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Editor
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The principal purpose of p.o.v. is to provide a framework for collaborative publication for those of us who study and teach film at the Department of Information and Media Studies at the University of Aarhus. We will also invite contributions from colleagues in other departments and at other universities. Our emphasis is on collaborative projects, enabling us to combine our efforts, each bringing his or her own point of view to bear on a given film or genre or theoretical problem. Consequently, the reader will find in each issue a variety of approaches to the film or question at hand – approaches which complete rather than compete with one another.

Every March issue of p.o.v. is devoted to the short fiction film.

p.o.v.

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Stacey Cozart and Marilyn Raskin graciously
proofread a number of the articles in this issue.
I am very grateful for their help.

RR

Mitko Panov

With Raised Hands

(Poland, 1985)

Mitko Panov***With Raised Hands***

(Poland, 1985), 5 min., 35 mm, b/w

Principal production credits

Direction and screenplay	Mitko Panov
Cinematography	Jarek Szoda
Film Editor	Halina Szalinska
Music	Janusz Hajdun
Production	PWSFTv&T (National School for Film, Television and Theater), Lodz, Poland

Cast

Etel Szyc
Monika Mozer
Jaroslaw Dunaj

Festivals and awards include:

Golden Palm for Best Short Film, Cannes Film Festival, 1991.
First Prize for Best Student Film, International Film Festival, Rimini, 1987
First Prize, International Student Film Festival, Tel Aviv, 1986
Silver Dragon Award, International Short Film Festival, Krakow, 1986
Main Prize, International Student Film Festival, Munich, 1985
Grand Prix, International Short Film Festival, Monte Casino, 1990
First Prize, International Short Film Festival in Ismailia, Egypt, 1995
The Egyptian Filmmakers' Society's Special Award for Best Film, 1995

Mitko Panov

Born in 1963 in the southernmost state of 'Former Yugoslavia', the Republic of Macedonia. After studying painting at the University of Skopje, he left for Poland to study directing at the internationally acclaimed National School for Film Television and Theater in Lodz. In 1988, he moved to New York City where he taught film directing at the New York University's Graduate Film Department (1992-1995). In 1994 he received a nomination for the Pyne Carter Award for Excellence in Teaching. Between 1992 and 1993 he participated in founding the New York Film Academy workshop and designed its curriculum. Since 1995, he is a guest professor in film directing at the Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film in Munich. In 1998

he moved to Austin where he teaches film production in the Department of Radio, Television and Film at the University of Texas at Austin.

Filmography

- 1984 **Grand Prix**. Documentary. 16mm, Color. 15 min.
1985 **Szero Rom**. Documentary. 35mm, B&W. 6 min.
1985 **With Raised Hands**. Narrative. 35mm, B&W. 5 min.
1986 **Bread and Salt**. Creative Documentary. 35mm, Color. 23 min.
1994 **Yield**. Creative Documentary. 35mm, Color. 15 min.
1998 **The Meadow**. Narrative. 35mm, Color. 20min.

Television

- 1984 **Those Lips, Those Eyes**
1985 **Tale of Ordinary Madness**. TV play
1989 **New York Mosaic**. Series of documentary reports
1993 **Freedom of Expression**. Montage film-short for the PBS series
The Declaration of Independence
1994 **Mongolia**. 9 episodes for TV series *Choices*
1995/96 Music Video productions
2000 **Comrades**. Feature Documentary



Production shot from Mitko Panov's *With Raised Hands*.

A note on the photograph of the boy in Warsaw (1943)

Richard Raskin



Widely considered one of the most striking images of the Holocaust, this picture – taken by an unknown SS or Wehrmacht photographer – was included in the pictorial section of the so-called "Stroop Report," sent by SS General Jürgen Stroop to SS Chief Heinrich Himmler as a memento after he (Stroop) ultimately crushed the Warsaw ghetto uprising of April-May 1943. Only three copies of the report, with its accompanying photo album, were made.

The boy in the photo may be Tsvi C. Nussbaum, who survived the horrors of Bergen-Belsen and now lives in the U.S. The trooper holding the submachine gun has been identified as SS Rottenführer Josef Blösche, known as one of the worst scourges of the Warsaw ghetto, terrorizing and murdering Jews at every opportunity.

Later this year, I hope to complete a book devoted entirely to this photograph, which inspired Mitko Panov to make *With Raised Hands*.

An interview with Mitko Panov on *With Raised Hands*

Richard Raskin



How would you describe your relationship to the photograph that inspired With Raised Hands? When did you first see the picture and had it been particularly meaningful to you for some time before you made the film?

I can't say that I had much of a relationship with the photo before I decided to make the film. I first saw 'the image' of the boy (with raised hands) in a painting by a known Italian painter, Renato Guttuso. That must have been about seven years before the film was made. But at that time, I had no idea that the boy in the painting was taken from an authentic photo, nor that it treats a real historical event. I think it was clear that the colorfully painted image of the boy was related to a war, but it was unclear which one. Nonetheless, the image stayed with me

for a long time, and when I recognized it in the actual black and white photo, I was surprised to discover that it was taken in Poland, during the extermination of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. In any case, that boy with raised hands, surrounded by armed soldiers, aiming their weapons at him, must have spoken to me in some way. At the time I saw the actual photo, I was studying directing in the Lodz Film School, and I very soon decided to make a short film about the photo.

In order to understand the main reason behind that decision, and exactly what attracted me to the photo, I will have to tell you where I saw the print of the original picture. It was in a book of a (former) Yugoslav, I believe a Croat/Jewish art critic Oto Bihalji Merin, another acclaimed name from the post WW II art scene. His book was entitled *A Re-vision of Art* and it is a comparative art study about various "eternal" themes (images, visions, forms) that keep re-appearing throughout the history of culture and civilization. The chapter containing the photo was called *With Raised Hands* and knowing the film's godfather will probably help explain the content of the film, and the reason for its existence. Basically, Merin was comparing images of the same motif – of raised hands – throughout the history of culture. For thousands of years, these images had been reappearing from the planes of the ancient Latin and Central American civilizations, to the tomb stones in the Jewish cemeteries. According to my understanding, they have expressed man's eternal and deep striving toward 'the skies'

and in a visual way, spoke of man's innate spiritual aspirations. In a way, they are testimonies of the sacrilegious nature of the human.

I don't know of any short film made before yours which invents a fictitious a story about the making of a photograph. Do you recall how the idea first came to you? Did you know of other blends of documentary photo and fictional film at the time?

There must be quite a few films that incorporate documentary photos within their narrative. Bergman's *Persona* for example uses exactly the same photo in a sequence that is shot and cut in the style of a 'photo-roman'. I learned about that – and saw *Persona* – after I shot the film, but seeing it beforehand wouldn't have prevented my use of it, because I felt it was used in a very different context. However, I am not sure if there is a short film about the making of a documentary photo. I'd be surprised if there isn't one. I believe that by now, pretty much everything has been covered.

Did you have any moments of hesitation when you wondered whether or not it was entirely legitimate to weave a fiction around the making of the photograph?

I never had that kind of hesitation. In my eyes, all art and culture weaves fiction with history, sometimes up to the point that no one knows any longer what was real, and what's part of the teller's imagination.

However, I did have some concerns about the fact that the picture was already pretty well known and used in other art forms, and that it was a commentary on an important part of our history. I am not sure whether I make myself clear but: you don't want to make a false or

even mediocre piece of media about something that deeply affects millions of people. (Even though journalists do that all the time and they keep getting more sophisticated at it. In my opinion, they specialized in it during the recent wars in former Yugoslavia.)

But to get back to *With Raised Hands*: even though the film uses a real historical event, and brings fiction (or wishful thinking) into it, I don't think it manipulates, abuses or in any way violates the historical truth. People crave freedom and 'salvation' whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims, and whether they live in conditions of war or peace. I hope that that's a truthful assumption and that's what the film is about: the desire to be free, whatever that means.

Did your story evolve at all at a later stage in the production process, from shooting script to final cut? Were there any shots you filmed but chose not to use?

Not at all. There was an 'iron' story board and shooting script, and only one shot in the film was not planned and one (that was shot) was not included in the final cut. The entire film was shot in a ratio 1:3 and the editing pretty much consisted in simply assembling the shots. For example, the second (and most complex) shot had only two takes. Both of them pretty similar. But this is not to say (to the students) that all films should be shot with an 'iron shooting script' but it just so happened in the case of this one.

Can you describe your preparations, including casting, location scouting, arranging the décor, finding costumes, etc.?

The film was shot as a student *étude* during the second year of my studies in Poland, and that was in the mid eighties. That matters, because the production model of the film school at that time pretty much determined the way you work.

The school itself was organized as a small film studio with strong links to the "real world" and we (the students) had many of these resources available.

Of course, you had to pay out of your own pocket for some 'extras' but the bulk of what you needed was provided. A lot of the tasks, like casting extras, selecting costumes, finding props, etc., were pretty easy, because everything was there in the studio. At that time, they had just completed a feature film about the Holocaust and a lot of the stuff was still in place.

When it came to the casting of the child-actors, I had to do everything on my own. I don't know who suggested this idea, but since I was clearly looking for children with Semitic features and there weren't enough kids to choose from, someone suggested that I try the Gypsy communities. It sounds strange to me now, as I tell it, but that's how it was. So I started visiting pretty much all of these communities in Lodz, making portraits of the children, and getting to know them. It took some time to find the right ones, but I was very lucky in general. The boy that I found for the main role was a natural. Of course, it helped that I had the photograph, so I knew exactly what I was looking for. The same was true of the locations. I held the picture in my hands

and spent a lot of money on taxis, driving around, looking. I didn't have location scouts or a production designer, so I had to find it all myself and then verify it with the director of photography (Jarek Szoda). But since it's impossible to find a perfect location that will give you all the desired angles (it's a period piece after all), I had to concoct the film locations from several different locations that in reality had nothing to do with one another. Some were in the vicinity and other about an hour or so away. If it wasn't a student production, we would have probably built a set on the studio lot but I am not sure that that would have worked better.

Could you describe the unique form of "story board" (photos) you made, and why you chose to do it that way?

I often take photos in preparation for a shoot. I photograph the locations and use random people as stand-ins. It helps me discover the right angle, distance, lens. It is a great tool for visualizing the film, (assuming the visuals are very important). It is much better than the video camera and there are reasons for that: not only the image and the lens is more alike, but because it is still, it helps you to reflect on what you've got. You can line up the stills on the floor and create a film sequence, you can switch their order and do some editing.

It is like a 'frozen' film that you keep before your eyes, and you animate it with your imagination.

The reason I used it in *With Raised Hands* was because it gave me a clearer sense of how the film would look even before it was shot.

How did you direct your actors? Do you recall what instructions you gave to the main German soldier at various moments in the action? To the little boy? To the other characters, for example at the moment when you shown them in close-ups?

Some of the faces you see belong to professional actors and others (like the children) are non-professional, so the approach varied. When it comes to the children (there are three of them), they all belonged to the same neighborhood, so once I cast them, I spent about one month, working with them on weekends. The assignments we did were very simple, pretty much in order to establish a rapport with them. During the shoot I simply stood right next to the camera, and made sure that each of their reactions and motions corresponded to what we had established during the rehearsals. I needed that rapport because I was not sure how they would handle the close ups if I were not right there with them, doing almost exactly what they were supposed to do but on the opposite side of the camera. It was very important that we already knew each other, and they felt familiar and comfortable with me. I actually remember that the younger boy started crying when he first saw the men in uniforms, holding guns, and he refused to 'act' for half a day.

The second shot in your film is quite long and complex. It lasts almost a minute and covers a number of actions: first people out of focus approach the camera, then the main German soldier appears from our left within the frame in a close-up. He smiles to the camera, then begins coaxing someone off-camera to do something. (Soon, of course, we will understand that he was speaking to the boy.) He then moves out of our view and a woman, whose back was toward the camera, turns around, after which another soldier pushes her away, as well as about 18 other people, one at a time. All of this in a single, unbroken take. It would

undoubtedly have been easier for you to divide these various actions into separate shots, but instead, you chose to cover them all in one continuous take. What were your thoughts in going for that kind of continuity rather than cutting at that early point in your film?

The overall visual concept prevented me from breaking down the opening scene into more shots than there are. The idea was that until the moment of the freeze frame (when the boy raises his hands and we reveal the full situation as in the documentary photo) everything is seen from the POV of the soldier who is a cameraman/photographer. So, everything had to be shot from one single angle, the angle of the German photographer. Since that was supposed to be the camera of a war photographer, shooting propaganda footage for the Wehrmacht, we decided that our own camera had to behave in a similar way: as if the DP [director of photography] behind it is someone who is just getting ready to shoot his still; someone who is not familiar with the subjects or with what is about to happen. For him, as for us, it is a process of gradual discovery or disclosure. First, he fixes the focus, then adjusts the speed (the shot starts in slow motion and then reaches 24 frames per second) and only then, he starts identifying the characters. Then he switches the turret (shown in the opening shot) in order to find the right lens and camera distance. Since there were three primary lenses on those cameras, there are only three shots until the moment we come to that freeze-frame (the moment when the photographer 'discovers' the image that we recognize from the documentary photo). In other words, the camera behaves like any camera in preparation for a given

shot. In addition, the director of photography and I saw a lot of WW II war footage and borrowed the stylistic features of that camera work. As I said, what follows after the freeze frame is kind of a fantasy, and it's no longer from the POV of the reporter. Therefore, there isn't only one point of view.

Could you discuss your choice of music for the film and your decisions as to where and when it should be used? I would very much like you to describe in your own words the moment when the boy finally raises his hands in the air, and we hear a musical note when this happens.

The music was the only element that was changed after the film was completed. The original music featured a women's voice singing a cappella and that was meant to replicate some traditional Jewish singing. It didn't work.

I could afford hiring a seasoned composer, whose work I was familiar with, and who had done a great job on a short that I liked a lot. He suggested the piano as the right instrument and referred to Haydn's children's concertos which I was not familiar with. As with most written scores, we recorded the music while screening the film. We didn't do much music editing either. But overall, the choice of music belonged to the composer, Janusz Hajdun, who simply did a great job.

That musical accent at the freeze frame (when the boy finally raises his hands – the moment of "giving up") is meant to lay stress on the dramatic importance of that moment. To get back to what I was saying

about the development of the plot: that is the moment of transcendence, when we switch from one reality to another. From the documented world of a war photographer (who wants to capture his photo), to the internal world of his subject (who dreams of escape).

The boy's throwing his cap into the air is of course an important symbolic gesture. Your thoughts when you decided to have him do that after he disappears from our view?

I am generally a great fan of film lapses. I like films in which more is hinted than told. I jokingly call them 'interactive films' because they don't spell everything out for you, but leave a lot to your imagination. That way, you can also do your own share in making the film. That's a huge topic and I often like talking about it. Before that moment (in the film) there is another lapse, when the boy actually escapes from the sight of the photographer. We never see that critical moment of the boy running around the corner. We just see that he is no longer there.

Did you ever consider trying to contact Tsvi Nussbaum - possibly the little boy who survived, and to arrange for him to see the film? I believe he was living in upstate New York in 1985. Do you think that it might be interesting to know how he would experience the film or would that not be of particular interest to you, considering that the film is a work of fiction?

