from point to point[22].

This circling discloses the activities between the 'important' times: the ordinary presented here is understood as the periods of delay, all the protractions around events. Much comedy associates itself with delays: we need only think of Laurel and Hardys' endless tussles with the music box (see **Chapter One**). Forman's achievement is to avoid making the delays energetic or eventful in any way, and to present the content of these delays without the assertion of revelation, as if the film were discovering these periods for the first time. Similarly, characters are not presented as if they have just met their situations anew; or, alternatively, have cultivated a wise or knowing viewpoint on their situation. Therefore, characters are not driven to alert conversation where they discuss the nature of these delays, or shown devising, for example, urgent strategies with which to circumvent their obstacles. Equally, they do not display an articulate or focused consciousness with regard to their predicament; they are depicted as numbed participants existing in the habitual run of things.

The rejection of narrative linearity is replaced by the circular patterns which characterise the scene; and the narrative is structured around circularity rather than plot advancement. This is reflected in the use of scene space: the scene is centred around the dance floor, with the activities moving all around it. This pattern is duplicated in individual interactions as illustrated in the moment where the soldier finally reaches Andula's friend who has been sitting alone at the table. She is seated at the bottom left hand side of the screen in medium shot and the soldier's bulky frame

[22] The fact that so much time is spent in the space of the dance hall does not rule out a strategy based on plot advancement. One might consider the long scene which opens *The Godfather* (Francis Coppola US 1972) set in and around the Corleone house during a wedding (there is slightly more flexibility of space here than in the dance hall scene). This scene becomes the site of multiple plot machinations and initiations of plot questions (and, of course, the scene has no comic strategies). Hence, the matter in hand is not simply one of the length of time (as a proportion of the film) spent in one space but also one of how the extended time is allocated.

fills the foreground as he enters from the right with his back towards us. Forman's upholding of a medium two shot allows him to convey the manner in which the soldier evasively moves around his *point* (the woman) even while courting interaction.

a) The camera distance allows the viewer to experience the extended circling of his approach despite being quite near her (he makes a prevaricating approach towards her side and then shifts behind her instead of approaching her head on).

b) It allows us to see their behaviour towards each other *simultaneously*, thereby showing their problems in fully engaging despite their physical proximity. The shot perfectly conveys the existence of interaction without engaged association. More precisely, she is shown in a characteristic state for the women in the film – a state of waiting stripped of anticipation.

c) This one medium shot means there is no shot/reverse shot of looks, significantly because eyes rarely make contact. As she looks up to him, the soldier looks away – even though he stands immediately behind her – as if his focus of attention lay elsewhere. Although his advance is obvious to both of them (although he must maintain the self-deception that it might not be) his nervousness over eye contact is characteristic of his circumlocutory approach; and indicative of the film's attentions to the mechanical delays which avert moments of occasion (see below Section Three (A) for why these aversions are not tense or edgy).

E) Sustaining a Non-Carnivalesque Humour

Horton draws attention to the carnivalesque nature of much comedy which acts as a social release. There is something liberating about the comedy of the Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy, The Three Stooges, Chaplin, Keaton and W.C. Fields. The Marx Brother's especially 'work, joke, and 'destroy' in a carnivalesque freedom and frenzy... For them, every day is a holiday, uncontrolled by society's schedules and norms'[23]. Later he says that

> much of the comic involves fantasy, festivity, wishes, attempts at wish fulfilment, a turning upside down of the *norms of everyday society*, and thus a joyous, free-wheeling sense of pleasure and freedom, then the ability to 'play' with time and space offers the

[23] Horton, ibid., p13.

> comic film-maker an almost limitless spectrum of possibilities [my italics].[24]

Horton's use of 'festivity' reminds us of Cavell's use of the term in his discussion of the comedies of remarriage. In *The Awful Truth* (see **Chapter One** for details) Jerry and Lucy had to learn to revivify their daily routines by turning their time together into a series of festivities. In this way they turn the repetitious into a series of mini-events; they must learn to fight off the boredom of living with the same person every day of their lives 'in order to suggest that the rhythmic recurrences of diurnal ordinary life provide fun and interest enough to inspire life and a commitment to its continuation'[25]. The witty and inventive stylistics of comedy might be understood as a redemptive search for the everyday, allowing the films and their characters to breath life into the apparently boring, and allowing the viewer to take pleasure in the frustrating delays and distractions. These films encourage their viewers to enjoy lives not based around 'getting to the point'. Outside film worlds, however, we often get frustrated with people who mess around, or jest, when we are impatiently insistent on concluding a situation.

The 'play' with time and space in *Loves of a Blonde* does not result in redemption. The comedy here lies in the boredom of delays, not in a rescue from the boredom; the 'norms of everyday society' stay in place. In this case the audience finds a mordant humour in the understanding that life can be so without festivities that even its absurdities may be humdrum. The comedy here is reticent; it is life accepting rather than life affirming, its tone is not unlike that of the inevitable shrug of the shoulders ("oh well, what can you do?"). Thus this 'humour of the everyday' differs from the joyous and energetic *possibilities* opened up by the American clowns; as Eidsvik says a 'key quality in this humour is scepticism raised almost to the cosmic level'[26].

This comment chimes with what Cavell considered the comedies of remarriage to be: a rebuff to the threat of scepticism. The rebuff consisted of the way the couples regained touch with the mundane repetitions of the domestic, rather than escaping everyday life by flying into fantasy, into 'exhilarating' new occasions (into thoughts of

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[24] Horton, ibid., p19.
[25] Mulhall, op.cit., p235.
[26] Eidsvik, in Horton ed., op cit., p92.

extra-marital affairs, for example). In *Loves of a Blonde* the characters and situations are even robbed of the melodramatic opportunities to entertain these fantasies. The characters' all-pervasive scepticism encourages flights of fantasy (e.g. Andula's loves), but they are simultaneously grounded in despondency.

Thus the soldier's pursuit of the ring lacks the *fantastic* energy of so much slapstick. There is something zombie-like about his quest and absolutely nothing manic, the soldier displaying an automatic single-mindedness but with a distinct lack of urgency. It is another indication of the type of sensibility being depicted by the film, a sensibility shaped by the inevitability of disappointment and a rather deterministic, accepting submission to it.

As the soldier bends down on all fours to retrieve the ring from under the table, there are three low angle shots of the three women looking down at him, each shot from the soldier's optical point of view. The low angle does convey the sense of being looked down upon, but the precise effect of the humour comes from their inanimate looks and behaviour: they do not leap up in disgust as the soldier moves towards their legs, nor do they show an indignant exasperation. On the contrary, they just sit with their heads leaning against their hands, peering on with disinterested blankness. This in itself reveals their own feelings of superiority, but such superiority manifests itself in a calm disregard towards his ineptitude rather than a haughty superciliousness. The film cuts between each individual face, accumulating the force of their blankness; consequently his humiliation is achieved through individually re-iterating what is in fact blanket indifference.

With his masculine prowess challenged by indifference rather than anything more definite, the soldier too seems aloof with regard to his own humiliation. After he rises from the table, drink having spilled all over his head, he merely nods politely (apologetically?) at their emerging sniggers – this being the lowly height of their contempt. His muted response mismatches his clumsy actions, his behaviour more fitting for, say, the retrieval of a dropped handkerchief.

Section Three – The Awkwardness of Interaction

A) Shuffling in a Two-Shot

Forman's stylistics present the uninspiring awkwardness of situations of possible intimacy. He uses two-shots which paradoxically deflate any sense of engaged bonding. At the end of the dance hall scene three close-up two-shots, one for each pairing, convey couples interacting with a subdued friction. The awkwardness these shots depict is shuffling and nudging; the movement of bodies within them, despite the discomfort of the participants, is not presented as tangled and strained (see contrast below to *A Woman Under the Influence*).

The camera films the first soldier sitting next to Andula's friend, from shoulders upwards, his arm now around her; but if the close-up emphasises their proximity, it equally depicts their nervousness as they catch each other's eye only fleetingly and then look quickly away towards the other dancers. The soldier says "Well shall we" which amounts to the most dispassionate invitation to a dance that is possible (his words coming as if they have been discussing the matter for an hour), the misplaced nonchalance of which reflect a common fear of indicating commitment in sexual matters but also here an indifference to commitment *per se*. The choice of holding to the two-shot close-up as he just rises and disappears from the shot, allows the film to depict his unsophisticated treatment of her, without appearing to be overdemonstrative about his carelessness. The choice of the close shot over a longer distance one, where he would have remained in the frame for longer, just allows for the sense of a more off-hand disappearance. Thus, his unsophisticated behaviour (he does not wait and accompany her to the dance floor) is conveyed, not by lots of incident and conversation but by the choice of a close-up which shows the nature of his separation from her.

Andula and her soldier are also shown dancing in a close-up two-shot: the soldier tries to dance romantically by staring straight into her eyes and he presses for a cheek to cheek position. Andula's rejection of his move on her is shown, not by a blatant rebuff, but by the couple nudging their upper bodies and heads in time to the traditional jazz music, thus discreetly indicating his failure to assert a cheek to cheek smooch against the grain of the music. However, the holding of the two shot means that their change in dancing style is not accommodated by the camera distance. By

filming as if they were indeed engaged with each other cheek to cheek, Forman makes the viewer feel the niggling inappropriateness of the framing. (The two-shot also keeps the focus directly on the *change* the soldier has to make.)

When the soldier in the first example above finally starts to dance, a similar close-up is used once again, this time to trap the woman's head against the soldier's chest. Yet the possible physical tensions in her entrapment are checked by restricting her manoeuvring to a feeble choice between either staring with bewilderment at his chest or tipping her head back so as to make reluctant eye contact. His immobilisation is also rendered as pitiful by limiting him to the most pathetic of positions: in another two-shot close-up consisting of his head peering over hers. Unable to look at her, he seems to have frozen into a position which allows him only to stare blankly outwards.

The indication that he was never going to find any physical *movement* with Andula's friend, because he is without the capacity to make her the *centre* of his attention, is conveyed by the one shot of this sequence that is not a close up. As they start to dance, a medium long shot shows them located uneasily on the edge of the dance floor. Their marginalisation from the event is depicted through their irritating lack of fit, not shown through positioning them in extreme isolation: as the dancers fill the majority of space in the shot, the couple merely shuffle incommodiously against the left side of the frame.

B) The Lack of Confident Display

Note the shot breakdown of the scene with Mila and Andula in the bedroom:
Mila reads Andula's palm and she tells how she once tried to commit suicide. This gives him the opportunity to say that he would like to show her his scars. In order to get in a position to embrace her he tries to teach her self-defence foreplay. His nose is hit in the process and he pretends to be more hurt than he is. The film cuts away to show Andula's friends taunting the one remaining soldier (dissolve).

1. (ms) Andula sits straight up alone on the edge of the bed without her clothes and with her back to the camera.
2. (ecu) Mila takes of his shirt, then stares out (towards Andula).
3. (ecu) Back of Andula's head (mostly hair). Mila's hand comes into shot, she winces.

Mila tries to move towards her but his attempts at interacting are awkward. Andula wishes for the blind to be closed so the room will be completely dark. Mila attempts to close it but it falls off the window.

4. (cu) Andula lying still on bed, back towards camera, head slightly turned towards Mila's activities, her eyes peer over her shoulder.

5. (cu) Mila holding the unrolled blind out in front of him (from Andula's optical point of view lying on the bed), he rolls up the blind which reveals more of his legs.
6. (cu) (As 4) Andula turns her head away.

Mila returns to bed after fixing the blind, switches on the light, Andula has moved.

7. (ecu) Andula's head bowed on her hands, she says "I don't trust you". Mila moves into shot and pulls her towards him (slight ellipse).
8. (cu) (Upper bodies) Having intercourse. He is on top of her and she is looking towards the ceiling, she says "I do trust you. Like I never trusted anyone before" (ellipse).

After sex they chat in a quite relaxed manner.

Cavell understood an aspect of performance in film to be a knowing theatricalisation of the self: Bette Davis and Greta Garbo, for example, enacting 'piece[s] of private theatre'[27]. *Loves of a Blonde* shows it characters to be constructing or contriving situations (e.g. the soldiers trying to win over the women in the dance hall scene; Mila's seductions of Andula; all Andula's manufactured devotions). Although their performances certainly ensure their separateness from each other, theirs is not a confident or 'knowing' enactment of theatre. Throughout the film most of the characters' behaviour consists of a plodding construction, they seem cursed not to behave confidently. This is a consequence of boredom where one is enveloped in endless artificial constructions so as to manufacture interest for oneself. In many cases calculation has become so explicit it has taken precedence over the purpose of calculating. At the end of the dance hall scene when the women go to the toilets the close-ups of their faces backed up against the toilet walls convey their wearisome options: either to reject the men completely, or go through with another perfunctory encounter. The women are not shown moving freely around the toilets, comfortable with the space where they make their decisions (the film does not even provide a wider establishing shot). On the contrary, the toilets give a meagre breathing space. The cramped toilet provides an ideal locale within which to depict the character's limited room to manoeuvre.

The characters' movements show how they fail to 'affirm their existence' confidently. When the women finally shuffle back to the soldiers, they are huddled together arm in arm, their movements are like that of old grandparents. Their reluctant approach towards the soldiers is therefore shown to be going through the motions,

[27] Mulhall, op.cit., p244.

perfunctory motion slightly preferable to no motion at all. When Andula later accompanies Mila upstairs the film carefully shows the deliberateness of each movement in the bedroom. The lack of fluency in their lovemaking is created by the film not allowing them any continuous or co-ordinated interaction, each of their bodily movements therefore seems abstracted, and dwelt upon.

These laboured motions take place on a stage which is not conducive for confident performance. The room where Andula and Mila have sex is characterised by pared down decor; it is minimally furnished with one functional wardrobe. Throughout, by constructing a drab environment for the characters, the film presents interiors of regulated minimalism, but they do not give the impression of abject poverty; thus it favours locales which are monotonous in their lack of idiosyncrasy. The image always seems to be slightly blurred, its lines not quite distinct[28]. Similarly, the film does not set up contrasts of black and white which would further sharpen edges within the frame and which might allow for impressive contrasts. The image is dominated by whites but not those of the blinding variety; the colours here are on the white side of grey. *Diary of a Country Priest* was always on the black side of grey, the image perennially on the verge of fading into darkness whereas the environments in *Loves of a Blonde* need to remain monotonously *fixed,* inescapably present but not nurturing. Forman's skill here in avoiding both extremes of striking decor (those provided by rich and poor milieus – see **Chapter Two**) goes beyond providing a satire on the numbness fostered by regimented socialist planning (which was supposedly part of the intention) and becomes more generally telling about how many familiar locations fail to impress on those who inhabit them.

Despite the limiting of *contrasts* in the image, the film encourages compositions of uncomfortable angularity. This is especially clear in the sex scene where the lack of curves prevents any feeling of warm sensuousness. However, the angularity produces a sense of people and objects not easing and moulding together, rather than abject harshness (3). Although there is a sense of the brittle, the desexualising techniques here tend towards the unaccommodating and do not stress the brutal (which is often the case in films which include uncomfortable sexual encounters).

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[28] It should be noted, however, that the quality of the image is a difficult aspect of the film for a viewer to verify because of the variability of prints.

Sex is often filmed as a successful performance by one or other of the partners, and is often intended to be an exciting display for the viewer. In real life we refer to "sexual performance", a term which catches some of the act's overtly conscious moves to please the partner. In contrast, Andula has no part in any performance, giving or receiving pleasure; she acts as a bemused spectator to her own sex scene. This feeling of being an excluded participant is most clearly indicated in the shot of her undressed, back to the camera, strangely suspended in inaction (1). Mila is not in the shot, nowhere in her vicinity, and one wonders why she would find herself in such a separated position. Sitting with her back to the room, she has, as we colloquially say "turned her back on events". She occasionally rotates her head to peer out over her shoulder, continuing a pattern in the film of characters' staring over a shoulder to the periphery (Andula spying Mila in the dance hall, the soldier catching the crying woman during his dance).

In this scene Andula is unable to centre herself with regard to the activities, and so the film finds its most profound viewpoint on life's happenings existing away from an involving focus. The film suggests that Andula stares at her own activities from the margins, which does not however give her an enlarged perspective with which to cope with exclusion. Instead, she simply feels uninvolved in her own happenings.

However, Andula is not only presented as an inactive participant in the narrative of her own life, she is also shown to be a disengaged spectator to it. This is because Forman characterises the world of *Loves of a Blonde* as one where the participants fail to acknowledge each other in satisfying ways. This concern of the film is most manifest in the final scenes consisting of Andula's visit to Mila's parents in Prague. Here, Mila's mother unremittingly lectures Andula about her terrible behaviour: her comments are the product of a bored housewife whose lack of self-scrutiny is itself a product of a sensitivity so numbed that her surrounding world has become completely unknown to her. Andula watches on as each member of the family drones on about her behaviour as if she were not present in the room. The film does not only draw out situations, it makes Andula sit through them; she is a bemused spectator to her own life's delays.

By the end of the film, when mother, father and Mila sleep in the same bed, a viewer is not surprised that their tossing and turnings, their pulling the blankets, their

whinges about Andula go on and on. Yet, the sense of a situation going in circles is given emotional resonance by the fact that Andula is sitting outside listening in. Earlier when the mother gave her harangue, Andula just fell asleep but now, finally, she starts to cry. Tears often lead to a recognition of a crisis because they bring matters to a head; tears prompt characters, in some manner, to actively confront or attempt to address a situation. Crucially, however, not only does the film not hold on Andula's tears for long, but it soon returns to the head to head conversation with her companion in the dormitory where she contentedly spins her optimistic self-deceptions.

The film's glimpse at tears conveys a sadness which for a moment declares itself, but Forman is more interested in a melancholy which does not exhibit a clear outward show. Hence, the film gives no narrative detail or attention to Andula's suicide attempt, using it merely as a vehicle for Mila's seductions. Throughout the film Andula is rarely alone, but as we have seen intimacy is not fulfilled. In this way, the film's depiction of loneliness does not become a forceful scrutiny of alienation or isolation. Forman presents characters who do not feel their states of remoteness as anything so pressing: lacking clearly articulated feelings of detachment in the company of others, their loneliness without solitude is often only vaguely apprehended.

Mila's mother is able to construct dramas verbally, but she has little ability to take part in real ones; she exemplifies the sort of person who manufactures problems in order to fill a space. The presence of manufactured drama in both their lives is exemplified by the blaring television that Mila's father stares at unresponsively. We have seen how blank staring is used as a symptom of boredom throughout the film, and here the mother's voice represents the oral equivalent of blankness. Her sentences lazily run into each other, her intonation no longer acts as guide to the points which are significant, and those which are merely supporting. This is because she has stopped hearing herself. Forman uses her vocal delivery as another way of representing a lack of self-scrutiny: her words do not deliver a genuine crisis, not because of their falsity, but because hers is a mode of speech stripped of the required variety of emphasis.

It is apt then, that the music from the television should continue to *accompany* her voice as she blandly pontificates. Throughout, the music comes mainly from within the fiction, just part of the environment again, rather than outside the fiction providing drive or momentum for the narrative. Furthermore, the music tends to *play over* the

characters' activities, rather than playing *in time with* the characters. As the mother goes on and on the music becomes a bluesy whistle. In the dance hall scene the music from the band acts as a mocking refrain to all the soldier's activities, becoming a wailing lament when the soldier travels after the ring. Because the music mostly comes from within the fiction it tends to diffuse around the space, and so there is a sense of its distance. This is in contrast to music being precisely directed on a soundtrack, sharp and present, even at moments of low volume. This helps the music act as ironic chorus, detached but not oblivious, singing at the characters but not in tune with them, and further flattening the specific contours of their activities.

The music is not scored for the moment, nor pinpointed to give vigour to the narrative or the characters' movements and words. It is like a blanket pulled over them; to say that it smothers would be too strong, but it has the effect of quietly muffling. At the end of the film, a pensive guitar chord accompanied by a sweet female "ah,ah,ah,ah" elides the film's final transitions: starting with Andula outside the bedroom in Prague; to the shot of her in bed with her girlfriend; to a shot of the girl playing the guitar near their bed; and ending with Andula working in the factory. The music ties together her exclusion and her tears, the failure to acknowledge her, her self-deception (on the bed) and the boredom of menial factory work. The music rolls the locations and emotions together suggesting they are consequences of each other but moreover it smoothes off the emphasis of each to convey a life levelled off.

Andula is exposed to a series of banal performances (as when we say "Oh, what a performance!" when an incident seems to have more time spent on it than it deserves), but she is unable to present herself through a confident public performance. Thus, the film shows Andula watching Mila endeavouring to put up the blinds, while this activity was prompted initially by Andula's fear of exposure by the light (8). As is the case with the music, the characters are not given the varieties of lighting which would allow them to shape and control the terms of their display. This contrasts to much cinema where the stars and directors manipulate the placing of lighting, from the back or from the side, so the characters can announce themselves with confidence. For an unknown woman, like Garbo, the nuances of lighting were part of the 'dangerous wish for perfect personal expressiveness'[29], but the lighting was, nevertheless, central

[29] Cavell, 'Ugly Duckling, Funny Butterfly', op. cit., p228.

to her affirmation of distinctiveness. Andula's complexion remains pallid; in the flat lighting, she is unable to flatter herself. She has no carefully honed illumination to make her the *centre* of attention.

Forman's achievement is to use the cinema for the seemingly unsuitable end of presenting characters who are unable to declare themselves. When Mila rolls the troublesome blind, with Andula watching on, he unavoidably exposes more of his naked body (5, FIG.3); he is, therefore, unable to reveal his flesh with a control that might render his nakedness as erotic. The film justifies its cut at the moment the blind is about to reach the top of Mila's legs by explaining it in terms of Andula's timid withdrawal of her gaze (6, FIG.4). Thus, the moment does not stand out as a crude sight gag, but instead takes its place within a more reticent pattern of Andula's irresolute connection with happenings. Similarly, the activity with the blinds never evolves into invigorating slapstick because it is seen in terms of Andula's tentative viewpoint[30].

The actual moment of sexual intercourse is only accorded one shot (8) – yet again, the film is more concerned with all the activities that surround occasions of pleasure. With Mila lying on top of Andula, they are both quite static save for a slight frictional shuffling. Once more, she stares out to the ceiling, neither a controller nor an engaged spectator to her own lovemaking. Furthermore, Andula's physical behaviour conveys the indeterminate emotions of such a moment: her strained face suggests both displeasure, and something of a yearning for Mila; and her body looks both cramped by him while seeming also to be clutching him for further closeness. Forman avoids the forceful sentiment which might have resulted had he presented her predicament in a determinate manner.

The placement of the shot comes immediately after she declares her mistrust of Mila (7). That the intercourse is cut in after her explicit rejection of him is jarring, not in a shocking way, but in the manner of something uneasily contrived. The cutting here conveys the way boredom enforces a series of unnatural constructions. By not seeing the lead into intercourse, the viewer cannot know that Mila has not forced her

[30] The fact that the cutaway from Mila was probably required by censorship demands does not change this observation on the manner in which the cutaway is enacted: Forman chose to present the cutaway in terms of Andula's tentative viewpoint, which need not have been the case. He might, for example, have cut to Mila's face showing an exasperated expression.

into the act but the fact that probably little has happened in the time of the ellipse would be more in keeping with the film's concern with behaviour not prompted by overt coercion, more in tune with its characters' unemphatic moves into activity. In the middle of intercourse Andula finally announces her trust of Mila, the convinced tone of her voice indicating how she is suddenly able to manufacture sincere commitment. *Loves of a Blonde* distinguishes itself by finding cinematic stylistics to depict a character who repeatedly undermines drama because she so effortlessly slides into self-deception while having so little capacity for self-promotion.

Conclusion

The chapter has shown how it is possible for the cinema to make emotions such as boredom, and characters with little charisma or appeal, worthy of attention without transforming those emotions or characters out of all recognition. Because the insight revealed is often achieved by the subdued relationship between consecutive frames and the blankness within them, the following analysis of *A Woman Under the Influence* concentrates on the allure for the director of a dramatic use of the cinema frame. This contrast further illuminates the unconventional stylistic choices of *Loves of a Blonde*.

Dramatic Contrast – The Chaotic Physicality of the Ordinary: Frame as Captor in *A Woman Under The Influence*

A) Energy Realism

"She's unusual....but she's not crazy. This woman cooks, sews, makes the bed, washes the bathroom – what the hell is crazy about that" shrieks Nick (Peter Falk) to one of his workmates. Yet, *A Woman Under the Influence* (John Cassavetes US 1974 – see appendix for plot summary) becomes an interrogation of his statement, revealing the everyday life of an American blue collar housewife to be far from innocuous or mundane but rather a constantly energetic struggle, an endless chaos, a state of craziness. Like Andula, the protagonist Mabel (Gena Rowlands) might be described as an unknown woman but her separateness encourages a desperate and passionate pursuit to connect rather than the permanent disengagement of *Loves of a Blonde*.

Separateness in *Loves of a Blonde* was conveyed either by keeping characters in autonomous frames or by showing their interactions within a frame to be nudging and shuffling. In contrast, Mabel's struggles to be known results in bodies and gestures clashing within a fidgeting frame. Looking back, the energetic, yet fractured, deployment of Cassavetes' camera and actors has exerted huge influence on modern American film melodrama, his style characterising the first complete expression of what Raymond Durgnat has labelled 'energy realism'[31]. As Adrian Martin says, 'what matters above all, is the headlong, tense, unbroken, 'you are there' movement of the camera and cast, the confused imbroglio of bodies, gestures, shouted accusations, the sense of mounting spectacle. Such sequences are almost a signature of modern American filmmaking'[32]. Cassavetes' melodrama is also a continuation of the cinema's traditions of forceful physicality and expressionism. A delineation of some key features of Cassavetes' style will have ramifications for an understanding of some tendencies of modern American melodramatic expression in general.

B) A Ruthless Camera

In part the stylistic dominance of 'energy realism' is an indication of the allure engendered by the ruthless, invasive, even impertinent possibilities of the camera wedded to the obtrusive power of the edit. The camera scurries after the kids as they chase around the garden and house, and then cuts to capture them in a still position, before dashing with them again. The camera is complicit in the kids inexhaustible manoeuvres: darting off, coming to rest, spurting again. The camera movement conveys the impossible task the mother has in settling them; Mabel never finds calm amongst their unpredictable surges. This film depicts the extremities of personality compelled by the daily pressures on a housewife, but Cassavetes' achievement is to normalise these extremities, to make them a likely possibility considering what Mabel deals with, day in, day out. In *A Woman Under the Influence* the normal tasks never become routine, the ordinary for Mabel being a constant state of disequilibrium. Both *Loves of a Blonde* and *A Woman Under the Influence* show us women who feel the weight of the 'every' of everyday, but in the former the resultant feelings of characters

[31] Adrian Martin, '*Mise-en-Scène* is Dead', *Continuum*, Vol.5 No.2, p89.
[32] Martin, ibid., p89.

are boredom, blankness and floating consciousness, while the consequences in the latter are obsessive absorption, excessive expressiveness, and a hysterical consciousness.

Cassavetes taps the camera's power of emphasising exclusion; the photograph frame being unique, as Cavell claims, in suggesting a world beyond it, 'the implied presence of the rest of the world'[33]. He writes:

> You can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph – a building, say – what lies behind it, totally obscured by it. This only accidentally makes sense when asked of an object in a painting. You can always ask, of an area photographed, what lies adjacent to that area, beyond the frame...You can ask these questions of objects in photographs because they have answers in reality. The world of a painting is not continuous with the world of its frame; at its frame, a world finds its limits...A photograph is cropped...The camera crops it by predetermining the amount of view it will accept...objects in photographs that run past the edge do not feel cut; they are aimed at, shot, stopped live. When a photograph is cropped, the rest of the world is cut *out*. The implied presence of the rest of the world, and its explicit rejection, are as essential in the experience of a photograph as what it explicitly presents.[34]

In the scene where Sam, the family doctor, comes to visit the house (prior to Mabel's institutionalisation in a hospital) Nick, his mother, Mabel and Sam wrestle within the frame, each with their own methods for controlling the mutual madness. Scrambling towards and away from the camera, the family members rush in and out of focus: Cassavetes making an asset out of the lens' sluggishness in accommodating changes in distances, the blurred characters reflecting the unclear definitions they have of each other. By forcing the characters to move uncomfortably within the boundaries of an insistently positioned frame, the frame's borders construct an oppressively demarcated domestic space which encourages the transformation of the home into a battle ground where family relatives grope for power in a manic flux.

In this case the camera holds its ground for a lengthy period of struggle, but the frame is used in a variety of ways as an imprisoning device, stressing its

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[33] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, op.cit., p24.
[34] Cavell, ibid., p23/24.

circumscribing and delimiting possibilities, thus presenting a picture of everyday life as a series of repressions achieved through incommodious containments. To this end the film makes a strength of its breaches in formal camera behaviour, the seemingly clumsy informality enabling both the sense of a moment unrehearsed, of life just caught in the raw, but also allowing a restrictiveness in the formal placement of the frame which suits its theme. For example, characteristic of the film's camera movement are the slight shakes from side to side: this allowing for an informal accommodation of the characters, rejecting tidier cutting and so appearing as if the action is just being 'caught' rather than pre-planned. However, this also facilitates the coverage of character movement while only slightly varying the boundaries within which they are permitted to move; indeed it is as if the characters are physically battering against a cage, causing the shifting frame to vibrate. The camera "has its cake and eats it": masquerading as an innocent recorder, capturing the impromptu action the best it can, while it in fact structures a whole series of suffocating strictures.

Never allowing her the space to make herself understood, or *known*, the film insistently 'frames' Mabel. In the doctor scene she is shot in the front room from the position of the stairs. On many occasions, as the camera holds a medium shot, she roams the space alone; this is a pattern of the film, the camera fixing its gaze on her agitated body. In this scene, the aim is first to calm, then remove her, this dominant angle of shooting depicting Mabel as a frightened animal coming forward to seek care and attention, then dropping back to the far wall in a defensive position through fear of being grabbed. "Just let me stay in my house" she screams as she pushes up against the wall: the home is all she has, but that makes her desperate clinging to it ever more restricting for her. Whereas Forman conveys the feeling of vaguely apprehended loneliness in two heads shuffling on a pillow, Cassavetes creates frames of intense isolation which express Mabel's imprisonment in such a limiting role.

C) The Pressures to Perform

A Woman Under the Influence is in line with the cinema's dominant tendency for actors to obsessively perform for the camera. While pointing at her kids Mabel announces "I never did anything in my life except make you, you and you"; and later, after angrily forcing the kids to go to school saying "All of a sudden I miss everyone",

one gets a sense of the fragility of Mabel's own identity outside her role as mother. Indeed, for Cassavetes domestic life is as much about conforming to roles and then performing them; domesticity is not so dissimilar to more public existences where one expects performative behaviour. Through straining to be a good mother and housewife, Mabel loses a sense of herself. The film asserts that the central and routine necessities of a housewife/mother's existence necessarily requires a strenuous performance. Cassavetes' actors, like Forman's, cannot dictate the terms in which they display themselves. Unlike Forman's actors, however, the lack of control over their display manifests itself in performances which are under constant pressure.

Unlike Andula, Mabel's imaginative leaps do not allow her to remain blank. She spends her day to day life obliged to act out imaginative scenarios, plunging into a world of pretend, ironically for the benefit of the children's own future mental rectitude. There is a recognition of the demeaning deflations to which a housewife becomes accustomed in Mabel's accepting admission "I make a jerk of myself *everyday*" [my emphasis]. If her everyday role requires creating happiness for the family, then her *presentation* of herself becomes too dangerously tied to others ("Tell me what you want me to be. I can be that. I can do that. I can be anything").

D) Intimacy as Clashing Bodies

Being too dependent on others makes everyday intimacy – relationships within families – a fraught site of mutual hindrance. Nick screams at Mabel to be herself but this is a loaded demand, his yelled orders indicating his own inabilities to cope, and making her improvement an impossibility. The behaviour of Nick's mother is characterised by a similar impulse, her own maternal protection of her son producing a skewed view of the necessary cures for Mabel. By clashing bodies in close physical proximity Cassavetes represents family intimacy as a bruising affair. We might characterise the film's rhythm of an imposing and imprisoning frame followed by violent edited bursts as tapping the camera's two extreme bullying capacities: both its intrusive scrutinising and its snatching appropriations. In the doctor scene the film tends to cut sharply when Nick and Mabel come together, on each occasion the film cutting from the medium shot that is Mabel's cage to an intensely close shot of Nick seizing Mabel in his arms (FIG.5).

Cassavetes makes use of the power granted by the edit to achieve this sensation of snatching. On one occasion Nick's movement to grab Mabel is shown as a jump cut ellipsing the time of his lunge, editing straight to the point of embrace. The force of such cuts, often with weak graphic matches, convey his moves as violent intrusions into her circumscribed space. A series of intensely close shots around their bodies follow, creating sharp breaks across a 180 degree line; the frame is often unable to accommodate the characters' movement with dislocated body parts uncomfortably competing in the frame. At one moment a harsh cut to a new perspective has not centred on their shoulders and heads and so the camera is forced to pan up from their arms into some sort of 'correct' position. These lethal cuts around their clasping upper bodies characterise the frame as not dissimilar to Nick's grabbing hands. All this contrasts with the awkward two-shots in *Loves of a Blonde*, resigned compositions which accept life as a routine lack of fit; the two-shots in *A Woman Under the Influence* display a passionate physicality that refuses to fit in the frame.

When words fail characters in films, the medium has been ideally suited to channel the problems of expression into physical movements. On the splice of that jump cut, accompanying his desperate clasp, Nick screams "I love you", submitting to the most hysterical technique of trying to calm another. In *Loves of a Blonde*, boredom had destroyed the language of intimacy with the result that there was little of passion that the characters desired to express. For Cassavetes the repetitions of life, particularly the unique intimacy that arises from being with a partner every day of your life, enforce the constant pressures arising from the limits of language. With personalities so intertwined (as we say so commonly "the fights were inevitable, we were with each other every day"), one's sense of self becomes dangerously wrapped up in the other person (Nick and Mabels' bodies 'wrapped up' in the frame). Each character seeks mutual assurance, but ensure the lack of such confirmation by bullying the other into a defensive position.

E) Closing in on Expressive Faces

This vision produces an array of grotesque expressive faces, a long way from *Loves of a Blonde*'s stares which have hardened into blankness, reflecting sensibilities so bored by the repetitions of life they have lost the will to self-scrutiny. The repeated

close-ups of Andula show an emotional immobilisation which has erased so much facial activity. In contrast, through yet another of the frame's imprisoning procedures, the camera's obsessive scrutiny of Mabel reveals that her subjection to routine existence has encouraged a remorseless self-scrutiny ("I'm never going to be me again").

When Mabel tilts her head to search for herself in the back of a spoon, the camera keeps the face that is viewing in view, refraining from shooting her distorted reflection. Once again, there is no need for the spoon to express Mabel's state of mind because Cassavetes understands a unique capability of the camera is to push right up to a face and watch the interior drama unfold there. The film's close-ups are always reserved for the upper parts of the body, rarely for hands or objects: in Cassavetes' world even the commonplace interactions of life are actually about one's face imprisoned in close-up, tirelessly under scrutiny, inexorably facing the social dictates of others; and with the frame as ruthless captor once again. The medium almost encourages the camera to stare at the variety of movement on a face, and it is Forman's achievement to present faces not necessarily conducive to the camera's attentions.

In the spaghetti breakfast scene when Nick returns home with all his workmates after the nightshift he claims, quite seriously, that the number of babies fluctuates from year to year because of "something in the air". The embarrassment stemming from his misplaced conviction is reflected in nervous giggles off-screen (his friends politely trying to deflate his intensity), while the camera stares at his increasingly anxious face, eyes darting around the table for support, disbelieving that his insight has received such a muted response. The viewer is forced to feel the social embarrassment on his behalf: the locked-in close-up and the off-screen sound producing a terrifying picture of sudden social isolation. In *Loves of a Blonde*, the soldier's face, numbed by a life of disappointment, showed almost contented resignation when humiliated by the table of women; in *A Woman Under The Influence*, Mabel and Nicks' faces draw a clearly distinct, nuanced map of neurosis, these expressions exhibiting the surface texture of their daily family lives.

F) The Melodrama of Extended Time

The power of the camera's presence manifests itself in remorselessly staying with events. The spaghetti sequence is built up from anguished moments but none of them provide the focal point of the scene around which can be constructed a single dramatic crescendo, and then an aftermath. Cassavetes' scenes have some of the same undramatic qualities with regard to length as the dance hall scene in *Loves of a Blonde*, the sense of sprawling on, refusing concentration and condensation, refusing orientation towards a set of clearly defined goals. However, in that film the length of the scene appeared to be a frozen moment, circling around the point, rather than moving from point to point, whereas Cassavetes uses extended time to construct a pattern of conflict points punctuated by heart-stopping hesitations.

After all the workmates have left, a medium shot shows Nick making a series of gestures: he stares off at the men as they disappear, he drops his head and then waves his arm as if to say "What can I do. I've done everything I can". It might have been the repose after a storm, but as a moment of expressive weakness his frustration will inevitably lead him back to Mabel. Walking back to the table, they restart their noisy conflict. Indeed, throughout the scene moments of turbulent action (the dropping of spaghetti, Nick screaming at Mabel to "sit [her] arse down") are followed by agonising moments of social immobilisation, often in the form of embarrassment (who is going to break the silence?), from which, unlike *Loves of a Blonde*, the characters seek impassioned release. In contrast to that film therefore, Cassavetes' extended scenes reflect a vision of everyday repetitions not as mundane recurrences, but as inexorable, magnetic returns to conflict and crisis.

The insistence of this pattern of crisis followed by uneasy silence is mirrored in the doctor scene described earlier with its repeated choreography of Mabel escaping into isolation followed by intense clashes of bodies. In *Loves of a Blonde* the length of scenes permitted the unusual strategy of letting scenes drift away from any focused engagement, characters never achieving a felt connection; in *A Woman Under the Influence* the force is resolutely centripetal, Nick and Mabel irrevocably hurtling back into uncontrollable, physical engagement.

The strategies of Cassavetes' scenes show his intention to stay with the crowding minutes of time. In the spaghetti scene Mabel is repeatedly shot in the

background from the front left hand corner of the table. She is centre of the frame but the workmates' bobbing heads and outstretched arms successively obscure our view of her. They are merely getting on with eating but such natural bustle perennially surrounds Mabel. Her obfuscation in the frame matches her thwarted attempts to be a mother to all of them ("I love them"), to achieve a sense of engagement and control, and through it a sense that she matters. Mothering is an instinctive way for her to express her passion; having performed the role every day of her mature life, it is the only way she knows. For Cassavetes the habitual frustrations of a mother and housewife are best revealed by an insistent film camera, an instrument ideally suited to such melodrama.

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Chapter Six

The Resonance of Repetition in Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring*

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Introduction

The central aims of this chapter are to explore:

a) *Late Spring*'s use of repetition to show how emotional effect may accrue across the film rather than be achieved in the shorter term by dramatic sequences or striking images.

b) how shots and scenes which may seem to be redundant to the narrative are in fact crucial to its progression and coherence, and therefore how the film reveals some general and special possibilities for the visual telling of stories.

c) how the medium may express the humour and comfort in routines, especially domestic ones, rather than convey the boredom caused by them (as in *Loves of a Blonde*), and further how the film may then express loss in terms of the halting of routine.

Section One - The Humour in Repetition

A) Depicting a Reticent Familial Personality

Ozu's undramatic style in *Late Spring* is ideal for rendering a reticent form of family interaction; a melodramatic style would not depict the necessary familial personality. Noriko (Setsuko Hara) and Somiya (Chishu Ryu) are a father and daughter who do not communicate in grand gestures or noisy statements. The director's skill is in creating a style which will do justice to their more subtle mode of communication; Ozu's depiction of family interaction is therefore at the other extreme of a director of melodrama such as Douglas Sirk (see contrast with *All I Desire* below).

Noriko and Somiyas' relationship is characterised by a deep love that does not display itself as passionate engagement. It is often because of their innate understanding of one another that they leave much unexpressed. This understanding is shown early in the film by Noriko and Somiyas' integrated movements around their home and elsewhere. However, their mode of communication has its limitations and part of the sadness of the second half of the film arises from their inability to openly express feelings. When Noriko is weeping in her chair, Somiya walks into the hallway and folds a towel. As Noriko's face is shown in close-up, Somiya is shown walking

away, down the hallway, in the background of the shot. Many families might have hugged or held each other at this point and the film's show of Somiya's distance in the same shot as Noriko's tears goes beyond expressing Somiya's need to maintain separation so as to encourage Noriko's departure. His behaviour indicates a prevailing family characteristic[1].

Ozu's style accommodates the range of behaviour within this mode of family interaction. Because this mode is one characterised by a long term stoicism, the film cannot rest its effects on short term emotional crisis. The characters do not let matters explode into conflict, or release their emotion by directly bonding with each other. After folding the towel Somiya states "It'll be nice again tomorrow", inferring that Noriko will get over her current sadness, that (her) life goes on. It is indicative of their relationship that at this point Somiya should use a detached metaphor delivered with a calm worldly wisdom. Ozu depicts the tensions which lie in the character's reticence by avoiding a more effusive rendering of the situation. The viewer is encouraged to feel that the necessary care apparent in Somiya's behaviour also ensures that it may be too detached for the needs of the moment.

Somiya and Norikos' mode of interaction is ideally represented by a film style which refuses to depict seminal turning points as dramatic peaks. In an important scene in Kyoto where Somiya insists on her marriage for the final and conclusive time, thereby sealing their separation, their conversation culminates calmly as they return to packing their belongings into bags. They graciously assist each other by gently passing those belongings between them and there are no sharp arm movements in the packing which might clearly display anxiety. The film holds on this moment (for eight seconds) emphasising their matter of factness, their stoical acceptance, rather than their outward grieving at their mutual loss. This rejection of an expansive grieving illustrates how

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[1] It has been noted that Japanese families tend not to touch each other as much as Western ones. If so I would say that Ozu's concentration on a Japanese family within the film provides an ideal fictional scenario. The scenario facilitates the exploration and expression of reticent human interaction. More generally, with regard to this chapter overall, I recognise that I am not a scholar of Japanese culture, but I hope that any deficiencies arising from my knowledge of Japanese context will be compensated for by interpretations which are prompted by a sensitivity towards the film's place within the equally important context of the history of film style. For more details of Japanese historical and cultural context (circa 1949) than I provide – details which do not, I feel, invalidate the interpretations in this chapter – see Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour: Neo-Formalist Film Analysis*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, 1988, esp. p317-326, David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, British Film Institute, London, 1988, and David Bordwell, 'Our Dream Cinema: Historiography and the Japanese Film', *Film Reader*, 4, 1979, 45-61.

Ozu's avoidance of dominant modes of film melodrama fits with his desire to represent this type of familial communication.

The film does not allow the characters' moments of significance to come to crisis. The insistence here on the return to a mundane activity (packing bags) illustrates how the profound cross-roads in the characters' lives might only show themselves through their just 'getting on' with the little things. There are, of course, repressions here, but they do not manifest themselves, as in melodrama, through spasmodic performative bursts or excessive *mise-en-scène*. In fact, the film's skill rests in drawing the viewer's attention to those oblique manifestations of repressions which do not easily betray themselves: here, the viewer is shown that the activity of packing bags may constitute the obscure site of the unsaid.

B) Depicting Change Without Convulsion:

The Kyoto Sequence and Settling into Marriage

The calm nature of the Kyoto packing moment is representative of the Kyoto sequence as a whole: it is characterised by this sense of the *settled*. In the Kyoto bedroom scene the camera remains at ground level as Noriko rises from the floor to switch off the light. The camera does not cut or tilt to accommodate the whole of her body in the frame and the effect is to establish a slight moment of disequilibrium, so that as she settles down again everything falls back in place. Once settled she regrets her earlier comments concerning Onodera's marriage (now she thinks "they make a wonderful couple"). This restful moment of settling back into bed and the placidity of the Kyoto sequence as a whole reflects Noriko's gradual acceptance of her situation. Ozu's relaxed approach conveys the way in which day by day adjustments towards consenting to something, such as Noriko's own accession to settling down herself (into marriage), may be steady, almost imperceptible[2].

In this way, Ozu orientates the viewer towards the delicate processes by which some of the world turns. He therefore refuses to polarise situations and characters. For example, the film's point of view in relation to marriage is not orientated to one

[2] An understanding here of the emotional tone of the sequence helps explain why Ozu does not accommodate Noriko by changing his framing. Kristin Thompson registers this stylistic choice as only an 'arbitrary device' (Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour*, op.cit., p330)

perspective or balanced between competing opinions, but rather suspended. Ozu's film represents a view of life which rarely hardens into adamant positions. The film's understanding of marriage vacillates, not because the film itself is confused, but rather because it is clear about the confusions and apprehensions which accompany life's changes. One might say that the film is in accord with Noriko's own worried fluctuations with regard to the matter[3].

The film is therefore adept at finding stylistic methods to convey the worried states of characters not given to proclaiming their vacillations. Early in the Kyoto sequence Noriko is seen for the first time sitting in front of a mirror, shot separately from Onodera and Somiya. In a similar way to the moment in the bedroom (described above), Noriko stands up but the camera remains on the mirror (4 seconds) refusing to accommodate her (and there is, moreover, no coherent sight of her in the mirror). At first the disappearance of Noriko's clear reflection might seem inconsequential, but the loss hints at Noriko's feelings of losing a grip of herself, or a fixed sense of herself, at the point where she is not able to display her emotions to Somiya and Onodera. The shot not only conveys Noriko's niggling apprehension at this point, but also patterns out with the final wedding scene, where the mirror represents Noriko's more strongly worried state of mind, even though her own body and pace show little vehemence. The mirror therefore becomes the vehicle by which the various strengths of Noriko's consciousness are shown (achieved by substituting Noriko's actual self with an accordingly less representative reflection of her).

After settling down into bed in Kyoto the film has two cutaways to a vase which alternate with shots of Noriko's pensive face (her face shows a slight change in

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[3] Ozu presents neither an unqualified endorsement for marriage nor a devastating critique. Both would be too adamant for his world view; they are both starting points for a more rhetorical drama. Much criticism on the film has tended to engage with whether Ozu's world view is progressive or regressive, conservative or radical and so on. Robin Wood says the film subscribes to the point of view that the institution of marriage itself functions (and not just in Japan) as a means of subordinating and imprisoning the woman (Robin Wood, 'The Noriko Trilogy', *Cineaction!*, 26/27, 1992, 61-81, p72). This interpretation seems incongruous with the film's moment by moment style which understands the characters worries in terms of their everyday perspective, not in terms of an all embracing socio-political theory. Furthermore, Wood critiques writers who have described the tone of *Late Spring* as 'untroubled serenity' but replaces that assessment of the film with something equally extreme by describing it as 'disturbing and desolate'(Wood, ibid., specifically p63 but the words are characteristic of the tone adopted throughout the piece). I feel the film to be moving precisely because it conceives of the significance of loss outside situations of desolation.

register, at first it looks content, then, after the vase shot, it appears more concerned)[4]. Placed here, these shots of an inanimate object suggest Noriko's worried fluctuations with regard to marriage which lie behind her front of passivity (FIGS.1,2). Although the vase seems to be somewhere in the room behind Noriko, the effect here, because of the lack of establishing information with regard to its position, is to abstract the vase as a visualisation of the *mood* of her state of mind. Suggesting the emotional activity behind the restfulness – she is lying face up, no other character is watching, she has no need to *show* too much – the inanimate vase suitably conveys the *sense* of her uncrystallised thoughts circling around varying manifestations of stillness: those thoughts shuffle indistinctly between, perhaps, the possible still tranquillity of marriage and vague feelings of non-human, ornamental lifelessness, of being *stilled*[5].

C) The Comedy of Shot Repetition

Because the shots of the vase are overlaid with Somiya snoring, Ozu is able to show the developing aspects of their separation within undemonstrative scenarios. The sound of the snoring reminds us that he sleeps while she lies awake pondering her future, and it therefore signals their forthcoming separation[6]. Noriko has a desire to continue conversing, so Somiya's snoring is an innocuous way for the film to contrast her youthful concern with his older age and therefore hint at the generational difference lying at the heart of their need to separate. However, Somiya's snoring might also be feigned (he seems to fall asleep remarkably quickly), an attempt by him to prevent further discussion and diffuse any conflict over the subject. His scheme would also

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[4] It has been suggested that Noriko shows tears at this point, although this is certainly not clear on the prints I have viewed. However, they are quiet tears if they do occur and therefore compatible with the overall interpretation suggested here.

[5] Bordwell and Thompson discuss the presence of the vase (Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, 'Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu, *Screen*, Summer 1976, 41-73, p65). They dismiss Donald Richie's interpretation that it is something the viewers pour their emotions into and Paul Schrader's description of the vase as 'transcendent'. I think both these interpretations submit to vagueness rather than understanding the vase in terms of a precise expression of a character's vague feelings. However, I do not concur with Bordwell and Thompsons' disagreement with these interpretations. They write that the vase is not at all motivated by the narrative but works against, or brakes, the narrative flow because of its indifference to Noriko's emotional situation. They see the objects, such as the vase, in the film as 'hypersituated': they cannot be interpreted, they are divorced from function and exist as 'pure' spatial elements (Thompson and Bordwell, *Screen*, ibid., p64).

[6] *Late Spring* is often written about as if it is purely a tragedy because its later sad stages tend to linger in the mind. However, this is also because the film's subtle wit may be easily missed. No critic I have studied on the film mentions Somiya's snoring at this point, and it may be ignored because the humour is embedded in the commonplace.

encourage Noriko to ponder the matter herself, thus again preparing her for their separation. Any division between the two characters is only gently suggested because the snoring is almost effaced by not being accorded the weight granted to the image.

Significantly, the visual repetition of the shots of the vase might lead a viewer, not orientated towards Ozu's techniques, into neglecting the soundtrack. The film's humour is fundamentally constructed around principles of shot repetition; shots which might at first appear simply repetitious in fact vary through slight developments. I am defining 'slight' here proportionally: the seemingly subordinate soundtrack is subsumed under the more authoritative images. Much of the humour of the film emerges from ideas around the principle of repetition and an analysis of two sequences will illustrate Ozu's uses of this technique: (a) the train sequence and (b) Hattori and Noriko's bike ride.

a) Repetition as Repetition

Note the following shot breakdown of the morning train sequence near the start of the film:

1. (mls) Station platform. A figure in white with back to camera (possibly Noriko). Slow theme music playing.
2. (ls) Front of the platform from railway line.

Note: These opening shots are reasonably anonymous: the film often moves in from a general landscape to a more specific scenario (see Section One (E)) below for a discussion of this technique).

3. (mcu) Music changes to a more jaunty variation on the central theme. Train moving towards a tunnel away from a still camera, continues into tunnel.
4. (mcu) Train is shown moving through the tunnel with the camera moving with it (as if attached to it).
5. (ms) Train carriage interior. Large lower body filling a third of the frame in the foreground, morning commuters sitting behind.
6. (mcu) Noriko and Somiya stand side by side. They seem to be looking out of the train window towards the right. He asks whether she has brought his manuscript.
7. (mls) Exterior view looking *towards* the train.
8. (cu) Carriage interior. Noriko standing up (as in shot 6) but without Somiya.
9. (cu) Somiya sitting and reading, he looks up to Noriko, asks Noriko if she would like to change places.
10. (cu) (As 8)
11. (cu) (As 9)
12. (ms) Exterior. Train passing.
13 (cu) Train going over bridge, shot in the manner of shot 4.

14. (mcu) Carriage interior. Noriko and Somiya sitting next to each other reading.
15. (ls) Exterior shot of a cooling tower (from a tracking camera seemingly fixed to the train)
16. (mcu) (As 14) Noriko asks when he is getting home and then glances out of the window.
17. (ls) Exterior view looking towards the train.
18. (ls) Another exterior shot.

This whole sequence is accompanied by jaunty music.

The exterior shots of the travelling train are one important element of the humour of a sequence which works through repetition (for example, 3,4,7,12,13,15,17,18). The lengthy holding on the train as it moves away allows repetition within a single image: the length of the shot goes beyond acting as an establishing tool (we do not *need* to see the train travel right to the tunnel). There is an imbalanced relationship between shot length and shot information (3).

The second shot of the train, giving no more information about location, geography or direction only adds to this sense of repetition (4). Similarly, by having a still camera on one shot and a moving camera on the next there is a joke created by filming the train from different angles and with different camera mobility only to provide similar information. Therefore, the slight variation in the shots paradoxically draws attention to the perfunctory (in other parts of the film repetition is not so absolute and is only apparent, actually containing subtle developments). The humour arises from giving slight variation to something so repetitious, from the amount of weight given to so little. This is merely a routine commuter train.

By repeatedly cutting back to show similar shots of the travelling train and unrevealing shots of passing landscape, the film emphasises the journey the train takes each day into town. These shots communicate that sense of a train travelling without the accompanying pleasures of landscape or *sights* which a train might pass on a special route. The shots represent what one might feel, if one looked out of the window, when travelling the same journey, from the suburbs into town, each consecutive day.

Nevertheless, none of these repeated cutaways is suggested to be from the travellers' visual point of view. Ozu establishes this humorously in the exterior shot (7) following Noriko and Somiyas' stare out of the window (6) which the viewer might

expect to be their point of view, but which is clearly not from their visual perspective (a similar relationship exists between shots 16 and 17, see also FIGS. 3,4). Moreover, the fact that the tracking shot of the cooling tower follows a shot of them both reading means that neither of them could be looking out at the one view which appears to be a passenger's perspective from the window (15). In fact, the train is mostly filmed as if from the perspective of a passer-by outside, thus creating a feeling of anonymous trains passing regularly throughout the day ("there goes another train passing by") (17,18). The perspective of the shots therefore does not convey any personal emotional investment by anyone on the journey.

Many of the shots in this sequence are therefore meaningless in terms of supplying future plot information or expressing any special feelings by one of the characters, but they are essential elements if the train journey is understood as a celebration of the routine. Throughout, Somiya and Noriko look quite happy, and therefore Ozu shows their contentedness with their habitual activities. The characters' pleasure in the routine rhythms of their daily lives is humorously emphasised by pitching a jolly soundtrack against the repetitive images[7]. In *Loves of a Blonde* we saw how the routines of existence resulted in a despondent boredom; in *Late Spring*, the rituals of daily life are shown to provide much comfort. Indeed, it is the loss of Noriko's familiar routines with her father, established in sequences such as the train journey, which a viewer feels at the end of the film.

The lack of conversation between the two during the journey indicates how the sequence wishes to convey the characters' happiness through the repetitive rhythms of the journey rather than any distinctive thing they might say (or do). Stanley Cavell's description of the couple in *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra 1939 US) is appropriate here:

> What this pair does together is less important than the fact that they do whatever it is together, that they know how to spend time together, even that they would rather waste time together than do anything else – except no time they are together could be wasted.[8]

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[7] It is worth noting that once again, as in *Loves of a Blonde*, the soundtrack in *Late Spring* is not scored to accompany the characters' actions moment by moment.

[8] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, p83.

The film's rhythm of repeatedly moving back to the train's interior might lead one to expect a developing conversation but the film desists from engaging its viewer with involved character interaction. Instead, the characters are shown to be happy, content to exchange only cursory comments (for example, Somiya's offer to change places) (9), suggesting that they receive enjoyment enough from engaging in quite minor social rituals. Furthermore, by showing how the characters have changed positions following an exterior shot, the film draws attention to those *movements*, emphasising them as the only *activity* of such a journey. They have moved, but the viewer does not see them move because of the insertion of the exterior shots; indeed the endless movement of the train contrasts to the couple's stillness inside it. The film suggests that even trivial social interaction, or sitting together quietly (14), may provide comforts on such a journey (and the later loss of comfort as the film progresses is achieved when their silence and stillness together take on a different quality).

b) Ambiguity Through Repetition

Note the shot breakdown from the Hattori and Noriko bike sequence:

1. (ms) Sea. The more solemn variation on the theme tune breaks into the jaunty variation.
2. (ls) Tracking shot along sea and bank.
3. (mcu) Noriko riding a bike, from 45 degrees looking to the left.
4. (mcu) Hattori riding a bike, from 45 degrees. looking to the right (they are both smiling). In both shots the camera tracks with them.
5. (ms) Two shot from behind of them riding adjacent. The camera remains still as they head off down the road.
6. (mcu) (As 3)
7. (mcu) (As 4)
8. (mcu) (As 3)
9. (mls) Characters both riding towards the camera.
10. (mls) Characters riding along road (in profile) from left to right (camera pans slightly with them).
11. (mcu) (As 3)
12. (mcu) (As 4)
13. (mcu) (As 3)
14. (mls) Riding along road (shot from other side to shot 10)
15. (mls) Riding along road. Large Coca-Cola sign in foreground.
16. (ms) The two bikes standing next to each other on the top of a small hill. Noriko and Hattori are not in shot, jaunty music becomes solemn (shot held for ten seconds).

17. (mls) Side of the hill. Noriko and Hattori walking away from the pair of bikes which remain up on the hill to the right of the frame. Music's solemn tone lightens into an airy whistle .
18. (mcu) They sit down on the hill.

The train ride sequence depicts the pleasures to be found in the routine. This seems an unusual subject for a film to entertain, but Ozu continues the theme by playing on audience expectations in the bike ride sequence[9]. The viewer is taunted, unable to decide whether Noriko and Hattori's pleasure may be the result of the early sexual excitement of a blossoming romance or an invigorating bike ride with no future potentialities, or something between the two. Ozu's mastery of shot juxtaposition is exemplified in the manner in which he suggests sexuality even within an innocuous repetition of images. By doing so the film finds a style to express that feeling – one which the characters may also be experiencing – of not knowing whether a moment in life constitutes a significant turning point, or is just more of the same.

Because of their eyeline match, it first appears as if Hattori and Noriko are riding towards each other (3,4), but the following two-shot shows that they are in fact cycling next to each other (5). This sets up the comic play with how *close* they are, but it is achieved simply through the deception of eyeline matches. When the film repeats the close-up shots after the two-shot (6,7), it re-emphasises the joke by having changed the meaning that they initially communicated. The shots are a repeat of the ones before (3,4) but their meaning has now been changed by the intervening two shot. Nothing has altered within the repeated images themselves, only our perception of them.