I would love to know how he would react to the film. I actually wouldn't even mind making a film about it, even though I am not sure whether that should be a documentary or a fiction.¹

¹ Since the time this interview was made, Mitko Panov and I visited Tsvi Nussbaum and showed him *With Raised Hands*. When I asked Tsvi Nussbaum how he experienced the film, he answered: "It touched my heart." Tsvi Nussbaum is quite possibly the boy in the photo, though this cannot be established with any certainty. And Mitko Panov did in fact film our meeting. RR

Do you believe that the short film has its own kind of storytelling, very different from that of the feature film? If so, how would you describe the ways in which the short fiction film tells its story?

In my eyes, it definitely has its own, unique way of storytelling. I almost compare it to a different medium, like an oil painting versus watercolor, even though I know that's not an appropriate comparison. As one of my colleagues says: the short film is based on a strong idea or even a gimmick. I'd like to avoid making generalizations but I believe that the long film is primarily based on a strong character and involving story. A strong idea doesn't suffice. I think that sometimes even a strong concept can't hold two hours together. It's mainly the human drama that can sustain one's attention for that long a time. By the way, I consider as shorts only films that are up to 15 minutes long. A 30 minute film used to be called a 'medium-length' film and I think that's a time in which you can also do some character development.

However, there are some similarities when it comes to structure. Structure-wise, the short film is like a nucleus that contains all the basic elements that exist in the long film: exposition, confrontation, resolution; plot point, twist, climax, etc.

Is there any advice you would give student filmmakers about to make their own first short films?

I have been teaching for ten years now, and I always try to start with the infamous "visual story telling"; a story that can be told without

using words. A very academic approach indeed, but it still works. It's kind of teaching the forgotten language.

But I have no general advice. In my opinion, teaching filmmaking requires a strictly individualized approach to every student and film.

27 October 2002

With Raised Hands

Jakob Isak Nielsen

With Raised Hands is based on a famous Holocaust photograph taken during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the spring of 1943 that shows Jewish dwellers being rushed out of their homes. In the foreground of the picture a young boy stands with hands raised, behind him a German corporal carries a machine gun that is pointed in the boy's direction.

In bringing the above-mentioned photograph to life, director Mitko Panov presents an interpretation of the scene that centers on the possible actions of the boy before and after the taking of the photograph: the German corporal is seen trying to isolate the boy in the foreground of the shot while at the same time getting him to raise his hands and wear a cap. However, the boy disobeys and runs away from his spot. The corporal finally manages to put the boy in his place, but then a gust of wind blows off the boy's cap. After checking the reactions of the cameraman and the corporal, he decides to leave his spot again in order to pick up the cap. However, gusts of wind keep blowing it further and further away. When he catches up with the cap, he puts it on his head and decides to leave the scene.

What I intend to examine in this article is *the presentation of the boy in the film*. In particular, I will concentrate on how the audiovisual style of the film is used to underpin the two important choices made by the boy: 1) leaving his spot in order to pick up his cap and 2) leaving the scene altogether.

Getting Started

The way a film begins will often give us guidelines as to what to expect of its images and sounds and how to interpret them. The very first image in *With Raised Hands* is a shot of a camera with lenses of different focal length; two hands adjust things on the camera and rotate the turret; a shade is placed in front of a lens; the taking lens is selected as the title of the film blends over the image. Already at this stage we can infer that the choice of filmic structuring device carries special significance in the film. How will the shot be framed, what will its area of focus be? Furthermore, the unfolding of the film is associated with a refinement of the film making process. Consider the beginning of the film: choosing focal length and placing a shade in front of the camera lens are preparatory phases of filmmaking. Even the title of the film is linked to a preparatory phase of filmmaking: a split-second after the title appears, the cameraman raises his hand in front of the lens to check the area of focus.¹ This act forms a visual parallel to the film's title *With Raised Hands*. It's an example of how an early stage in the film

- the title - is elegantly linked to an early or preparatory stage of the filmmaking process.

The first sounds in the film also seem like preparatory, probing notes on a piano. Perhaps we can expect a development and refinement of the sounds and images? Indeed, there is a cut to the blurred visuals of the camera established in shot 1 - first the probing notes of the piano turn into a delicate melody and then a picture comes into focus. The film comes into being at the same time as its visuals and in this case also sounds are refined. I will argue that this is not just an elegant way of leading the viewer into the film but that throughout the film, progression - most notably the development of the young boy - is linked to a continual refinement of filmmaking processes. In fact I will argue that as the boy evolves and matures *so does the visual syntax chosen to convey this development*.

Three Modes

All in all I will distinguish between three different visual modes in the film that play a prominent part in conveying the boy's development: a Primitive Mode, a Transitional Mode and a Progressive Mode. There isn't the same development from primitive to progressive in terms of how sound is used in the film, e.g. it doesn't make sense to talk of the non-diegetic sound of a moving train used early in the film as belonging to a *primitive mode* — especially not as the sound subtly

¹ I assume this is the reason for raising his hand in front of the lens.

suggests what might happen to the dwellers in the near future: deportation! However, sound is structured *in accordance* with the shifts of visual mode and I will argue that sound is also used to underscore an important choice made by the boy.

To clarify the issues at hand, I have worked out a schema that outlines the way I see the structure of the film.

Visuals	Shot no.	Sound	Duration (sec.)
Opening shot and title	1	piano	16
<i>Primitive Mode</i>	2a, 2b, 2c	train	93
Cross-over: freeze frame of shot 2c - boy with cap, then a shot of the cameraman and a still picture of the German corporal	2c-4	piano	12
<i>Transitional Mode</i>	5-12	wind, footsteps	80
Cross-over: staged formation - boy without cap.	13	wind, footsteps	8

<i>Progressive Mode</i>	14-25 [?]	wind, footsteps	57
Cross-over: the boy disappears behind a street gate.	26	piano	23
A moving train.	27	train, piano	5
The original photograph that the film is based on. End credits.	28	piano	60

Hopefully, the schema can be of help if there is doubt about the exact location of the shots and visual modes discussed below.

The Primitive Mode

After the first shot in the film - of a camera - there is a cut to the visuals recorded by that camera. The next 93 seconds of the film are presented as visuals focalized by the camera in the film. In the course of this minute and a half the scene is set, the characters are introduced, and a few character descriptions are presented: a German corporal enjoys the presence of the camera, a woman is worried, a boy is uneasy.² In my opinion these visuals are not subjective in the traditional sense, i.e. they are *as seen through the camera on the spot*, not as seen by the cameraman. For example, there's no attempt to set up a subjective shot. In

[?] I have registered a cut in each of the last two swish pans.

the first shot we only see the cameraman's hands adjusting things on the camera — there is no lead in to a POV shot in the form of a close-up of his face. In fact, the first time we see his face is through the lens of his own camera: he walks up in front of the lens to check whether things are in order. This act also supports my claim that it is the camera that is the prime focalizer — the camera is *not* rotated about a vertical axis, it is the *cameraman* that moves whereas the camera itself remains fixed.

In terms of visual style I have chosen to describe the 93 seconds of camera-focalized images as belonging to a *primitive mode* — not because I consider this section of the film inferior or imperfect but simply because it forms a starting point for a continual development of visual syntax. In many ways this section of the film and in particular the presentation of the boy within this section bears a resemblance to very early cinema: there are no cuts — only changes of focal length³ — and overall the camera is stationary except for a very short pan. At this stage the film also maintains temporal and action continuity, and the spatial continuity is only upset by changing focal length lens during the shot, thereby altering the distance to the characters in front of the lens. In effect, the changes of focal length draw attention to the fixed base of the camera and therefore authenticate rather than deflate our

² In terms of dramatic curves this section of the film corresponds very nicely to the film's *exposition*.

³ Changing focal length lens in the middle of a shot — I should add — is not a typical feature of early cinema or of any period of filmmaking for that matter.

impression of the scene as a continuous shot filmed from a fixed position.⁴ Furthermore, although there is a close-up of the corporal and medium shots of the Jewish prisoners being rushed forward by a German trooper, the boy is only presented in medium long shot and long shot at this stage in the film.

In actual fact certain aspects of the visual staging are similar to those of the Lumière brothers' *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle* (1895). Naturally, I'm referring to aspects such as the one-take, the slightly damaged black-and-white film, the extremely limited amount of camera movement, but also to the action in front of the lens: when the boy in *With Raised Hands* runs out of frame, the corporal runs after him and puts him back in his place in front of the lens. A similar staging is used in *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle* when the young boy who stepped on the water hose tries to escape and actually disrupts the composition of the shot by almost running out of frame before being brought back into the foreground of the shot by the gardener to receive his punishment.

The situation and tone of *With Raised Hands* is, of course, very different from that of *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle*. However, I draw attention to the staging of that particular film because even though the boy in *With Raised Hands* certainly isn't a prankster like the boy in *Le jardinier*, I do think that he has some boyish character traits in the be-

⁴ There are two changes of focal length lens (in-camera cuts), and while the footage appears to maintain temporal and action continuity one can deduct from closer inspection that the footage has actually been edited in post-production — there are slight discrepancies between the positions of the characters before the changes of focal length.

ginning of the film. For example, his actions are presented as instinctive rather than as a result of careful contemplation. He is first seen being dragged into the frame by the German corporal, then he runs over to his mother's lap for protection.⁵ As this is unsuccessful he naively tries to get out of the proceedings — probably for the second time — by running away from the scene and hence out of the frame. Again he is put back in his place. In a sense the boy and the visual syntax of the film are both at an early stage of development. This is not just a case of parallel but distinct developments; there is, of course, *correlation* between character development and the visual mode — for instance, in the Primitive Mode there are no close shots to *convey* careful reflection on the part of the boy.⁶

The Primitive Mode ends with a freeze frame of the scene that is almost identical to the original photograph from the Warsaw ghetto that the film is inspired by. The sound of a moving train that accompanied the images of the Primitive Mode fades out. The cross-over to the Transitional Mode is initiated by this freeze frame, followed by a medium shot of the camera and cameraman taken from a frontal position and a still picture of the German corporal's face. In my opinion these images act as an intermediate phase in the film. The flow of

⁵ I assume that it is the boy's mother, though it could of course be another woman responsible for him.

⁶ I use *close shot* as a common description for relatively close shots of the actors and not in the sense of *medium close-up*. To describe scale of shot, I use the terminology suggested by Barry Salt in *Film Style and Technology*, 2nd edition (London: Starword, 1992), p. 142.

images is brought to a halt by the freeze frame, it being deviant from the earlier *moving* images in the film. As the freeze frame is very similar to the original photograph from the Warsaw ghetto, one could draw the conclusion that so far the film has presented an interpretation of what went on before the taking of the photograph whereas what follows will be an interpretation of what could have happened afterwards.

I extend the intermediate phase to include the shot of the cameraman and the still picture of the German corporal because I think these three images constitute a unit. The film pauses for a moment and invites the viewers to contemplate some of the circumstances of the situation: the arrangement of the characters in the scene, the camera, the corporal. For instance, the still picture of the German corporal extends the opportunity for dwelling on the psychology of the villain. Even the shot of the cameraman stands out although it has moving images. What we have is an image of a cameraman steadily cranking the handle *isolated* between two still pictures. Paradoxically, filming is thus separated from moving images. Consequently, this succession of images highlights the *act* of filming as an emblematic activity. The use of music also supports the interpretation of these three images as a unit: the beautiful piano notes heard at the beginning of the film are re-introduced over exactly these three images. Aside from these images, the piano notes are only used at the beginning of the film and over the last shots of the film, giving it structure and circularity.

The Transitional Mode

In the Primitive Mode visuals were presented in the form of a continuous shot filmed from a stationary camera base with only very limited camera movement. The Transitional Mode has more complex visual syntax — it has more film language, so to speak. There are numerous cuts and there is substantial camera movement. Even though the texture of the visuals is very similar to that of the visuals in the so-called Primitive Mode, most of the shots are clearly not focalized by the camera in the film. For instance, the eye lines from the boy to the cameraman reveal that the camera position has changed.

It is symptomatic of the Transitional Mode that instead of being tied to a specific camera position, the camera moves into the action in front of the lens, picking out pieces of the scene from different angles. First we see a close-up of the boy's mother, then we see close shots of some of the others in the group and finally a close-up of a young girl. This string of shots builds up intensity in the scene. It invites us to focus on the mental processes of the characters: what thoughts and sentiments do they carry within themselves? Most of them direct their gaze at the German corporal. What can we read into their gazes: hatred, disbelief, fear? The string of close shots is concluded by the crucial shot of the boy who — standing with his hands raised — cannot prevent the wind from blowing off his cap.

The wind blowing off his cap is crucial because it is the *complicating action* of the film. The missing cap upsets the staging of the scene and the question is how the different characters will react to this imbalance. The boy looks in turn at the cap and at the cameraman. The cameraman stops filming; he looks at the boy, then at the cap; finally, he looks at the corporal. Still in the same shot, the boy — whose raised hands are visible at the bottom of the frame — turns around towards the camera in order to see the reaction of the corporal. As he does so the camera moves from the face of the cameraman to the face of the boy, who first looks at the cap, then at the corporal. These eye lines form non-verbal questions that the characters direct at one another. A reverse shot to the corporal informs the viewer — as well as the boy and the cameraman — that he doesn't respond directly to their questions. It is difficult to tell whether he is simply bored by the proceedings or whether he deliberately avoids their gazes because he is irritated by the turn of events. In any case he doesn't react to the issue at hand.

From the close-up of the German corporal the camera slowly starts to move. First it moves to the boy's mother on the left, then to the characters huddled together next to her — the hands of the boy are visible at the bottom of the frame turning around the same axis as the camera. The camera movement not only registers the facial expressions of the characters, but also encloses them in a semi-circle that has the complicating action as its center. The camera movement finishes its

circular movement on the face of a young girl who looks in turn at the cap and the boy. She seems to be more attentive to the situation and its implications than the others. Finally, the camera pans right to a medium close-up of the boy, who now faces the cameraman again. He looks at the cap and then at the cameraman. There is a reverse shot to the cameraman as seen from the boy's point of view. The cameraman simply goes back to filming, in effect leaving it up to the boy as to which action to take.

Clearly, the visual style that leads up to the decisive choice of whether or not to pick up the cap is more complex than what was used in the Primitive Mode: there is a string of close shots, shot/reverse shot structures, point-of-view shot/reverse shot patterns, and there is a complex correlation of blocking and camera movement. However, there is still action continuity from shot to shot as discussed above in connection with "eye line communication," and there is no reason to assume that there are temporal gaps between the string of close shots that introduced the Transitional Mode. On the contrary, the overall arrangement of the shot has been established via the freeze frame — the string of close shots are picked out of this totality and hence appear to be in temporal sequence or, alternatively, to be part of the same temporal frame. I will return to the question of temporal continuity and action continuity below when discussing the Progressive Mode.