When Ozu's camera cuts around the cycling characters in a circle, often at jumps of approximately 90 or 45 degrees and in tandem with the jaunty music, it is made to dance around them (5,9,10,14,15). However, by cutting in a circle rather than tracking around them (as Max Ophuls might, for example), Ozu also keeps something

[9] I wish to distinguish my own use of 'playing' here from Thompson's understanding of 'play': she writes that the bike ride constitutes an unessential scene in the chain of major story events, one that only exists to fool us (Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour*, op.cit., p343). She correctly recognises the 'selective communicativeness' of the sequence, but sees this only in terms of Ozu wishing to run rings around his viewer. Unlike Thompson, I understand that Ozu's 'play' essentially contributes to the narrative, his 'selective communicativeness' crucial to the film's exploration of the way moments in life 'play' with us, the way they deceive us with regard to their importance.

more prosaic in play. Ozu suggests the shots to be both a possible joyful dance around a blossoming romance and, at the same time, a straightforward list of mostly repetitious images (if not in angle then in information) around a bike ride that offers no potential emotional upheaval.

An important feature of repetition for Ozu is that it allows slight changes within the shot to become significant. The first shot of the bikes on the hill suggests a coy sexual joke constructed using off-screen space: the coupling bikes, the human absence, the sight of the hill side, the return of more solemn music, the length that the shot is held and the surrounding understandings the sequence has built around a possible romance, all lead a viewer to surmise that Hattori and Noriko are embracing by the side of the hill (16). Significantly, the shot which eventually reveals Hattori and Noriko to be simply chatting repeats substantial elements of the previous shot in the new one (17). The film therefore draws the viewer's attention to how a slight shift in the perspective of the shot might explain the characters' pleasure not in terms of bodily interaction but rather as something more commonplace. Furthermore, by substituting this shot in place of maintaining the suggestion of something more directly erotic[10], Ozu suggests the sight of the commonplace, of the chatting, might be the site of the sexual frisson.

D) The Comedy of Domestic Movement

The sequence where Noriko teases her father about her trip with Hattori later in the same day illustrates how Ozu uses a series of stylistic techniques to embed the characters' interactions and communications within the repetitions of domestic routine. The humour arises from the film realising that the mundane repetitions of domestic life have the capacity to incorporate and then reveal the nature of the inter-personal relations within families, suggesting further that domestic routines may accurately reveal the contours of family intimacy. Noriko's movements around the house show the freedom she creates for herself while living with her father. Although she appears to be trapped in a form of servitude – tidying up after him, hanging up his clothes, making the dinner – she is in fact "running rings" around him. Her engagement in her

[10] By having an ellipse after shot 16, or finishing the scene completely.

routine domestic tasks cunningly facilitates her control over Somiya. The main stylistic features are as follows:

1) *Maintaining medium shots of the whole dining room (and study) and shooting square on at approximately 90 degree angles.* This strategy allows any humorous effects to emerge from the rhythms of characters' movements around domestic space rather than from highlighting expressions of sly deception (Noriko) or of exasperated frustration (Somiya) in close-up. Noriko often supplies a hint of her afternoon with Hattori, but then continues with her domestic chores, walking away nonchalantly. Equally, Somiya does not wish to exhibit too much concern so he continues washing and getting dressed. Each character legitimates their avoidance of the other by appearing enveloped in routine domestic tasks.

The characters move in and out of the kitchen and bathroom, and to and fro behind the screens in the dining room. Because the dining room (incorporating the study) is filmed square on, rather than at oblique angles, the characters frequently disappear behind the screens. Ozu desists from allowing the camera to follow the characters around corners or cutting to make them immediately visible. On one occasion, both characters disappear from the room but Ozu holds on the shot and waits until Somiya re-enters. Therefore, instead of engaging the characters in a feisty tussle around the house the film depicts the characters' cat and mouse negotiations in terms of a pattern of exits and entrances which would be naturally determined by their respective activities.

2) *Using a reverse shot (a cut across precisely 180 degrees).* When the sequence does cut it 'breaks' the 180 degree rule of classical Hollywood melodrama[11]. The justification for these cuts is not immediately obvious, but if a character is moving across a room a shift around 180 degrees will dictate whether they walk towards or away from the camera. On one occasion a reverse shot shows Noriko crossing to the back of the room, on the way to the kitchen. This cut allows her to walk away from the camera rather than towards it and so creates just the slight sense of her moving away, out of Somiya's reach, without either film or character seeming to assert any increased distance.

[11] However, such cuts do not break any of Ozu's own stylistic rules: he regularly uses 'aberrant' procedures.

3) *Position in relation to each other.* The scene situates the characters' movements within a calm atmosphere which is achieved by each of them feigning nonchalance. On a couple of occasions when Noriko mentions Hattori she speaks with her back to Somiya. On one occasion Somiya asks Noriko a question and she answers in a throwaway manner by turning her attention away to shuffle through kitchen objects on the floor.

4) *Expressing relationships through mutual rhythms within the home.* The sequence illustrates both the closeness and the distance in their association with each other. By keeping the medium shot of the dining room, the film allows the viewer to watch Somiya exit to the right behind a screen at the same time that Noriko enters left; then to see that he re-enters as she exits. On another occasion, in a head on shot down the hallway (to the kitchen) they pass each other and then both simultaneously move off-screen left but into separate rooms: she to the dining room, he to the bathroom. Thus, they move in tandem but into separate places. When they do come together, their meetings are fluent: Noriko being ready at her father's side to hang up the clothes that he has just taken off. This parallel to-ing and fro-ing around domestic space expresses both the closeness and understanding in their relationship (they move in a symmetrical dance with each other) and the way their closeness is characterised, at least in this instance, by little direct communication or intimacy.

Throughout the scene, Ozu deploys his camera so that it is in a position to film the characters' most basic or repetitive movements, rather than using it demonstratively to draw out and highlight every *subtle* nuance of their behaviour. In *Late Spring*, the placement of the camera facilitates those elements of character communication which exist around mundane movements.

E) Repetitious Landscape Shots: The Absence of Human Movement

Throughout the film Ozu includes general landscape shots of gardens or stations or office buildings. The scene at the Ryoanji garden provides an example. The viewer is first shown a *long shot* of the stark garden with its sand and rocks, followed by a *close-up* of the rocks. After the conversation between Onodera and Somiya there is another shot of the sand and rocks, whereupon the film cuts to a medium long shot

of them looking out towards the garden followed by a *medium shot* of only the sand and rocks. The sequence ends on an extreme *long shot* of the sand and rocks.

Ozu's narrative construction rejects a classically linear sequential mode of scenes and instead juxtaposes little pockets of drama often in the framed manner of the Ryoanji garden sequence. This sequence works around a typical Ozu system whereby the film at first moves centripetally from general landscape shots into the human drama and then centrifugally out to the landscape shots again. (Often this entails a move from the exterior to the domestic interior but this is not the case in the sequence described above.)

The repetition of the landscape shots at the end of the sequence would seem to make them narratively redundant (they are almost identical to the ones at the beginning). However, once again it is important not to equate repetition with uselessness. The later shots are not redundant if one understands them as framing devices: their effect is to place the minutiae of the human incidents stylistically, and therefore thematically, *in the centre* of a wider world[12].

Equally, the landscape shots that precede scenes do not act as establishing shots in the manner of classical cinema. The opening sequence of the film has a set of shots showing an unpeopled railway station, each shot setting the building and platforms amongst the surrounding trees. The setting of a railway station suggests motion, but, in fact, it becomes a surprising location to convey immobility. Here we are given non-human signs of people's arrival without ever seeing any human activity: the

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[12] These shots have caused many problems for critical interpretation. Bordwell and Thompson see them as 'wedging in', characteristically assigning them as spaces which do not contribute to the unfolding narrative (op.cit., *Screen*, p46). Noël Burch calls them 'pillow shots', drawing attention to their 'blank beauty' (Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, Berkeley Univ. Press, Berkeley, 1979). I am sympathetic to Donald Konshak who writes 'This nomenclature is quite inadequate...Both these terms [Bordwell's and Burch's] give the sense that what I call the 'space devoid of humans' shots are cushions or mediators between segments of the "real" narrative action.' (Donald J. Konshak, 'Space and Narrative in *Tokyo Story*', *Film Criticism*, Vol. IV, No.3, Spring 1980, 31-39, p35). Konshak considers these shots to be integral to the narrative, signifying 'desertion' and 'longing and loneliness' in relation to the specific human situations and my own interpretation builds on these latter ideas. However, Konshak also associates these shots with Zen aesthetics with its emphasis on simplicity, harmony and austerity (ibid., p36) . The ideas associated with Zen have often been used to explain Ozu's work but tend to vagueness around states of viewer 'contemplation'. They are imprecise about the focus of the contemplation at particular moments in the narrative and, furthermore, such interpretations are rarely integrated with Ozu's concentration on the mundane, rather than exquisite, nature of everyday life. Wood astutely says 'I would ...place the stress on what we are being invited to contemplate: not some ineffable eternal mystery but the concrete and often prosaic realities of life-in-society' (Wood, op.cit., p69).

viewer hears the sound of the telegraph knocking or sees the signal lights. However, these shots stand as meaningful entities *in themselves*, albeit in a supportive manner, by setting their stillness against later shots of movement. These shots of stillness provide something enduring to place beside the ephemeral human drama.

By structuring the narrative in terms of blocks, Ozu does not allow his story to develop through a purely linear progression. The film understands that everyday life cannot be represented by a fluent, ongoing narrative, marching forward, oriented teleologically towards a resolution. The landscape shots repeatedly situate the characters' activity in terms of a larger world and cycle continuing around them, precisely establishing the importance of family relationships through this perspective. This contrasts to a viewpoint which must establish significance from the momentum provided by a sequence of events. So we can see how shots which do not ostensibly further the plot are in fact crucial to the film's narrative. They are not breaks in the narrative or moments in which to ponder the scene just finished.

A distinction might need to be made between the presence of man made buildings and the presence of nature within these landscape shots. Throughout, the film constructs compositions where the hard, straight, insistent lines of buildings, machines or concrete (railway stations, trains, bikes, pavements) seem to cut through nature. The placement of the industrial and the 'modern' within nature shows the film's concern with viewing the man-made in the context of the seasonal cycle and through that the life cycle. However, this does not require the viewer to over- romanticise the film's view of the natural world, and hence expect its point of view to be allied with a stoical attitude. The integration of the natural world does not necessarily signify a serene "life goes on" approach: despite death or separation the world continues turning.

The separation of Noriko and Somiya is the emotional core to the film and the emptiness of so many of these nature shots provide the opposite of philosophical consolation. The fact that these shots of nature are literally without human movement means that they also feel *lifeless*: they are inadequate beside the human detail which they sandwich. The medium long shot of the sea at the end of the film, following on from the specific presentation of Somiya's grief, provides an epic contrast and an empty contrast: without the nuance of the slight but crucial variations of the

characters' daily repetitions – around which the film has been built – it is an image that is not *enough*[13].

Indeed, it is the human face, not the landscapes, which is always the *core* of Ozu's stylistic framework. The centripetal move from landscape shots, to medium interiors and finally into close-ups provide *Late Spring* with its regular rhythm, easing us on each occasion from far to near, and often out again. The observation of people close-up is undoubtedly Ozu's centre of focus, but this rhythm renders the transportation to them as something regular. The destination is not a dramatic moment of relief, or a crowning glory. Ozu progresses into positions of intimacy without the excuse of a heightened event, and thus the importance of witnessing closely lies in it being the most routine perspective imaginable.

Section Two – Repetition of Domestic Locations

A) The Use of Domestic Space in Narrative Development: Noriko's Bedroom

Late Spring accrues its emotional resonance through careful repetition of household rooms. Indeed, the force of the last fifteen minutes of the film depends on the understandings built up from the characters' movement in domestic locations over the entire film. Many films use locations to build emotional effect but few achieve their resonance from such careful patterning of mundane locations. These locations do not pack an immediate visual punch but are animated gradually by a developing significance.

The film's unassuming method of patterning ensures that the strongest emotional consequences of scenes are frequently delayed. However, this method does not equate to a melodramatic mode of delaying the answers to suspenseful questions which are left hanging in the air. Rather, the delay is a consequence of building up information which appears inconsequential because of its ordinariness at the time. Such

[13] See Section Two (C) below for more on the overall perspective of the film being everyday rather than cosmic.

information is firmly embedded in familiar locations and the habitual placement and movement of the characters within them[14].

The emotional resonance of the final scenes is achieved by repeating the use of locations throughout the film, thereby establishing the locations' cosy familiarity. At the end, Noriko stands, weighed down by her wedding outfit, in front of her mirror, in the middle of her upstairs bedroom. The film uses the location to suggest that all the life has been emptied out of *her* by showing her room emptied of all the furniture with which she gave life to *it*. While her personal space has been thinned out, she is filled out by the wedding costume.

Ozu's technique of changing the angle of shooting a room in the middle of a scene by 180 degrees (often to a medium long shot) achieves its full effect in this scene (Kristin Thompson calls these re-establishing shots[15]). Such changes of angle might be seen as perfunctory, merely the same activity observed from a fresh view, but they are actually cuts which are motivated by the narrative juncture. In this scene the re-establishing shot is used to shift the perspective from the stairs towards the windows (the scene has until this point been shot from the other side). This new angle of Noriko's bedroom has only been used twice before. First, in an early scene with Noriko and Aya, the film cut on Noriko's rising movement from her chair to show her open the window. The cut on her movement and the opening of the window showed her energy and freedom of movement and her control in her own private space at this point[16]. However, half way through the film, when this shot is used again, she is immobile in her chair after Somiya tells her that he will be re-marrying. The shot here rhymes with that earlier period of freedom and now suggests the beginning of its curtailment. When the re-establishing shot is used in the wedding scene, it emphasises her changed position. However, this emphasis is achieved only because of the developing coherence of the pattern, not through the force of the cut in this late instance[17].

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[14] Therefore, in order to unravel the film's arrangement, I shall start each of the following sections with an aspect of the final sequence of the film and then trace back through earlier sequences.
[15] Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour*, op.cit., p345/346.
[16] Cuts on movement are discussed in more detail in Section Four (A) below.
[17] Wood has discussed how Noriko's freedom of movement is curtailed as the film progresses. He does not, however, breakdown the stages of this progression in detail (Wood, op.cit., p72).

Therefore, by the end of the film an apparently innocuous change in shooting angle in fact carries much weight. Because of his disciplined circular system largely constructed around 90 and 45 degree cuts the viewer becomes accustomed to the few angles used in each room. In most film drama editing patterns do not proceed by such strictures, a greater degree of shooting angles being used within the 180 degree range; indeed, melodramatic editing is often geared towards shooting a scene in a flexible manner so as to achieve a forceful effect in any particular moment.

B) Everyday Objects and Narrative Development:

The Bentwood Chairs and the Dressing Mirror

The important objects in the film are not flaunted as direct symbols: such symbolic meaning would be too immediately forceful and not embedded in the characters' habitual activity. Instead, objects collect their meanings through repeated usage, and develop associations throughout the narrative. Noriko and Somiyas' particular interaction with domestic objects delineates their emotional progression[18].

For example, Noriko's bentwood chairs are first seen in her room where Aya and Noriko sit and chat; unlike Somiya, both Aya and Noriko seem to prefer not to sit on the floor. At the start of the film therefore, it might be claimed that the chairs carry a straightforward meaning: they represent the 'modernity' of the two women because they are a Western style of furniture. However, any emotional resonance gained by the presence of the chairs is achieved by their development *within* the narrative situations. On both occasions when she is followed up into her room Noriko settles into her chair with her back towards Somiya and her Aunt. The chairs are the furniture to which she flees for personal space and, to a certain extent, the place where she ends up feeling most trapped.

Her *ownership* of the chairs is wholly usurped in the final scenes when Somiya and Hattori sit on them downstairs while Noriko kneels on the floor upstairs; unlike Aya and Noriko at the film's beginning, the men were last shown sitting next to each other on the floor. The chairs have been removed from Noriko's room and now sit in Somiya's study. The sadness for Somiya at the end of the film is partly conveyed by his sitting on one of the chairs which both represents her absence and conveys an

[18] For some general ideas about everyday objects on film see **Chapter Two**.

unfamiliar position for him. Thus a household chair, never pushed to the centre of attention, always deployed or re-located without emphasis, is able to encapsulate *both* Somiya's loss and the disruption for him in these final moments.

The repetition of a mirror, another household object, is used to suggest a sense of loss, of emptying out. First seen in the Kyoto scenes, at the beginning of her acceptance of change, the shot holds on the mirror even as Noriko rises. As she adorns her wedding outfit the film shows a medium close-up of her in the mirror. At this moment, because of the loss of Noriko's independent personality, the viewer has a mediated engagement with her: she becomes a *reflection*, the use of the mirror conveying that "this is not really *her*". The concentration on her image in the mirror suggests how she feels she is being seen: in terms of a public show and social acceptance. Moreover, her immobility, the fact that she is no longer moving around the house, is established by the presentation of her as *framed*.

However, the conveying of Noriko's state is not achieved by deploying the mirror in an expressionistic manner: there is no cracked glass, no disorientated image, no reflections returning a manic gaze. The mirror keeps its place in the domestic order, and the calmness of its deployment allows for the presentation of Noriko's less vehement feelings of having been gradually stilled. The next shot of the mirror, after her departure, is from a similar angle to the previous occasion; and the fact that the shot rhymes with the one before draws attention to the only difference, the disappearance of her reflection. The mirror remains unmoved standing in the bedroom, its familiar presence conveying her absence[19].

C) The Emptying Out of Narrative Locations:

Hallways, Off-Screen Space and Shots of Empty Rooms

When Somiya returns home at the end of the film there is a shot down the hallway, towards the front door, before he enters. The shot has been shown five times before in the film; this time, however, the sewing machine has vanished and because of the previous repetition we are alerted to its disappearance (again her absence is

[19] Wood makes the point that the empty mirror means that Noriko is no longer even a reflection; she has disappeared from the narrative (Wood, ibid., p72). However, he also says that the effect is that of 'death', but it seems important to the film that the particular sense of loss here is exactly not that of death.

conveyed by one of the household belongings). Earlier, after the argument with Somiya concerning re-marriage, there is a shot down the upstairs hallway: it too is empty, no-one enters and coming at this moment, at the beginning of their separation, it foreshadows the sense of loss which characterises the final sequence.

Therefore, some of the early shots of rooms without people achieve their full emotional pay-off later[20]. Moreover, the viewer is made to feel the sense of the emptying out of the domestic space. So much of their home is created and fleshed out by Noriko's personality, that by the end of the film a viewer has a sense, not simply of loss, but more precisely of loss of habitual behaviour from a domestic space. This is a palpable feeling for anyone who has lost a member of their family and still lives in the rooms of a home which one associates with their repetitive, and therefore most characteristic, movements. However, it is crucial to the film that the particular sense of loss here is not that of death. Somiya must come to terms with a loss where the focus of grief is blurred precisely because it is not caused by a crisis like death. Indeed,

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[20] Kathe Geist makes the point that the viewer does not often realise why things are important until later in the film (Kathe Geist, 'Narrative Strategies in Ozu's Late Films' in Arthur Nolletti Jr. and David Desser eds., *Reframing Japanese Cinema*, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992, p 97-100). She connects this observation to the theme of missed opportunities. She also explicitly rejects Bordwell and Thompsons' description of these shots of hallways as 'deformities' where Ozu is merely 'playing' (Geist, ibid., p93/94). Indeed, Thompson describes Ozu's style as 'unreasonable' (based on a misinterpreted quote from the director himself): she says that his stylistic choices are 'arbitrary, neither natural nor logical' (Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour*, op.cit., p331). Therefore, the viewer has to 'work' things out. It seems, however, that a characteristic of moments which only later receive their full emotional pay-off is that they do not obfuscate but simply do not fully reveal or crystallise at the time: the feelings conveyed by the empty hallways are not confusing, they are temporarily vague. Domestic spaces often reverberate with the indeterminate or confused emotions generated by the interactions of the people who inhabit them. For Thompson, however, Ozu's 'playing' with space ensures that the viewer must 'frequently re-orientate' him or herself in the spatial framework of the scene. I concur that the viewer needs to re-orientate to Ozu's visual patterning but not 'frequently' because those patterns have developing coherence. Thompson fails to see the emotional development inherent in Ozu's stylistic patterning because she understands such patterning to be a sequence of novel tricks which the viewer must 'work out'. She says:

> Once chosen his devices became a narrow set of features with which he could play within his films; they were parameters. This is not to deny that much of the power of his films comes from their extraordinary serenity of action and from the emotion generated by the characters. But these elements are readily apparent; to dwell on them to the exclusion of the film's complex stylistic patterning would be to belabour the obvious (p331).

In contrast, this chapter is written with the understanding that the 'emotion generated by the characters' is accounted for *by* 'dwel[ling]on the film's complex stylistic patterning'. I do not think that the emotions 'generated by the characters' are 'readily apparent' but if they are, some labouring will be needed to account for the methods by which they become apparent, at which point and for how long.

in real life, the sadness or disappointments with which we might find most hard to cope are those which we can not define or demarcate as crises and therefore can not come to terms with easily. *Late Spring* suggests that such manifestations of sadness are especially difficult to understand when they are caused by situations which seem to be part of the expected (living) order of things (a daughter having to leave home, to separate from her father); or when the sadness is the result of the realisation of an intended project (here Somiya's plans to marry off his daughter).

This explains why Ozu repeatedly shows movement around the home in the earlier sequences: this movement enables the later scenes which are empty of movement to resonate with this particular type of loss. The film will often show a character leaving a room, cut on that movement, and then show him or her walking down a hallway before they arrive in another room. These repeated shots of characters moving through passageways might initially appear redundant, precisely the sort of unnecessarily intermediate shots which are often edited out of films. However, these shots are required to accustom the viewer with a character's routine movement each day around their domestic space.

Crossing domestic spaces is essential for Ozu but *Late Spring* rejects imminent or actual movements which blatantly electrify space. Ozu's cutting allows characters to move around the home with a regularity, almost a nonchalance: the cuts to repeated shots of characters moving through passageways are not invested with emotional weight but create subliminally the energy of uneventful movement. Through showing the aspects of Noriko's ordinary behaviour that characterise her as she goes about her domestic life Ozu communicates a type of movement which captures the sensation of "*feeling so at home*". Ozu's cutting circumvents any tensions which often occur when movement is circumscribed within a single frame.

Therefore, Ozu cuts to accommodate his characters' movements, but not from a position of disdain which would allow him to shoot from any angle: this would be exhibiting a nonchalant attitude towards his characters rather than creating the nonchalance of habitual movement. Ozu instead chooses regular perspectives on space so as to convey the habitual, refusing to stimulate the feeling conveyed by those spaces in the short term. Often the film's shots, although clearly chosen to emphasise some things over others, do not particularly resonate as special frames but their later

repetition reminds us, for example, of the absence of Noriko, inferring the change in a routine by maintaining a routine shot structure.

The movement around spaces which might not seem to be essential to the economical development of plot becomes crucial if the viewer re-orientates to a narrative whose power depends on experiencing the rhythms of Noriko's repetitive behaviour as she goes about her life. Noriko's presence is mainly characterised through this strategy (especially in the first half of the film) rather than through any overt narrative events or moments of crisis in which she may have been involved. Therefore, by including even intermediate moves around the house, Ozu *fills* it with Noriko's presence and thus makes us feel the emptiness that Somiya feels in the final moments.

The film's insistence on maintaining the integrity of certain patterns explains the motivation for shots that many critics have found narratively obtuse[21]. The shot of the empty hallway before Somiya's final entrance into the house also harks back to an earlier occasion when the camera remained fixed on the same shot of the empty hallway for 13 seconds. This occasion follows the scene where the Aunt has secured Noriko's marriage acceptance and then leaves exuberantly, joyful in her successful matchmaking. Somiya is first left alone in the hallway and then exits left to see her out of the house. However, the film refuses to *show* her departure out of the door, signalling it instead by the bell (which always rings on every entry and exit). The shots of the porch and doorway from inside the house are shown on seven occasions, so one is alerted now to the decision not to show them. The sound of the bell indicates what we are not seeing, but it is the empty hallway which becomes important.

The future emptiness of the house will be the result of the Aunt's behaviour (whether justified or not); it is the consequences for Noriko and Somiya that she leaves behind, the consequences consisting of a series of empty domestic spaces. The shot of the empty hallway, in fact, allows the film to sustain its narrative coherence based around Noriko and Somiyas' domestic inhabitation. The coherence is also maintained by it keeping to an established pattern of using 90 degree shots, square on, down hallways. Consequently, the viewer comes to appreciate that apparently obtuse shots do, in fact, perform a credible purpose in furthering the narrative.

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[21] See, for example, Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour*, ibid..

Section Three –The Drama of the Small Gesture

A) The Stylistics Of Stillness: The Rejection of an Energetic Camera

In this section I combine the previous observations on repetition with an understanding of the use of performance in the film. As illustrated in the discussion above, movement around locations was intimately related to the repetition of those locations. The significance is that through the use of repetition, the smallest change can be emphasised. Thus a small movement by one of the actors may carry large emotional weight. In this way Ozu builds up his drama from movements which are not urgent or energetic: the slow drop of a head, shuffling with a small object or simply one character's changed position in relation to another character.

Even the smallest gesture may be given melodramatic treatment in the cinema: one might track in or cut, for instance, on a character's hands as they play with a piece of string. The emotion here might be achieved from the vigorous change in camera position, with a sudden cut to close-up. However, *Late Spring* does not resort to any energetic camera movements: here, through the repetition of characters' positions and shooting angles within rooms, small gestures stand out without the animating force of the movement of the camera. As a consequence, Ozu discovers unique capacities for using stillness in an art of moving pictures.

Indeed, the camera only moves noticeably on a few occasions in the film and mostly a tracking camera balances a similar travelling movement within the frame: walking, bike riding, or the train 'advancing'. Therefore, the effect is to cancel out the space being travelled and to achieve a sense of stillness. The following are two examples.

The chest up close-ups of Noriko and Hattori while riding their bikes are accompanied by a tracking movement at the pace of the riding. The effect is to render them floating on the spot. These shots come before the viewer knows that they are riding next to each other (see Section One (C) above) and this floating effect adds to the confusion over their orientation by providing no sense of any space crossed within the location. Furthermore, the low angle of shooting which places their heads against the sky, minimises background movement and therefore the impression of their movement. The characters appear as if they have drifted free of spatial co-ordinates

and their apparent stillness adds to the tease of the scene: it emphasises the joy in going for a ride, with a friend (or a partner?), with no particular destination intended[22].

When Noriko and Somiya walk together after the Noh play they are shown, in the second shot of the sequence, in medium two-shot from the front, with the tracking camera accompanying their stately walk. In this instance, their momentum forward is suspended and replaced by the tension between them: this, in effect, is where the *movements* which matter to them reside, while their consciousness of walking is disregarded. Conversely, the opening and closing shots of the sequence are shot with a camera which remains still. In the opening shot the still camera draws attention to their walking, and the distance being travelled, as they both wait for the silence to be broken. In the final shot, as they are both filmed from behind, on either side of the road, it suggests the feeling of walking away, walking away into separate futures.

B) The Stylistics of Stillness: The Circling Stylistic

Ozu maintains the rigour of a still frame in order to register the slightest movement from his actors; he plays human movement off against straight lines. However, the film also deploys a loose circular stylistic, shooting at 90 and 45 degree angles, around a single point, thus creating a tension between stillness and movement. I have shown, for instance, how this system works to teasing effect in the bike sequence where the movement around the pair is achieved through jumps which maintain a dual possibility: both the sense of a romantic liaison achieved in the charisma of the circling 'movement', with the simultaneous possibility of a routinely pleasurable bike ride achieved through a sequence of still shots, each one much like the others.

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[22] Wood finds the tracking shots 'exhilarating', but if the bike ride sequence is invigorating in some respects, the vigour will not be located in the tracking movements *per se* (Wood op.cit., p72). Similarly, as I discussed in Section One (Ca), during the train sequence there is a shot with the camera travelling at the speed of the train (it appears as if it is attached to it). This is one way of creating the sense of the commuter train just travelling, as opposed to *moving*, with no anticipation encouraged concerning its destination or its dynamism within the landscape. Once again Wood (ibid., p72) sees the camera movement at this point as a 'burst of energy' but this assessment misses the irony of the shot and the sequence. Furthermore, Wood links the camera movement uncomplicatedly to the film's establishing of Noriko's freedom at these early stages, but the balancing nature of the camera's movement shows that any sense of freedom is not directly achieved by the decision to move the camera. A recognition of this has ramifications for the meaning of the sequence and therefore for the exact manner in which the pleasures of her life are being characterised. Moreover, a journey along a railway track with no control over the locomotive would be an unconvincing way of establishing an uncomplicated picture of a character's freedom.

In the bike ride sequence, the circle of still shots convey a jauntiness because of the rhythms of the soundtrack and the activity being depicted. However, Ozu's arrangement of a circle allows him to combine the emotional current from the circular 'movement' with a calming influence induced by the circle being constructed out of still shots. Ozu's rotations could never have the full scale virtuosity of, for example, Max Ophuls' camera. It would be unsuitable to depict the day to day life of Somiya and Noriko with such fluent movements; Ozu creates broken circles which are unable to achieve the same flowing continuity.

The final moments of Somiya peeling his apple exemplify the purpose of Ozu's circles. From the moment that Somiya sits on Noriko's chair, there are five cuts as the camera moves around him. The power of this sequence stems from the rhythm of cutting which has become an established syntax. The contemplative move around Somiya is now intertwined with the rhythms and activities of the other sequences: the sequence carries the weight of the film with it and therefore expresses part of the sense of loss. Once again, emotional effect is achieved from the repetition and consistency of a style which may not be particularly telling in any one moment.

Equally, the activity contained within these shots is the circular movement of peeling an apple. Left all alone Somiya now tests his luck for the future by endeavouring to peel the apple in one complete piece. Sadly, the peel breaks and Somiya bows his head with resignation. The apple peeling provides no consolation and the peel's broken circle aptly matches Somiya's feelings of incompleteness. At this moment of human loss, and of feeling at a loss, Somiya is not permitted to find solace in the refuge of complete circles.

Therefore, the breaking of the apple peel suggests the inadequacy of a larger conception of the life cycle that Somiya has been forced to use as his method of persuading Noriko ("life must go on") and which the film has used as a frame for the minutiae of the family story. Ozu's broken circles evoke an everyday perspective where one cannot see the *complete* picture, so to speak; the film understands that an epic, long term, conception of an ongoing life cycle cannot act as a consoling influence if a character is living and *feeling* a life day by day[23].

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[23] By not understanding Ozu's everyday perspective, Schrader and Konshak are led into simplistic formulations about Ozu's acceptance of transcendence, his serene affirmation of the "way it is".

Ozu's undramatic circular style, constructed from still shots, prevents him condemning the present, as Ophuls' circles do, with a fateful view of the future. Ophuls' circles, formed by his virtuoso panning and tracking, infuse the present with the all-encompassing power of destiny. Ozu's centrifugal and centripetal system, from general landscape to intimate human activity, shows that he welcomes a sense of the everyday drama framed in a wider world, but equally his broken circles make redundant any sense of an all-embracing epic philosophy. Ozu's perspective is rooted at ground level in day to day domestic concerns: by locating his drama in the unsuccessful peeling of an apple he situates his world view in accord with the regular, uneventful consumption of fruit.

C) The Stylistics of Stillness: The Use of Trees

The film is sceptical towards any inspiration or serenity provided by the life cycle *per se*. The film's organisation should prevent the viewer treating this aspect of the undramatic style of *Late Spring* with uncritical reverence. For instance, the shots of trees which are peppered throughout the film are like witty asides, something like the murmurs of a chorus, rather than the positive assertion of a non-human perspective. The trees' meaning is established from the human perspective, rather than the trees establishing the umbrella perspective through which the human activities should be comprehended ("the wisdom in the trees"). Indeed, the immobile trees achieve their effect because of their obliviousness to the specificity of human lives, the film recognising the gap that exists between the rhythms of everyday domestic existence and those of the natural life cycle of which the trees are a part. The shots of the trees convey the feeling of fascination and bemusement when humans consider their own patterns of activity, from a day by day perspective, against the rhythms of the wider world. The film evokes the bewildering feeling of lack of fit which arises when we consider our day to day lives beside something more enduring. The gap created by the comparison always feels like *something* forever out of one's grasp and control, but that 'something' is vague and without focus and partly accounts, regardless of the film's humour, for the undercurrent of loss throughout the film.

A sense of loss results from the emptiness emanating from the trees' stillness: they are without human mobility and make no significant movement within the frame

(they only sway a little in the breeze). It is this stillness, in disparate frames devoid of human movement, which is set against the detail of the human activity from which Ozu builds the meaning in the majority of the film. The trees represent a long term lack of movement that is inimical to a relatively short term human life. Moreover, the stillness of the trees (or the vase) characterise the sort of immobility that is encroaching on Noriko. The close-up shot of the upper branches of the huge tree which follows the Noh play shows the inertness that marks out trees from humans. This inertness links to Noriko's sense of feeling trapped, unable to move, in that previous scene[24].

D) Revealing Small Gestures through Strategies of Length: The Noh Play

As well as using repetition of domestic objects and locations over the course of the film, Ozu also uses repetition within a single scene, and moreover, repetition within a single shot. The Noh play scene is built up of lengthy shots which contain little movement; there is, one might say, a low proportion of activity to length. In a melodramatic scenario a shot may last a long time and the camera can remain still but the frame will be filled with a range of developing character movement. In contrast, most of the shots in the Noh scene are extremely repetitious: for example, the viewer is shown a shot of Noriko and Somiya watching the play for 15 seconds but it appears to be longer than required, the shot containing repeated amounts of the same information. The viewer is able to absorb the fact of them watching in less time.

However, in the Noh scene the purpose of using repetition through length is to go beyond conveying the *fact* of them watching. The length of shot draws attention to Noriko and Somiya's stillness over time and thus their formal behaviour while watching the play. As the scene develops it becomes concerned with Noriko's claustrophobia within this formality, sandwiched between her father and Mrs. Miwa.

The Noh play itself is privileged with the lengthiest shots in the whole film. In one 50 second shot a line of men dressed in robes sit with their legs crossed and chant; they sit almost still. In another 50 second shot the viewer watches the central character in the play (a large 'woman' dressed in white robes) in close-up, also largely still, except for a ceremonious movement of her fan around her head. Significantly, the one movement of the fan becomes particularly emphasised against the amount of time

[24] For a more complete analysis of the Noh scene see Section (D) below.

the character is shown still. These stylistic strategies of the Noh play mirror the film's presentation of the characters in the audience: the Noh's style of performance structured around limited movement matches Noriko's own immobility[25].

As the Noh play chants over Noriko's saddened face, the stylistic formality of the play and the social propriety of the viewing seem, at this time, distant forms of expression and reception for her. Ozu's use of the Noh play allows him a scenario to explore Noriko's feelings of social entrapment by using modes of stillness. The following breakdown is of one sequence of shots late in the scene.

1. (ms) Noriko and Somiya sitting watching the play. Somiya repositions his hands slightly, moves his head to the right, bows, moves head slowly back to the left. Noriko slowly turns her head to look towards him, moves it right, smiles and bows (shot length - 15 seconds).
2. (ms) Mrs. Miwa in a three shot (the other two people are anonymous); she bows (7 sec.).
3. (ms) (As 1) Noriko looking upset, she turns, looks across at Somiya regretfully, moves her head down again, turns her eyes to the right (20 sec.).
4. (cu) Mrs. Miwa sitting still watching the play (6 sec.).
5. (cu) Noriko turns her eyes away from the right, looks down, closes her eyes, bows her head even further until her chin slowly drops down to her chest (20 sec.).
6. (ms) Profile shot. Noriko staring downwards, others staring off-screen right at the play.
7. (cu) Noriko's head. She looks towards her father (7 sec.).
8. (cu) Somiya watching the play contented, remaining still (7 sec.).
9. (cu) Noriko's head. Her eyes looking down, then turns to Mrs. Miwa (7 sec.).
10. (cu) Mrs. Miwa watching the play, her back straight, rigid and still (7 sec.).
11. (cu) Noriko looking at Mrs. Miwa, then moves her head back down to her chest (15 sec.).
12. (mls) Noriko and Somiya surrounded by the audience. Somiya moves his arm (7 sec.).
13. (ls) 'Woman' in the Noh play on the stage; she widens her arms out very slowly (13 sec.).
14. (cu) Noriko still, her head bowed (10 sec.).
15. (mcu) Exterior. Upper branches of a tree.

[The Noh chant plays over all these shots].

[25] This Noh play is supposedly concerned with an aristocratic woman being driven into a frenzy by the memory of a lost lover (Bordwell, *Ozu and The Poetics of Cinema*, op.cit., p310). Therefore, a significant aspect of the Noh's style is its formal display of frenzy, a melodramatic situation pared down to isolated movements within stasis and monotonous, incantatory chants.

Within these lengthy shots of the stationary characters, small movements become telling gestures (1). Noriko's head movements, as she looks between her father and Mrs. Miwa, or when bowing, are repeated with different inflections throughout this sequence: they become forceful because they are the only movements within quite lengthy, repetitive shots. Moreover, any restrictions of movement are dictated by the social rules of the public setting. Somiya and Mrs. Miwas' nodding heads seem to indicate an understanding between them even though this covert relationship is hidden behind public gestures of decorum (1,2). Similarly, Noriko's polite and friendly bow to Mrs. Miwa actually masks her reticence (1).

The activities of public decorum seems to be a cover for what Noriko feels is her entrapment. The six seconds of the shot of Mrs. Miwa from Noriko's perspective (4) indicates both Mrs. Miwa's detachment from Noriko's emotions and Noriko's lack of attentiveness to the Noh play. The stately pace of Noriko's environment contrasts with the rush of blood she is feeling inside; she finds herself in a situation proceeding at the wrong speed for her emotions. Equally, the exterior show of her emotions must remain embedded in the circumscribed language and speed of the world around her. When the film later repeats the use of a bow of the head (5), the gesture of public decorum has altered to become one of private disappointment; and the dipping of the chin to the chest is the insufficient manifestation of the sinking of Noriko's heart.

Therefore, in this environment movements are slight and slow, but significant. By both returning to shots of Mrs. Miwa and Somiya and holding on them for seven seconds at a time, Ozu builds up a sense of the gradual and undemonstrative coercion of Noriko (8,10). The holding of shots for longer than is necessary for the plot is the method by which the film makes the viewer experience the increasing burden of Mrs. Miwa and Somiyas' presence for Noriko. At the same time, the return to the characters conveys Noriko's feelings of restriction simply through sandwiching her between shots held for extensive periods. However, if one feels that Noriko is entrapped, one should be precise about the nature and process of this entrapment. The long-drawn-out repetitions of the Noh scene evoke the slow working of social and familial pressures and the quiet weave of their power throughout the whole film. Ozu's achievement is to find a style that represents a form of social pressure which is not physically or verbally adamant.

The length of the shots emphasises their stillness, which in turn allows the film to convey the increasing problems for Noriko in assessing or reading the situation within this unforthcoming environment. Both Somiya and Mrs Miwas' inertness is explained by the static manner with which they attend to the play but this maybe also allowing them an excuse for not acknowledging Noriko's discontent. When the viewer is shown Somiya contentedly staring at the stage (8), it seems unlikely that he has not noticed Noriko's displeasure; the camera's attentions seem to betray Somiya, suggesting that he realises what is happening but is forced to see out his own performance. The slight awkward shifting of his arm intimates that he is shuffling under the pressure of Noriko's eyes (12). To behave sincerely in what he believes are her best interests, he may well be feigning attentiveness to the Noh and remaining motionless.

However, once again, Ozu uses stillness to communicate situations which are unresolved and uncertain: like Noriko's slight movements, Somiya's inactivity may mask significant *movements* inside him or, alternatively, his stillness may indicate an obliviousness to Noriko's feelings. Ozu's use of stillness, therefore, allows him to remain faithful to the inscrutability of undemonstrative behaviour, ensuring that interpretations of Somiya's posture (for viewer and Noriko) remain only possibilities not certainties. Thus the sequence's use of disproportional lengths of shot (as against the rest of the film) are a sophisticated strategy to render, within the gestural vocabulary of social propriety, the confusions existing between public decorum and private feelings.

E) The Repetition and Development of a Gesture: Noriko's Bowing Head

Ozu manages to invest the smallest of human movements with emotional force. He does not need to resort to large energetic movements in order to create an effect. It is worth summing up the methods by which he achieves this:

a) by maintaining a still camera and *mise-en-scène* he is able to draw attention to slight movements.

b) by repeating similar gestures and slightly expanding on their meaning throughout the film (often by a slight variation in emotional context) and by not cluttering the drama

with a multitude of gestures he can build up the strength of a small movement through maturing emphasis.

c) the bowing of the head in the Noh sequence was deployed both as a public gesture of politeness and a private gesture of sadness. By layering one gesture with a number of meanings both within a single sequence and across the film, Ozu is able to enlarge the capacity of a gesture to communicate meaning, or complicate a gesture's capacity to straightforwardly convey meaning, while keeping the performance of the gesture slight.

The film carries the gesture of Noriko's bowed head throughout. Two examples are when Noriko's Aunt forces her into accepting marriage or when her father later does the same. We have seen how important the gesture is in the Noh sequence and by the end of the film it has built up palpable resonance. Three examples of Noriko bowing her head and averting her eyes, from the end of the film, will illustrate the points more closely. Firstly, in the packing sequence at Kyoto, Somiya gently lectures Noriko on why she must get married and she listens with her head slightly bowed. Because of repetition throughout the film, the viewer knows this to be a sign of her unhappiness (of going within herself, of not wanting to face the world). The gesture suspends her sadness at a point before uncontrollable grief. However, Ozu has also invested the gesture with another possibility. There is a certain reverence in the bowed head, reflecting the occasion here where she finally *bows* to her father's will. Furthermore, throughout most of the scene Noriko has a slight smile, but it may be a forced smile of resignation to the inevitable. Her gesture simultaneously conveys firstly her unhappiness, secondly the drop of resignation and thirdly, by its respectful listening position, it implies some of the social and hierarchical pressures that have caused it (the pressures by the community, including her father, to get married).

By using repetition, accompanied by slight development, the film allows the gesture to take on more strength in the wedding dress scene. While Noriko thanks her father, her head is shown bowed in close-up. Her smile has become more strained than in the packing scene: it is not as fresh or as spontaneous as it was, for instance, in the earlier bike ride scene, and thus it is another gesture moulded throughout the film. Her smile drops away as she lowers her head and so once again her private grief is buried

within an action of social politeness to her father. Noriko is unable to let her grief spill out; the gesture *contains* her sadness.

Moreover, because Noriko's head is now wrapped in the cumbersome head dress it means that both the lowering of it and its raising has to be enacted even more slowly. Consequently, the pace of this scene is ponderous, but it carries force because of the amount of emotional resonance this slowly performed gesture has accrued. The film does not climax with a finale where the characters' feelings finally burst out into confrontation or conflict or confession. On the contrary, with her head in the bowed position, her grief cannot be shown at all, masked as it is behind the ceremonious costume. Paradoxically, the emotional effect generated by the gesture is achieved because her bowed head now completely *hides* her grief.

As well as the necessary but reluctant bow to her father, the heavy costume acts as the physical manifestation of the *weight* of tradition to which Noriko has had to conform, and the consequent emotional burden. Previously, she has always managed to raise her head, but now the cumbersome costume ensures the effort will be too great. Thus the film conveys Noriko's burden not through a strenuous movement, but through the absence of a small one, the large head dress preventing even a raise of the head.

Finally, Ozu is able to use the pattern of the bowed head to indicate Somiya's loss of Noriko, in the penultimate shot of the film, by showing him gently bowing his own head in sorrow. By both dropping his head in this way and doing so while sitting on Noriko's bentwood chair his melancholy is linked to the loss of Noriko by repeating a gesture associated with her. The film further extends the narrative possibilities of gestural patterning by communicating *his* grief through an unassuming gesture employed routinely by her. The film eschews representing the loss in an overt manner, for example, by inserting a flashback to Noriko's smiling face, or recalling a memory of an eventful occasion associated with her. Instead, Ozu reminds the viewer of Noriko's habitual movements indirectly and thereby characterises Somiya's loss more subliminally through the disappearance of those familiar gestures which once surrounded him.

Section Four – Elucidating Character Through Habitual Movement

A) The Liveliness in the Commonplace

Ozu's cutting technique is able to inject commonplace movements, such as rising from seating positions, with a little shot of energy, without removing their significance from the ordinary situations in which they are embedded. There is a moment, halfway through the film, when Aya stands up to meet Noriko after being sat on the floor with Somiya. The film cuts from shooting from one side of the room to the other *as she stands*. She stumbles very slightly because her leg has gone to sleep. Aya's stumble further expresses what the viewer knows about her: she is unaccustomed to such cross legged positions on the floor because she is a woman who sits on armchairs rather than adopting the traditional Japanese sitting positions. This moment does provide a bit of 'local colouring', and a throwaway joke, but it also suggests that Aya's attitudes will emerge, not only, for example in her conversations, but in the general run of things.

Ozu draws out Aya's rise by cutting on her movement. This is a technique conventionally used in cinema to glide over a cut because the viewer's eye is distracted with the movement of the character and is therefore less likely to notice the break. However, Ozu uses the technique in a contrary way to draw attention to activity which would otherwise appear perfunctory, obvious actions in a scene where humans move about. In the Aya example, by cutting to the opposite side of the room, Ozu inserts a tiny 'shock' as she completes her rise. This effect is achieved by editing together shots of relatively unequal distance with a weak graphic match.

By using this technique throughout, the film conveys Noriko's customary liveliness without having her adopt particularly energetic, conflictual, or 'larger than life' behaviour. In the bike ride scene the camera cuts from long shot to a medium two shot as Noriko drops down to sit on the hill. Here, her youthful energy is conveyed simply in the action of seating herself next to Hattori. A similar cut is used when she rises in response to her Aunt's first suggestions of marriage. Here, her rising movement shows her youthful petulance in response to the suggestion (she thinks she can just bounce off and leave). The film conveys Noriko's anger in a simple jump up

from a seating position, rather than having her resort to long periods of excessive gesticulation.

Therefore, Ozu develops another pattern throughout the film, this time of Noriko rising from a seated position when she feels pressured. She does this with her father, in her room, before she unhappily leaves the house. Ozu avoids a shouting match between them, communicating Noriko's discontent through her decision *not* to stay still and discuss the issue. The film therefore finds its most dramatic moments in, for instance, Noriko's inability to stay seated.

Ozu uses a noticeable cut on movement when Noriko separates from her father while they are walking home from the Noh play. There is a close-up of her (shoulders upwards) as she turns her head to separate from him, followed by a cut to a medium long shot from behind. Thus, the cut provides a change in distance and a reverse in shooting direction and it is disconcerting on the eye to see Noriko's head move to the left and then her whole body move to the right. This is not a violent or taxing or bewildering arrangement of shots but the cut does make the viewer feel the separation more strongly. The result is to turn their separation into a relatively more forceful moment, without resorting to obviously forceful tactics. The viewer is reminded of the significance of such a move away from her father, in the context of their friendship and by the standards of their polite code of behaviour towards each other.

In her final wedding dress scene the camera settles into a low medium shot of the room; the film sets up a pensive scenario where it would not be suitable for the camera to adjust on her movement. Ozu can now show her changed state by choosing not to adopt a technique he has used earlier; and because of his recurrent use of the technique, the viewer notices the disregarding of it. Thus, another important aspect of Ozu's use of repetition is his choice not to continue a pattern, thereby earning the right to create his drama in terms of deprivation. In this scene, the camera stays in place as Somiya helps Noriko up from the floor and as she walks sluggishly across the room. Her movement at the pace of someone old or injured conveys her loss of youthfulness (at least for the time being); moreover, adorned in such a costume, Noriko's movement harks back to the presentation of the woman in the Noh play with the lengthy shots of that character's stately movement on stage. Therefore, in this case, by not cutting on

movement, the camera *frames* Noriko as if on a stage, artificially costumed, living and moving by the same restricted formalities as the Noh.

B) Elucidating Character Through Simple Movements with Objects

The film elucidates relationships between characters through simple arm and hand movements interacting with basic objects. In melodrama, characters might reveal their closeness to others by embracing or their anger by punching. In contrast, characters rarely touch each other in *Late Spring*, so Ozu finds more indirect modes of revealing their associations[26]. The film reveals these associations through domestic activities, many of which are not strenuous, but consist of simple light hand and finger movements.

Without significant shifts in the tone of the characters' behaviour, the film's attention to their handling of objects is able to extend to conveying loneliness and separation. When the Aunt is lecturing Noriko about marriage, Noriko starts fiddling with a piece of string. Accompanied by her bowed head, Noriko's behaviour conveys her urge to go within herself; her hand movements may not be urgent or physically violent but they still express Noriko *pushing* the Aunt away.

The fiddling with the string *contains* the strong desire to withdraw, just as Somiya's peeling of the apple is the restrained activity by which the film represents his strong feelings of solitude. Somiya attempts to focus his concentration (away from his emotions) on a habitual task – and fails. However, in this instance we are shown a rare close-up of a character's hands. At the moment when he realises he has failed to complete the peeling in one ring, his hands stop still. Then the peel drops. The stillness of his hands contrasts with the sudden movement of the peel, dropping out of the frame. The lack of his hand activity conveys the sense of his effort – and, in a sense, his life – having come to a standstill, while the peel disappearing from the frame combines this halting with the sense of something lost. A longer shot here, rather than the close-up, would be inadequate because it could not capture the intensity of something dropping out of the shot; the film does not cut to the peel falling on to the floor because it wishes to maintain the integrity of something lost from the frame, and

[26] A point made by Wood ibid., p69.

now unrecoverable. In this way, Ozu generates a mesmeric piece of action from simply the peeling of an apple.

C) Elucidating Character Through Positioning in Domestic Space

A more melodramatic film than this one might choose to emphasise character discontent by bringing the characters to conflict or by threatening potential confrontation. Ozu's drama is far less orientated around crisis, choosing instead to express the discontent between characters through the way they sit or stand in relation to each other, their mutual positions within the domestic space. In the final stages of the film, Somiya and the Aunt enter into the bedroom where Noriko is standing in her wedding dress; but she is positioned at a right angle to the pair, looking in a different direction. Noriko remains motionless on their entry, not looking around towards them. The effect of the moment rests in her stillness, in her not turning, rather than, for instance, turning away in disgust.

Noriko does not face her father at this point and her behaviour is an extreme example of Ozu using characters' oblique positions in relation to one another, of failing to face each other, as an indirect way of expressing the state of their relationship. In an earlier scene with her father, he sat in his study in the foreground, while Noriko moved across the far hallway in the background. The film keeps them in different planes, and thus shows that their conflict manifests itself in terms of avoidance. Although Somiya and Noriko are shown in distinct planes, there is no sense of the rich and vivid *mise-en-scène* created by the depth of focus used by Orson Welles, Jean Renoir or William Wyler. The effect here is more prosaic, less charged, simply the two of them staying within their separate domestic spaces.

Indeed, deep focus strategies are an extreme case of the tendency in melodramatic cinema to achieve powerful resonance from the compositional structure of single shots. Naturally these shots do not carry all their meaning separately from the understandings the narrative has built up to that particular moment; nevertheless they have a compositional strength in the instant which crystallises or cements narrative concerns or simply forcefully conveys a moment in a film. One only need think of all those stills in film books which are striking on their own terms, or consider how we find ourselves calling attention to the excitement arising from the visual blatancy of

individual shots. Such comments become a criteria for quality – such as when we say "Hasn't he a wonderful visual sense, aren't his images fantastic" – resulting in a critical vocabulary centred around a discussion of the 'image' as a more self-contained entity, in preference to judging the skill of a shot in terms of the suitability of its composition, or its consistency, in terms of a superceding narrative coherence. Throughout the history of film criticism writers have lauded a whole spectrum of pleasurably arranged images from the sumptuously opulent to the fiercely stark. This critical tendency arises from emphasising the undeniable possibilities for the power of the film image rather than, say, the patterned construction of a narrative and it is a distinction of *Late Spring* that its precise visual sense cannot be defended within the paradigm of immediately striking images.

Conclusion

Ozu's *Late Spring* reveals that although film is a medium constituted by images, the medium does not require demonstrative pictorial strategies to achieve emotional resonance. This is because the unique opportunities provided by film's narration through images allow for compositional patterning which can be developed over the course of the film. This stylistic capability constructed around repetition demonstrates that the medium is quite suited to uncovering insight in those elements of life which do not immediately proclaim their significance, for example habitual behaviour around familiar spaces, small gestures, domestic furniture, and empty rooms. However, it is Ozu's particular achievement to have exploited this possibility of film so successfully. The following section explores the different eloquence that may be achieved in film from not adopting such a patient strategy.

Dramatic Contrast – The Joys of Domestic Space in *All I Desire*

A) The Force of Domestic Architecture

Late Spring is not unusual in being primarily set within domestic locations. Many American film melodramas, especially those of the 1950s, were set in and around the home. Although each of the family melodramas of that period differed in many

respects, they were regularly structured around an emotionally forceful connection between characters and their domestic locations. I will explore these connections through an analysis of *All I Desire* (Douglas Sirk 1953 US), a discussion with ramifications beyond this individual film and melodrama of the 1950s and one which illustrates that cinema tends to characterise even domestic space in eventful ways. Furthermore, although many melodramas were characterised by this forceful connection between character and location, *All I Desire* and *Late Spring* are particularly comparable in their favourable representations of domestic space.

The central dramatic aspects of *All I Desire* (see appendix for plot summary) take place in and around the family home, but domestic space is not rendered in the low key mode of *Late Spring*. Becoming a vibrant emotional entity in itself, the home is far from being a site of the mundane; and overflowing with sentiment, it is romanticised in a way that Noriko and Somiyas' living space is not. As Naomi (Barbara Stanwyck) approaches the house at the start of the film the camera pans and tilts up from the pathway, eventually enveloping the whole front façade in the frame while simultaneously the music, melodic strings in nostalgic lament, swells up on the soundtrack. The saturation of frame and soundtrack combines to express Naomi's burst of feelings; although her sentiments are of loss and regret they are conveyed in a register of fullness, immediately characterising the house, because of her viewpoint, as a site of abundant resonance.

Naomi's stirring approach characterises a moment of entry as an event, one which contrasts with the depiction of entrances and exits in *Late Spring*: the shots outside the house showing the repetitive day by day approaches, or those from inside as the characters leave from the porch area. Differences between these occasions are almost imperceptible and gather significance only gradually. In *All I Desire* the movements between inside and outside the house carry a singular and special force: Naomi's careful approach becomes 'a mother's return' (further emphasised by the contrast with Ned's carefree dash indoors with his dog) while her re-entry with Henry (Richard Carlson) in the closing moments of the film becomes the physical encapsulation of their decision to 'remarry', once more to 'cross the threshold'. Whereas arrivals and departures for Ozu convey the habitual and workaday, cinema has often invested them with a ceremonial significance.

The doors and windows of the house are given dramatic distinction because of the worlds which they divide (FIG.5). The camera has the ability, via doors and windows, for flexible movement between these worlds: it can physically traverse these divisions. The house's entrance acts as an emotional threshold; the boundaries dividing inside and outside become clearly marked due to the clash between the home as heart of the family and an outer world of threat and danger. The character of Dutch, and the illicit and murderous activity surrounding him, represents this other sphere, allowing the home and Naomi's decision to resettle there to crystallise into a haven of safety. However, there is also an ambiguity in this security because of the allure of the dangerous life. Is the house a little too safe? While inhabiting it would one need or crave the excitement of an unfamiliar world? The windows and doors resonate as the sites of these hesitations.

Windows are a particularly amenable piece of architecture for the cinema. Many and detailed comparisons may be discussed but one observation is that *mise-en-scène* and the window resemble each other through both allowing a framed glimpse into another world. When a film adopts the visual perspective of a character's view through a window, the camera's abilities and the character's abilities match each other so closely that they both unify in a unique way. The presence of a window makes this a closer unification than that achieved by a regular point of view shot. Therefore, when Naomi peers at the family through the window on her return, the camera has the ability to represent, so precisely and sympathetically, her emotional experience (however, this is not a sufficient condition to ensure the moment's artistic success).

The windows of the home become screens that exclude but also invite tantalising glimpses into the other world. The windows' temptations produce a yearning for what one is able to see but cannot have. After Henry switches off one of the house lamps at the end of the party at which they have been celebrating the performance of the school play, the camera pans to the window, accompanied by rousing music, and through it we see Dutch stalking outside the house. The audience sights 'the other' from a position of safety, building up the sentiment of the house. In another shot later in the film, from outside the house we see Henry working through one window, Naomi at the phonograph through another window further along and in the final third of the frame the embracing shadows of Russ and Joyce projected onto

the wall. Although not yet fully united and despite their different proximities within the house, this shot stresses the intimacy of the family through a binding of its members. The façade of the home unites the characters to become a dreamy tableau: the cosiness beyond the windows combined with the shadow kiss, a blatantly romanticised image of young love. Any intimacy in *Late Spring* avoids such self-conscious declarations.

B) Cinema's Transformation of Private into Public

These declarations, with cosy framings and shadowed projections, are a particularly cinematic way of publicising intimacy. In *Late Spring*, Ozu's achievement is to represent the home as a distinctively private space (even with invited guests). The tendency of the cinema is to transform even the private into something public with the effect that it often misses out on the interest arising from the mundane activity which also characterises domestic life. The sense of the private space turned public is made particularly overt by the return of "big star" Naomi. We see her shadow clearly stretched out on the pavement (it is not dispersed) as she approaches the house: her appearance represented with an expressionistic theatricality, her shadow being "larger than life". The shadow signals the nature of Naomi's presence, a presence which in time turns the house into a theatrical location. Paradoxically, Naomi's struggle to re-integrate into the private space of the home involves an endless effort of performance, transforming the house into an arena characterised by more public modes of behaviour.

The theatricalised home becomes a location of shifting shadows and light, far removed from the flat, equally distributed light in *Late Spring*'s home. On Naomi's return, the lights from inside the house illuminate her face: she is lit up by the house, it makes her shine again. Such patterns of light are signalled early on in the film's literal stage setting: at the high school play, as the auditorium darkens and the curtains open, we are looking not at the stage but at Naomi, staring out from the front row, illuminated by the streams of light flooding from the stage. This moment provides an elegant reversal, with public attention (highlighted by the film's attention) shifting from the stage to the visiting star. Representing a transferral of spectacle the moment was prefigured a few seconds earlier when Lily looked out of the curtain peephole: the visual point of view shot showed her mother, framed in an iris circle, as the unexpected

object of exhibition. In this vein, the lights of the home later become aids to performance: at the party the guests crowd around Naomi while she is lit, in true star fashion, by the large side lamp. She then moves to proclaim the poem from the stairs but she first turns down the 'house lights'.