Sound, Causality and Choice

It would be unjust not to mention the use of sound because in this part of the film sound is used to great effect in the presentation of the boy's development. The interplay of causality and choice is particularly noteworthy here, and in many ways it is sound that brings these properties into play.⁷ First of all, the sound of the wind gains in volume after the intermediate phase of the film. Naturally, the sound of the wind sets up the complicating action: it blows off the boy's cap. This does not involve a choice on the part of any of the characters but is purely a matter of causality. However, the causal chain of events is in fact enmeshed in choices. After the wind blows off the cap, the boy is shown in close shots contemplating what to do, i.e. he has learned from the corporal's former chiding and he checks the reactions of both cameraman and corporal before taking action. In the first third of the film, he showed no sign of this type of reflection. As he is about to make his decision, the sound of the wind diminishes and gives way to the dubbed sound of his footsteps. At this stage in the film, the actions of the characters have not yet produced sounds; we don't hear the cranking of the handle, we see the lips of the German corporal move but we don't hear the words coming out of his mouth. As a consequence, the dubbed sound of the boy's footsteps literally stands out on the soundtrack. Giving so much weight to the sound of his

⁷ For a detailed account of this parameter (pair of properties) for story design, see Richard Raskin, 'Five Parameters for Story Design in the Short Fiction Film' in **p.o.v.** no. 5 (March 1998), pp. 165-76.

footsteps conveys to us that his decision to *step out of* the static frame is significant. Moreover, the visual design of the shot contributes even more to the significance of his choice: all the other characters in the shot are static and thus it seems as though he steps out of a photograph. Outside this framing he is no longer forced to raise his hands.

The Progressive Mode

As the boy decides to leave his position in order to pick up his cap, the visual mode changes again. First, the camera position is altered. From now on the camera moves away from the staged formation and down an alley. The boy has decided to pick up his cap; he is developing into a character that makes significant choices. However, there is still an *interplay* of causality and choice. Gusts of wind keep pushing the cap beyond the boy's reach and further away from the group. The boy *does* follow the cap but this is an automatic reaction and not a deliberate choice, which is visualized by only including the feet of the boy in the shots where he follows the cap; there is no close-up of the boy that could enable the viewer to interpret that he is contemplating whether or not to follow the cap. This continued causal chain of events helps balance the boy's second decisive choice: leaving the scene altogether. First, the gusts of wind carry the cap to a position from which it is easier for him to leave and second, they also give more time and more opportunities for character development. Each gust of wind sets up a

contemplative look back at the proceedings. While he himself may not be completely aware of the significance of his choice, his looks back at the proceedings convey to us that it is at least a deliberate choice made upon careful reflection. After all, he not only leaves the scene but also the possible comfort of his mother's embrace.

In this final stage of the boy's development there is a departure from the type of visual syntax used earlier that is directly related to the boy's actions. In the Primitive Mode he was captured, framed within the optics of a stationary camera: when he ran out of frame he was brought back into the foreground of the frame. When he steps out of the framing later on — as though stepping out of a photograph — he breaks out of this framing for good. However, his actions also break down the visual syntax of the Transitional Mode: when he runs after the cap, action and temporal continuity are disjointed because he *outruns* the swish pans. When the two last swish pans rest on his character, he has either moved much further than action and temporal continuity allow, or he has performed actions that are not possible within the temporal frame of the swish pan, i.e. in the course of the last swish pan he has moved several feet, picked up his cap and stands in an upward position! Last but not least, his final choice to leave the scene is portrayed as a breaking out of a p.o.v. construction. Allow me to elaborate: when the boy leaves the scene, he looks back at the proceedings three times in his pursuit of the cap. The first two are classical cases of a p.o.v. sandwich: a shot of the boy looking (lead in)

followed by his p.o.v. of the proceedings followed by another shot of him looking (follow up). However, in the final case there is a shot of the boy looking (lead in) followed by a shot of the proceedings that we — on the grounds of the last two p.o.v. constructions — assume is what the boy sees. In this final shot of the proceedings the young girl walks up to the cameraman to see where he is, but the follow-up shot reveals to us that he is no longer there. Therefore, his leaving the scene is conveyed as a breaking out of the syntax of former visual modes. In a way, it may be said that his choices and his progression as a character are conveyed by means of a continual progression of visual syntax until ultimately he breaks out of this syntax.

Into Darkness

The final shot of the boy shows him walking down a street. It is perfectly staged as a further departure from the former visual modes of the film because the two important elements of the story design — the boy and the cap — disappear into off-screen space. First, the boy disappears behind the blackness of a gate in the middle of the street. Quite literally this marks a final departure from visual modes: he's no longer visible. However, this is also an inconclusive visual mode: he isn't exactly riding off into the sunset but is left in off-screen darkness. Second, although he probably throws his cap up in the air out of joy, a freeze frame leaves the cap hanging in mid-air in the off-screen space

above the top of the frame. Both the cap and the boy are left in a kind of visual limbo, thus alluding to the uncertain future of the boy. Actually, this uncertainty was already hinted at towards the end of the last follow-up shot mentioned above by a dark cloud of smoke that comes drifting down the street from left to right. As the next shot shows the boy walking down the street in the same direction, the film literally gives the ominous impression that he is being followed by a dark cloud. In that sense the next to last shot in the film — a shot of a train passing — may of course indicate what he narrowly escaped, but it could just as well suggest what he will face in the near future: deportation.

The film concludes by showing the original photograph that inspired *With Raised Hands*. It prompts a new question: What happened to the *real* boy in the photograph?

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With Raised Hands – Confessions of a Teacher. Part II

David Wingate

I wrote an article in POV Number 13, March 2002, about my experience of selecting students for a documentary course. I called it "Confessions of a Teacher". The present article continues in the same mode, an attempt to share some of my experiences as a film teacher with the reader.

The present article is the result of a conversation between Richard Raskin and myself during the Nordic Panorama festival in September last year in Oulu, Finland. We were talking about a short film he had recently seen and I was saying how I had been using the film for many years in my teaching. He asked me write some of these experiences as an article for POV.

This black-and-white film, only six minutes long, was made by students at the Polish film school in Lodz in 1985.

The film uses an iconic photograph from the Second World War, a little boy in a big cap, standing with his hands up in front of a group of people and two soldiers in German army uniform, steel helmets and with submachine guns. Some of the men in the group have hats and side curls suggesting that they are Jews. In the film the little boy manages to escape from this situation. His cap blows off in the wind. He goes after his cap and gets away.

The photograph was taken in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943. It is one of the famous images from the war. I recognised it at once the first time I saw the film. I'm sure in Poland it has even more iconic power, at least for people my age and older. Many of the students I deal with do not recognise the photograph at all. When I realised this for the first time, I was disappointed and I remember being terribly tempted to

give the film a prologue in which I told the audience about this photograph before showing the film. But I don't do that – I think the film must be allowed meet its new generations of audience and their associative world and their memories on its own merits. There seems to be a text on the end credits – in Polish of course - which seems to tell something about the photograph. This text is not translated in the VHS version of the film that I have.

In general I find short films very useful for teaching. The students can more easily grasp the whole film at a single viewing and it is possible to discuss it with them in some detail a short time after they have seen it. I find myself using documentary, animation, fiction and experimental shorts in this way. Over the years I have built up a library of shorts on VHS which I use in teaching sessions in all kinds students in all kinds of ways

I work free lance mostly with professionals in the film and television industries. But I do teach, mostly as a guest teacher doing lectures and workshops at a wide variety of institutions. The students I deal with have very different kinds of backgrounds, strengths and motives. So I am obliged to teach quite flexibly.

The Polish film *With Raised Hands* has been in my VHS tape library for at least 10 years and I use the film in different ways.

I sometimes show "With Hands Up" together with other short film-school films. As an introduction to such a session, I can suggest

that there are different approaches when choosing what film make as a student, what level of difficulty and risk to choose.

One extreme choice is to knowingly try to make a film that is well beyond the students' present skills and maturity. The resultant film may well be very rough and parts of may not work at all. Indeed the whole film may fail, and be un-distributable. The students will then not be able to use the film as a whole in their work portfolio, as only parts of it perhaps may viewable. But by choosing such a bold experiment with high risk of failure, the students may learn a huge amount and make considerable progress. This would be a choice of looking at the film as a chance to experiment and to learn as much as possible, rather than a chance to make a good film, one which makes it round the festivals, gets sold to TV and so on.

A second extreme choice is to make a film that is knowingly well within the students skills and maturity - playing safe as it were. The resultant film can be expected to be well polished, be elegantly made, but perhaps not particularly bold or original. It may get them work after school, but may not impress people in the industry particularly.

My suggestion is that students should be encouraged to choose films the lie between these two extremes – particularly when making their final- or diploma films. For intermediate films, it may be good for them to take greater risks and try to go well beyond what they can manage. For the students important films - the big films each year and in particular their final, diploma film, all the films they want to have in

their work portfolios when leaving the school - they should be a little less bold, take a bit less risk. With the help of their tutors they can choose to be near or just beyond the edge of what they can. The resultant film will be a bit rough, but show the students promise and potential.

I feel that good student films in general can well be a bit rough, made by people who have not yet mastered their skills, but are who are being bold and original. The polish comes, as it were, on its own so long as the student goes on working in his or her profession after school.

With Raised Hands is a good example of such a film. It is not entirely polished in its execution, but it is bold and original in its conception and it is made with great conviction. It really is an extraordinary example of what can be done with small resources.

Showing other student films which “play safe” alongside this Polish film allows the students to get this point.

I have a US art college short film called *Extended Play* which works quite well as a contrast to *With Raised Hands* in this respect. “Extended Play” seems to me to be a more consciously trendy and polished film than this Polish short, but the students find it almost boring by comparison, especially if I show *With Raised Hands* first.

Another way of using *With Raised Hands* in teaching sessions is simply as an example of east European film. Many of the students I deal with have not seen many, or even any, east European films.

Watching *With Raised Hands* some of these students remark that the Polish film is using moving pictures in other ways than they are used to. For some of them this is a revelation. This saddens me a little, of course - their film experience has been so dominated by films from the USA that they are unaware of films from the other 9 tenths of the world! But that is the way it is.

If enough of the student group are interested in this sense of difference in the use of moving pictures, then we explore it. If not, then I simply make the point that film in Eastern Europe developed differently because the Wall protected their film industry from being as overwhelmed by foreign imports as the west European cinema has been. I ask them to imagine that they had grown up in another world where 90% of their cinema diet was dominated by foreign film, say Chinese film. Would they not think that was a bit weird? Given another historical development, it might have been so, that the Chinese film industry dominated the world market as the US one has done for 50 years. Indeed, perhaps the Chinese will dominate one day. Who knows.

If the students do want to explore this sense of difference, then one easy point to make is how the gaze of the camera shifts into and out of the so-called “subjective” within the same shot, while the US films tend to insist that you should cut. I give them the question “who sees?” as something to ask of any shot in a film. I suggest one can think there 3 three general answers to this “who sees?” question.

In most shots the audience is more or less being invited to observe what is happening - a sort of “we the audience see.”

In other shots the audience is being invited to see what one of the people in the scene is seeing. So “we see what he or she sees” becomes the answer to the “who sees?” question. This is the so-called “character point of view (pov)” shot or “subjective camera” shot.

Lastly there are some shots that are so unexpected, or so obviously commentaries, or obviously stylised that they make you feel the presence of the film-makers. Film theory people say you are aware of the presence of the films “narrator”, the “author”, the “director”. The rather more primitive “Who sees?” question can be answered by a kind of “we see what the film-makers see”.

Talking about these three alternative answers to the “who sees?” question, I do not present them as separate categories. I rather sketch them as mutually independent areas of answer within the field exposed by the “who sees?” question.

Typical in US films - and US film history - the pov shot is established as the second of a trinity of three shots. The first is a “she/he looks” close-up of the person obviously looking at something off screen. The film typically holds this shot a moment longer than expected, making us a little curious about what the person is looking at. The second is the “pov shot,” the camera being roughly where the persons head is, looking at what they have been looking at. And the

third is the “he/she stops looking” close-up, often the continuation of the first shot of the trinity.

Note that in this way of doing it, there is a cut from the one who is looking to the pov shot - what they are looking at. And a cut away from the subjective pov shot back to the person again.

Early films using this kind of pov shot typically had all three of the shots in the trinity. Later films use only two of the three – he/she looks, we see what they see and then we cut to something else. We see something in a subjective way and then cut to the person who has been looking etc.

I have some film excerpts that I show to illustrate this.

In *With Raised Hands* there are two classic cuts from a close-up of the boy looking to a shot of what he seems to be looking at. But in one of them the apparent pov shot continues as a pan and later in the pan the camera picks up the boy himself. So he appears in his own point of view shot. The shot is unusual in that we only see the boy's hands at first at the bottom of the frame and we hear only his feet moving against the pavement as he turns – a very “subjective” sort of sound. Some of the students experience this moment when the boy seems to appear in what he himself is looking at, as a moment when the film-makers become present, as I wrote above. I assume this is because they find it unusual and unexpected and therefore feel the presence of the “narrator”.

This not cutting to and from the pov shot is regarded as a “sin” in some US film making dogmas. In my experience it is quite common in East European films – they seem to do it naturally. And if you watch East European films a bit, then you don’t find it unusual.

I have some film excerpts I show to illustrate this.

Perhaps one might speculate why the Americans feel we should cut and the east Europeans feel it is OK to slide. What might this tell us about the cultural and historical differences between USA attitudes to and beliefs about the subjective and the central European ones. I don’t know.

In *With Raised Hands* there is a cameraman in the film, also filming what is going on. Some of the shots in the film are seen through this camera. So this gives a special answer to the question “who sees?” In these shots we see what this cameraman sees through his camera.

Sometimes students who feel they have experienced something new and different about moving pictures in *With Raised Hands* want to explore this further. I am always pleased when this happens. There are various ways to help them.

Sometimes the students will spontaneously start talking about the “symbolic” significance or use of the pictures. I don’t find ideas about filmic symbols or metaphors particularly useful in teaching people who want to make films, rather than people who want to analyse films.

One way of exploring these things and yet avoid symbols and metaphors is to talk about pictures which “illustrate” the events shown

in the film - “illustrate” perhaps the “story” in the film – as opposed to moving pictures which are the “gestalt” of the films events. I use the word “illustrative” here in the same sense as illustrations in a book, pictures which support the printed word. So I am suggesting that some films show an “illustrative” use of moving pictures, using the pictures to support the meaning of the film.

I am using the word “gestalt” here in the sense of the moving pictures in and of themselves, expressing and giving dramatic embodiment to the meaning of the film. The moving pictures themselves ARE the film.

I have some film excerpts that I use for this “illustrative” contra “gestalt” discussion. Some of the shots in *With Raised Hands* can then be including in this.

A number of times I have had students who say that certain shots in the film “stand for” things rather than “showing” things. That seems to me a fruitful distinction, worth exploring.

They usually talk about the second to last shot in *With Raised Hands*. Here the boy goes away from us and is hidden by a bit of fence and then his cap goes flying up in the air, once and twice and then the shot is frozen with the cap hanging high above the street. This shot, the students say, “stands for” his happiness, the celebration of his escape. They say the film doesn’t “show” us his being happy or celebrating - we don’t actually see him being happy, but we know it just the same.

And again, they talk about the final shot of the film – railway carriages rushing by us. This “stands”, these students say, for the fate of all other people in the group who, unlike the boy did not escape, but were sent by train to the camps. Again, the students claim, we are not shown them being taken to the camps, but we get it all the same.

Sometimes students are impressed by the economy of such shots, not only that they are cheap to make, but that they say such a lot in a filmic way although they are really quite simple.

I find all this is very gratifying, because these students are, I feel, experiencing something of those other traditions of film making – those of the empires to the east rather than the empire to the west - of which they have had so little experience, for historic reasons. For some of them it is the beginning of long personal journeys of exploration into other ways of using film.

A third point I as a teacher sometimes make about this Polish short film is that the film-makers have chosen to quote an existing picture in their film. As an analogy I suggest the students try to imagine that they were going to write a song (or a poem) and had decided to quote a line from another song in their new song. Where they choose to place the quote in their work is a vital creative decision. Do they start with it the quote? Do they end with the quote? Is the quote somewhere in the body of their song?

In *With Raised Hands* the quote – the Warsaw ghetto photograph – is in the middle of the film (and it occurs again in the end credits). So the

film has to build towards the quote, pass through it and build on from the quote.

The quote becomes like a gateway in the middle of the film through which the film must pass. Placing it here determines the structure of the film and in particular the structure leading up to and immediately after the quote.

I then try to generalise this point saying that if you too early in developing a film decide upon a first shot, or a last shot or a transition some where in the film you have fallen for, then you determine large areas of the film around these shots. I say that a group of people trying to develop a film are in great need of something concrete to hang on to and feel secure about. They are like people exploring an unknown country together without much a map. Often they will agree that they have a great opening shot, or perhaps a wonderful final shot and feel safe that they at least are sure of that. Or perhaps they have some transition which they know must be used somewhere in the film. And they will build quite a bit of security in the unknown landscape by agreeing about this transition.

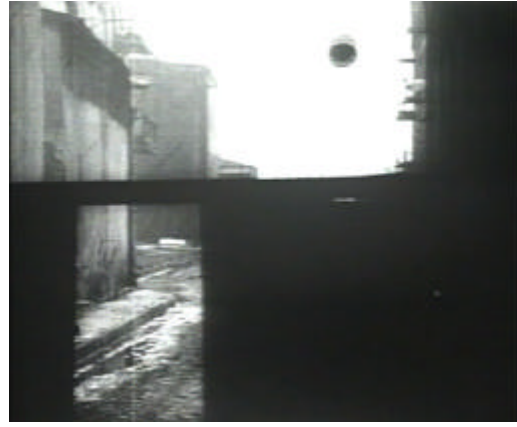
But this locking down of parts of the film before one is clearer about the rest of the film, is usually unwise. And this is because the thing you lock down early become just like a quote – like the stills photograph quote in *With Raised Hands*. They determine and distort large areas of the films structure on either side themselves. Having locked these things down, you begin to reject other good ideas and

inventions because they do not “fit” with respect to the locked down parts. So the locked down parts start restricting your creativity.

The thing to do is to say that these early inventions are valuable but try to put them aside as possible solutions, rather than deciding it once they have to be used. And then look at them again when the rest of the film, in particular the areas before and after the moment you had thought to lock down, have begun to clarify.

Selected stills from *With Raised Hands*





Unni Straume

Derailment/Avsporing

(Norway/France, 1993)

Unni Straume***DERAILMENT***

(Norway/France, 1993), 7 minutes, 35 mm, b/w

Principal production credits

Director and Screenwriter	Unni Straume
Cinematography	Harald Paalgård
Editing	Unni Straume
Producer	Marianne Slot Nielsen
Assistant director	Aamund Johannson
Lighting	Olivier Guillaume
Music	Rolf Wallin
Production	Unni Straume Filmproduksjon and K-FILMS, Paris

Cast

The Woman	Anne-Lise Berntsen
The Man	Tom Remlov

Festivals include:

Official Selection, Cannes, 1993

In competition, New York Film Festival, 1993

Unni Straume

Born in 1955, Unni Straume grew up in Fiksdal, a small closely knit fishing hamlet on the west coast of Norway. She attended the film school at the Regional College in Volda, and graduated in 1978. She spent the next twelve years as a documentary filmmaker before producing her first feature *To a Stranger* (1990). Her short film, *Derailment* premiered at Cannes in *Un Certain Regard* in 1992. *Dreamplay*, her second feature, was selected for *Un Certain Regard* in 1994. Her most recent feature, *Music for Weddings and Funerals*, opened the Haugesund Festival in 2002 and was also selected for the Venice and Toronto Festivals in 2002.

Filmography

1990 **To a Stranger**

1993 **Derailment**

1994 **Dreamplay**

1995 **T83**

1998 **Thrane's Method**

1999 **Daddy's Sunday**

2002 **Music for Weddings and Funerals**

An interview with Unni Straume on *Derailment*

Richard Raskin

How did the idea for making this film come about, and how does it happen to be a Norwegian-French production?

As one can understand from seeing the film, the idea is a fantasy based on a similar experience. It is Norwegian-French because the Metro in Paris is more fascinating than the Oslo transport system. There is also less space between the seats, which is fundamental for this little story. The fact is also that I was very connected to Paris after the French release of my first feature, *To a Stranger*, and the distribution company K-films with Klaus Gerke and Marianne Slot Nielsen, was enthusiastically involved.

Both actors are perfect for their roles. How did you choose Anne-Lise Berntsen and Tom Remlow for the two parts in the film?

I wanted the characters to be of "a certain age," and they are two persons I saw a lot at that time. And wanted to try, because of the sensual expression of their faces. This is a film of close-ups.

How do you yourself see the logic of the title Derailment?

It's the logic of non logic. Poetry I guess.

The photography is spectacular. What were your thoughts when you decided to do the film in black-and-white rather than color, and also in your instructions concerning the lighting, which also contributes greatly to the viewer's experience of the images?

My first feature *To a Stranger* is in black and white, and it was natural to continue this study. Actually I would still be working with B&W if it was commercially possible. As I said, this film is basically close-ups of faces, and I think black and white gives so much to portraits in general. And the fact that we were working with moving lights from outside the train, gave us even more possibilities for playing with the expression. B&W also gives a certain abstraction and takes us away from the trivial world for a while.

I see that you also edited the film. So there was no other person there killing any of your darlings or pressing you to do so. Yet there is great economy in the 30 shots of the film, and not a single superfluous moment. Your thoughts on both directing and editing?

For me writing, direction and editing are all parts of the same process. Working in a short format, it is possible for one person to do both – so why not?. Killing your darlings is not really that difficult. Maybe if someone had told me while shooting that a specific shot would be cut out, or when I was viewing the rushes. But in the process of editing, the rhythm, the breath of the film, becomes primordial. Even when I work with an editor on feature films, I am involved totally in the decisions about every single cut. Anything else would be unthinkable.

One of the things I will use your film to illustrate in my teaching is how you manage to bring the viewer inside your characters, how you invest your characters with inner lives. Your thoughts on making the inner reality of characters a main focus of a film?

I guess that in a film with no words, it is easier to come inside a person. It sounds strange, but often words produce confusion and are too culturally based. When you are forced to read all communication through the way the characters move and look at each other, it may be easier for anyone to identify with them.

The dream sequence is beautifully managed. Could you tell me in your own words your thoughts behind the lovely shot of the curtain fluttering over the broken plant pot on the floor?

I think it is better to not try to explain that shot. Such images come very intuitively to me.

Derailment is the most erotically interesting short film I have ever seen, and perhaps one of the strengths of the eroticism in the film is that so much is left unsaid or un-shown – left to the viewer's imagination. Your thoughts on showing enough but not too much? On finding that balance?

Of course this is very personal, and being a shy person in this respect, I feel it embarrassing when they show me too much on the screen. I just follow my own sensibility when I shoot scenes like that, hoping this is also that of the audience – at least of my audience.

I gather that we hear the woman's footsteps at the end – that she is now following the man. Is that correct? And your thoughts on letting the footsteps suggest this, rather than showing her at that moment? Might this have been an idea that came to you after the shoot was over?

I hate to put an end to stories - both in life and in art. And both solutions, no steps, or seeing her in the last scene, would have determined the ending. As it is now, you cannot be too sure...

You have made feature films as well as shorts. Would you agree that short films have a different way of telling their stories?

Maybe, I am not quite sure. Maybe we should talk more about this. But in the final analysis, each and every film has its own unique way of telling. Short or long. Feature or documentary. Addicted as I am to filmmaking, the only reason why I do too few shorts is the terribly short time of shooting. I love being on the set, and I find it cruel to make all the effort to arrive at this magic moment - and then finish it all in three days!

Is there any advice you would give to student filmmakers, about to make their own first short films?

I can only give advice if the student wants to make atmosphere- based films. I don't know much about action-driven films. Here are some suggestions to a poetic mind: Insist on realizing your own images, creating as close a relationship as possible with the cameraman if you cannot do the filming yourself. Concentrate more on each moment than on the story. If each moment has something magic, the story can be very simple and even banal. Develop and respect your own intuition and be sensitive towards your actors' (or documentary- characters') personality when you are choosing them.

The filmmaking process is all about dialogue, and it is very important to have good relationships with everyone involved, especially on the set. In fiction you must have an inner image of all the scenes before you create them. New ideas can change and develop them, but the atmosphere must be the one you first imagined.

14 October 2002

An interview with Anne-Lise Berntsen on *Derailment*

Rasmus Stampe Hjorth

Anne-Lise Berntsen is one of Norway's all-time best known sopranos. She began performing in 1978 and had her opera debut in 1985. She has since toured most of the world and recorded 11 albums. Her film debut was in *Derailment* (1993). In 1998 she played the lead role in *Vargen kommer*, and a year later in *The Prompter*. For further details on her impressive curriculum vitae, see Anne-Lise Berntsen's website at <http://nettforlaget.net/goto/annelise/norsk/index.html> [RSH]



*How did a famous soprano like you end up in a film like *derailment*, a film without dialog? Was it your first appearance in film?*

Well that was quite simple, actually. I knew Unni Straume from before. We were close friends. She thought of me as the face for that film, and then she told herself: "No. I can't do that. I simply know Anne-Lise too well." And then she auditioned quite a number of other actors and at the very, very end, she auditioned me as well. And she decided that I

had the best face for the woman in the film, and that Tom and I made a good couple. That was the way it actually came about.

Later on you played the lead role in The Prompter (1999). Did that have anything to do with the part you had played in Derailment?

I don't think so. Maybe that was more because I had a reputation in Norway at that time. My face was seen in magazines and in the papers, on TV and so on. That was why Hilda Heier contacted me. I don't think it had any connection with *Derailment*.

But you have a great face on film.

Well thank you [laughter]. That was a long time ago.

How did you prepare yourself for playing your role, and how was your collaboration with Unni Straume?

That was a really special thing, because I hadn't acted in front of any cameras other than TV cameras [laughter]. So Unni said: "Just trust me, just relax and do exactly what I say. And don't ever think you have to act." Because I am used to stage acting which is quite different [laughter]. So when it came to the shoot, she of course prepared everything technically first, which took a lot of time, and then she simply whispered something to me. She simply whispered the thoughts in my head, and I just concentrated. That's all there was to it. I have never been directed either before or afterward in such a very calm way. It was almost as though she was whispering thoughts in my head without making a sound. It was a nice experience.

Could you briefly describe Derailment as you see it?

This is a difficult question because I haven't seen this film in its final form... It was a sensual story, told in a simple, elegant and lyrical way.

What do you remember best from the shooting of Derailment? Is there a particular situation or scene that you would like to mention?

As a matter of fact yes. The scene in bed where Tom and I never were lying at the same time, and the interplay with the cameraman. It was such a moment of utmost beauty as Unni stood behind Harald's back,¹ whispering almost without a sound. Everything depended on two things: Harald's virtuosity and my total honesty and relaxation. And it was so fantastic in the room during the entire scene, which came out just as it was supposed to. So I remember that as an artistic moment of intense beauty. Because the camera really was the "person" I most wanted to see and looking into the camera's "eye" was a special experience.

11 January 2003

¹ Harald Paalgård was the director of photography.



An interview with Tom Remlov on *Derailment*

Richard Raskin

Trained as a theatre director and dramaturge in Norway and the UK. Lived and worked as a writer, actor and university lecturer in London from 1971-78. Artistic Director at Norway's oldest theatre, Den Nationale Scene in Bergen, for ten years from 1986, during which a strong field of contemporary Norwegian playwrights were introduced, most notably Jon Fosse. Managing director of the government owned production company Norsk Film AS from 1996-2001, and from 2001 Head of the Producers' Department at the Norwegian Academy of Film, and partner in the film, TV and stage production company Dinamo Story AS. Apart from some 150 productions for the stage, he has produced or co-produced appr. 20 feature films, most notably *Insomnia* (Erik Skjoldbjærg, 1997), *Bloody Angels* (Karin Julsrud, 1998), *Aberdeen* (Hans Petter Moland, 2000), *Cool & Crazy* (Knut Erik Jensen, 2001), and *Music for Weddings and Funerals* (Unni Straume, 2002).



How does it happen that you got the role of the male lead in Derailment?

What happened, in the manner of *auteurs* which Unni so palpably and committedly is, she draws upon people that she gets to meet. We got into a collaborative relationship in connection with a funding body of

which I was the chair and she was the representative of one of the film organizations. And we got to know one another and found a common ground in terms of likes and dislikes. And at that juncture, since I had done some acting occasionally and partly trained as an actor, when she had this story she - in her mind - put me in the role. And after having done so, in her development of the story and of the screenplay, she then asked me if I would mind doing it. It's an instance of an *auteur's* process, I think.

Do you happen to remember the instructions that Unni gave you during the shoot, as to how she wanted you to play your part?

Well put it this way. When she auditioned me for the role, because we did some screen tests, her concern was the ability to project a dreamlike image, if you like... a dreamy vision, which is of course is what it's all about. I'm asleep and some sensory or sensorial touch sets off a trail of fantasies, basically. This is what she was concerned with. That I would be in tune with the images that she had conceived visually for the film. That I was able to project them, and in other words give the cue to employing the subjective images which forms the main body of the film. It was more in the screen-test that she directed me, giving me the images and the situation and then letting the camera roll. 'Cause of course there's no dialogue, there's no action as such. It is an ability to project as observed. Allow the camera to catch whatever was going on. Having tested it, she was sort of happy

that that was possible. And we worked on it for quite some time. Having worked as an actor, of course I knew something about it. I knew something about techniques to employ in a situation like that. You could say I gave her what I knew how to do and then she wanted a bit more and adjusted some parts of the sequence and we did the actual shooting three months later. As I remember the shoot itself, she directed mostly the others, the extras, the circumstances, rather than me and the actress. Because she had talked so much about the situation and the idea that she allowed us to do it. So we played off each other.

Are there any other things you remember from the shoot after all these years, that you might want to mention?

It was a very pleasant experience. I mean, a week in Paris in the summer, shooting a story that very much belonged in Paris in the summer. It was a case of really entering into a world which was also the world that the film was to evoke. It was lovely, and it was a lovely crew and together we enjoyed Paris [laughter].

Derailment is a very unusual short film in the way it tells its story. I was wondering if you could tell me in your own words... if you were to describe this film to someone who had never seen it, how would you describe Derailment?

It's a film about the quintessential brief encounter. One touch, in the anonymous vacuum of a crowd, in the anonymously urban setting of a metro... One touch between two people stirring up the deepest desire to become one with another.

10 October 2002

Derailment

Daniel Bach Nielsen & Rasmus Stampe Hjorth



What happens?