Just as the public auditorium becomes transformed into the space of display, so the private space of the home becomes the site of public activity. The open plan of the house facilitates this theatricalising, with the central staircase, between living room and dining room, allowing characters to talk on or from a 'balcony' area often down into the main living space. Sirk frequently 'splits' the screen, with landing above and a room below, enabling third parties to burst in on characters talking in another 'plane': Ted pokes through the banister columns to tease Lily below him; Lena strategically interrupts Naomi and Henry from resuming their old scores; and Joyce also halts her parents to protect her father from further emotional pain. On each of these occasions the design of the house allows the film to theatricalise the orchestrations of private family interactions. Equally, as Naomi reads the poem, Lena creeps round from the kitchen; the careful placement of the stairs joining the lounge at the front of the house and the kitchen at the back enable her to watch from 'off-stage right'. Members of the household become characterised as performers or spectators.

Moreover, the desire of Lena to marry the male housekeeper is dependent on the twists in the main story; they figure as a side show, necessarily interested observers to the main performance. The kitchen might have been a more workaday space but it is not exempt from the performative transformation. Michael Walker describes the kitchen as a liberated zone, but this description implies that it is a space of freedom, where it is in fact also a place where characters feel the need to perform[27]. Lily's movements around the kitchen at the start of the film exemplify this, swinging on the banister, leaning back onto the table, achieving just the postures needed to project her words upwards and outwards, using the decor and furniture as supports (or 'props') for her affected mannerisms (FIG.6)[28].

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[27] Michael Walker '*All I Desire*', *Movie* 34/5 Winter 1990, p33.

[28] A discrimination might need to be made between those moments when characters feel themselves to be under an obligation to perform, in the sense of self-misrepresentation and concealment, and those when they are free to indulge a desire to perform. On one level Lily performs because she wishes to here (she is under no immediate pressures), but it is also true that Lily feels this is how she ought to behave; her own youthful insecurities make her strain to be theatrical.

Equally, Naomi's kicking of the matchbox from the wall is a typically showy gesture, part of her effort to be at one with the house once again. Such large theatrical movements in the kitchen contrast with Noriko's small functional movements around the house in *Late Spring*. There is also a concentration of dramatic function here with the coincidence of Joyce's entry as Naomi kicks the matchbox: the gesture would already be eloquent without Joyce's witnessing it with disapproval, and being assaulted by its consequences – the shower of matches. Similarly, Naomi's arrival at supper time allows the confrontation with all the members of the family and is the condition of possibility for the panning shot which reveals (in four seconds) their reactions to Naomi in terms of their various positions and affiliations within the family. These moments are representative of the saturated mode which may be opposed to Ozu's less intensified techniques.

D) The Exuberant Mobility of Family Interaction

Ozu is intent to show Noriko's movements around the house but he is content to justify those movements in terms of functional behaviour around domestic space. Ozu's sequence of still frames matches those functional movements. In Sirk's home, even beyond the party scene, character movement is a choreographed dance and suitably a moving camera follows its steps. The cinema's possibilities for camera mobility lend themselves toward capturing the vivacious pursuits within and between the various rooms of a family home, for weaving together and conveying communality even in disparate or disruptive activity. After a night where certain partners have come together, each character joyfully speeds downstairs for breakfast. In one lengthy shot the camera tracks and pans as the characters enter the morning room: it tracks left with Lily as she looks out of the window, tracks right as she moves towards the table, whereupon it picks up Ted, tracks with him into the centre of the house (shooting him through the outside windows) catches Joyce coming down the stairs and so it continues. Crucially, the moving camera knits together the family members as they move around the home, the moment achieving power by recognising the various individual personal comings and goings and then uniting them all as contributions to the joyful exuberance existing around a family home. Ozu had no lesser strength of

feeling for the family in domestic space but his sequence of still frames contributed to a quieter and more modest vision of character integration within domestic spaces.

The manner in which a home has been filled will have a bearing on an audience's feelings when it is empty. Cinema's tendency of making the private public has ramifications for its representation of loss. Because of the nature of Noriko's domestic movement during *Late Spring* the empty rooms at the end convey the loss of everyday behaviour from a domestic space. In *All I Desire* the sense of loss is in a different register. As Naomi is leaving the house, she looks behind herself, her visual perspective conveyed by the camera panning the empty lounge and stairs. Accompanied by the emotive strings of the soundtrack this shot rhymes with her initial sighting of the house on her arrival, further strengthening the effect of a rousing melancholy. What is lost is all that exuberant movement, the home resembling a bare stage at the close of a show; this is a loss already permeated by the inflating sensation of nostalgia ("oh the times we had"). The single still shots of empty rooms in *Late Spring* prompt a deflating resignation in the viewer which emerges from the realisation of something gone, whereas in *All I Desire* the movement of the pan combines with the engulfing music to convey a plenitude even in depletion.

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Chapter Seven

Unconcealing the Obvious in Eric Rohmer's *A Tale of Springtime*

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Introduction

The central aims of this chapter are to explore:

1) issues of plot and storytelling. Rohmer's *A Tale of Springtime* is fascinating for its undramatic approach to storytelling, especially in its adoption of plot structures and emotional currents associated with melodramatic scenarios (here the mystery thriller is the blueprint), which it then reconfigures into everyday situations.

2) the stylistics of a flirtatious narrative (colour, lighting, editing) where the purposes and direction of scenes are kept loose and character traits are not crystallised.

3) the possibilities for characters' dialogue in film to exist outside focused events, and the methods for engaging the viewer in scenarios where characters channel their energy into saying rather than doing.

Section One – The Art of Undramatic Storytelling

A) Accounting for the Opening Sequence

Note how the opening sequence is fascinating in so far as it encourages questions around included rather than excluded information.

Shot breakdown

1. (ls) Front of an educational establishment. A slim young women with short dark hair walks away from the building.
2. (mcu) (ellipse) Same woman behind car windscreen.
3. (mls) Shot of her point of view through car windscreen. Film titles come up, Beethoven's *Spring* sonata starts on the soundtrack.
4. (mls) (ellipse) Moving shot of bushes, bridge and then expanse of river probably through car side window (90 degrees from driver's seat).
5. (mls) (ellipse) Wall running down the right of frame. Much bright, white sky (45 degrees from driver's seat).

Comment – A sense of travelling is established because the shots of the world passing the car draw attention to the surrounding aspects of the journey (especially with the musical accompaniment) rather than urging questions over destination (excluded information); landscapes and music signal Spring[1]; all shots, even exterior ones, at or from eye level.

[1] The whole film desists from using music outside the fiction to increase the intensity of sequences. Such music is only used at the beginning and end of the film (Beethoven's "Spring" Sonata) acting as a frame enclosing the story (here at the beginning, and at the end when Jeanne clears up) and, more significantly, as a marker for the season of spring. The film avoids scored music which would match

6. (mls) (ellipse) Outside building. Music stops.
7. (ms) Through an interior doorway *in* an apartment, towards the entrance doorway of apartment. Woman enters first door, walks through interior door, looks around a dark room.
8. (mcu) Probably woman's optical viewpoint. Unmade bed, pan from bed across chairs, littered table, stale bread.
9. (ms) (As 7) Woman moves, folds up coat and jacket.
10. (mcu) Picks up three pieces of clothing in sequence as she walks across the cluttered room, returns to replace them all. (She makes a clear attempt to tidy up, then decides not to.)
11. (cu) Philosophy text books lined up on shelf. Her hand takes one and then another.
12. (mcu) Large wardrobe. Woman moves chair, stands on it, brings down some clothes, gets down, moves chair, opens wardrobe, moves some clothes, takes some others, places them gently in her bag.

Comment – Emphasis on filming entrances and doorways; shots of her viewing apartment; much moving and collecting of clothes, each movement and collection carefully included. Why are her routine exits and entrances so important? Why are we meticulously being shown so much moving of clothes especially as the film never resorts to any techniques that render such movements out of the ordinary?

13. (mls) (ellipse) Busy road from the direction of front car window.
14. (mls) (ellipse) Another busy road from the same direction as shot 13.
15. (ms) Medium-low angle shot from front driver seat. Passing shops eventually emphasising green leaves of trees.
16. (ms) (ellipse) The woman's car going around a corner.

Comment – Very little change of information between shots 13 and 14. Why are we seeing her in transit again? Why more similar shots of cars on the street (after all, they are very standard, generalised shots of city traffic)?

17. (mls) (ellipse) Head on angle. Large doorway adjacent to shop. The woman walks into shot, along the pavement, stops at doorway, enters, door shuts behind her.
18. (mcu) Stairway. The woman walks up it (towards camera), looking tired and continues to climb it (up and away from camera).
19. (mcu) Front of doorway. Looks for key, enters, closes door, door shuts.
20. (ms) Inside light apartment. She looks around.
21. (ms) French windows. She walks over to them and looks out.
22. (cu) Left flower box.
23. (cu) Right flower box.
24. (ms) She moves back into centre of room, takes off her coat, places it on the back of a chair.

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the film's visual progression step-by-step. Indeed, the film often uses stylistic devices to merely index sections or moments rather than employing them to raise the dramatic stakes.

Comment – Emphasis on another *entry* into an apartment, especially the walk upstairs, and time spent in corridor. Why show her climbing the stairs for so long? Why do we need to see her going through all the motions of unlocking the door? She is not, for example, burgling the apartment, which might, on suspenseful grounds, have justified the shot. Her movements are seen in such completeness, without being given emotional resonance. Overall why do they warrant such attention?

B) A Non-Disrupting Protagonist

The first shot of *A Tale of Springtime* shows a woman – who we later learn is called Jeanne – walking away from her educational establishment. This is the character we are to follow exclusively for the next five minutes as she travels around the city. She appears in almost every scene in the film thereafter, and the film closes with her. From the opening shots the film encourages us to follow her movements and yet, as the central protagonist, she does not drive the plot in the manner one might expect. Protagonists in most narrative films tend to disturb order or act to resolve disruption; this is what lends films their drive, as the protagonist either disrupts or searches for solutions to situations. However, Jeanne has a desire not to disturb order. The film's skill is to rework a denial of a melodramatic expectation into an exploration of a type of personality.

The opening five minutes (without dialogue) are characterised by her travelling through the city. Because her behaviour is so routine (folding up clothes, picking up books) these opening scenes appear as merely preparatory, a prolonged establishing sequence, rather than a period which intends to throw up early narrative questions. A deception is created by beginning the film as if it might be the commencement of a mystery, with a systematic journey and all the detailed paraphernalia of a character's activity, without quite forcing such questions as "Where is she going?" and "What is she doing?". Indeed, by limiting the sequence's emphasis on exclusions the film also reduces its elusiveness.

The protagonist's movements barely suggest the seeds of plot momentum and her activity gives clues as to why she might not be the driving force. The sequence contains visual point of view shots of Jeanne looking: travelling shots out of the car windscreen from the angle of the driver's seat (15) and, later, as Jeanne enters the dark and messy flat, a survey of the scene as the camera pans around the general disorder

(8). This sets her up as an observer of external events, a behavioural feature then carried throughout the film. There is a pattern throughout of Jeanne observing; for example, later in the film, as she enters Natasha's flat several shots emphasise her looking around, inspecting the environment. The film's peculiarity resides in clearly drawing attention to a narrative journey, with Jeanne at the centre (she travels as the audience does around the apartments and the cottage in the country) but then compelling her to observe rather than act. Moreover, we might notice how composed her movement is in this opening sequence; she moves through the locations calmly, she does not *fill* them with a noisy presence. As in the opening sequence, so in the rest of the tale; she travels, she watches on, she occasionally offers some non-committal advice but never instigates any disruptions.

For a director so obsessed with speech, any prolonged period of silence carries a special significance. This non-talking opening sequence gives clues to Jeanne's later behaviour where she often remains silent in significant moments[2]. When Natasha unravels the "Mystery of the Necklace", Jeanne tends to sit quietly, aside from providing a few lubricating questions. Moreover, Natasha's mobility while narrating the mystery contrasts with Jeanne's rather unvaried position, Rohmer carefully providing cutaways to her listening. Similarly, during the argument between Natasha and Eve in the cottage, the film again inserts shots of Jeanne watching the conflict, and staying silent as it unfolds. Importantly, there is nothing contrived or sinister in Jeanne's reticence, and the film renders her silent watching perfectly suitable to the moments. (Why wouldn't she listen as Natasha tells the story? Wouldn't it be sensible to stay out of the argument?) Nevertheless, the film insinuates her silence to be a significant behavioural pattern.

Indeed, it is insinuated but not blatant, and therefore Rohmer can maintain a suspension that is skilfully poised, inferring aspects of Jeanne's character, aspects which only near the end of the film are more explicitly expressed. That her characteristics are so gradually and implicitly revealed is largely due to the unusual narrative strategy of featuring a protagonist who does not draw attention to herself.

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[2] Pascal Bonitzer makes this point, describing the silence as that 'which has us ask of a partner: what are you thinking of? And which arouses, in general, an irritated response.' Pascal Bonitzer, *Eric Rohmer*, Cahiers du Cinema, Editions de l'Etoile, Paris, 1991, p85 (Note: Private Translation).

Therefore, we might say that, by conventional dramatic standards, her characterisation is at odds with her central narrative placement.

A similar point could be made about the opening sequence, where the film is meticulous in showing so much information that is seemingly redundant for tight plotting. It is worth reiterating that Rohmer makes nods towards the thriller type of opening (even though the film is not a thriller) only to subvert it. It is frequently a characteristic of mystery thrillers that they commence with particularly confusing openings which encourage narrative questions based on high levels of excluded information. The essence of Rohmer's subversion of convention consists in the unexpected nature of the *included* information in the opening; this reversal of a generic pattern allows the film to express a different type of behavioural situation. Jeanne is shown walking up the stairs for a long time; she is also shown looking for her key and putting it in the door, whereafter the film waits for a lengthy period in the hallway until the door has been completely shut (18). These inclusions determinedly follow all the "in betweens" of her travels, and are emphasised because of the rarity of their inclusion in films. Such inclusions might be judged laborious, until the viewer recognises that the explicit coverage of all the to-ing and fro-ing, of the trouble she takes to go through with her activities, of her painstaking, methodical itinerary (folding clothes, fetching books) is intended to be the centre of attention.

Rohmer shifts the plot mystery to lie at the heart of included rather than excluded information. A whiff of enigma is created by the film because it shows too much, not too little. Jeanne herself implies a mystery element to her travels when she comments at the party, later, that anyone following her movements during the day would be at a loss to account for the motivation behind her actions. The reason why Jeanne judges that her movements would be read as unfathomable is actually because those movements would appear not to be strictly *necessary* (Why is she bothering? Why doesn't she stay in the first flat?) However, by solving this mystery, the viewer will understand their necessity, realising that the opening sequence gives us the first clues to her all-consuming orderliness (she cannot bear to stay at the messy flat). Here lies the film's central dramatic paradox: some of Jeanne's most significant character traits are to be found in those apparently trivial movements in and between apartments. However, these traits are only hinted at in the opening sequence. Part of Rohmer's art

is to discover secrets in the apparently obvious (and in moments which therefore appear narratively redundant).

Thus, the film encourages the audience to play the detective in the opening sequence, but insists on an unconventional line of investigation[3]. During Jeanne's early travels the nature of the locations is overtly emphasised but those spaces prompt questions like "Will the character be comfortable here?" rather than more teleological questions such as "What will happen here?" The questions are closely aligned with Jeanne's everyday relationship to location, rather than with any urgent narrative relationship to it (these are considerations we usually associate not with following a film, but maybe with the renting of a flat). More precisely such questions link into the film's interest in the psychological revelations indicated by characters' routine behaviour within domestic spaces: "Could the character sleep, eat and drink here? Could she sit happily and read a book?" If we do pose the question "what will happen here?" it should be in accordance with these primary considerations. Tom Milne sets out the case in regard to Jeanne with delicate insight:

> Within the space of the first reel, for example, a casual inspection of four different apartments lays out the entire scenario. First, the flat belonging to Jeanne's boyfriend, all peeling paint, cheery disorder and random sleaze; as soon as you see Jeanne's apartment, its spotless, orderly twin, you know that lurking somewhere in her mind is the doubt, can I *really* be in love with this man? Next comes the apartment where the party is held, and where Jeanne is like a fish out of water among walls brightly painted in primary colours and hung with framed collages of snapshots and family memorabilia. Intrinsically alien to this unashamedly assertive display of tasteless gregariousness, Jeanne finds her natural environment in Igor's apartment. Essentially modest, despite the hint of class in the sprinkling of family portraits decorating the wall (all Matisse-Modigliani vintage, and lending a tone that the 'artistic' posters in Jeanne's apartment strive to emulate), it nevertheless has a graceful sense of proportion, a cool spaciousness in design, that answers the need for order in Jeanne's mind. It is, if you like, a tangible representation of the mental territory Jeanne has staked out for herself.[4]

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[3] Bonitzer also writes that the narrative form of the classic detective novel interests Rohmer, or at least provides him with a model for the construction of his plots. He also says 'Everything is a clue, and a false clue'. Bonitzer, ibid., p29/30.

[4] Tom Milne, '*A Tale of Springtime*', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, June 1990, p151.

Milne has played the detective game astutely by re-orientating himself to Rohmer's unconventional justifications for locations.

C) Masking Significance with Situation

The film clouds the audience's investigation into Jeanne's character by providing obfuscating plot scenarios. In the parlance of the mystery thriller one might be tempted to label such points as red herrings. They are obfuscating not because of their forcefulness but because of their fluency, and accustomed to absorbing plot situations in films we are beguiled into hardly even thinking twice. There is a pattern throughout the film of Jeanne sitting alone, often on a couch, cross-armed. This is the case at the party, her aloneness reiterated as the film cuts away to the general melange around her (most probably her visual point of view again). Rohmer carefully justifies her isolation with plot detail: Jeanne did not intend to attend the party, she knows few people anyway, and besides she is only wasting the night away until her apartment becomes vacant. However, by *never* allowing the jostling party-goers to enter into Jeanne's frame space, Rohmer's *mise-en-scène* is just insistent enough to niggle at, but not undermine, those rational plot explanations[5]. Is she perhaps a little too alone here?

At the party Jeanne meets Natasha, a young woman who studies music. After the party, up in Natasha's apartment, Natasha performs her rendition of Schumann. As she plays, there is a medium close-up of Jeanne's body. The camera slowly pulls back to isolate her alone on the couch (FIG.1). She appears lost in thought, but the film prevents the audience reading the moment with confidence. The film never uses close-ups melodramatically for moments of alarm, tending instead to employ them when a character is in deeper thought. We know already that Jeanne enjoys the process of thinking, so does the close-up indicate this or is it a suggestion of a deeper worry? Similarly, does the camera pulling back convey pure absorption in the Schumann or is it more precisely a clue to her isolation?

The latter interpretation is discouraged by the moment's relationship to the plot: it comes after such a comfortable conversation on the couch, where the primary

[5] This is one of the few occasions in the film when Rohmer uses off-screen space to agitate on-screen space. For a further discussion of this see Section Three below.

focus was around Natasha's feelings towards her father Igor and his girlfriend Eve. Indeed, from the characters leaving the main room at the party up to this moment, the flow of dialogue has been geared towards Natasha's concerns. Thus, Jeanne's preoccupation seems to continue in that vein: she is enthralled by Natasha's playing. However, it is also true that this is the middle of the night, she is in a strange apartment and with an unfamiliar woman playing the piano, all elements which may be stimulating a moment of self-realisation in Jeanne. Yet at this point, because of the weighting of concerns, it seems less likely that Jeanne's immersion is caused by more serious pondering.

There are many occasions when the camera isolates Jeanne from the 'crowd', often when other characters are furthering the narrative in the form of a disturbance. In one incident, in the cottage, Rohmer has Eve emerge out of the distance, from behind, to interrupt Jeanne and Natasha. Eve is seen rushing towards the French windows with the intention of grabbing her bag before leaving. As she is about to enter there is a cut around 90 degrees which isolates Jeanne, her head turning to see Eve's entry (FIG.2). Rohmer had previously shot the scene from and towards the window along a 180 degree line and this is the only cut of such sharpness in the film. The sudden shift here re-orientates Eve's entry in terms of Jeanne's spectatorship, Rohmer emphasising her as observer to a 'disturbance'.

The film's skill is to not overemphasise this isolation, and moreover to mask its more perturbing undercurrents by simultaneously presenting Jeanne's separateness as sensible calmness, shy reticence, unassuming friendliness, or formal etiquette. After all, within the story, she is situated as Natasha and Igors' guest. In so many situations the film is eager to present convincing reasons for Jeanne's behaviour under the guise of politeness. Yet rarely is it portrayed as a guise, as that would transform the film's drama, resting it more forcefully on the intrigue around deceptions. Although her decision to allow Gaelle to stay in her apartment appeared to be friendly generosity, in hindsight it looked more like an inability to disturb order. Such quiet politeness is at the heart of the film's deceptive strategy: the plot makes Jeanne appear like a neutral character, an unassuming onlooker to the tensions between Natasha, her father and Eve. However, Rohmer's scheme of creating an inactive protagonist is central to his

investigations of the character traits obscured by serene and undemonstrative behaviour such as politeness, detachment from conflict, and tidying apartments.

D) The MacGuffin

One of the prime investigations of the film, therefore, is into Jeanne's personality; but her placement as an inactive heroine might throw one off the scent. One might also be diverted by the film's overt mystery around Natasha's necklace. If we compare this situation to Alfred Hitchcock's use of MacGuffins it may provide us with clues to Rohmer's narrative strategies. For Hitchcock, the MacGuffin was a device or gimmick that was of vital importance to the characters but of little importance in itself. It is the catalyst that drives the action. In *The Thirty Nine Steps* (Alfred Hitchcock 1935 GB) the fact that the MacGuffin turned out to be the mechanical formula for the construction of an airplane engine was trivial besides the need for the Robert Donat character to *discover* that fact in order to prove his innocence. It was the pretext for his adventures across the Highlands and beyond. In *A Tale of Springtime* the necklace is of little importance in itself: it is a vehicle to explore the characters' prejudices and jealousies (especially Natasha's), as well as their mind games.

Yet it would be incorrect to state that the necklace drives the 'action': in many scenes the necklace is not only forgotten, it does not even provide the pretext for the drama. The story of the necklace is not related by Natasha until the middle of the film (after 50 minutes) and none of the further scenes is initially motivated by Natasha's eager investigations. Cleverly, by using an object and encircling it with a mystery, and therefore playing on our expectations of MacGuffin type strategies, the film flirts with establishing the necklace as the plot motivator.

In fact the necklace (superficially) masks the more important plot line in the film: the possibility of a scheme by Natasha to push Jeanne into Igor's arms at the expense of Eve. This seems to provide the central mystery as it is kept in play through many of the film's manoeuvres. This situation allows the film to explore issues of manipulation, seduction, alliances and paranoia in mild scenarios. For example, Jeanne claims she rejects Igor because she wishes to scuttle any plans to push her into a relationship. However, the coolly detached manner of her rejection is an indication of

psychological forces less motivated by *plots*. The scuttling of the plot acts as Jeanne's excuse.

It is this type of excuse which really interests the film. In the same way as it subverts traditional ideas about the role of a protagonist in order to explore characteristics of Jeanne, it also uses conventional narrative frameworks that may amount to nothing. In these terms the necklace is a *red herring MacGuffin*. However, the necklace is not a particularly strong red herring: it has limited motivating qualities, and an audience is quickly alerted to the 'real' enigma around Natasha's schemes (after all, she propagated the necklace suppositions in the first place).

Yet, it is because we pass so easily to the 'real' mystery around Natasha's plotting that we might mistake *its* import. In fact, the film suggests that this intrigue *too* amounts to nothing. The suggestion of its insignificance allows for the distinct possibility that none of the characters' behaviour and movements throughout are motivated by anything 'sinister'. However, the film does wish to keep this intrigue in play so that it functions as a contrasting device to all the possibilities which are not sinister. Rohmer's plot structure is a double sleight of hand[6].

E) The Secrets in the Habitual

Rohmer plays with the viewer's fascination with excluded plot information. In the analysis of the first sequence of the film we saw that all Rohmer's *inclusions* in fact held the clues to Jeanne's behaviour. There are various moments throughout where Natasha appears to be plotting: when she adamantly desires to buy the bread hence leaving Jeanne and her father alone, when she conveniently forgets to mention to Jeanne about the phone call, or when she mysteriously pulls her father away from Eve to talk with him in private. Here Rohmer plays on expectations about the nature of information a film should provide.

[6] If the necklace is a red herring MacGuffin, then if one looks closely the character of Igor might be the real one: for most of the duration of the film he is of vital importance to the characters but of little genuine emotional interest to the viewer. He is a centre of conversation before his entry in the film, he is at the core of Natasha's plot behaviour described above, and is crucial to the final stages of the film with regard to Jeanne. In the dinner time discussion, he remains rather detached and neutral (we later discover that this was a mask, but that does not affect this point) yet he is central to Eve's behaviour in the scene: she desires to impress him and to embarrass Natasha in front of him.

In the first case, Igor has returned home and Natasha has persuaded him to stay for dinner. Natasha's decision to go for bread, expressed with much enthusiasm, looks like a set up to leave Jeanne and Igor alone. Although it is true that they will need bread for the extra person, the fact that the film includes a character deciding to go for bread seems less important than the fact of Jeanne and Igor being left together. Again it is a matter of weighting, but once again the overt plot flow may have deceived us. The act might be typical of an unassuming, daily, domestic task that for Rohmer reveals relevant character traits: it reveals the way Natasha gets carried away with excitement, here over the occasion of her father staying for dinner, or her impulsive generosity of spirit. Crucially, the film plays on the fact that Natasha's errand for bread might look naughty when one can initially only justify the film's inclusion of such a slight action in terms of a larger potential consequence. Yet, the errand may also be an 'innocent' act (innocent in terms of schemes) that warrants inclusion because it embodies information more illuminating of Natasha's character.

In the second example Igor supposedly made a phone call to Natasha confirming his presence at the cottage. Because Igor's presence has been an issue under discussion between Jeanne and Natasha it seems peculiar that Natasha did not mention it. Moreover, when we find out about the call in the seduction scene it comes on the heels of a couple of factors that appear to point to Jeanne's set up: Natasha's obsession with scaring Eve from the cottage and then her sudden decision to leave with her boyfriend. Besides, earlier in the film, Natasha forgot to tell Jeanne that Igor would be coming to collect some clothes from his room. By placing the information at this point the evidence against Natasha seems convincing.

However, as soon as the accusation is put to Natasha in the final scene her reaction seems completely sincere ("you don't look for my real motives") and the honesty and instinctual emotionalism which her screen presence exudes now re-balances the plot flow (which was strong in her absence). Suddenly, it does appear as if Natasha forgot to mention the call because she sincerely thought it unimportant (she says that the phone call did not change her opinion that he would not go to the cottage). The film encourages the viewer to hesitate over establishing a clear difference between a strategic withholding of information and an accidental piece of forgetfulness. (How accidental is forgetfulness? How much effort was put into

remembering?) *A Tale of Springtime* never isolates a character who overtly lies, that option being too assertive for Rohmer, hence the use of undisclosed information as a basis for possible doubts and deceptions.

Rohmer's interest in the mysterious seems close to that which Stanley Cavell discussed with reference to Poe's *The Purloined Letter* where the 'narrative comes to turn on the fact that a purloined letter was hidden by being kept in plain view, as if a little too self-evident, a little too plain to notice'[7] (see **Chapter One**). I mentioned in Chapter One that many detective stories are structured around what is hidden in the apparently self-evident. Cavell also discussed how Martin Heidegger had written of *unconcealing* the obvious and saw this as a recurrent theme in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*:

> The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and [ordinariness, everydayness]. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes.)[8]

Rohmer seems to be subscribing to a similar philosophy when he refuses to show us what takes place between Natasha and her father in the bedroom. Once again, we are tempted to read the exclusion as significant, the deliberate withholding or hiding of plot information. It plays as a significant exclusion following both the meal where Igor has had his first proper opportunity to appreciate Jeanne and the various manoeuvres concerning each characters' possible visit to the cottage. In these manoeuvres Natasha's decision to go to the cottage and then her refusal in the light of Eve's decision looked suspiciously like plotting. Coming at the end of Natasha's failure to achieve her perfect scenario of Igor and Jeanne alone at the cottage her secret liaison carries suspicion. However, her intention to withdraw may have been an honest change of heart and the incident behind the door may simply be Natasha cheekily checking what her father thought of Jeanne (after all she makes no secret of a desire to see her father and Jeanne as a couple); nothing incriminating went on, hence its exclusion. Rohmer carefully weights plot to distract; but what is hidden exists in

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[7] Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Scepticism and Romanticism*, Univ. Of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, p164.
[8] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, point 129, quoted in Cavell, ibid., p164.

what Rohmer shows, not what he excludes; and the secrets the film exposes are shown in the undramatic (not the possible conniving behind doors) and the everyday (buying bread).