The story takes place in the Paris metro. Our main female character is in her thirties. She is standing on the platform and as the train arrives she enters a crowded carriage. In her search for a place to sit she spots a man of the same age sleeping against the window. She edges slowly round people and places herself on the empty seat opposite the sleeping man. Her legs slide in between his as she squirms into a comfortable position looking intensely at him. In his sleep the man slips further down in the seat and puts on a satisfied expression. She continues to look at him, leans against the window and closes her eyes. The story jumps to an apartment in what seems to be a deserted block

of houses. The balcony doors are open and long white curtains dance in the wind. We see her in a frontal shot, lying down and she slowly turns to the side with a tender look on her face and smiles. We then see the 'sleeping man' awake, lying in the bed, and returning a satisfied look. A broken flowerpot is revealed behind the curtains. She turns her head around and looks intensely into the camera. We now return to the metro, where the man opens his eyes, notices her legs touching his and smiles. Then she wakes up returning a faint smile but freezes as he gets up and she looks away. On his way out of the train he glances at her, this time making eye contact. He walks through a tunnel as we hear the doors closing and the train leaving. He stops just before the tunnel turns, looks back and continues to walk. We hear determined steps of high-heeled shoes coming closer, the screen turning black as the steps get even louder.

How does *Derailment* tell its Story?

The most prominent element in the storytelling of *Derailment* is its pace. The story simply takes its time. It is approximately 5 minutes long and consists of only 30 shots which results in an average shot length of no less than 11 seconds! This slow rhythm contributes to the very special atmosphere and stresses the film's disregard for time. It is almost as though time does not exist in the story; as though riding the train is rather a condition than a journey. The story is thus situated outside of time in a poetic sense – something that the black and white

images also seem to stress. Being shot in 35mm black and white adds two other connotations as well. First it reminds us of old movie classics and especially of the aesthetics of the French new wave. On the other hand it also connotes a documentary style. We therefore consider the black and white a very clever and deliberate choice in order to shut out colours. This helps keep the viewer's attention focused on the two main characters instead of, say, noticing the multicoloured clothing of the other passengers on the train.

Derailment is also characterized by many close-ups which enlarge the important details. The film is in many ways a story about details and the centre of the film is the familiar unwanted - but inevitable - body contact which causes the derailment of thoughts. It is about stolen glances, about seeing without being caught seeing. That the man is sleeping offers the woman an opportunity to study him in peace - which in turn triggers the dream sequence. Here we physically leave the train, but the sound keeps the story anchored on the shrieking rails, thereby transforming this usually unpleasant sound into a form of background music in the bedroom.

A social understanding of *Derailment*

As people enter crowded places there are certain rules to be followed. Our encounter is varied, fascinating and highly complex. These face-to-face relations are a part of what Goffman called the "Interaction Order" which is the techniques, methods, understandings, and expectations

we use to make sure we don't violate or exploit the working consensus of encounters, not only to "save face" on behalf of others, but for fear that they, too, might be placed in a similar situation at some future time. The interaction order itself provides a protective membrane for the self, since interaction and the social self by nature are fragile. In this film the interaction between our two main characters is essential and sensitive; here is a step by step attempt to understand the thoughts of our characters.

What happens when we enter a crowded train? Our boundary for what is an appropriate distance to other persons is crossed and hence we are extra cautious about which signals people send us and how we react to them. In this case the meeting starts when our female character searches for a place to sit. As she enters the carriage she looks only briefly at the passengers to avoid paying undue attention. She sees the male character, sits down in the opposite seat and squeezes her legs between his. It is important for the meeting to continue that he is asleep so neither of them is embarrassed about the close contact. She sits quite still, afraid to wake him up, and feels the heat from his legs as she stares intensely at him, letting her thoughts fly. She pulls down her skirt to be decent, contrary to her thoughts. She closes her eyes and forgets about time and place, and her dream begins. She lies on the bed, trying to control her breath. They are still two strangers to each other lying at an appropriate distance from one another. There is a mirror in the window – perhaps a metaphor for the way she sees

herself, just as the broken flowerpot might evoke a ruined relationship she once had. The dream ends, the man wakes up, looks at her, smiles at her, maybe because of the way their legs are 'melted' together, or maybe in recognition of his dream. Might they have shared a common dream? She can feel that he is looking at her and senses the restlessness in his legs. She opens her eyes and looks at him, smiles back and then looks away. She is embarrassed because of her thoughts. It could also be out of disappointment over his leaving. She gets up now and looks at him. As he turns she knows that it is now or never. When he is about to enter the tunnel we hear her footsteps as she follows him.

A woman breaking the norm

The film contains several gaps. Even though we do not doubt that the story is about the woman's flow of thoughts, it is a shot of the man's head that frames the dream sequence. We do not see them in a two-shot in the dream, which could imply that the vision takes place within both of them. So far there has been no conscious contact – only a hinted mental one. Not until the man leaves the train do they – by exchanging glances – become obviously aware of each other's presence. The woman pursues her vision and the man, with a single turn of his head, teasingly leads her on. The footsteps at the end of the film clearly indicate that she follows him. On the whole, the classic gender roles have been turned upside-down in this film; the woman initiates the contact by intruding her legs between his, she smiles at him, and

finally she follows him when he gets off the train. She becomes an active character who makes things happen.

There is an atmosphere of melancholy in this film, yet we pick up signals that are cheerful in a very subtle way. In a situation in which we isolate ourselves as much as possible, despite the fact that we are surrounded by people, the main female character breaks the solitude. Whether the dream sequence anticipates future events or remains a dream is not important. The point is that for a short while common behaviour is 'derailed', spontaneity praised, and an encounter between strangers may offer an interesting experience on a train, in bed or maybe just in thoughts of derailment.

Derailment

Brian Dunnigan

*As for the place not desired, there is something there
and that is disorder. As for the desired place there is
nothing there and that is order.*

Bertolt Brecht

Derailment is a short film of poetic beauty that explores the conflict between dream and reality. A simple narrative frames a woman's encounter with a sleeping man and opens up a resonant space of romantic possibility. Yet as the title suggests such encounters involve the risk of derailment, of slipping from our everyday, familiar track into the unknown. And what derails us, what always derails us, is our free-floating *desire*. In this sense the film tells an old story about storytelling itself, about our need to generate new stories for our selves and our fear of what change might bring. The film suggests that our imaginings and romantic longings are the glittering surface, that play over our deepest fears of darkness and death.

This is also therefore a world of *mythic* resonance. A wordless, black and white world built around image and sound, looks and glances. The first shot establishes that we are Underground, and no longer in the bright rational light of the everyday.

A woman steps out of the darkness as a train arrives. Her face suggests the composed, privatised world of the city dweller. The

warning hum of the closing door reminds us that there is no turning back and there may be danger ahead. As we take off into the darkness of the tunnel, we could be on a journey to the land of the dead. (The warning sound is also a structuring motif; it is repeated later to awaken the woman from her dream and to remind her that time for making a decision, is running out) For now however, the ethereal lighting, the shadow figures, the dissonant echoing sounds, all prepare us for a dream-like journey. The woman moves slowly in and out of the light and pushes passed the swaying, ghostly bodies, the lost souls of this underworld.

Lulled by the motion of the train we are already in a somnambulant world, where time seems to have slowed down and every image feels charged with meaning. The woman is searching for a place to sit (but there is also a suggestion she is looking for something more) and her gaze alights upon the face of a sleeping man. She squeezes in to the seat opposite him.

A series of shots now show her growing, *erotic* fascination with the man building to an intimate almost caressing close-up of the man's face. A *gender reversal* of the Sleeping Beauty, she is the one who can dream about waking him up. She is also the one who is taking pleasure in *looking* at his secret sleeping smile and his open legs as he touches himself. It is her gaze that organizes the narrative flow, she is in control of the fantasy. The film at this point, represents a satisfying shift away from the dominant male gaze of mainstream Hollywood. Yet the

reality of their bodies touching, her knees between his legs, seems to break the spell. She tugs at her skirt and looks away to her own sad reflection in the train window. In reality she is alone yet the almost gothic imagery of their faces reflected and doubled suggest not only a disturbing *otherness* but also a parallel world where they may yet meet. They will encounter each other again on the street of dreams.

The woman's eyes close and her head falls to the window, mirroring the pose of the sleeping man. Faint, ghostly voices and the screech and squeal of the train act as a transition into her dream. The carved, stone cherub (divine messenger) on the cornice of the window watches over the entrance to this world, as lace curtains part to reveal a mirror, symbol of that parallel world of possibility. In this place she is fulfilled, she has her heart's desire. On the other side of the looking-glass she has found her twin, her soul mate. Her face lights up, a huge loving smile, full and sensual at once post-coital and divine. She turns to her sleeping partner, the man from the train. His look is more distant, he seems strangely absent as if he himself is symbolic rather than real. He is a reminder of something lacking in her self or perhaps the impossibility of relationship itself. A broken flower pot adds to the sense of unease. An image of fertile growth now scattered. Then a moment of *irony* as the woman turns her gaze toward the camera, towards the audience on the other side of the screen/mirror. We are reminded that another aspect of the film's affective pleasure, is that it is

a film about film and the cinematic pleasures of looking, dreaming and desiring.

A warning buzzer cuts across the dream. We have arrived at a station and the doors are opening. It is the man who wakes up first and becomes aware of the woman's legs between his own. Now it is the man who looks at the sleeping woman. She awakes to find him smiling at her. She briefly returns his smile then looks away while sounds of another train slowing down, suggest a sense of coming back to earth, to gravity to the heaviness of social reality. Just moments ago she was lying with this man in fantasy and now in reality he wants her. He is standing in the doorway waiting for her to follow him. Now we recognize the essential nature of this tale. It is a variant of the "what if...?" story. The one where you pass someone in the street and there is a moment of recognition. You want to stop and say something but you let them go. You will never see them again but *what if* you had spoken to them, would your life have changed forever? In this sense *Derailment* is similar to certain television adverts which focus on dreaming individuals looking out of buses, walking along deserted beaches, staring at the sky – which end with the brand name of the company that will change your life and make your dreams come true. The difference of course, is that the advert is superficial and sentimental; manipulating desire for something we don't really need while concealing the costs of excessive consumption. The challenging, disturbing and utopian aspect of the dream wish is lost.

The woman in *Derailment* however must be aware the she has woken up into not only a daydream but also a complex *patriarchal* reality; an insecure, fragmented world of privatised emotions where it is dangerous to dream of love and relationship with strange men. This is an important aspect of the disturbing power of the film. If she follows him, she risks much more than he does. She doesn't know this man whose footsteps echo down a lonely subway tunnel. (Anything could happen; we do not know the consequences of our actions nor do we have enough information.) She hesitates as the warning buzzer sounds then makes a decision. The train leaves and a woman's footsteps click emphatically over black. Is she walking toward life or death? You need to take risks, you need to go off the rails from time to time, but what if you get what you desire?² In the end our desires are shadowed by existential dread yet still we cling to the hope of a better life; and what is life without a dream of love.³

² "There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart's desire. The other is to get it." George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*.

³ "We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep" William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.



Modernism and Eroticism: *Derailment*

Benjamin Halligan

The Pirelli Calendars have been described as 'sophisticated erotica.' In a sphere where anything on shiny paper can pass for sophisticated, and erotica is all too often an unpleasantly bulbous woman in Wellington boots, it is a real pleasure to find a product that lives up to its raffish charm... For the most part, man's attempts to portray the woman of his imagination end with the outmoded blandness of the pin-up, or the unsubtle crudity of a gynaecologist's homework.

David Niven, 1975¹

The notion of the “object of sexual desire” as the focus for the projection of erotic fantasies on the part of the desirer was one intrinsically well-suited to Modernism, and one that ably illustrated Modernism's debt to Freudian thought. It gives rise to a kind of naïve self-proclaimed “honesty”: that *this* is what's on my mind, that the fantasy, no matter how gaudy or retrogressive, is a true expression of the (to use Shakespeare's term) unaccommodated man. And the modernists, who concerned themselves with the ills of accommodated man (that is, man in relation to the new invention of the city, of modern life), could not but help applaud. Along with Henry Miller they equated eroticism with veracity. The same case has been made in relation to the popularity of jazz in the 1930s among white intelligentsia – the music as a kind

of “primitive”-authentic expression, one outside the rules of “good taste”, and one that journeyed from the underground (the brothel) to an area of respectability (Carnegie Hall, for example). Here, it was argued, jazz and its milieu had become the locus for projection: colonial fantasies and a confirmation of racial stereotypes. It was a theory that suited those who could not tally the love of jazz on the part of the poet Philip Larkin with the racist sentiment that is (seemingly) honestly laid out in his published *Letters*.²

The Freudian-Modernist re-reading allowed a re-imagining of (or, as the Freudian would have had it, a “tapping into”) the context from which cultural artefacts sprung. Gustav Klimt’s paintings provide a perfect, albeit belated, metaphor; his studies (or, perhaps, “evocations”) of ornate Viennese women, almost imprisoned in their gold leaf clothes and weighed down by jewellery, were, as it turned out, creatures cut from a different cloth altogether. Klimt had first painted his women naked, and only then painted the clothes onto them. He had first imprinted the image of sexual freedom onto his canvas (and unaccommodated man expressing the unclothed woman), only to reject the sexual freedom with the rich trappings of society and its fashions. And the faces that are left barely betray the erotic glint typical of Pierre Bonnard’s women. Here in Klimt, in x-rayable view beneath

¹ Niven, David. *Introduction* in *The Complete Pirelli Calendar Book* (London & Sydney: Pan Books Ltd., 1975), unnumbered.

² Anthony Thwaite, editor. *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1940-1985* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

the surface of the paintings, was the “true” subject. And Klimt, like Freud, was a native of Vienna.

A new, truer subtext was available – the one that centred on sexual-oedipal tension. Any number of respectable English classics (the respectable English classic as the previous benchmark for respectability) could be decoded along such lines: tea and country walks as barely-suppressed sexual soundings-out, advances, rebuffs, dangers. In the perception of the Modernists, as the need for self-censorship on the part of writers (exemplified by, say, Jane Austen) vanished to be replaced by the desire for unaccommodated, “base” expressions (which reached a fashionable zenith in the 1960s), a countercurrent grew in strength: the desire for an ‘artistic’ realisation of such expressions. In a way, Fellini’s *Otto e Mezzo* (*Eight and a Half*, 1963) represents the fullest reverberation of this situation; a film of base, masturbatory, biographical confessions – whole sequences of which function as a kind of spermatorrhoeascape – that provides an autocritique along the lines of how such an expression is, somehow, in itself insufficiently artistic, unable to “make the grade” with the sophisticated contemporary audience. David Niven, that self-deprecating model of male sophistication, acknowledges the *need* for a kind of discretion in such an enterprise. He wouldn’t argue with Brecht on the subject of pornography – that mystification is useful in hiding an essential blandness in bourgeois art (except, of course, that Niven appreciates it rather than condemns it – at least in the case of Pirelli’s “sophisticated erotica”).

Another “critical point” could be seen the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe. Unlike Nan Goldin, Mapplethorpe never seemed interested in ritual in sexuality (that is, in sexuality as an intrinsic component of existence); unlike Andres Serrano, Mapplethorpe never seemed interested in stylised images of sexuality (that is, sexuality as a cipher for religious or philosophical mindsets). The Mapplethorpe erotic tableau – posed, or mid-narrative, but seemingly almost always with an awareness on the part of his subjects, in this respect akin to Victorian erotica – denoted such a degree of naïve honesty in his project (which, in itself, had a kind of naïve version too: the documentation of Mapplethorpe’s locale in the queer underground) that the photographs came to suggest something else altogether. The subjects were so obvious (Berlin leatherboys, pronounced phalluses, Tom of Finland-like caricatured machismo – the whole gamut of clichéd homoerotic imagery) that the viewer is forced into considering what it is that Mapplethorpe is *really* talking about. Likewise, the studies of flowers, so delicate, alive and “anatomically” luminous, suggest nothing other than sexuality, from eroticism to the fundamentals of the biological act of procreation. The subtext has overwhelmed and negated the subject matter.