Section Two – The Unconcealing of Character

A) The Mystery Over Characterisation

The eloquence of Rohmer's filmmaking lies in a balancing act: the sustaining of doubt, without it toppling over to become the film's narrative structuring principle. The feeling of doubt wriggles under the surface, rather than dominating the audience's engagement with the film[9]. Doubt tends to dominate in a suspense thriller and it is worth re-emphasising that a comparison between this film and the thriller is not artificial. Rohmer steals that genre's motivating features, resituating and remoulding them into a less suspenseful scenario.

Rohmer extracts major questions from the thriller genre, namely "What are the characters' real motives? Why are they behaving as they are?" and transposes them into an uneventful framework. The discovery process which he then reproduces is one akin to getting to know people in daily life. On first meeting people we may judge them on sketchy indications but during later meetings, discarding some initial impressions, we build on more substantial evidence. We often realise ways in which we were deceived; we might, for instance, have read too much into a mode of dress, or taken the behavioural consequences of a person's nervousness to be their usual mode of interaction.

The film plays on our tendencies to misjudge others in our lives by processes of deception that are not necessarily sinister. Thus, Rohmer understands the way that the narrative concerns of the thriller form may usefully serve as an investigative framework into more commonplace scenarios. The example of Eve is instructive:

1) We hear a lot about Eve's deficiencies from Natasha before we ever see the character. We trust Natasha enough not to disbelieve her. But are her jealousies with regard to her father clouding her rational judgement?

[9] Bonitzer says that 'the problem of doubt...in all senses of the word is at the heart of Rohmer's cinema, and gives it its tone'. Bonitzer, op.cit., p29.

2) When we finally meet Eve, in the dinner time discussion, she seems, in her manipulating of proceedings, to live up to expectations. But Eve, trying too hard to assert herself in an unconducive environment, might not be doing herself justice (people often behave uncharacteristically on first meetings, or at least allow some of their less common personality traits to dominate).

3) When Natasha attacks Eve, about smoking during the chopping of food, the balance of sympathy shifts. Natasha does indeed appear to be over-reacting and Eve appears to be behaving reasonably, at least in part. But is Natasha deliberately behaving excessively to drive Eve away?

In each of the above situations Rohmer weights the evidence, encouraging one judgement of the character rather than another. But he inserts contrary information which lingers without quite overriding the dominant evidence.

By subtly recontextualising the characters, what the viewer feels about them is imperceptibly adjusted throughout the film. The film never fully 'explains' a character (although our understanding of them may mature). Moreover, by not consuming his characters under one dominant trait (or even a complex of traits) the characterisation is prevented from polarising into more obvious conflicts.

B) Hidden Motives in the Commonplace (and a Comparison with Hitchcock's *Strangers On A Train*)

The film builds deceptions into its framework, mostly around the possibility of Natasha's plotting, but the beauty of the film's ambiguity is that the deceptions could also be more commonplace. The film shows how human behaviour, even in reasonably friendly environments, can be manipulative or paranoid, and full of conflicts of interest. If Hitchcock convinced us that the everyday was full of this behaviour he did so by making it sinister, dangerous, even murderous, and therefore full of fear. He thereby transformed the everyday into something more fantastic. Rohmer's undramatic strategy, however, is to de-criminalise these emotions (the thriller genre tends to criminalise them), and to portray them as unexceptional aspects of human behaviour.

The discovery of these modes of behaviour in Hitchcock tends to disturb, and there is a thrill in the disturbance. In Rohmer their detection, if not comic, is gently

ironic, and tends to produce a feeling of pleasure[10]. This pleasure comes with the recognition of all the hidden motives which lie behind behaviour that appears innocent, behaviour where no such impulses would seem to be at work. It is therefore significant that the undermining of innocence should produce a guilt whose associations are never vicious or cruel. The guilt lies in motives not openly disclosed; although the failure of the disclosure is never malevolent, nor need it be wilful concealment.

A comparison of *A Tale of Springtime* with Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (Alfred Hitchcock 1951 US) is instructive especially with regard to the equivalent meeting scenes (FIG.5). Hitchcock builds up an ominous momentum to the meeting between Guy and Bruno on the train (see appendix for plot summary). A sequence of crosscutting between their respective legs (and contrasted shoes) walking, leaving taxis and then catching the train is followed by a shot from the front of the train as it speeds along the tracks. This momentum is continued inside the train as we follow Guy's legs until he sits down and kicks Bruno's feet. Natasha makes a slightly studied approach towards Jeanne but *A Tale of Springtime*'s preparatory stages are lackadaisical by comparison. Jeanne has been shown alone on the couch; Natasha kisses her boyfriend as he leaves, walks down the short entrance hallway, turns to look at the bookshelf, and then deposits herself on the couch.

The film maintains just the hint, through Natasha's confidence in approach, that Jeanne should be wary. Indeed, the film holds on to the sense of a strange meeting. He also keeps Natasha's boyfriend's departure in silence which might hint at a secret; and Natasha's staring at the books seems the sort of delaying tactic that is symptomatic of an orchestrated approach. Once again however, the film uses the skeletons of melodramatic structures in order to shift the nature of Natasha's forwardness. The momentum built up in Hitchcock's opening sequence signals that Bruno's forwardness is rooted in a pathological obsession, whereas Rohmer's relaxed depiction of Natasha's approach defines her forwardness in terms of a youthful social confidence (with the delay in front of the books perhaps indicating a touch of adolescent awkwardness).

Rohmer sets up the situation as a strange meeting in order to de-criminalise it. In Hitchcock's film Bruno's display of friendliness is a scheme of seduction. The

[10] See Section Three below on flirtation.

seduction is sinister and the friendliness artificial. Natasha also seduces, but the friendship is sincere; moreover, for Rohmer, sincere, everyday friendship *entails* seductions. Rohmer's unusual achievement is two-fold: to dramatise the issue of friendship at its most commonplace (chatty, discursive conversations, sharing apartments and so on) and to discover the seductions that operate within that (Natasha offering bottled water, Jeanne arranging flowers for Natasha). Both the friendliness and the seductions are normalised[11].

The transference of seduction to more friendly, day-to-day situations is an important narrative change. To dramatise a process of friendly seduction the film's depiction of Natasha's coaxing of Jeanne into trusting her and into leaving the party is required to be subtle but not insidious. She covers her switch from the 'vous' to the 'tu' form in a moment of decisiveness ("I don't want to stay another minute. And neither do you. You told me"). This decisive statement follows her assertion that she does not like coaxing people, but the coaxing lies in masking the switch to the friendly form of address under the weight of a superficially blunt statement.

A denial of such coaxing is necessarily a deception for Rohmer but it is crucially also a self-deception. This aspect of self-deception differentiates Natasha's behaviour from Bruno's, and characters throughout *A Tale of Springtime* make claims about their behaviour only to contradict themselves soon afterwards. Eve states that she never thrusts her philosophical opinions on others, a statement which presented as a moral claim is in itself a contradiction in terms, and which is also disproved by her later conversation. Such self-deception in behaviour among acquaintances and friends is Rohmer's route into the subject of deception. Furthermore, Rohmer uses the medium's possibilities for visual deceptions but again transfers them to more friendly scenarios. For example, the film ensures that the characters' postures are deceptive. Natasha's seductions seem to emanate from her beguiling mix of feisty assertiveness and innocent coyness, the manner in which she holds her body showing both confidence and shyness. Natasha's position on the couch, her legs pulled up and her arm half outstretched, elbow pointing towards Jeanne, makes her appear relaxed and in

[11] Rohmer's depiction of friendship is never bullish as is often the case in films: there is no concentration on male bravado or female camaraderie (often in a 'liberated' space free from males) where the presence and passion of comradeship is made more explicit. Rohmer avoids this partly because he depicts friendship outside pressing dramatic scenarios.

control; but the avoidance of direct eye contact indicates a nervousness (she frequently lowers her eyes). The film depicts seemingly contradictory elements of her posture, so the audience will not single out one dominant aspect to her behaviour; it undermines the assumption that characters' postures will, in some simple sense, reveal them.

The film requires the audience to undertake the process of investigation into gestures or postures not crystallised by urgent scenarios, gestures such as Jeanne's straight back with folded arms on a couch during a reasonably relaxed party conversation. Rohmer sustains the head-on angle of the couch throughout the conversation; a two shot is kept, with no resorting to shot/ reverse shot, creating a persistence that is naggingly, but not explicitly, recommending a certain unconventional line of perception. During the opening meeting in *Strangers on a Train* Hitchcock obsessively applies over-the shoulder close-ups during conversations. Such cutting builds up the latent hysteria that underscores Bruno's manipulations and Guy's susceptibility to them. The only movement Rohmer adopts is a very slow, almost imperceptible, track in, over a small distance (mls to ms). The reticence of such a camera movement precisely conveys the lack of hysteria in any manipulations taking place, and moreover, acts as a gentle probing motion *suggesting* (rather than urging) that the viewer explore the varied signs of those manipulations.

In Ozu's *Late Spring* we saw how certain small gestures became resonant over the course of the film through their insistent repetition and their highlighting against stillness. Their resonance was not dependent on wishing the audience to embark on a process of scrutiny or probing (although the narrative encouraged a re-orientated perspective of a different kind). In his own understated manner Ozu's patterns emphasise the postures and gestures, whereas Rohmer de-emphasises such detail deliberately. However, this restraint is not achieved by burying information. Perversely it is achieved by making it readily available, but not so readily apparent.

C) The Drama Lurking in the Inconsequential

a) Removing Dramatic Focus

The deceptive relationship between what is available and what is apparent is achieved through a style of *inconsequentiality*. At the end of the conversation on the couch, as Natasha rises and enters the hallway, there is a cut to an empty room. The expectation here, based on conventional editing procedure, is that the film has now entered Natasha's apartment; the viewer assumes their decision to depart will be followed by the destination signalled in the immediately preceding dialogue. In fact, they simply enter another room at the same party. The emptiness of the room deceives us into supposing this to be the establishing shot of a new sequence, where instead it is the continuation of the present one. The soundtrack on the cut is also deceptive: the drop in noise from the main party area is so substantial that it at first seems to disappear absolutely (although, after a few seconds, the murmurs can be heard again). Subsequently, there is another five minutes of screen time before they both eventually leave the party. Thus, Rohmer films the routine of leaving: the picking up of the coats; having a drink of water in the kitchen before they leave.

The extension of scenes beyond their expected length allows the film to obscure their focus, direction and dominant purposes. The reason why the film's gestural detail might be missed is because such movements are less insistently tied to an urgent purpose. We are immediately alerted to Bruno's lunges forward towards Guy or his legs outstretched over the table in *Strangers on a Train* because they are in close tandem with the scene's dominant concern. The dominant dramatic concern of scenes in *A Tale of Springtime* is less easy to ascertain, the seemingly inconsequential extensions distorting their focal point.

Such extensions weaken the viewers' need to construct focused questions over potential outcomes. Rohmer has created a cinema that is not particularly orientated towards the future and by re-adjusting the viewer's interest to the significance of routine behaviour he discourages audience involvement based on thoughts such as "If she is behaving like this she might do that". The concentration on routine behaviour is essential to the nature of the film's momentum; the overriding advice of the film is "Don't move on! Stop and look more closely at the things you normally overlook." The terms predictable or unpredictable would be inappropriate with regard to incidents

in the film as it never primarily directs its audience into predicting outcomes. The film soon re-orientates its audience into not feeling a sense of postponement: its interest lies in all the protractions in the kitchen or the lengthy dialogue sequences which apparently delay future activity[12]. Indeed, from the opening sequence we learn to ask a different type of narrative question. The misleading party edit described above acts as a marker to alter one's viewing expectations.

Despite *A Tale of Springtime*'s blurring of focal points, the film preserves its narrative clarity. The narrative flow remains coherent so the film is never abstract, obtuse, or difficult to follow[13]. Directors such as Alain Resnais and John Cassavetes lack focus and direction but they are deliberately striving to be disruptive or even perversely intractable (often for justifiable ends). By contrast Rohmer aims for a certain simplicity of narrative coherence which ensures that his own complexities reside in enigmas that do not strike an audience as perplexing; any enigmas must be rooted in familiar and recognisable human activity. Rohmer's apparent inconsequentiality and lack of narrative focus is *felt* as relaxed familiarity.

b) Manipulations and Seductions in the Throwaway

The routine of leaving the party appears so inconsequential and innocent that one might not notice that on each departure (from the coach, from the cloakroom, from the kitchen) Natasha is always first to embark, whereupon she turns her head to Jeanne, almost enticing her to follow (FIG.3). This mini-pattern of Natasha looking over her shoulder to Jeanne is a gestural indication of the spell that Natasha has woven, and the control that she has exerted. But amongst all the commonplace paraphernalia of the departure, which is integral to the inconsequentiality, one hardly notices her success. Indeed, Natasha's spell is subtly woven partly by using such paraphernalia. In *Strangers On a Train* Bruno's alluring gestures are emphatically highlighted: Bruno entices Guy by loudly ordering a double whisky against Guy's initial will. In *A Tale of Springtime*, embedded in the to and fro of 'getting to know you' chat, Natasha politely offers Jeanne some bottled water. In the Hitchcock film, both the showiness of the gesture and the potency of the drink indicate the difference.

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[12] For a detailed account of the role of dialogue see Section Four below.

[13] Although I could imagine many viewers finding the film difficult to follow in a different sense: bemused by the apparent banality of what they are watching.

Rohmer is adept at dramatising the hidden manipulations buried in the general run of things. After the dinner time philosophy discussion all the characters return to the lounge. Eve and Igor deposit themselves on a couch that holds three, Jeanne sits to the right of the screen on a separate chair, and Natasha goes out of shot (presumably to sit opposite). Eve moves an item of clothing to create room for Jeanne on the couch. Jeanne happily takes up the offer, so that all three characters are now sitting together with Natasha out of shot and excluded.

The incident is constructed to look superficially innocent: Eve's removal of the clothes, enabling Jeanne to sit more comfortably, plays partly as a gesture of politeness. However, couches, like wardrobes, are pieces of furniture which always hold more significance in the film than a viewer might first expect. In the context of the dinner time conversation Eve's behaviour has other motives. Eve has been determined to strike up an affiliation with Jeanne in order to undermine Jeanne's relationship with Natasha and here she lures her into a geographical alliance in the room, three against one. The film justifies Jeanne's move in terms of understandable social forces: she is, as we all might be, flattered to receive the attention, especially by someone she has just met, after a meal where she feels judged by the other participants. Jeanne merely flows with the force of social acceptance. It is just such unacknowledged manipulations, those which highlight the other side of the coin of social decorum, with which Rohmer is fascinated.

The conflicts are displaced and discovered in moments that might be considered throwaway. Here, such seating manoeuvres appear to be just the preparatory period before another discussion. However, it is crucial to an understanding of Rohmer's stylistics that he does not merely discover the conflicts which exist in middle class socialising but, in presenting them so obliquely, asks *us* to discover them. In doing so he redefines our understanding of what the inconsequential might be in film narrative. Moreover, this inconsequentiality is essential to the tone of the film, essential in conveying the manner of these seductions and manipulations.

The inconsequentiality is partly responsible for removing the sense of threat from such issues. Indeed, in *Strangers on a Train* there is, once again, that intimate relationship between narrative focus and danger. Each of Bruno's manipulations is clearly signalled and at each turn we feel the dangerous consequences for Guy. In *A*

Tale of Springtime the sense of foreboding is replaced by something less insistent, namely a latent instability. This also allows for another insight into everyday life: the way such behaviour is not often overtly realisable or instantly crystallised in our daily existence. We often only comprehend the precise motivations for actions much later than their occurrence precisely because they are too intertwined with other patterns. Sometimes our own involvement in activity is so tightly implicated in preoccupying and obscuring factors such as social decorum that it stops us appreciating the true import of human actions. By contrast, film drama often clarifies the intentions of its characters' behaviour quite clearly, thus allowing the emotion of a moment (even if sophisticated) to be directly and unambiguously felt.

D) The Symptoms in the Routine

Even if they do not translate into fear or danger, *A Tale of Springtime* is serious about its latent aspects but it is significant that although both the women cry at the end of the film there is no sense of tragedy or upheaval. Again, Rohmer prevents the tears from dominating the scene; their crying is levelled out with some of the other emotions of the sequence. The tears are stripped of the disproportionate emotional weight they normally carry in drama. However, as usual we should be careful when matching proportion to significance because the characters' fears, although not necessarily destabilising, remain emotionally crucial.

Jeanne's crying momentarily emerges, hardly undermining a dominant demeanour characterised by politeness and self-control. Her few seconds of tears are not dissimilar from her domestic clumsiness (e.g. while chopping food) which *arises* from time to time in the film (and eventually leads to the discovery of the necklace, as she pulls the shoebox out of the wardrobe by accident). The tears at the end of the film, and the little pieces of clumsiness throughout, reveal Jeanne's hidden story.

Adam Phillips, with reference to Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, writes about a 'history that our competence conceals'[14]. Phillips says 'As psychoanalysis turns instinct into personal history, so there is no such thing as a mistake, only the continual disclosure of the past'[15]. Freud's book on 'everyday life'

[14] Adam Phillips, *On Flirtation*, Faber and Faber, London, 1992, p12.
[15] Phillips, ibid., p12.

gives countless examples of how instances of forgetting, bungled actions and, most famously, slips of the tongue, are not merely random or banal occurrences but disclose less apparent aspects of our psychology and personalities[16]. Phillips calls it 'The Mistake Book, a virtual encyclopedia of errors and accidents, [which] reveals with scientific sobriety the slapstick of everyday life'[17]. He goes on to say:

> By the end of the book...we have been absolved of terror and introduced to the psychoanalytic world of multiple plots...[Freud] reveals that we are not making fools of ourselves...We are suffering from an excess of meaningful intentions...Accidents are reminders of unfinished business, that we are living too few of our lives.[18]

As well as accidents, in Phillips language we might say Rohmer unconceals the characters' competent behaviour. The film shows competence and incompetence to be different sides of the same coin, thus Jeanne's clumsiness and her tidiness are both exhibited during her interaction with wardrobes. Perhaps some of Jeanne's hidden stories are indirectly exemplified by her attraction to Natasha. As Jeanne is lured by Natasha in the party sequence, the film intimates Jeanne's attraction to the traits she finds lacking in herself: Natasha's instinctual manner, her purer emotionalism and her intuitive reactions. Equally, Natasha is attracted to some of the opposite traits of Jeanne[19]. However, so many of their psychological characteristics which motivate their actions lie in their routine behaviour, never directly articulated either by the characters, or by the film.

Furthermore, unlike Bruno's compulsions in *Strangers on a Train*, Jeanne and Natashas' are deliberately not depicted as extraordinary or traumatic. In the film, characters' obsessions will be discovered outside extreme behaviour; indeed, for Rohmer those alternative lives, about which Phillips writes, are revealed in mundane routines. The film is fascinated with obsessions that do not display themselves as

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[16] Sigmund Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in James Strachey ed. and trans., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-1974.
[17] Phillips, ibid., p11.
[18] Phillips, ibid., p11/12/13.
[19] It is quite within the films deliberate vagueness over the exact nature of their relationship that the women might feel some sexual attraction towards each other. However, assessing the 'exact nature' of a relationship is precisely the sort of judgement which Rohmer gently undermines.

consuming or manic. Innocuous actions become symptoms: for example Natasha running out to fetch bread or genuinely forgetting to tell Jeanne a piece of information, or Jeanne crossing arms while speaking or gently folding her clothes into her hold-all (rather than, perhaps, stuffing them in). It is apt therefore that the final action of the film is at once throwaway and pertinent: Jeanne tidying up, removing some dying flowers.

Section Three – The Stylistics Of Flirtation

A) The Flirtations of Springtime

Jeanne holds on to her desire for order, but she still opens up new possibilities for herself: finds a friend, spends some free days at a country cottage, allows the possibility of a new lover. As Raymond Durgnat has said, 'Rohmer...[has] interests in traits like tidiness...But he equally esteems harmonious confusions, and disorder as readjustment'[20]. It is therefore especially apt that the film is set during springtime. Here is a period which eschews the extremes of weather; it has neither the intense heat of summer nor the harsh cold of winter. Spring is an "in between" time where many matters might be entertained but not necessarily develop into fruition. The opening of the film, where Jeanne travels between apartments, emphasises the film's concern with "in betweens". We might say that Jeanne spends the film displaced from her normal environments ('excluded' from both her flats) and the whole film opens up a space free from any rigid commitments.

The concentration on young bourgeois adults provides the perfect social group for Rohmer (even Igor behaves youthfully, this youthfulness a characteristic commented upon by other characters): setting his story among the young (not children, nor the middle aged) allows him credibly to suspend narratives of commitment. These characters are mature enough not to be freewheeling adolescents, nor to be constrained by the rules of parents and formal schooling, but are young enough for their lives not to have formalised into rigid patterns (their youth is as significant as their social status, because an older middle class might be too confirmed in its ways). The characters are faced with a period of greater possibilities, although these possibilities have not

[20] Raymond Durgnat, 'Eric Rohmer: the Enlightenment's Last Gleaming', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, July, 1990, 187-188, p188.

necessarily crystallised as clear choices. Furthermore, what commitments the characters do have, public and private, are only discussed at one remove: Jeanne's boyfriend, her teaching job, Natasha's musical training. The public and private narratives of commitment are not what prompts a viewer's involvement in the film. This is made all the more telling by the manner in which the film is so discriminating about the social detail of the characters, convincingly establishing their 'real' lives, but then suspending the direct treatment of the drive and struggle of those lives.

The film is concerned with the way characters balance or juggle order and disorder, which is another way of saying that it is interested in the changes or the differences which may be negotiated between extremes. For Jeanne and Natasha the opening or entertaining of a new possibility will not consist of the yearning for something out of the ordinary, something eventful (see **Chapter One**, especially the section on *Vertigo*). In this film the different experience might consist of a visit to a new friend's house, or the teasing out of undisclosed information at a party. However, narrative film normally depends on more vigorous change or disruption. Here, the experiences courted are those that offer no chance of serious disturbance or risk, because the film is interested in precisely the adjustments and negotiations of lives which operate within quite narrow boundaries of change. Similarly, as we have seen, the film shows those seductions and manipulations to provide stimulations within circumscribed scenarios (and outside sinister circumstance).

The stimulations for the characters are flirtatious ones and Durgnat talks of the 'flirtatiousness, which risks disorder'[21]. Furthermore, the film's tone is flirtatious and like all flirting it does not quite commit itself to either the serious or the comic, nor does it let the viewers harden their opinions over either plot or character. Rather, it pleasurably keeps the options open. Phillips discusses how flirtation amicably erases controlled boundaries:

> flirtation has always been the saboteur of a cherished vocabulary of commitment...The generosity of flirtation is in its implicit wish to sustain the life of desire; and often by blurring, or putting into question, the boundary between sex and sexualization. Flirting creates the uncertainty it is also trying to control; and so can

[21] Durgnat, ibid., p188.

> make us wonder which ways of knowing, or being known, sustain our interest, our excitement, in other people.[22]

Jeanne and Natasha's relationship matches many of these descriptions (including perhaps the blurring between 'sex and sexualization'). Natasha is always prompting Jeanne to hypothesise about new emotional scenarios ("but what if?"). Phillips contrasts flirtation to states of commitment:

> To be committed to something – a person, an ideology, a vocabulary, a way of going about things – one has first to be committed, perhaps unconsciously, to commitment itself. The question need not be: should we dispense with our capacity for commitment? But, what does commitment leave out of the picture we might want?[23]

He then goes on to understand the place of flirtation in the narratives of our lives, which we might translate for our purposes into film narratives:

> If our descriptions of sexuality are tyrannised by various stories of committed purpose – sex as reproduction, sex as heterosexual intercourse, sex as intimacy – flirtation puts in disarray our sense of an ending. In flirtation you never know whether the beginning of the story – the story of the relationship – will be the end...From a sadistic point of view it is as though the known and wished for end is being refused, deferred or being denied. But from a pragmatic point of view one could say that a space is being created in which aims or ends can be worked out...flirtation keeps the consequences going...Like all transitional performances it is an attempt to re-open, to rework, the plot...It prevents waiting from becoming a useless passion.[24]

As in real life, so in film: narrative deferment need not only be for suspenseful purposes, or to generate various types of gratification (sexual or otherwise) which depend on deliberately delaying a confirmed or inevitable end point. *A Tale of Springtime* creates a space in which aims are being 'worked out', and its 'open' plot keeps the 'consequences going'. The four pillars in Natasha's kitchen encapsulate the

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[22] Phillips, op.cit., pxvii/xviii.
[23] Phillips, ibid., pxviii.
[24] Phillips, ibid., pxviii, xix, xxiii, xxv.

film's flirtatious philosophy, and the film's exploration of flexibility within order. The pillars were originally built to circumscribe a section, to cordon off a space, to give the dining area order, so to speak. However, because Natasha's parents disagreed over the effect of the pillars, their erection actually created disruption within their marriage. Furthermore, Natasha jokes that the pillars are now best used merely to lean against, but naturally her throwaway comment is germane. When humans lean they are not focusing their body definitely towards another person; neither committed to a particular situation nor driving toward some crystallised conclusion, leaning here is a posture which signals relaxed pondering or mental hypothesising (waiting as a *useful* passion).

B) The Undramatic Beauty of Springtime

A Tale of Springtime is beautiful, but its beauty is not demonstrative (e.g. it rejects impressive landscapes, perfect symmetry, glamorous faces). Rohmer's understanding of beauty lies in flirtatiousness: he constructs it out of what Durgnat calls 'harmonious confusions, and disorder as readjustment'[25]. The tenor of Rohmer's composition stems from a negotiation between order and disorder which avoids extremes. His refusal to focus or channel the narrative goes hand in hand with situating his characters within spaces where they are *reasonably* comfortable but which neither joyously liberate them, nor close them down.

The season of spring is characterised by colours and light which facilitate this suspension. The film removes the characters from any darkened environment (too much like winter) such as Jeanne's boyfriends gloomy flat or the party room with its dark blue lounge and heavy pink hallway where Natasha wears her silver top and red dress. The film is nearly all set in clear, natural light; but the sky is always bright white, never dark blue (too much like summer). When Natasha opens a window in the dark bedroom in the cottage the daylight illuminates the room, but the light disperses equally rather than streaming through the window in sun beams. This dispersal of light is characteristic of the way the film illuminates the characters. Many of the shots in the film have a window (or French windows) somewhere in view; and the lighting is constructed so as to make the characters appear to be lit by natural light, rather than

[25] Durgnat, op.cit., p188.

honed or shadowed by the directed beams of focused studio lights. The film makes it appear as if the characters move within an environment which is light, rather than being lit[26].

The film tends not to use colour as directly representative of character traits or the characters' development because as we have seen their traits are not necessarily clarified and the characters do not *develop* in any linear manner. The frames of the film are filled with lightly coloured artifacts: yellow and white flowers (and flowery dresses), white interior walls, light pink cake boxes, white-washed walls on the route to the cottage. When a journey is being taken in the film (e.g. on the way to the cottage) the exterior is filmed through the front windscreen, making everything appear as if it is covered with a haze and thereby muffling any heady colours, and further whitening the sky. When Jeanne talks on the telephone in her own apartment, the camera moves closer towards her, filling the screen with the poster behind her head: fluffy abstract shapes in light colours on a fresh, clean white surface (FIG.4). Jeanne is set against this image of airy flirtatiousness, the poster not depicting anything fully formed or finished. Her face against the poster here matches (or summarises) the pleasurable indeterminacy brought on by most of the spaces she inhabits during the film.

C) The Stylistics of Harmonious Confusion

In tune with Rohmer's wish not to stress moments, his stylistic strategies tend to infer rather than spell out. However, the film takes the framework of melodramatic stylistics in order to maintain some element of instability ('harmonious confusions'). In thrillers one method of creating danger is to cut to close-ups at moments of alarm. Rohmer mostly rejects such use of close-ups and instead builds his agitations – tensions would be too strong a description – by keeping the characters' whole bodies in relationship to each other. Therefore, rather than breaking up conversations with shot/reverse shot editing, the film will often maintain a medium two-shot because over-the-shoulder shots do not allow for the observation of the way whole bodies move together in space. Often, Rohmer constructs a strong sense of on-screen space so as

[26] Many modern, non-studio films do not hone their lighting towards characters. However, it is more unusual to have a film where the characters are in *bright* light, but are not lit by specifically directed lights from within or outside the fiction.

to achieve a balance within the frame and only on a few occasions will he disturb his frames with matters happening off-screen (or the threat of them)[27]; but equally he does not allow his characters quite to settle into equilibrium within the frame itself. The head on two-shot of Jeanne and Natasha at the party sets up a quite symmetrical shot composition (order), but then their contrasting postures provide the slight lack of fit (disorder): Jeanne's body positioned straight ahead while Natasha's legs and arms run sideways towards Jeanne. Rohmer also plays on our expectations of conventional cutting: the viewer feels some niggling tension because he resists breaking this shot down into smaller units.

Crucially, by being so sensitive to contrasting body positions, the film can create its anxieties from situations which are apparently calm. The film maintains the medium long shot of the couch and the chair in the incident where Eve encourages Jeanne to move next to her, the shot draws attention to two becoming three, and thereby communicates some of the manipulations which exist in domestic seating arrangements. (Thereafter, in the scene, Rohmer cuts against the three shot, shooting Eve and Igor together, with Jeanne and Natasha separately, ensuring that the film's point of view in this case does not necessarily conform to Eve's manipulations). Thus, there is an intimate relationship between the film showing bodies in space and it revealing those concerns over negotiations of distance with regard to one another, or over the boundaries of private and social space in situations which are not particularly fraught. When Igor and Jeanne sit next to each other chopping food, the film again shoots in a two-shot and there is an awkwardness in their placement; their own admitted clumsiness results as much from them sitting too closely together as from inherent traits.

Moreover, as well as showing the co-ordinations between characters, the medium shots reveal the incongruity between different simultaneous actions of an individual character. By seeing Igor or Jeanne *simultaneously* chop food and engage in small talk in the one shot, the viewer is able to experience their inferred stress in conversation through their clumsiness in chopping. A cut to a close-up of their hands would destroy the finely balanced association, and concentrate the revelation (and the

[27] Durgnat, ibid., mentions this in passing on p188. Contrast this with Bresson's strong use of off-screen space in *Diary of a Country Priest* discussed in **Chapter Four**.

awkwardness) too absolutely. Such medium two shots are integral to Rohmer's obsession with dialogue because they retain those links between speech (and thought) and bodily behaviour, and thus the various disparities between saying and doing[28].

Furthermore, an aspect of the shot's achievement is in its precise illumination of the manifestation of instability (the chopping), but with an imprecision with regard to the origin of that instability: regular nerves on first meeting or sexual tension? Such shot preferences tie into the film's concern with the narrative possibilities of inconsequentiality. The film's rejection of frequent cutting relates to its inhibitions in making clear the direction of a scene, and its reluctance to guide the audience moment by moment, via editing, through a narrative with explicit emotional development. In fact, nerves on first meeting may indeed be a form of sexual tension and so Rohmer's flirtatious style keeps open a few possibilities of a moment, matching those occasions in life when we can not quite clarify what we are feeling, and may find satisfaction, or contentment, in not attempting or needing to do so.

D) Editing as Friendly Agitation

Rohmer avoids the conventional areas of excitement (notice how Natasha's story about the necklace is told in dialogue rather than related in a hyperbolic flashback). Indeed, he makes a case of circumventing climactic moments, a strategy which is signalled humorously when the two women rush up to the top of the hill, so as to experience the "beautiful" view, only to find it all fogged over. By cutting before or after one might expect, the film's editing between sequences avoids allowing scenes to climax, encouraging us to reconsider what is important and what is not. After hearing Natasha play the Schumann for over a minute one might expect to hear it reach a crescendo, especially as the sequence has centred on what seems an emotional period for Jeanne. Instead, Rohmer cuts mid-note, avoiding the obvious heightening the music could have provided; the music certainly holds significance but not for its capabilities to act as an emotional spur for the audience.

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[28] Rohmer's medium shots are characterised by a lack of extremes in either closeness or distance and he never uses extreme high or low angles, his shooting direction being mostly at eye-level. Similarly, he refuses to dwarf his characters in interior or exterior landscapes, in huge ballrooms, or massive expanses of green or sand. These stylistic choices match the film's concentration on *middle* class characters in bourgeois locations: well fitted and shiny kitchens, smartly furnished dining rooms, cottage gardens with small orchards. There are no extremes of class, wealth or poverty.

The cut in mid-note produces a minor jump, and although not in the same vein as those used in the thriller, it is another indication of how Rohmer's stylistics are characterised by gentle agitations. His mode of editing is deliberately not fluent and the cut mid-note might be taken as a messy edit. However, the editing here is a product of exactness not clumsiness: Rohmer's scene cutting eschews rhythmic flow for a more awkward continuity.

Rohmer's continuity produces an undercurrent of agitation across the duration of the film, without necessarily pinpointing any discomfort to a particular action or moment, thus he produces disruptions to order that are not all-devouring. In a thriller a hand may knock fiercely on the door of an apartment whereupon the film might cut to another location ensuring that the viewer is left nervous about occurrences in the apartment. In such a case the editing is *devoted* to consuming the audience with nervousness; whereas Rohmer's editing is less driven towards the monopolising of a moment.

The hypothetical example of the hand knocking on the door is a confrontation of sorts, but Rohmer's editing largely avoids all-consuming encounters. Films are accustomed to editing their drama around confrontations but Rohmer has a conception of important actions or happenings that lie outside confrontations. There is much manipulation occurring between the characters, but the film's feeling of inconsequentiality, and flirtatiousness, is partly due to those adjustments lying outside the boundaries of characters' focused assertions.

Section Four – The Possibilities For Conversing On Film

A) The Depiction of Uneventful Dialogue

The most frequently stated criticism of Rohmer's films is that "they are just about people sitting around talking". The criticism is founded on a judgement about the medium: that to film characters speaking is to miss out on the visually expressive potentialities of the art. It is not the emphasis on dialogue *per se* that makes Rohmer susceptible to these attacks, but rather the dialogue's nature and placement. Few people complain about the dialogue in Howard Hawks' films. For example, *To Have and Have Not* (Howard Hawks 1945 US) is full of dialogue exchanges but the nature of the exchanges tends to be pithy, sassy and sophisticated; moreover, the dialogue is

placed in scenarios of blatant sexual tension. In any Marx Brothers' film the viewer finds endless dialogue but it tends to be crack one-liners (nature) wrapped around hellraising comic action (placement).

The nature of the dialogue in both these examples is characterised by a clear statement of its purposes. In the Hawks' film the dialogue might be delivered with a slow burn, in the Marx Brothers' films with manic speed, but they are both intended to strike an audience with immediacy. Similarly, although they are skilfully layered with innuendoes, unstated implications or double meanings, these underhand aspects are purposefully accessible: indeed, they are central to the dialogue's forcefulness.

Rohmer's uniqueness lies in creating a cinema centred around dialogue without relying on the forcefulness of a particular line or phrase. Films with dialogue are usually praised thus: "Oh, wasn't it full of good lines?" whereupon those lines are easily extracted from the films and comfortably related in conversations amongst audiences. Many lines from Hollywood's Golden Age have become aphorisms in themselves, with their original filmic context long forgotten. Audiences are unable to quote from the work of many filmmakers, but not being able to quote a director so obsessed with dialogue is significant. This is because the points and purposes of Rohmer's dialogue are not stated (or encapsulated) within particular lines.

The purpose of Rohmer's dialogue is less easily ascertained, but that purpose is consistent with the deceptive strategies operating throughout *A Tale of Springtime*. The dinner time philosophy discussion is an ideal scene with which to elucidate the intentions of Rohmer's dialogue. Here is an indicative scene of four people sitting around talking; more exactly they are *discussing* issues around the teaching of philosophy. One might therefore be tricked into thinking that the primary import of the scene abided in that surface discussion, as if the interest lay in the intelligence and personality each character brings to our understanding of, in this case, philosophical and pedagogical issues. At this level, Rohmer beguiles or bores depending on one's attitude to the filming of conversation between literate people.

Those who are bored might not sufficiently appreciate the purpose of using the medium to merely watch people chat about an intellectual issue; those beguiled may appreciate more the documenting of intelligent discourse. However, both responses are consequences of Rohmer's decision to locate his dialogue away from the normal

sites of melodramatic focus. As stated above, Bacall and Bogarts' interchanges are placed within an overt environment of sexual tension, and the dialogue in the Marx Brothers' films is often embedded within manic hysteria, but in *A Tale of Springtime* the dialogue does not seem to be generated by any eventful context.

The film's everydayness lies in the rejection of that eventful context: the film's conversations match those dinner time discussions in day to day life. When people of many different classes sit down with their friends or family they would maintain that they often converse without a focused agenda (although they might admit to a thematic agenda in the sense of discussing this or that issue) and Rohmer reproduces this state of personal engagement. The placement of the scene at dinner time, within a domestic framework of family and friends, signals the interaction as social discourse without urgency. The film cuts into the conversation in mid-flow, and there is a sense that the viewer may have joined it at anytime. The slight peering camera movement from behind the pillar is not enough to offset the unassuming tone of the scene's beginning: it is indeed a subtle prompt to watch closely but it masquerades as merely the invitation for some relaxed eavesdropping[29].

The film reverses the conventional structure by replacing a pre-ordained eventful focus generating dialogue with everyday conversations that will in turn produce engaging insights. Whether one is bored or beguiled, Rohmer has deceived us with the fluency of his approach; because it is unusual to watch characters discussing issues so fully in films, we might be led into thinking this was *A Tale of Springtime's raison d'être*. Paradoxically, however, this emphasis on speaking provides the clues to unspoken desires. Rohmer's filmic art lies not in depicting intelligent conversation *per se*, but in discovering the gaps between surface or spoken intentions and the characters' genuine motivating forces. The gap is revealed by

[29] Close-ups or tracks-in are adopted sparingly in the film, and then less to accentuate or crown an emotional moment than to subtly draw attention to one, to act as a general *marker* to the drama. The opening shot here typifies the way the film uses what might be a tool of suspense and transforms it into a less anticipatory device. Suspense dramas often include 'peeping' shots: when we creep around the door, what will be the secret lying in the room? Here, the track is so slow and slight, a friendly invitation to eavesdrop, rather than a sinister peep. The shot's muted demeanour matches the contrasting type of deceptions at play in the scene, and the less threatening nature of the secrets that lie within it. We might describe the shot as lightly introductory rather than anticipatory, and its placement at the beginning of a scene is typical. Rohmer never adopts sudden changes in distance mid-conversation; he uses no similar shots in the middle of his scenes.

contrasting what is said and what is shown; Rohmer has no desire merely to film the intelligent speech of characters, he wishes to *show* characters who talk.

Moreover, because the philosophical conversation about transcendentalism in Kant acts as the occasion for showing the talk here, Rohmer's perspicacity extends far beyond middle-class socialising[30]. Most people in varying social strata spend hours of their lives talking, and the gap between what is said and what is desired is a commonly felt occurrence. However, it is important to Rohmer's deceptive strategies that he should depict characters so eloquent and erudite because one's expectations of this class would be for them to have a high success rate in expressing their feelings through language. So much more fascinating therefore to watch those with the gift of eloquence – and those taking such pleasure in the practice of intelligent, reasoned and ordered discussion – leaving so much unsaid, and uncontrolled.

B) The Channelling of Creative Energies Through Speech

At this stage, there are two significant points to recognise about the dialogue in *A Tale of Springtime*:

1) Rohmer's dialogue scenarios are the indirect site of immense creative urges, these urges redirected from possible energetic and melodramatic embodiment. The characters' creativities are channelled through social discourse, rather than finding their expression in overt physical activity.

2) Because of these creative urges the dialogue scenarios illuminate a set of mini plots or stories: characters construct stories (Natasha and the Necklace), or life plans (Jeanne) or manipulations (Eve and the dinner time discussion). Imaginative scenarios or plots are removed from the main narrative and instead are entertained in the dialogue.

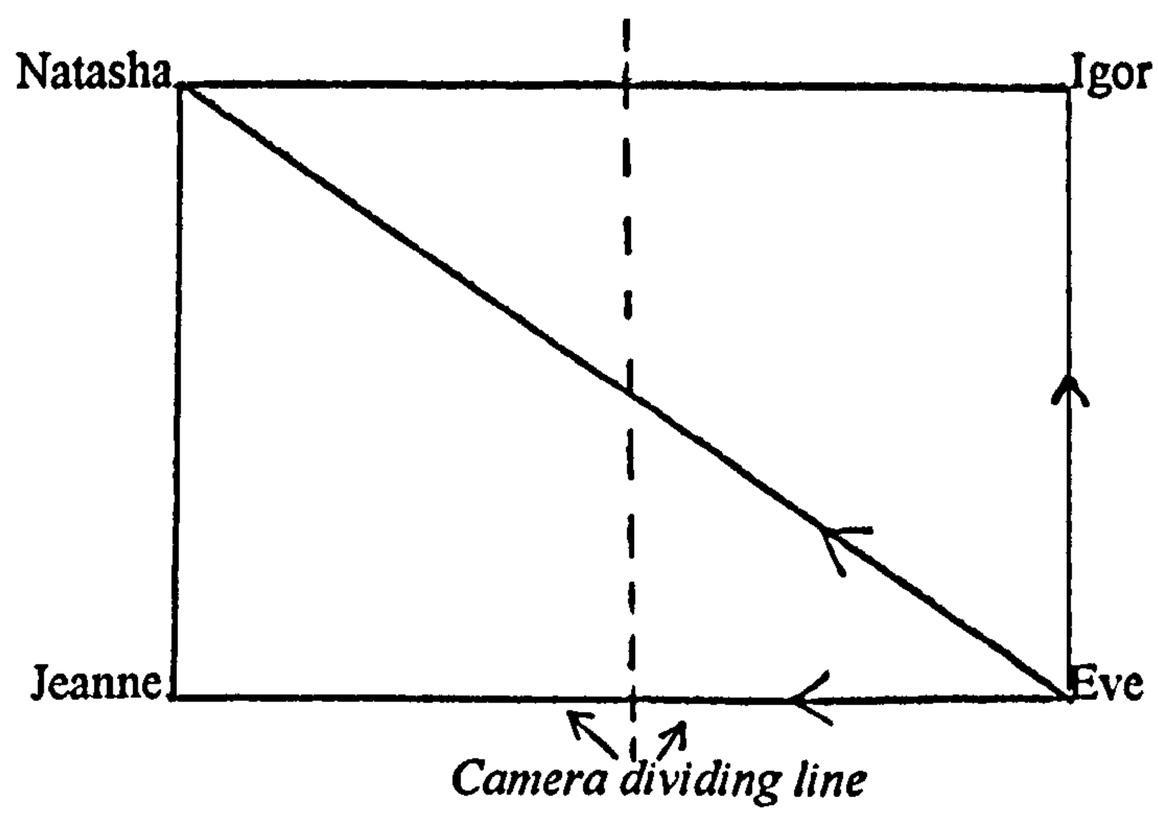
I will look at Eve and Jeanne in detail to explore these points:

a) Eve – Using Dialogue For Plotting

In the dinner time scene, Eve attempts creatively, but indirectly through a discussion of academic philosophy, to reposition the other characters into a more favourable situation with regards to herself. Thus she endeavours to construct,

[30] Bonitzer also writes about the philosophical discussion being a pretext, op.cit., p66.

whether wholly consciously or not, her own plot through the discussion. Eve's adopting and pressing of the philosophical subject matter indicates an eagerness to prove herself on Jeanne's territory. Thus, via the discussion, she endeavours to win Jeanne's approval, impress Igor and embarrass Natasha: the three-pronged strategy aiming to isolate the latter. Of course, Natasha has spent most of the film determining her own seductions through speech in order to draw Igor away from Eve and nudge Jeanne into her place.



Both Eve and Natasha wish to create a triangle with themselves at one corner and with the other excluded. In contrast to this triangular ordering, Rohmer films the whole of the seated conversation in repeated two-shots: Jeanne and Natasha, Eve and Igor. We can characterise the framing as representing the two most overt couplings: the two close friends and the two lovers. He never cuts across this dividing line to film, say, Natasha and Igor, or Eve and Jeanne.

Rohmer extends Eve's mini plot, unravels it 'beneath' the discussion and accords it a flexible dynamism of its own; the plot does not halt at her initial manipulations. In keeping with the film's flirtatious desire to maintain openness or flexibility with regard to outcomes, it suggests that Eve's plotting produces unintended consequences as the scene develops. The unpredictable consequences of Eve's strategies disturb the more direct visual structure; they wriggle against the ordered rigidity of the framing. Thus, Rohmer perturbs the controlled surfaces with unstable undercurrents.

Crucially therefore the film does not only reveal the hidden behaviour operating beneath social speech, it also shows how those undercurrents take on a life of their own even during ordered, often placid, verbal interaction. In doing so it undermines the characters' control of speech at precisely the same time they assume it is faithfully serving them. Eve's overeagerness to impress Jeanne perversely seems to indicate an arrogant disregard for Jeanne's job rather than an obsequiousness. This is possibly because of the clumsy conclusions concerning teaching practices that Eve develops as a result of pontificating from a position of limited knowledge. An even more disguised consequence is that her decision to pronounce on this subject allows Jeanne to shine, thus attracting Igor to the unintended woman. Furthermore, Eve's language seems to have its own measured ability to undermine her intentions. She asks the group to forgive her jargon in one sentence and then proceeds to restate the point in equally contrived terms ("the predicate is not contained in the subject"). She also has a predilection for name dropping, intimating that her statements are based on patchy pieces of knowledge rather than on an ability for sustained thinking ("In Husserl's sense too"); and after chastising Natasha for her limitations in knowledge, Eve is incapable of completing the explanation of the "synthetic a priori" .

Any humour here is neatly embedded in the flow of conversation, not stated in the form of jokes; so the comic elements do not overbalance the scene to become its defining feature. Woody Allen often uses philosophy as a vehicle for similar explorations into pretensions and pomposity but he tends to state his observations in the form of funny lines; he thrusts his statements forward as comic truths (e.g. "How should I know why there were Nazis, I can't even work the can opener"[31]). A contrasting example in *A Tale of Springtime* illustrates the difference in directness. In the line just quoted Allen employs the can opener, a commonplace object, as a deflating device to the big question. Rohmer employs a similar tactic but the undermining takes place within a characteristic two shot: Igor's ungainly carving of the meat is conducted by the side of Eve's posturing, the shot illustrating a less obvious form of clumsiness by juxtaposing her words with a routine example of physical inelegance. Igor's awkwardness might give the clue to where his attentions actually lie (see section above on Freud and everyday clumsiness). Furthermore, in the Allen

[31] A quote from *Hannah and Her Sisters* (Woody Allen US 1986).

example, it is the witty line which makes the point, and delivers the *punch*; indeed Allen's agility with words is always his trump card. Rohmer has less confidence in the winning capacities of speech, its ability to command a moment.

The use of the meat slicing might descend into an alternative form of blatancy but Igor's activity is not given equal weight in the shot; his meat slicing delicately, and thus deceptively, plays as background colouring to the central conversation between Eve and Jeanne. This calm depiction of inelegance illustrates the mild nature of the humour which fits snugly into the film's overarching unassuming address. The meat slicing is another example of routine activity which delivers crucial information if one looks hard enough; embedded in the paraphernalia of meal time activity it might easily be missed.

Eve seems oblivious to her own clumsiness, and the meat example is typical of the way the film indicates aspects of the characters' dialogue about which they may not be aware. Significantly, however, it does so through a strategy which accordingly presents the extra information to the audience obliquely. In this way, the film refuses to allow the audience to be smug, easily detecting everything of which the characters are unaware. For example, Eve's own appearance and mannerisms glaringly appear to speak more truth than her speech. She indicates a preciousness in the manner in which she eats, especially when she slides her food off the back of her fork with an over accentuated refinement. She performs a showy gesture on completing an explanation, raising her finger and placing it with self-satisfaction against the side of her face. Similarly, as she speaks, her face and head, complete with thin features, and prim pony tail, pokes itself around the table: towards Igor for approval, towards Natasha to look down her nose, towards Jeanne for her complicity. However, later when Eve decides to leave the cottage, exhausted with the effort to hold on to Igor in the face of Natasha, we see the strain to perform fall away, and she reveals herself to be characterised by more casual postures. In *A Tale of Springtime* messages that seem most obvious, that appear to have sealed up the argument, are precisely those which remain vulnerable to further explanation.

b) Jeanne – Using Dialogue to Keep Order

Jeanne's mannerisms and appearance reveal a much less conniving demeanour, indeed they convey a more ordered and controlled personality. Jeanne's hair is short, neat, compact and her voice sounds smooth and deep when compared with Eve's rather higher pitched and shaky delivery. In contrast with Eve, as Jeanne talks her head is poised and well-balanced, her hands still as she gives her explanation of the "synthetic a priori". Indeed, set against Eve, Jeanne's contributions to the discussion have all the relaxed confidence of expertise, never needing to boost her own cleverness at the expense of another, never resorting to jargon or name dropping.

Jeanne's fluency indicates that in such discussions she finds her most natural mode of discourse. In the dinner time discussion she appears as the voice of reason; outside this subject area however her ordered processes are shown to be a substitute for a more vibrant engagement with life. In one scene she sets out her life's progression with studied discipline: through training, teaching, a bigger apartment and marriage. Her litany allows for none of the passion one might feel for the possibilities in these areas. Moreover, she is prepared to marry her boyfriend despite her half-hearted attachment to him; her desire for planned order over his suitability represented in her claim that marriage would give some level of regulation to their relationship.

Jeanne's arranging of her life carries the appearance of rationality in its sequential alignment, but her words are no less a fictional construction than Natasha's musings over the necklace[32]. Natasha's creative energies manifest themselves in such stories; the stories providing a vehicle for her emotionalism which is at odds with the formal discourses at play in the dinner time scene. In that scenario she can only contribute to the discussion at a tangent, with overtly personalised comments that exist outside the boundaries of the debate ("I got an A on my philosophy finals paper") and which almost destabilise the methodological underpinning of the discussion. Her

[32] Just preceding Natasha's story about the necklace there is another such introductory motion resembling a thriller device, but which eventually opens out into something less stunning. The film adopts an unusual medium close-up as Natasha announces, with wide eyes, "I'll tell you a story"; on saying this she opens the door into the far bedroom. The opening of the door signals an exciting entry: in fact, the room is rather mundane, and the story delivered, concerning the necklace, is quite prosaic in terms of excitement (although interesting for other reasons) and could have been delivered in any room in the cottage (although the blankness of the room corresponds nicely to Natasha projecting colourful creations out of nothing).

necklace contortions are like her piano playing, a more instinctual emotional site outside apparently rational discourse where she endeavours to express herself.

Jeanne's constructions present the other side of the same coin. Through Jeanne's programmatic life plan the film displays another aspect of creativity with words. Rohmer shows his fascination for the energies put into talking – or the energy channelled and controlled through talking – thereby illustrating the way we may tell stories in speech to substitute for drama in life. In this case Jeanne plots her life with the intention to manufacture an order which will smother any messy complications which a more open or spontaneous search for happiness might entail. This creative process of systematisation shows the tendency to invent her own reality with words so as to control and console. Jeanne's dialogue forces the audience to vascillate in their judgement of what is rational good sense in planning and what is the irrational concocting of hardened structures which are limiting.

C) Speaking and Showing Unexciting Stories

Whether she realises it or not, Jeanne hides behind certain words; her prospective life story protecting her from being consumed in emotions that may result in disorder. Natasha's shows of creativity in regard to the necklace are more obviously signalled as story creation, but the film is just as interested in narratives without mysterious qualities, those delivered with impassive or inexpressive intent. Indeed, the film presents a type of story creation which would not be conventionally classed as exciting so as to illuminate the creative processes existing in more mundane scenarios.

The delivery of such inexpressive stories, along with the transferral of plots into dialogue might provide exactly the necessary ammunition for those wishing to criticise Rohmer: he ignores the cinema's possibilities for visualising vivid narratives. However, Rohmer re-orientates the audiences' relationship towards visual expectations. Although he rejects the use of vividness or conventionally pictorial compositions, he finds a coherent visual strategy in depicting the tension between what is said and what is seen. Moreover, as I have discussed throughout this piece, the film has explored deceptions in scenarios where one might not expect them, and this holds true with regard to dialogue where the most innocuous or relatively stolid speeches are in fact sites of quite varied psychological or interpersonal activity. Rohmer redefines the

possibilities for both word and image in the cinema; neither gain their force from a directly expressive power, but rather maintain their interest from their individual unassuming existences, which when combined beget psychological discoveries.

By using its narrative structure to interrogate what the characters say, the film avoids requiring visual assertion in the instant. In the dinner time discussion scene Igor takes a quite nonchalant role, asking the odd question, carving the meat (Natasha also says very little in the scene but her presence is greater due to being a focus for Eve's 'attacks'). He appears to be showing a gentle and intelligent interest in the discussion, his limited role reflecting a decision not to divert attention from the two women. However, in the seduction scene he verbally discloses that this was the moment when Jeanne "revived" his desire, thereby revealing that his neutral demeanour was actually masking a latent sexual yearning. The psychological insight arising depends here on the ordering of relevant information, rather than any asserted contradiction between his actual feelings and his public behaviour at the time.

Rohmer does indeed substitute action for dialogue but in ways that should undercut any conventional criticisms generated by suspicions about films that rely excessively on speech. For a viewer not re-orientated to Rohmer's strategies Natasha's extended descriptions of her father and Eve, on the couch, after the party, would appear an odd and unnecessarily protracted piece of exposition. Why, one might ask, can we not see the character traits she describes for ourselves, preferably embedded in Igor and Eves' own behaviour? The answer is that her description is not neutral exposition, but rather a device playing on our expectations of such expositional dialogue which would normally persuade us that Natasha's words are the uncomplicated truth. The placement of her comments is crucial, coming before we have even seen Igor and Eve: her view can appear both as preparatory exposition and privileged information because we have yet to care about judging those characters for ourselves (we have no emotional investment in them). In fact, it eventually turns out that Natasha may have been too biased towards her father's talents, and unfairly disparaging about Eve. Thus, Rohmer carefully arranges when something is said and when something is seen in the narrative to encourage a certain assessment of its reliability. Expositions conventionally use characters as mouthpieces for neutral plot

information and, in this case, the expositional method provides *A Tale of Springtime* with another vehicle with which to explore the apparently innocuous, or obvious.

We *see* Jeanne's travels in the film's opening sequence and also listen to them spoken about by the same character in the following party scene. Jeanne needs to live out this part of her life again, live it anew, but this time through speech[33]. In this case and in the mapping out of her life (and on many other occasions in the film) there emerges a sense of the characters longing to control or (re-)create events through talk, or to flirt with things in speech rather than committing to them; they are not satisfied with simply *doing* them. This in turn explains the prolonged length of time Rohmer films the characters speaking, and his refusal to edit them down thus producing a spinning out quality[34]: there is communicated here a verbal longing by the characters which overwhelms the desire for events themselves. This extending of the time normally given over to a character to express themselves in film also communicates something of the ease of everyday speech for eloquent people, that is speech which is not generated by actual eventful happenings. Such speech cannot be pared down into succinct and cogent movie dialogue.

This ease coupled with the apparent eloquence, poise and sense of rational enquiry encourages the delusion that the characters are truthfully endeavouring to reach towards some satisfactory and conclusive explanatory accuracy. However, it is the flirtation with possibilities, keeping the matter open, rather than the journey towards a satisfying end point which stimulates Natasha (and the audience). Besides, the example of the necklace proves that the verbal explanations turn out to bear little relation to the rather mundane truth[35]. It is crucial that the necklace is later discovered by Jeanne in a moment where there is no dialogue: Eve's innocence is proven through an accidental action which is *seen* by Jeanne and the audience (the necklace falls out of

[33] Bonitzer ibid., talks about characters needing to deliver an exegesis of their acts (p85). He says that the opening sequence is almost silent and the second sequence, the meeting with Natasha, consists of Jeanne commentating on her behaviour in the first. Earlier in the book (p27) he says that in the film it is necessary to see something and speak about it at the same time: to see that it is not the same thing, to show that the word misses/fails/betrays/is not equal to the image (and vice-versa).

[34] Bonitzer connects this aspect of the film with Rohmer using the machinations of the detective story; there is a whole aspect of investigations, enquiry, spinning out. Bonitzer, ibid., p29/30.

[35] For Bonitzer the necklace is an object of spoken *and* visual fiction at the same time, each of the fictions taking issue reciprocally. Bonitzer, ibid., p27.

a shoe box as she collects her clothes) not worked out during verbal investigation or hypothesis.

It is the convincing way in which the characters' dialogues are presented – the superficial rationalism, the eloquence of delivery, the ease in finding vocabulary accompanied by the unhurried protraction – which may persuade the viewer of their truth, but which should instead reveal how those most gifted with the precision of speech are, in fact, in the process of creating and entertaining their own distorted reality. Crucially, this loquacity is not geared towards distorting reality in the conventional manner one is accustomed to by roles in film: madmen or conmen say, or a character like Bruno in *Strangers on a Train*. *A Tale of Springtime* explores how spoken words and images do not communicate the same thing, indeed they frequently contradict each other. More significant, however, is that the film depicts these contradictions in an unassuming manner: neither words nor images explicitly betray their duplicity.

D) Smothered by the Verbal

The most serious place in the film where Rohmer substitutes dialogue for action is in the final seduction scene. Here, Jeanne enjoys partaking of Igor's questions in the run up to the kiss ("May I sit beside you?", "May I hold your hand?", "May I kiss you?") because it sterilises any surge of passion. The breaking down of a sexual moment into a sequence of formalised questions introduces systematised speech into a scenario where one would expect feelings conveyed in body language to do the talking. The nature of their prevaricatory activity is a defence against the disorder that sexual passion might bring. After pulling away from Igor, Jeanne embarks on an extended commentary on her behaviour (about five minutes, with interruptions). In this speech she dissects the moment with even more ruthless precision: her admission that "[she] was thinking of [her] thoughts before [she] said yes" illuminates a personality rejecting submission to any progression of physical urges (either to partake of, or reject Igor), preferring instead to lock herself into a stream of thought processes (her thinking before the kiss, her thinking now).

Juxtaposition of commentary both before and after a moment of sexual possibility enables the film to explore the limitations of a certain rationality ("I acted by

the logic of numbers"). However, Jeanne correctly claims her procedure revealed that Igor did not love her, and there is a sense in which Igor is quite happy to just go through the motions with yet another young woman. Where Jeanne is mistaken is in *thinking* that her cold behaviour preceding the kiss confirms her control over events. She says she was not thinking of Igor, her boyfriend or herself; "I didn't feel I was led by a force. My choice was free" she exclaims. However, her detachment from the sexual moment (which is different from a confident withdrawal from it), from everything and everyone, does not secure her freedom of choice but rather suggests the limits of her control. For Rohmer her words could never ensure her freedom, for her very obsession with verbal analysis precludes whole areas of liberated action.