It is such a vantage point that informs the short, dialogueless film *Déraillement*. An unnamed woman (middle-aged, a functionally short fringe across the brow, a lined face, but with a full and sensual lips) boards a crowded underground train on the Paris Métro. She squeezes

into a free seat but is obliged to push her legs between those of a sleeping man (balding, harsh features, but quizzical – the ghost of youth is still there). She gazes at him. The way his face is doubled, via a reflection in the train window, recalls the late Jean Marais in the films of Jean Cocteau, and the way Cocteau conjured homoerotic imagery (two men, cheek to cheek, regardless that one man was only an “image” – a reflection in a mirror). The woman is, through social convention and convenience, forced into a kind of everyday erotic tableau. It’s the same kind of thing that would be realised, in Hollywood movies of the 1950s, in the classic scene where the male instructs the female in the correct way to hold a golf club, or (later) how to hold a snooker cue. Here, the erotic tension is dissipated across the oppressive *mise-en-scène*; grimy, claustrophobic, a drab black and white that plays with under- and over- exposure. It evokes a sense of commuters heading home an hour or two beyond their ideal times, after just another day in the office. The shots are tight – little in the way of establishing information – forcing us into this consideration of two otherwise anonymous faces. Even the blur of the train as it speeds under the opening credits prevents the eye from finding images from which to glean information. Her shuffle through the train is all shoulders and backs and coats – the narrative concern is, blandly, the chore of seat-finding. The way this is then mirrored (the woman’s legs searching for a place – and finding one between the man’s, who then, in his sleep, envelopes her legs further between his) then allows for a

transcendence of the aesthetic of the everyday. This is, after all, Paris – the city, as the cliché goes, of love. The woman fantasises about the man.

The sequence is now illuminated, predominantly bright white light which engulfs and cleans the images (which retain the tightness of the framing, the insistence on close-ups). A building (perhaps the Latin Quarter – although the windows suggest a town in Northern Italy), billowing white curtains (always the white, blank pages on which the dream is to be written – that moment of anticipation before the pen hits the page and the possibilities of fiction) and inside the woman on a bed, the man easing himself down to join her, seemingly after coupling. The wordlessness remains. The silence of the Métro, where the couple are unable to talk as they do not know each other, here becomes the silence of a couple who need not talk, as they know all there is to know about the other. The curtains move in the wind and between them, on the wooden floor, the viewer glimpses a broken flowerpot. The concentration on this detail cries out for interpretation – “the Broken Flowerpot of Bourgeois Convention” – and then derides the viewer for the obviousness with which meaning is attributed. But there’s a deeper resonance in the sense of something breaking (a second interpretation; the shattering akin to the unseen orgasm? Or, metatextually, perhaps the force that knocked the flowerpot off the window ledge was not the curtain caught in the wind, but the vibrations of the passing train – passing by in the reality from which this

fantasy springs). Despite the calmness of the surface of the film and the dreamlike not-quite-there quality, there is a palpable jolt hidden in its joints, as the sensual becomes physical, the imagined registers a trace in reality. This is, after all, the “derailment” of the title – the fantasy crashing into the *actualité* since, back in the Métro, the man’s eyes flicker open and he takes in the woman, then the row of four knees in front of him.

They have arrived at his stop. The man exits the train and looks back at the woman. He had detected something – the unseen presence of a fantasy; that, momentarily, he was the locus for as much. In his eyes is a frisson of longing, of what could have been, of the enormity of the spectrum of erotic possibilities. The train moves on, and the dream is left behind.

Cinematic Dreaming

Pia Strandbygaard Frandsen

Woman meets man – with the use of these three simple words it is possible to summarize Unni Straume's short film *Avsporing (Derailment)*. On the surface the story is simple and easy to grasp: A woman enters the subway. She takes a seat in the train opposite a sleeping man and closes her eyes. In a dreamlike sequence the woman and the man meet. As the train stops, they both wake up and the man eventually leaves the train. The screen turns black and we hear the sound of quick footsteps.

Seen from the outside not very much happens between the woman and the man. The clear cut story is, however, endowed with a profound and rather abstract content. In the shape of an accidental meeting between two strangers, it seems, that the film sets out to explore different levels of reality, which are normally hidden from the naked eye, but which nevertheless are as much a part of the world as any visible phenomenon. Instead of unfolding a complex story over time, Unni Straume dives into the moment, expanding time and space in order to investigate deeper strata of signification.

The film is a small gem - a fascinating condensation of image and sound. The content is unfolded through an almost minimalistic

aesthetic strategy, which endows the film with a significant sharpness as well as poetic beauty and distinct intensity. The story is anchored in a classical narrative structure with a clear beginning, a middle, and an end. As such the formal structure of the film reflects the fundamental clarity and simplicity, which characterizes the film. Instead of a traditional dialogue-based narrative strategy the film depends on the immanent expressive powers of image and sound as well as a highly suggestive montage. The consequent use of black and white, the extensive use of close-ups, as well as the subjective camera, and slow, smooth camera movements are some of the bearing visual means of the original aesthetic strategy, which adds a strong expressive dimension to the film.

Speechless relations

The two main characters, the woman and the man, never exchange a word in the film, nor do their eyes meet until the last sequence when they wake up. Nevertheless we are left with the unmistakable impression that they develop an intimate relation during the journey. A strong sexual undertone is created through three close-ups of the woman's bare knees as she gently presses them in between the thighs of the sleeping man. The sense of intimacy is first and foremost created by the suggestive montage of a series of close-ups of their faces. The very montage establishes the two of them in an intimate, interrelated space.

In addition to the extended use of close-ups and the suggestive montage, the camera itself plays a crucial role in creating this strong feeling of intimacy between the two. Generally it dwells on the faces of the characters for a long time, providing the film as a whole with an intense, emotionally charged atmosphere. Except from the first three establishing shots it seems as if the camera is literally speaking placed in the middle of the action. At first as an agent for the woman's gaze and later that of the man. Provided by its smooth, sliding movements the camera acts almost as a physical extension of the woman's body and her unspoken desires. It constitutes a tactile gaze, which seems almost to physically caress the face of the man. In the last sequence the tables are turned. Now the man is the owner of the subjective gaze, which 'touches' the knees of the woman and wanders further over her body to her face. As a substitute for the gazes of the characters the camera offers a privileged subjective point of view, which allows us to experience the unspoken 'action' between the two of them from the inside, so to speak - from an emotionally charged point of view.

A passage

The passage from the 'real' world into the 'dream' world goes through a highly suggestive and ambiguous image, which possesses a special intensity. Both as image as such and as far as it points to a distinct significance in regard to the film as a whole. The image consists of a close-up, which shows the man asleep in the train with his head leaned

against the window. A reflection of his face is seen in the window. The shot is almost identical with the first time the sleeping man is presented to us earlier in the film, only this time his 'real' face has moved very far out to the left of the frame placing his mirror image in the centre of the picture. Light and shadow flicker across the faces adding a strong imaginative dimension to the scene.



The image has two sides to it: an actual and a virtual. It is a double image, which shows the actual man as well as his virtual double i.e. his mirror image. The constant exchange between actuality and virtuality, which constitutes the image, eliminates the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, the physical and the psychological, and present and past in favour of pure presence and expressive intensity. It marks an opening towards other levels of experience and points to different

layers of meaning than those, which arise from the actual action in the train. From the double image the idea of new possibilities and hidden structures develop. The image not only condenses the intense atmosphere of the moment but also the essence of the film into a strong and concentrated visual form – a crystal image.¹

Derailment

The 'dream' sequence, which is preceded by the crystal image, is clearly detached from the actual action and the 'realistic' environment in the train. The sounds from the train, which have provided the film with a hypnotic sound track until this moment, continue, but are reduced to a distant noise. The scene is bathed in bright white light, forming a sharp contrast to the dim interior of the train.

In the 'dream' we find ourselves outside - in front of a building. Inside, in a white room, light transparent curtains move gently in the breeze from the open windows, embedding the scene in a poetic atmosphere of weightlessness. In the white room a close-up presents the woman as she looks directly into the camera from a lying position. She smiles and turns her head to the side, apparently to meet the gaze

¹ The crystal image applies to certain kinds of concentrated images, scenes or sequences, whose constituent characteristic is their 'double' nature – their complexity of actuality and virtuality. For a further description of the crystal image, see Deleuze *Cinema 2, The Time-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), pp. 68-78.

and the smile of the man from the train. He seems to lie down beside her. The next shot shows a broken plant on the floor with soil astray between the white curtains. It is followed by a close-up of the woman's face as she turns her head toward the camera again and looks directly into it. The sound of her deep sigh mixes with the grinding, still louder sounds from the stopping train, marking the transition to the 'real' world. Back in the train again the man wakes up and looks intensely at the sleeping woman. Both awake, they smile at each other as if they share a deep secret.

The sequence forms a decisive moment in the film. It constitutes a qualitative change in the relation between the woman and the man, whose relation seems to have changed on the other side of the 'dream'. Paradoxically the sequence possess a vacuum-like character, which is underlined by its significant brightness and quietness. It is clearly disconnected from linear, chronological time and inserts a pause in the causally progressing chain of logically interrelated events. It unfolds the moment vertically, so to speak, as a series of disconnected frames, which express states of mind and emotional intensity rather than physical action. Time is no longer the measure of action but is set free as an independent significant element. The mere presence of the characters on the screen as well as the very duration is the essence of the sequence.

Cinema and dream

The 'dream' sequence marks not only a pause – or a derailment - from the progressing story line, it also visualizes the psychological 'derailment', which the characters of the film experience. Furthermore it can be extended to include a discussion of cinema as such, that is, of cinema as a place for experiencing both emotional, psychological, and bodily 'derailment'. A place where you can literally lose yourself.

As if in a dream the protagonists are isolated from the crowd and seem to experience a feeling of bodily depersonalization. From the very beginning the film establishes a strongly imaginative atmosphere through the setting in the dark subway and the centering of the action around the underground travel. The monotonous, hypnotic sound of the train, the flickering play between light and shadow, and the lack of dialogue intensify the dreamlike atmosphere, which penetrates the film as a whole. Through a clear visual and auditory strategy the film delivers an intense experience, not unlike what we are able to experience in our dreams. The journey through darkness into light is like entering a world of imagination, of possibilities, and of sexual tensions, just as it is often the case in the dream. As in the dream the unconscious, the emotional, and the irrational is set free, and chronological time is suspended.

Avsporing demonstrates cinema's unique power to perceptualize aspects of the world which cannot be perceived by the naked eye or by logic. It visualizes non-explicit bodily and mental levels of meaning, and focuses on the irrational forces which are generally subordinate to

explicit action in dialogue-based traditional cinema. As such the film challenges the usual order of perception as well as the traditional way of creating cinematic meaning through causality and logically progressing action. In a clear and convincing way it embraces the immanent power of image and sound as the constituent elements of cinema.

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***Derailment* — Travelling as a Liminal Experience**

Anne Marit Waade

Derailment (1993), a short fiction film by Unni Straume, tells a story about two persons who meet by accident on an overcrowded train. Their legs touch, and the woman falls asleep and has erotic dreams in which she wakes up in a bed with the man from the train.

The dream as a motif is used in other films by Unni Straume (e.g., *Dreamplay*, 1994). In this analysis I will concentrate on how the director uses the dream as a theme and an aesthetic principle, and furthermore I will look at the journey and the concept of travelling as a specific form of dream and a liminal condition. Finally, I will discuss different storytellers in the narrative structure of the film.

In the story, the woman falls asleep and dreams about curtains waving in the summer breeze, and that she slowly wakes up and smiles at the man beside her in bed. He turns his head towards her and smiles back at her. There are several signs indicating that they are waking up after having made love: the intimate way they look at each other, as if they share a nice secret together, their calm bodies and relaxed, smooth faces. In this way the dream is illustrated explicitly in the film. There are also various aesthetic elements in the film that represent certain dreamlike expressions: e.g., when the light blends and the contours disappear in the picture, causing the image to blur as

though in a veil of mist. These dreamlike qualities of the image also serve as a contrast to the way the two persons' faces, and especially their eyes, are shown in close-ups with sharp contrasts and dark black shadows. The dark shadows and the long sequences of images of sleeping eyes illustrate another mode of the dream: a transformation from lightness to darkness, from being awake to being asleep, from outer images and concrete, tactile senses to inner conditions and mental fantasies. The camera guides the spectator from the appearance of the haphazard traveler, focusing on the lines and shadows of her face, and moving on to penetrate her eye, burst her retina, and follow the woman's inner fantasies and erotic images.

The transformation between being awake and asleep, and between the outside and the inside, is also shown in the director's choice of outer, physical surroundings. The subterranean veins of the Metro with its dark caves and hidden life which cannot be seen on the earth's surface, but at the same time busy activity and enormous streams of people and trains. The Metro may be seen as an image of the inner activity of the human body. In contrast to the dark inner life of the Metro with its sleepy, isolated individuals, the woman's dream shows a life of sunshine, breezes and social (erotic) interactions.

The windows and the billowing curtains in the dream illustrate yet another transformation between inner and outer life. On the one hand, the Metro shows the vital inner organs and circulation of urban life: blood and veins, life and pulse. The human beings are like white and

red blood corpuscles rushing to and fro. On the other hand, the dream and the fantasy represent inner mental conditions, and in the Metro this may be characterized by the fact that it is living people circulating in the system; it is small lives, filled with emotions, dreams, hopes and initiatives.

Another dreamlike element is evident (or better: heard) in the soundtrack. The natural sound is replaced by only one sound track: the monotonous sound of the scraping metal, screech and rails of the trains, and their doors opening and closing. There is no dialog, no voice-over, no lines are spoken; nor is there small talk from other passengers or sounds from the loudspeakers and so forth, sounds normally characterizing the underground. In this way, the single soundtrack of the film is reminiscent of the way we are awakened by a sound or a noise — for instance, when taking a nap on the train and we are suddenly awakened by the sound of the train stopping or the coffee trolley passing, or when somebody is shouting or the alarm clock starts ringing when we are asleep in bed; it is only this specific sound that reaches us and sometimes enters our dreams. In this way, the film both tells about and shows the aesthetics of the dream.

At a metafictional level, it may be said that as a narrative medium the film has much in common with the dream; it may shift in time and place, cross the borders of reality and extend its possibilities, and it is structured by series of images. Fiction and dream also both serve as parallel universes and "fitting-rooms" in relation to individuals work-

ing out their identity and social reality (Waade, 2001). In this way the film reflects both the dream and the narrative structure of fiction as self-reflecting strategies in life.

Like the dream, the film also thematizes the journey as both a mental condition and cultural phenomenon. It is not the exciting exotic journey that is staged, but rather the travelling that characterizes our everyday and common life — for instance, how we get to work and back home again. It is this kind of journey that constitutes our everyday life, a necessity that includes automatic and unreflected actions which we know by force of habit: stamping the ticket, waiting for the train, getting aboard, finding a seat, waiting for the stop signal, getting off, getting out – again and again. This kind of travelling constitutes a basic frame for everyday living, and it *is* everyday life. In spite of this, I still maintain that there is something extraordinary about the concept of travelling: it includes a process of transformation (transport) and liminality that allows for specific expectations, conditions and experiences. The ritual, as well as the journey, includes in its basic structure the progression "home – out – home", and it is in the passage between the positions and at their threshold that the extraordinary and liminal condition sets in. The liminal condition is described by anthropologists as a threshold state, an extraordinary condition that sets individuals free from conventions and rules of social behavior, and includes new possibilities for individuals.

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun and the moon (Victor Turner, 1969; 95).

Everyday travelling is in other words both ordinary and extraordinary; on the whole it is part of – and even constitutes – ordinary everyday life, but the journey itself also includes a specific transformation of a liminal, extraordinary space. The concept of moving from one point to another, from one place to another, to be on the way and to be transported, brings on a state of transformation and liminality. In this way both the journey and the dream include a condition of something unusual, something that opens up for intensified experiences, specific emotions, moods and expectations.

The tourist is a typical modern traveller. Zygmunt Bauman (1997) uses the tourist as a key metaphor for the postmodern experience of life: the tourist is both inside and outside at the same time, and the tourist is less concerned by the destination than the travelling itself (Waade 2002). The tourist represents new modes of fascination and an open mind in general with regard to new experiences and sense impressions. The tourist is not to be mistaken for the homeless, because the tourist is identified by having his/her home as a starting point and a place to return to (Rojek 1998). But the tourist is most concerned by

travelling, which may be seen as a lifestyle and a life strategy. The modern tourist does not have any specific goal for his/her journey besides travelling, and he/she does not have any ambition to find the truth about him/herself or others (as did, for example, the explorer, the anthropologist or the young man on his educational journey) (Waade 2001). The modern tourist is not even in contact with the people and the culture he/she visits, and instead it is the *story* and the *images* of the locals that attract the tourist's interest.

Off-hand there appear to be no links between the tourist's hunger for experiences and the tired passenger who, half asleep, gets on and off the Parisian Metro. The tourist typically wants to get *away* from these everyday rituals and ordinary experiences. But, just as the Metro trip is an everyday experience and at the same time contains elements of extraordinary qualities, it also includes a potential for the liminal conditions and intensified experiences of the tourist. It may be that it is this specific liminal state of being on one's way that basically fascinates the tourist — the kind of liminality that is constituted between two points and that gives rise to specific emotions, moods and new social and cultural rules and roles. At the same time, the journey includes an element of self-reflection: through the journey you are able to stage yourself and thus reflect yourself. Victor Turner and Richard Schechner see this as a part of liminality related to rituals, and they introduce the term "liminoid" to describe the self-reflecting strategy that strikes modern, secularized rituals (Turner, 1986:8).

Returning to the film, it is characteristic that it starts and ends with the trip itself: it starts when the woman gets on the train, and it ends when she gets off the train. The liminoid state constitutes the space between these two points. It is here that the dream and the specific sound set in. It is in the reflection of the window and the eye of the other that she can reflect herself, and it is in the fictive universe of the dream that one is able to see oneself. It is the trip itself that raises the possibility of erotic dreams, in which drowsy, accidental travelling companions turn into passionate lovers. Out of the inner darkness of the Metro, mental images of sunshine and summer love flow through open windows. The ambiguity of transformation is also evident at the moment in the dream when the woman looks at the broken flowerpot on the pavement, the pot having fallen out of the window due to the wind. The potsherds may symbolize broken happiness, but at the same time the image refers to the tradition of celebrating something new by breaking old pots and porcelain.

At one moment in the film, the story violates its own logic and aesthetic: at the moment when the dream becomes reality, when the soundtrack breaks and the frame of the story is exceeded. Or to borrow Richard Raskin's words: at the moment when the causality of the narrative is broken by one of the main figures' surprising choice and initiative (Raskin, 2001: 37). To be more precise, I am thinking of the moment, almost at the end of the film, when the man who was just smiling at the woman, stands up and gets off the train, and she

spontaneously stands up, looks at him and, after some exciting seconds, chooses to follow the unknown man out of the darkness of the Metro. She leaves the freedom and liminality of the threshold, and takes a step out into a new reality.

Who is telling the story? The main character is the woman, and since there is no explicit storyteller in the film, it may be said that it is the woman's story about the dream on the train. However, approaching the gaze of the camera, we become aware of several storytellers. After having introduced the woman on the Metro, the camera shifts to show the man's point of view. The man wakes up, and his eye rests on the sleeping, dreaming woman. In this way, the focus shifts from the woman to the man, and for a short sequence, until the woman wakes up, it is the man who is the confidential storyteller for the camera. The camera is not limited to only revealing the sights and fantasies of the man and the woman; it also lives its own life. I am referring to how we see the man and the woman on the train from different angles at the beginning of the film, and also to how in the dream the gaze of the camera floats around in the room and in and out of the window, as if it belonged to a flying invisible ghost that, like the curtains, flutters in the breeze. As long as the woman and the man are both lying in bed, it cannot be one of them looking at the broken flowerpot on the pavement. No, it has to be another person. Not necessarily a ghost, but still another narrative instance. The gaze of the camera on the train may illustrate the other passengers' view of the two persons. It may, for

instance, be a travelling companion we do not see in front of the camera lens, a passenger who has erotic fantasies on seeing two persons on the train with their legs intertwined. To focus on this narrative instance that is seen in the camera's eye, another implicit storyteller also appears: a storyteller that guides the spectator around in the Parisian Metro, and with help of the seductive effect of the camera is able to show us exotic everyday persons in a European metropolis. In this way the spectator becomes a scanning tourist able to focus on single individuals and locals on his way. As a *flâneur* in a modern city, the spectator is able to look at the crowd of people at a secure distance; and as a voyeur the spectator may be satisfied looking at a sleeping woman and her naked legs touching another person's legs. Thus, the dream does not necessarily belong to the woman, but it may illustrate the spectator's fantasy and daydreams.

In other words, different kinds of derailments take place in the film. The daydream serves as a fantastic derailment from monotonous everyday life, the journey itself illustrates a (liminoid) derailment from a standstill, and film fiction in itself is a kind of derailment and staged daydream in the spectator's everyday life. The film even includes another kind of "derailment": in the end when the woman breaks out of the dream, out of the soundtrack, gets off the train and crosses the limits of her own everyday life to follow a man that she just has touched with her legs and seen only briefly. And this kind of expectation and derailment is perhaps what leads us to go on dreaming,

travelling, making films and seeing films: hoping that something unusual and extraordinary will happen.

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Brief Encounters in Real Dreams?

***Derailment* and Poetic Vision**

Edvin Vestergaard Kau

*I saw you this morning.
You were moving so fast.
Can't seem to loosen my grip
On the past.
And I miss you so much.
There's no one in sight.
And we're still making love
In My Secret Life.*

Leonard Cohen

Dreaming About What?

Derailment is structured as a very simple story in three parts. 1. A Woman and a Man meet accidentally in the Metro; 2. they fall asleep and have a (mutual?) dream, and 3. they wake up, getting off at the same station, perhaps never to see each other again. Or maybe they actually meet this way every day; or they join each other on their way from the station, this episode marking the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Who knows, and who is able to find out?

In the middle section we see the two characters in the dream or the fantasy. The Woman is lying on a bed, perhaps dreaming about an accidental encounter with a Man in the Paris Metro. The man is also lying on a bed, perhaps dreaming about an accidental encounter with a Woman in the Metro. Or is it only she who is dreaming about him, since she is shown waking up during the first frames of the last shot of

the sequence? At any rate, it is possible to conceive it as their dream or daydream about an encounter in the train.

However, it might be the other way around. If so, we are talking about a more straightforward experience of the story of *Derailment*: we follow the Woman as the main character entering the train, see the passengers and the Man from her point of view, and experience their meeting. He is already asleep, and after taking the seat opposite him, not only accidentally touching his knees but placing her knees between his thighs, she also doses off. After that it seems that both of them are dreaming of another meeting, and of making love in the bed of the middle section of the film. In this mysterious way perhaps they even meet in a common world of mutual dreaming.

A special kind of bond between the two is hinted at simply through the editing of the point-of-view shots from her position, combined with the shots of his face *and* the use of long, extreme close-ups of her gaze. In addition to this is the last shot of her face in this scene, when she shifts the direction of her eyeline from his face to the mirror image of it in the window. Thus, the last thing she sees before also dosing off is this transparent version of his face — an appropriate way to visualise a passage into the dream about him and herself.

Real Dreams and Accidental Encounters?

This is thus a realistic interpretation of the meeting in the Metro, complete with a daydream or train dream in the middle, although still with

an element of the fantastic, namely the possibility of a meeting in their dreams, of entering the same dream world. This is a conception that almost has its own genre across several media and art forms: the intriguing and tragic meeting that is never to be. Countless artists have written poems and other descriptions of these glimpses of (im)possible love and fascinations.

Derailment is a purified example of this tradition. One might quote the poem "Rejseminder" ("Travel Memories") by the Danish poet Sophus Claussen, published in 1899 (My own English translation follows below): "Og det var på Skanderborg Station,/der blev mine Tanker forfløjne./Jeg saa en nydelig Person/ med nøddebrune Øjne. (...) Jeg husker de brune Øjne, hvor trist/hun blev da hun saa' os drage. (...) og da jeg sov ind paa Himmelbjerget,/de brune Øjne mig brændte.//De brændte saa sødt, de brændte saa hedt./Jeg drømte, jeg tog hende med mig. (...) Men det er paa Skanderborg Station,/der staar de alle tilbage". [And it was at Skanderborg Station,/my thoughts began to wander./I saw a pretty person/with nut-brown eyes. (...) I recall the brown eyes, how sad/she became when she saw us depart. (...) and when I fell asleep on the Hill of Heaven,/The brown eyes burned me.//They burned so sweet, they burned so hot./I dreamed I took her with me. (...) But it was at Skanderborg Station,/there they are all left behind.]

With its own ironic tone and quiet humour, *Derailment* joins this tradition of lost, or hardly born, love or infatuation, a tradition of

romantic and tragic tales that stretches from romantic poetry to traditional blues and popular songs about lost love or memories of infatuations with people that one may only have encountered very briefly on travels, in accidental conversations, or on trains... The dream – about the tempting, accidental encounter – resembles the poetic vision of sensual attraction in the Claussen poem; that is, the lovely beloved, of whom he only is able to catch a glimpse before the train leaves the station, and who in this paradoxical manner becomes precisely the image he can (only) dream about for eternity.

The poetic vision of *Derailment* may also be compared with some lines from a song (written by W. Jennings/J. Kerr) on the Roy Orbison album "Mystery Girl". In an almost weightless universe and with a lifetime of experience, he sings about dreams as well as real goodbyes. The song is called "In the Real World" and confronts the pain caused by the contrast between, on the one hand, what people may envision in their dreams of the good life and love and, on the other, facts which are impossible to change in the real world. "In dreams we do so many things/We set aside the rules we know (...) If only we could always live in dreams/If only we could make of life/What in dreams it seems (...) But in the real world/We must say real goodbyes (...) In the real world/There are things that we can't change/And endings come to us/In ways that we can't rearrange (...) when the dreamers do awake/The dreams do disappear".

Like the film, Orbison's song gives life to a vision of the tension between the (eternal) possibilities in the dream world and the experiences of separation in real life. This is what artists write about — and make good films about: the artwork becomes, as it were, poetry created in the space between dreaming and living. On the first page of his novel *The Music of Chance*, Paul Auster begins describing precisely "one of those random, accidental encounters that seem to materialize out of thin air – a twig that breaks off in the wind and suddenly lands at your feet". Part of the description is a reflection on what might have caused the main character Nashe *not* to meet "the kid who called himself Jack-pot". As it were, they meet by chance. The *Straume* film, as well as the Claussen poem and Orbison lyrics, is also about chance meetings. In the Auster novel, "it all came down to a question of sequence, the order of events".

In an interview on Danish television in December 2002, Paul Auster told about an incident of the same kind. While walking to the subway in Brooklyn on his way to Manhattan, he had been thinking of a slight acquaintance, and of the fact that it had been a long time since they had seen each other. But there, in the subway station, they met and subsequently had a pleasant talk on the train, since they were going the same way. How can this be explained? Why are they in the same place at the same time? Is there some hidden chain of causes and effects leading to the moment of encounter? Or, would other events have caused them not to meet, in the vein of the opening of *The Music of*

Chance? The journalist and Auster agree that it can't be explained rationally. They label it part of "the poetry of life".

But as I see it, this poetry does not have to do with the chain or the chronology of events. Instead of hypothesising about what would have led to people *not* meeting each other, it might rather be a matter of understanding their special kind of experience once they actually meet. This would mean that the important thing to focus on is the actual meeting and the quality of that experience, whether it is described through Auster and his friend in the New York subway, Orbison's real-life dreams, Claussen's girl beside the railroad tracks, or Straume's Man and Woman and their daydreams.

When it comes to the poetry of *Derailment* and its vision of dream patterns (as well as those of the other examples) it is *not* a question of sequence, of the horizontal structure, but rather the vertical structure or layers of fantasies or dreams. The centre of interest is the very moment, which encompasses the-dream-as-a-whole in a flash, so to speak. In this interpretation the film represents how in a fraction of a second the two dreamers experience all of the events in the dream universe. We don't need an hour and a half of sleep to lie and view our dream, as if it were a feature film! When we wake up and remember a dream, it is just as plausible that the elements constituting it simply *are* there in our mind, as if they burst out in the course of seconds just before awakening. Even though a dream may be remembered in sequence, it is instantly and "vertically" present as dream experience. This resem-

bles the fact that, on the one hand, the elements necessarily unfold in time within the body of the film, while, on the other, the film melts them together into the experience of one poetic moment for the viewer.

In the Same Bed?

At the beginning of the article I mentioned the editing of the central bed scene. One possible description of it is that the Woman and the Man in the bed are shown as looking at each other. But how are their gazes actually staged compared to the traditional point-of-view structure with its three-shot sequence of viewer/view/viewer?

The first three shots of the scene show a) two old buildings (establishing shot), b) two open windows with floating curtains seen from the outside, and c) the curtains seen from the inside. During this the sound of the train's brakes is heard, and the general noise of trains continues into the scene. After this the woman is seen from a bird's eye view, looking directly up into the camera. She turns her head to the left side of the frame (her right) with a happy smile appearing on her face. From this a cut brings the Man into view, leaning his head down, looking to his left, and finally looking straight into the camera. Consequently, the two gazes might be directed towards each other. After a shot of an indoor plant that has fallen to the floor, the next shot of the Woman shows her in profile from her left side (that is, opposite the side where the two former shots hinted that the Man is. But he is not to be seen: either he is hidden behind her or *he isn't present at all*). This

time she turns her head to her left, in the end looking directly into the camera, smiling this time too.

As will be seen, this editing practice plays of course on the traditional POV sequence, but with the variations in movements and eye-line directions it is almost deconstructed as well. Are they looking at each other at all? Are they even together in the same room? 1. The Man and his gaze are shown once and only once; his gaze is seen directed towards something: the Woman, who might not be present at all. 2. The woman is shown twice, but in the last shot she is looking into the camera instead of in the direction of the Man (who, as mentioned, may not be there at all). In fact, it is never really confirmed (as a two-shot would do) that they are together in the same room. The "symbolic" old buildings, the floating curtains and the bright lighting add to the dream quality of the sequence. Another important quality of this dream-like moment is that it is articulated through the special use of the element of *time*. The movements of bodies, heads and eyes; the wind lifting the curtains, and the shifting light are only made possible by Straume's way of moulding time as cinematic material. The timelessness of the dream-space is a result of this way of using time duration. Also, it is worth paying attention to the use of sound. The noise of the train connects sections one and three to the dream section in the middle; it is also possible to compose the duration of shifting light and sound precisely as a result of how time is used as a material.