Conclusion

Jeanne announces that her permission to allow Igor three questions resembles the folk tale, which she relates, concerning a couple who were allowed three wishes. The husband wished for a sausage, but his wife then wished for it to hang from his nose, ensuring that with the final wish the husband was forced to request the sausage's disappearance. The couple find themselves back at square one. And so with *A Tale of Springtime*, Rohmer's achievement is to rework traditional aspects of narrative film so that certain emotional propositions can be opened up but not hardened or polarised; propositions entertained in a chat on a couch at a party, over a discussion at dinner, during a visit to a cottage, that is to say, in innocuous scenarios without urgency, without the driving drama of commitment and upheaval, and without the occurrence of significant changes secured by the close. In doing so the film unconceals the variety in the apparently obvious, and the activity in the apparently inactive.

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Conclusion

The Unemphatic Achievement

The thesis has aimed to show that film is a suitable medium to reveal the significance to be found in uneventful activities such as tidying up. However, such suitability does not ensure the frequent occurrence of the uneventful in cinema. Therefore, the thesis places and discusses undramatic films within the context of film's tendency to be organised around the eventful[1]. Hence the sections on melodramatic cinema where I brought out how many aspects of the medium encourage its films to be structured around confrontation, or crisis, or significant periods of change in order to be absorbing. For example, the medium's ontology encourages an escape into fantasy (*Vertigo* – **Chapter One**); the potential for strength of sound inspires a persuasive vocal rhetoric (*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* – **Chapter Four**); the flexibility of camera movement allows film to frame the world, and re-frame it, with energy (*A Woman Under the Influence* – **Chapter Five**); the ability to shape and hone lighting transforms possible spaces of privacy and intimacy into ones of vivid public performance (*All I Desire*– **Chapter Six**); and the freedom brought by editing facilitates a crisp build-up to confrontation and crisis (*Strangers on a Train* – **Chapter Seven**). Stanley Cavell's work, analysed in **Chapter One**, is important for establishing how the medium's melodramatic tendencies are closely related to a flight from the everyday and ordinary.

The films of the everyday emerge out of this tendency, and their achievement is to avoid melodrama both in terms of cinematic style and narrative content. The thesis has claimed that certain aspects of the everyday – the habitual, the routine, the repetitious – may best be revealed by an undramatic style; a visually assertive presentation will transform the ordinary. In **Chapter Two** I show how some films might be said to have an interest in the "ordinary" but are, in fact, studies of crisis, created out of demonstrative techniques. Similarly, many filmmakers have what might be labelled "low-key" aspects to their styles whilst still presenting eventful predicaments. Indeed, this probably means that some important element of their style is not, in fact, "low-key" – for example, the energetic movement of the performers, or the tight structuring of the plot.

The close concentration on the particular films in **Part Two** of the thesis enabled me to break down the many aspects of undramatic technique while at the same time

[1] Three of the four undramatic films do contain events: death and blackmail in *Diary of a Country Priest*; the visit of soldiers to the town in *Loves of a Blonde*; a marriage in *Late Spring*. Yet they do not allow these events to determine, or propel, their narratives.

showing how each element of technique reveals various aspects of uneventful existence. For example, the films find ways of restricting energetic movements in the frame in a medium which we might expect to exploit aspects of movement: in *Late Spring* the use of stillness reveals matters of reticence in family interaction, and also enables small gestures lacking in urgency and vigour to become significant, such as the peeling of an apple. *A Tale of Springtime* discloses the characters' mundane behavioural patterns during casual conversation rather than directing our attention to a character making a sudden gestural movement: for example, the grabbing of an arm during a confrontation.

The achievement of the undramatic films is to reveal significance without the assertion of revelation, that is to find interest in, for instance, tidying up but without suddenly according the activity undue emphasis. In *The Awful Truth* **(Chapter One)** I illustrated how the repetitions of the everyday are brought to life by transforming them, which in fact means that each of the couple's little moments are accentuated. In her recent book Ivone Margulies discusses the films of Chantal Akerman, and describes them as providing a 'hyperrealist' picture of the everyday, where activities such as washing-up in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman 1975 Bel/Fr) are presented in real time in accord with strategies of literalness[2]. In doing so Akerman brings an obsessive emphasis to the activity of washing-up, the significances she reveals depending on filming the activity to its "bitter end", and Margulies' use of the prefix 'hyper' captures this sense of extremity. Whatever the specific merits and distinctions of Akerman's approach, her work is in keeping with much cinema in that it exploits the possibilities of visual assertion.

I mention Akerman's film superficially only to draw attention to the fact that the films in this thesis avoid such emphasis, and they do so by constructing metaphorical scenarios which allow an exploration of the everyday, of routine, and of repetition, rather than adopting strategies of literalness: they engage with aspects of the routine without remorselessly displaying them. The returns to the priest's diary are repetitious but they are not relentless, precisely conveying a sense of the priest's absorption in the diary as 'at once like attention and like inattention'[3] (see **Chapter Three**), and this finely judged rendering

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[2] Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday*, Duke Univ. Press, Durham and London, 1996.

[3] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Harvard Univ. Press, London, 1981, p271.

of unemphatic repetition is what I took to be the crucial aspect of the everyday. The films in this thesis have styles which resist tight condensation and literal presentation, both of which would provide too much declaration.

The depiction of this aspect of the everyday opens up an analysis which runs throughout the thesis concerning the possibilities for films to be meaningful while resisting assertion in the short term. Thus in general terms one of the matters it has explored is the film's potentiality to allow meanings to emerge, reflecting Cavell's observation about life that 'the significance of its moments is ordinarily not given with the moments as they are lived'[4]. In *A Tale of Springtime* important information only gradually emerges, but this is not a case of the film being clever, smugly tricking viewers to believe one thing, only later to upset their expectations. Rather, the chapter on this film explored its ways of making information quite available without allowing it emphasis, thus maintaining the integrity of a scenario's apparent unimportance. Many good dramatic narratives, although they also include long term patterning, development and transformation, tend to find vivid scenarios which will encapsulate tensions clearly or forcefully in the short term.

The undramatic films present short-term matters which are not by themselves cogent or telling. Each of the films has an evenness of lighting, colour, texture, and music; thus they do not exploit many areas of style through which films often express themselves. The aim of my analysis, therefore, was to demonstrate that, in other regards, the films are not "one-note". Moments which fail to impress immediately may have their significance revealed by making them part of a larger system of a film's patterning. This was the topic under discussion in **Chapter Three**, where I set out the medium's capabilities in re-orientating its viewers towards the totality of a film's visual organisation, a capability which allows the undramatic films to become absorbing.

I investigated the specific deployment of this possibility in the discussions of the individual films. For example, I charted how the dance-hall scene in *Loves of a Blonde* uses different, but related, techniques to convey the characters' separation from each other and their world: a two-shot or, perhaps, an optical point of view shot, neither particularly striking in themselves, may be so arranged to ensure a delicately varied inflection on the subject of the delays around events. In *Diary of a Country Priest*, the returns to the diary

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[4] Stanley Cavell, 'The Thought of Movies', in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes*, Univ. Of Chicago Press, London, 1984, 3-26, p11.

are situated so as to express an adjusted, or developed, perspective on the subduing of events: the use of the diary is not absolutely repetitive because in one sequence the diary's tone may be merged into the voice-over and then into conversation to imply a character being caught up in a diary's reflective idiom; while in another the failure to complete the sentence of a diary entry allows the film to convey death as the inability to continue with the routine things.

Analysing the films' avoidance of assertive techniques reveals how meticulous filmic construction can be. Throughout the thesis I have often used sentences such as this: 'The awkwardness these shots depict is shuffling and nudging; the movement of bodies within them, despite the discomfort of the participants, is not presented as tangled and strained.' The need to describe the moment as 'shuffling' rather than 'tangled' is to convey the precise expressive eloquence of the undramatic films in conveying non-vehement feelings (rather than to make the thesis more interesting reading). Concentrating on films which do not depict urgent or energetic scenarios allows the viewer to consider, and feel, emotions which are nuanced: thus the films express states of *inhibition* rather than ones of repression or they are interested in conveying *worry* rather than panic or trauma, and the films are able to express such states because, for example, the camera may *approach* or *nudge* rather than loom or tower.

I think that a sensitivity towards undramatic possibilities helps us understand moments or images which we might find narratively obtuse: we might consider them so because the images do not seem to be forwarding the teleological progression of the plot, or providing a visual composition which would be pleasurable or gripping in itself. It may be the precise intention of such images to avoid expressing a clear, delineated emotion or concrete piece of information, and instead remain meaningful but unresolved and uncertain. The films' undramatic techniques allow their characters and spaces to express vague emotions: the maid's confused feelings with regards to her pregnancy in *Umberto D*, Andula's childlike musings, or Jeanne and Natashas' flirtations undermining the 'cherished vocabulary of commitment'[5]. Thus the vase in *Late Spring* does not necessarily have one direct meaning, but might convey Noriko's worried fluctuations with regard to marriage, just as the early shots of empty rooms in the same film only *suggest* a sense of loss. These

[5] Adam Phillips, *On Flirtation*, Faber and Faber, London, 1992, pxvii.

early shots of rooms remain temporarily vague, reverberating with the transitional emotions generated by the characters who inhabit them, who *move* through them everyday.

Many of the undramatic images used by the films achieve force only as the films develop, but they never present themselves, even when they finally occur, as individually arresting: for example, the priest's face in *Diary of a Country Priest*, the peering over shoulders to the periphery in *Loves of a Blonde*, Noriko's bentwood chairs in *Late Spring*, the casual postures while chatting in *A Tale of Springtime*. So we might say that the undramatic films establish their emphasis, that which they wish to stress, in an unemphatic manner. The achievement of the films' stylistics is to allow the narratives to remain skilfully poised, conveying routine and repetition, without submitting to the possible banality of routine; the films are therefore able to unconceal the significance which often remains buried in the habitual. The importance of these films is that they find stylistic methods to do justice to the moments of life which do not proclaim their significance. An exploration of these methods allows us to enhance our understanding of the discreet ways in which film narration can bring the world to our attention.

APPENDIX

PLOT SYNOPSES

I provide synopses for those films discussed at length in the thesis as an aid to the reader, while recognising that alone they are inadequate summaries of "what happens" in the films.

Lengthy Synopses:

Chapter Four – *Diary of a Country Priest*

A young priest arrives to take charge of his first parish and continues to keep a daily diary of his life. He has an illness which prevents him digesting anything but bread dipped in wine. The priest's life in the village is made difficult and he faces a run of bad luck: his plans for the parish are thwarted by the unhelpful Count, who is having an affair with the housekeeper Louise: Louise, herself, writes the priest a note willing him to leave the village; Séraphita, a precocious young girl takes advantage of his good will; and Doctor Delbende, who befriends him, commits suicide. However, despite his difficulties in maintaining faith in the face of public hostility and private ill health, the priest persists in his efforts to do good. The Count and Countess' daughter, Chantal, is deeply troubled but the priest dissuades her from committing suicide. Subsequently, he visits the Countess at the Chateau to convince her to attend to her daughter's difficulties, but finds that she is locked into a debilitating mourning of her dead son. That night the priest hears that the Countess has died, but he has received a letter from her in which she explains how he had finally brought her peace. The church authorities are suspicious of the priest's behaviour because he fails to conform to the conservative dictates of the church, but his actions are at all times sincere, generous and sensitive. Indeed, it his honesty and lack of social posturing which bewilders the authority figures. One older priest, named Torcy, remains his confidant throughout, acting as an old fashioned father figure; he misunderstands the young priest's methods – which are, in fact, rather straightforward – but nevertheless respects him. One night the priest collapses in the countryside; he is kindly bathed by Séraphita. The various women come to treat him with increasing trust and fondness, although, on the surface, all the relationships remain quite restrained. The priest is given a lift on a motorbike by Olivier, the Count's nephew, to the railway station. They compare their different experiences of youth whereafter the priest takes the train to Lille. At Lille a visit to the Doctor confirms the terminal nature of his illness. He spends a short period numbed by the news, and then visits an old colleague from the seminary called Dufrety. The two young men discuss their faith but Dufrety's view of life has hardened into cynicism. In contrast, even on his death bed, the priest's selfless priority is to assist Dufrety's girlfriend who is locked into a degrading relationship. A letter sent by Dufrety and read out by Torcy tells of the priest's death.

Chapter Five – *Loves of a Blonde*

A young woman sings a song with a guitar. Another two women including the protagonist, a factory worker called Andula, muse about their relationships while lying in bed. The foreman of the factory where the girls work, arranges for a garrison of troops to visit the small town in order to provide male entertainment and company for the women. The soldiers arrive off the train, and turn out to be less than desirable. A dance is organised for the soldiers and the factory women and after much delay and prevarication Andula ends up being seduced and sleeping, not with one of the soldiers, but with Mila, the man playing the piano at the dance. He casually invites her to visit him in Prague, an offer which she takes seriously. However, arriving in Prague on a subsequent weekend, Mila is out 'on the town' and Andula is forced to sit with his parents who harangue her endlessly about her loose behaviour in coming to visit. When Mila finally arrives home he has completely forgotten about Andula, and is startled by her presence. Mother, father and Mila sleep together in the bedroom leaving Andula to be excluded in the neighbouring room. Back in her factory dormitory, lying with her female companion in bed, Andula is optimistic about her relationship with Mila.

Chapter Six – *Late Spring*

The film begins by showing a railway station. However, Noriko, her aunt Masa, and Mrs. Miwa are introduced elsewhere at a tea ceremony. This seems to be more a social occasion than a religious one (Noriko and her aunt chat about torn trousers). Noriko happily looks after her father Professor Somiya and enjoys the company of friends. Noriko and Somiya have a pleasurable morning train ride into the city. In the city, Noriko and Onodera, a recently remarried family friend, discuss going to an art exhibit; they discuss their visit afterwards in a bar. The possibility of a romance is suggested between Noriko and Hattori, another friend of the family who works for Somiya, especially during a bike ride which concludes with an amiably flirtatious conversation by the sea. Later that day, her father inquires about Hattori as a possible husband for Noriko, but Noriko informs him that he is engaged (there is the implication that she knew this before the bike ride). Despite this Hattori and Noriko still meet at a coffee shop, where he invites her to a concert. However, Hattori is eventually shown at the concert alone, while Noriko walks home. There she meets Aya, her working friend, and the two cheerfully discuss their married friends. Noriko's aunt provokes her by suggesting she marry. To Noriko's response that her father could not take care of himself, her aunt suggests that he marry the widowed Mrs. Miwa. Noriko is shaken by this and when she attends the Noh play, the sight of Mrs. Miwa upsets her. Returning from the Noh, she separates from her father on the street. At Aya's she is too upset to eat, and when Aya suggests she gets married, she leaves. Finally, at home that night, she questions Somiya and he half-lies to her about his remarriage. Eventually, prodded by Aya and pursued by her aunt, Noriko agrees to marry. During a visit to Kyoto, Noriko says that Onodera's remarriage is not as repugnant as she had thought, but she still longs not to leave Somiya. As they pack to leave, Somiya tells her that his life is ending and that she must start hers with her husband. He says that the two of them must strive for happiness in marriage. She

acquiesces. Later, Hattori and Somiya sit downstairs chatting in Noriko's bentwood chairs. Somiya goes upstairs to see Noriko who is dressed in her wedding outfit. We do not see the wedding or the groom. Somiya takes Aya to his favourite bar and tells her he does not intend to remarry and then comes home to an empty house. He sits in one of Noriko's armchairs, peels an apple, and then unhappily bows his head. The film cuts to a shot of the sea[1].

Chapter Seven – *A Tale of Springtime*

With her boyfriend out of the city, Jeanne – just starting as a philosophy teacher after completing her doctorate – decides to return to her own flat, only to find the cousin to whom she had lent it for a few days is not quite ready to leave. Rather than spend the evening alone at her boyfriend's, in an untidy squalor she finds oppressive, she reluctantly attends a party where, really knowing no one, she gets talking to a young woman in much the same boat: Natasha, a piano student, whose journalist boyfriend was suddenly called away on an assignment. The upshot is that Jeanne accepts Natasha's invitation to stay at her flat, really her divorced father Igor's, but given over to her since he is living with his girlfriend Eve. The two young women become fast friends, and over the next few days (one of them spent at the family's country retreat), Jeanne has a brief encounter with Igor under circumstances faintly embarrassing to both (Natasha forgot to say he would be coming to collect some clothes from his room, now occupied by Jeanne); and she learns that Natasha detests Eve, suspecting her of having stolen a necklace (a family heirloom Igor had promised to Natasha). Delighted when Jeanne elects to stay on because her cousin is still occupying her flat, Natasha bullies Igor into coming for dinner, only reluctantly extending the invitation to Eve. Despite Natasha's attitude, Jeanne finds herself warming to Eve, a fellow student of philosophy. When Igor proposes a weekend visit to the country, declined by both Natasha and Eve, he announces his intention of going anyway, since the garden needs attention. Insisting that Igor won't turn up, Natasha persuades Jeanne to go. Igor and Eve are both there, but faced by Natasha's open hostility, Eve leaves in a huff. Upset, Jeanne tries to leave, but is persuaded to stay by Igor. Natasha then leaves with her boyfriend William, who arrives unexpectedly. Left alone with Igor, Jeanne insists on leaving; instead she stays to have dinner with him, but they fail to become intimate. Back in the city, Jeanne accuses Natasha of trying to set her up with Igor in order to get rid of Eve. Tearfully denying the accusation, Natasha explains that she left with William, after his unexpected arrival, only because she feared they were heading for break-up. The two women are reconciled when Jeanne finds the missing necklace, lost rather than stolen. Jeanne decides to return to her boyfriend, now due back[2].

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[1] This synopsis relies heavily on the information provided by David Bordwell in *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, British Film Institute, London, 1988, p307-312.
[2] This synopsis is a slightly amended version of the one given in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 677, June 1990, p151.

Brief Synopses:

Chapter One – *Vertigo*

A former police detective, Scotty Ferguson, has developed a pathological fear for heights since being responsible for the fatal fall of a fellow officer. He is hired to follow and protect Madeleine, the wife of an old acquaintance, who seems to be suffering from delusions that she is another woman from the past. Scotty falls in love with her, yet tragically, because of his affliction, he cannot prevent her suicidal leap from a church tower. Months later he finds a woman, Judy, who looks almost identical to Madeleine. He reconstructs Judy in the image of Madeleine, and as their obsessional love affair develops, he eventually discovers that Judy is indeed Madeleine. She was a young woman hired to perform an intricate con trick to win insurance money and her fall from the tower was faked. In anger Scotty takes her back up the church tower. However, on this occasion she genuinely falls to her death.

–The Awful Truth

Jerry and Lucy are husband and wife who decide to get divorced, and then, after enjoying quick flings with a cabaret artiste and an oil tycoon respectively, decide to get together again before their divorce becomes official.

Chapter Four – *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

Jefferson Smith is chosen by the political machine to a fill out a senator's term. The bosses imagine that he is dumb enough for them to be able to control him. However he becomes aware of the bosses' corruption and threatens to expose it. They try to silence him, but inspired by Saunders, a wise female worker in Washington politics, Smith learns how to pitch the honest voice of one man loudly enough to be heard by the nation at large[3].

Chapter Five – *A Woman Under the Influence*

Mabel looks after her kids in a suburb of America. Nick, her husband, works unpredictable hours on a building site. Gradually, Mabel crumbles under the pressure and Nick is forced to put her in a hospital. He thinks he is doing his best to help her but he never really understands her predicament. At the end of the film she seems to be returning to health.

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[3] Adapted from Charles Affron's summary in Christopher Lyon ed., *The International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers: Films*, Firethorn Press, London, 1984, p302.

Chapter Six – *All I Desire*

Naomi, a theatre star, returns home to her family which she left many years ago: her husband Henry, her daughters Joyce and Lily, her son Ted, and housekeeper Lena. She now wishes to reintegrate into the family, and the local community, as a 'normal' mother and wife but faces various forms of resistance, or idolisation, from within the family, and outside it (for example, from an old flame, Dutch). Naomi must gradually work out a new balance of commitment to her private and public life, as well as building up bonds of trust with her husband and daughters. At the end of the film Henry declares her faith in her and they go upstairs.

Chapter Seven – *Strangers on a Train*

On a train, Guy, a champion tennis player, is approached by Bruno, a fellow passenger who is a fan of his. Bruno, who seems to know all about Guy's personal life, proposes a friendly arrangement for an exchange of killings: Bruno will get rid of Guy's wife, who refuses to give him the divorce he wants in order to get married, if Guy, in return, will murder Bruno's over-strict father. Guy indignantly rejects the insane proposal, but Bruno, disregarding the rebuff, proceeds with his part in the plan, strangling Guy's wife to death in an amusement park. To get even for what he regards as a failure to honour their contract, Bruno decides to compromise Guy by placing the tennis player's lighter at the scene of the crime, making Guy look even more suspicious to the police. However, Bruno's plan backfires and the film ends with Bruno crushed to death by a runaway carousel and the discovery of evidence clearly establishing Guy's innocence[4].

FILMOGRAPHY

DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST

French Title: *Journal d'un curé de campagne*

Production: Union Générale Cinématographique; black and white; 35mm; 120 mins. Released 1950; France.

Produced by Léon Carré: screenplay by Robert Bresson; from the novel by George Bernanos; directed by Robert Bresson; photography by Léonce-Henry Burel; edited by Paulette Robert; production design by Pierre Charbonnier; music by Jean-Jacques Grüenwald.

Cast: Claude Laydu (*Priest of Ambricourt*); Nicole Ladmiral (*Chantal*); Nicole Maurey (*Mademoiselle Louise*); Marie Monique Arkell (*Countess*); Armand Gibert (*Priest of Torcy*); Jean Riveyre (*Count*); Jean Danet (*Olivier*); Antoine Balpêtré (*Doctor Delbende*); Martine Lemaire (*Séraphita*); Yvette Etiévant (*Young girl*)[5].

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[4] Based on synopsis given in François Truffaut, *Hitchcock by Truffaut: The Definitive Study* (Updated Edition), Paladin, London, 1986, p283.
[5] Details from Lyon ed., op.cit., p230.

LOVES OF A BLONDE
Czech title: *Lásky Jédné Plavovlásky*

Production: Barrandov Film Studio for Ceskoslovenský Film; black and white; 35mm; 82 mins; released 1965; Prague; Czechoslovakia.

Produced by Rudolf Hajek; screenplay by Jaroslav Papousek, Ivan Passer, Miloš Forman, and Václav Sašek; directed by Miloš Forman; photography by Miroslav Ondrícek; edited by Miroslav Hájek; sound by Adolf Böhm; art direction by Karel Cerný; music by Evzen Illín; assistant director: Ivan Passer.

Cast: Hana Brejchova (*Andula*); Vladimir Pucholt (*Mila*); Vladimir Menšik (*Vacovský*); Ivan Kheil (*Manas*); Jirí Hrubý (*Burda*); Milada Jezková (*Mila's Mother*); Josef Sebáek (*Mila's Father*); Marie Salacová (*Marie*); Jana Nováková (*Jana*); Jana Crkalová (*Jaruška*); Zdenka Lorencová (*Zdena*); Tána Zelinkaová (*girl*); Jan Vostrêil (*Colonel*); Josef Kolb (*Prkorný*); Antonín Blazejovský (*Tonda*); M. Zednícková (*Educator*)[6].

LATE SPRING
Japanese Title: *Banshun*

Production by Shochiku (Ofuna); black and white; 35mm; 108 mins; released 1949; Japan.

Original story by Kazuo Hirotsu; script by Koga Nodo, Yasujiro Ozu; directed by Yasujiro Ozu; cinematography by Yuhuru Atsuta; art direction by Tatsuo Hamada; Lighting by Haruo Isono; editing by Yoshiyasu Hamamura; music by Senji Ito.

Cast: Chishu Ryu (*Shukichi Somiya*); Setsuko Hara (*Noriko*); Yumeji Tsukioka (*Aya Kitagawa*); Haruko Sugimura (*Aunt Masa*); Hohi Aoki (*Katsuyochi*); Jun Usami (*Shoichi Hattori*); Kuniko Miyake (*Akiko (Mrs.) Miwa*); Masao Mishima (*Jo Onodera*); Yosiko Tsubouchi (*Kiku*)[7].

A TALE OF SPRINGTIME
French Title: *Contes de printemps*

Production by Les Films du Lsange with the participation of Sofica Investimage; colour; 35 mm; 112 mins; released 1989; France.

Produced by Margaret Ménégoz; screenplay by Eric Rohmer; photography by Luc Pagès; edited by Maria Luisa Garcia; musical extracts: "Sonata No.5 in F Major" by Ludwig van Beethoven, performed by Tedi Papavrami (violin), Alexandre Tharaud (piano); "Montmorency Blues" by Jean-Louis Valéro; "Songs of Dawn" by Robert

[6] Details from Lyon ed., op.cit., p251.
[7] Details from Bordwell, op.cit.,p307.

Schumann, performed by Florence Darel; "Etudes symphoniques" by Robert Schumann, performed by Cécile Vigna.

Cast: Anne Teyssèdre (*Jeanne*); Hughes Quester (*Igor*); Florence Darel (*Natasha*); Eloise Bennett (*Eve*); Sophie Robin (*Gaelle*); Marc Lelon, François Lamore.[8]

Other films discussed in the order in which they appear in the thesis:

Vertigo. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Performed by James Stewart (*John "Scotty" Ferguson*); Kim Novak (*Madeleine/Judy*); Barbara Bel Geddes (*Midge*); Tom Helmore (*Gavin Elster*). USA; colour; 1958; 127mins.

The Awful Truth. Directed by Leo McCarey. Performed by Cary Grant (*Jerry Warriner*); Irene Dunne *(Lucy Warriner*), Ralph Bellemy (*Dan Leeson*). USA; black and white; 1937; 92 mins.

Pather Panchali/ Father Panchali. Directed by Satyajit Ray. Performed by Kanu Banerji (*The Father*); Karuna Banerji (*The Mother*); Subir Banerji (*Apu*); Uma Das Gupta (*The Daughter*). India; black and white; 1956; 112 mins.

My Childhood. Directed by Bill Douglas. Performed by Stephen Archibald (*Jamie*); Hughie Restorick; Jean Taylor Smith, Bernard McKenna, Paul Kermack, Helena Gloag. GB; black and white; 1972; 48 mins

The Southerner. Directed by Jean Renoir. Performed by Zachary Scott (*Sam*); Betty Field (*Sam's wife*); Beulah Bondi (*Granny*); J Carrol Naish; Percy Kilbride; Blanche Yurka; Charles Kemper; Norman Lloyd. USA; black and white; 1945; 91 mins.

The Wrong Man. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Performed by Henry Fonda (*Manny Balestrero*), Vera Miles (*Rose Balestrero*), Anthony Quayle (*O'Connor*); Harold J. Stone (*Lieutenant Bowers*). USA; black and white; 1956; 105 mins.

Kes. Directed by Ken Loach. Performed by David Bradley (*Billy Casper*); Lynne Perrie (*Mrs. Casper*), Colin Welland (*Teacher*), Freddie Fletcher, Brian Glover, Bob Bowes. GB; colour; 1969; 113 mins.

Paisá/ Paisan. Directed by Roberto Rossellini. Performed by (in relevant segment) Alfonsino Pasca (*Boy*), Robert Van Loon (*Joe from Jersey*). Italy; black and white; 1946; 117 mins.

Umberto D. Directed by Vittorio de Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattinni. Performed by Carlo Battisti (*Umberto*); Maria-Pia Casilio (*Maria*), Lina Gennari; Memmo Carotenuto; Alberto Albani Barbieri. Italy; black and white; 1952; 90 mins.

Mr. Smith Goes To Washington. Directed by Frank Capra. Performed by James Stewart (*Jefferson Smith*); Jean Arthur (*Saunders*); Claude Rains (*Senator Joseph*

[8] Details from *Monthly Film Bulletin*, op.cit., p151.

Paine); Edward Arnold (*Jim Taylor*); H.B Warner (*Senate Majority Leader*); Harry Carey (*President of the Senate*). USA; black and white; 1939; 130 mins.

A Woman Under the Influence. Directed by John Cassavetes. Performed by Peter Falk (*Nick Longhetti*); Gena Rowlands (*Mabel Longhetti*); Katherine Cassavetes; Lady Rowlands; Fred Draper; O G Dunn. USA; colour; 1974; 155 mins.

All I Desire. Directed by Douglas Sirk. Performed by Barbara Stanwyck (*Naomi*); Richard Carlson (*Henry*); Marcia Henderson (*Joyce*); Lori Nelson (*Lily*); Lotte Stein (*Lena*); Billy Gray (*Ted*); Mareen O' Sullivan; Richard Long. USA; black and white; 1953; 110 mins.

Strangers On a Train. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Performed by Farley Granger (*Guy Haines*); Robert Walker (*Bruno Anthony*); Ruth Roman; Leo G Carroll; Patricia Hitchcock; Laura Elliott; Marion Lorne; Howard St. John. USA; black and white; 1951; 101 mins.

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