Questions

Derailment is an intriguing film. The more one thinks about and works with it, and the more details one tries to analyse, the more exciting questions arise. I have tried to close in on some of them: do the Woman and the Man necessarily see each other at all? Are they just having separate Metro dreams — dreams that they, on the other hand, possibly have in common, and that they are able to smile knowingly at?

Or maybe they actually meet, after she follows him out of the Metro at the end, when we as spectators are not allowed to see any more and have to leave them and the universe of the film. Then we can reflect on and play with the questions and the possibilities, among them the idea that the train experience is the two characters' daydream, whether they have it in common or not. What their connection may be, then, is this possibility, which the film is able to articulate by bringing the two dreams together on the screen, something that is to be found only in the viewer's experience of this game's potential. As it were, this is a somewhat more imaginative and multifaceted world of artistic experience than the enjoyment of forever-lost glimpses of imagined loved ones in traditional poetry.

The title proclaims a derailment, but with its presentation of great and challenging possibilities for the viewer's playful experience, it rather seems to be on the right track. And, even more inspiring, it demonstrates the potential for poetic fantasy in cinema.

Oren Stern

FUNERAL AT PARC DE FRANCE

(Israel, 2000)

Production shots from *Funeral at Parc de France*.

Oren Stern

FUNERAL AT PARC DE FRANCE

(Israel, 2000), 24 minutes, video, color

Principal production credits

Director	Oren Stern
Screenplay	Rashef and Regev Levi & Oren Stern
Cinematography	Toli Ongerl
Editing	Uri Kleiman
Producers	Hila Levi & Amit Sharliti
Production	Camera Obscura School of Art, Film Department

Principal cast

Baruch	Shmil Ben Ari
Vivian	Anat Brazilay
Shalom	Eli Falah

Festivals and prizes include:

Best Short Film, Mexico City International Festival of Film Schools, 2001
Best Short Film, Best Actor, Best Screenplay and Best Editing, Camera Obscura
Competition, Tel Aviv, 2000
Jerusalem Film Festival, 2000
Mexico City International Festival of Film Schools, 2001
Isratim – Israel Film Festival, Paris, 2002

Oren Stern

Born in Israel in 1972. Graduated from the Camera Obscura School of Art, Tel Aviv, in 2000. His earlier work includes *Sharp Edges* (1996) and *Fragile* (1997). He is currently working on a new short fiction film.

An interview with Oren Stern on *Funeral at Parc de France*

Richard Raskin

How did you get the idea for this story?

The screenplay for the film was written with Resef Levi, the script-writer. We have been good friends since we were 12 years old. We decided to make a movie together, so... We held several meetings and started to discuss script ideas, and during this process, we remembered that while we were children we used to laugh while attending ceremonies and funerals. We decided to make film about this emotional situation and to add a little bit comedy.

Combining the climax of pain and sorrow with the climax of joy (a favorite football team that wins) gave us an interesting opportunity to develop an original dramatic situation.

Did the story evolve, change significantly from the initial concept to the final film?

The first draft of the script was much more comic and wild, but I decided to make the main character more real, so I made the story more restrained while trying to move the viewer.

How did you choose the actors for your film, both for the major and the minor roles?

The actor Shmil Ben-Ari, who plays Baruch, our hero, we chose even before we started to write. Shmil is a famous actor in Israel. In addition to Shmil, we have two other professional actors: Vivian (Baruch wife's) whom I chose after a long search and Shalom (Baruch fat friend). I saw Shalom on a local TV channel and I was aware that he is a very different person from the roles that he is usually given. I noticed that he had a great sense of comedy and perfect timing - two qualities that I think are very important in comic films.

The rest of the actors are non-professionals. Morris (Vivian's eulogist brother) was chosen for the part after I saw him at his own father's funeral. (This is a true story!) I saw him there and was very impressed by his ability to move everyone present with his speech. I knew that he is talented and was very happy that he immediately agreed to take a part in the movie. The other non-professional actors were members of my family and good friends...

How would you characterize the way in which you directed your actors?

That's a hard question for me. I think that I direct with simplicity. I explain the situation to the actor and describe his motives. The main instruction in the movie was in spite of the situation and the funny dialogues. The actors had to play the text seriously and had to believe in each word that they were saying.

Another very important thing: we didn't rehearse speaking the lines when we ran through the scenes before filming. It's very important that the actors say their lines for the first time in front of the camera. The most interesting things happen in the first take and it's a shame to waste them in a rehearsal.

How long did the shooting and the editing take?

We shot *Funeral* in five days and the editing took about half a year because we didn't have the possibility of editing more than one shift a week.

Funeral at Parc de France is clearly Baruch's story. Would you agree that it is easiest to engage the viewer's interest in a film if the story belongs primarily to one character, singled out from the start as having a special status in the film?

I think that the best way to interest the viewer is to make him laugh and to move him as much as possible. I could distribute the screen time to several actors in an equal way and create more than one main character, but I think that there is an advantage when you focus on one character who appears in most of the scenes – a complete and complex character. In this way it is easiest for the viewer to identify with him.

Your film is a bit longer than what I would call a "short film" strictly speaking. It's more a middle length film - what the French call a "moyen métrage" and we in Scandinavia would call a "nouvellefilm." I imagine that a film lasting 24 min. tells its story in a way that is similar to feature film

storytelling. Would you agree, or do you feel there are significant differences between the two formats, with respect to storytelling?

In every movie there is at least one character that has to change. In a feature film, there is time to create complex characters and to let them change slowly. In a short film every thing is faster and this is why you must find original ideas that can compensate for the time that you don't have.

Today we see a lot of features that are written and directed like a short film, and the reverse is also true. I think that *Funeral* was directed like a feature that was directed like a short film.

Is there any advice you would give to student filmmakers about to make their own first short films?

One very important thing for students making their first films is to bring something from their own lives into the story they tell, something very specific and real. Then they have the best chance of making something original.

Is there anything else you would like to tell about the making of Funeral or about your views on filmmaking?

Any director who chooses a good story, a good scriptwriter, good actors, a good photographer and editor, will definitely end up making a good film.

October 15, 2002

**"It was a misunderstanding":
searching for 'dark matter' in *Funeral at Parc de France***

Bevin Yeatman

'There is now overwhelming evidence that more than ninety percent of the entire mass within the visible universe is made of material that is invisible to telescopes. The gravitational pull of this "dark matter", therefore determines the motion of stars in galaxies, of galaxies in clusters of galaxies, and indeed of the universe itself.'

(Krauss 2001:x xii)

In a scene anticipating the central issue of *Funeral at Parc de France*, which, for me at least, is the conflict of desires, Baruch, the protagonist, insists to his wife Vivian that her arrangement for them to attend a theatre performance was 'a misunderstanding [and that she] can't argue with reality'. This, of course is Baruch's reality. He wants to

watch the live broadcast of a soccer match between Israel and France while his wife considers attending the theatre with friends a greater priority. The film can simply be read on this level of difference between husband and wife, the usual domestic 'farce/tragedy' that all of us experience at times with relationships of whatever nature. How often have we said ourselves 'it was just a misunderstanding'?

This scene, however, has a stronger intensity that folds about my own experience with the film and connects me with another level of engagement. It questions that engagement and asks what is it I am experiencing when I watch this film and further what does this film speak to me about this experience? The main focus for this story has become the processes of interpretation itself and this essay seeks to understand ways in which *Funeral at Parc de France* plays with me within the 'gravitational forces' of interpreting.

Baruch's interpretive 'horizon', utilising Gadamer's notion of an individual's ideas, beliefs and expectations situated in a particular socio-historic context, is astutely justified by his own rationalisations. He admits to his wife of his compulsion, even addiction, for soccer, as well as expressing his belief that Eli, the deceased father-in-law, would readily identify with the postponement of the funeral so that Baruch might be able to watch the soccer match on television. His is a necessarily embodied desire. He wants to participate in the game - if you don't watch it "you can't yell and affect the play." It is also important to remember that Baruch is betting on an Israeli victory.

However, the strength of this film is to blur the motivations of the characters and offer easier access to a more complex identification. For instance, Baruch is not as calculated as I have implied, as there is a genuine connection between him and his father-in-law. Eli is very much part of the soccer fraternity acting as umpire for matches. An opening image frames Baruch and Eli together in front of the goal-post, establishing this commonality of interest. Baruch has bought Eli an expensive vacuum cleaner to help facilitate Eli's obsession for cleanliness. Baruch admits that he had a conspiratorial escapade with Eli at his son's bar mitzvah. He also leaves Eli's whistle at the graveside as a memento and this contrasts with the bunch of flowers, signifying a different relationship, that have been left by Vivian, his wife.

An image of Vivian crying as she leaves the funeral reinforces this complexity. Baruch has embarrassed her because he is unable to contain his pleasures when the Israel's win is announced on the transistor he has bought to the funeral. Ignoring the solemnity of the occasion, he rejoices in the outcome but also disrupts the formalities. The contrast between pleasure and sadness is a further indicator of the multiple currents that operate, all at once, within the progress of the narrative and through its audiovisual intelligence. Vivian cries not only for her father but also for herself and her embarrassment. The context of the image suggests these two tributaries of despair.

The blurring of interpretations is shaped by the imbrication of interpretive horizons. The film establishes a sympathetic represen-

tation of the relationship between Baruch and Vivian and implies that their differences are wedded to their genuine affection and the pleasures they offer each other. A scene with Baruch immersed in the bath, well lathered, calling for his wife to scrub his back establishes this closeness with a potent economy. Baruch is relaxed lying in the bath singing and calling and Vivian responds jokingly by suggesting he call his mates to fulfil the deed. Baruch, so unaware of the frustrations of his wife, wonders what this moment has to do with them, a moment of intimacy he wants to share only with his wife. She obliges and they playfully indulge in their pleasures.

This bath scene is an obvious prompt for a more psychoanalytical reading, with a return to the womb, the mother and primal pleasures being easy frames to construct for the purposes of interpretation. The wife as mother, in terms of her treatment of Baruch and his need for her, is a motif that bubbles underneath the surface of the film. Other theoretical strategies could also be suitably applied to develop further interpretations. A cognitive approach would follow the chronological trajectory of the narrative and explore the manner in which the audiovisual modalities legislate particular perceptions for the viewer, while narrative theory might point out that the film is structured by vignettes connected by an economic ellipsis. Formalist strategies might focus on the lack of substantial camera movement, except during the soccer match, and discuss the framing in terms of its effect on creating a balance of viewing experience between intimacy and distance. An

obvious convergence of gendered relationships of power could fuel a feminist schema.

These interpretive game plans align themselves with Baruch and his ability to impose his own desires. His interpretive horizon is no different from any of the theoretical frameworks we impose, consciously or unconsciously, as we view a film and attempt to engage with that experience. Critics also have a passion for their own games.

What does the film suggest about interpretation? Interpretation is motivated by particular and multiple agendas that frame and constrain the possibilities and these have a powerful subjective quotient. It is also implied by the participation of others with contrary forces able to operate and interpenetrate at the same moment. This latter point directly established in the title of the film.

Funeral at Parc de France follows an economical narrative track ordered by chronological development and naturalistic cinematic conventions with the resolution of the story framed by a “twist” at the end, a common tactic in many short films. However, the potency of this film resides less in its conventions and shape and more in particular auditory and visual moments that offer an escape from its constraints. This is another fold within my engagement with the film which takes me back to my own “game of soccer”, my own obsession concerning interpretation and the experiencing of the audiovisual.

Some of these moments I have already discussed. Another is the opening sequence with sounds of pumping and then the bouncing of a

soccer ball on concrete conjuring the idea of a heartbeat. Retrospectively, I can extend this to a connection with Eli's death through heart attack, but there are also resonances with my own father's death. Intentional or not, this elemental sound suggests for me that the satisfying experience of this film is not in imposing a theoretical framework and developing a final "meaning" but the pleasures it brings of a more embodied experience, an experience involving not just the "telescopes" of analysis but also the "dark matter" that lies between and beyond the audiovisual experiences of the film. The film suggests to me through Baruch's actions that one game plan might be too obsessive and I need to be open to new connections, new possibilities and somehow acknowledge the forces I can't see or hear with the available frameworks.

How do I acknowledge this dark matter when the theories that seem so useful as tools of the trade in the engagement with film might be ineffectual in any quest? What might I mean by the equivalent dark matter in a film? How does it impinge on my engagement with the film and my attempts at communicating this engagement?

One avenue that seems very useful as a guide toward answers is the work of Laura Marks, especially *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural cinema, embodiment, and the senses*. Marks re-evaluates the priorities given to the audiovisual alliance and encourages a new appraisal of the influence of the remainder of the human sensorium – the proximal senses such as smelling, touching, and feeling. In the circumstances of

my own quest for the 'dark matter' in the film and the realisation that a different emphasis, a different 'telescope', is necessary this seems to offer another way of articulating the cinematic experience.

I acknowledge that Marks emphasizes 'intercultural cinema' which, for her, is a focus on films not defined by a single culture and her exploration of the proximal senses is designed to explore the manner in which intercultural films can embody new forms of knowledge and cultivate memory. Although I rely on the subtitles in *Funeral at Parc de France* as English is my only language, I do not believe that this film could be considered intercultural in the terms constructed by Marks. However, the need to rely on text to access the dialogue has already alerted me to a stronger connection with the remainder of the audio track. As the dialogue loses its signifying component the material qualities of the language are more apparent. The sound scape becomes a stronger focus and, in this film, establishes associations that resonate deeply into my own life experiences.

It is at this level of my own personal experience and the memories I recall of these that become an entry point to the 'dark matter' of this film. Certainly it is from a different cultural context from my own, but not so different that there aren't shared commonalities that I can recognise instantly. Playing amateur sport, relaxing in the bath, the tedious waiting for news at the hospital, the formality and informalities of a funeral, and watching an important match on television with mates, all of these experiences connect me to the film

and the filmmaker. These experiences resonate with memories and these memories catalyse my whole sensorium. A visual image from the film does not necessarily equate solely to a visual memory within my own subjectivity. Smells, tastes, and touches also play a pivotal role in my recollections and interpretations of these experiences.

The pleasures of this film, for me, relate to matters that are not usually acknowledged when we attempt to interpret our engagement with the cinematic experience. The problem, I believe with the analytical 'telescopes' that we readily utilise to watch the cinematic event do not acknowledge the full range of the experiences mediated by all our senses.

Ironically, *Funeral at Parc de France*, which is inaccessible to me through its dialogue has offered me an entry point into considering how active I am with all of the senses that I utilise to mediate the cinematic experience. This lack of understanding has given me an opportunity to argue with my own habituated reality and to realise that there are many threads woven within the processes of interpretation.

I recognise my own obsession with the game I play, just as Baruch cannot withdraw from the fascination of the televised match despite his declaration to his wife that he will desist. However, *Funeral at Parc de France* is more than a story of conflicting desires, it exposes some of the fascinating twists of the interpretive experience and has offered me an insight into how often I do not acknowledge the full range of the sensorium that I use to mediate the cinematic event.

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'If you are first you are first. If you are second you are nothing.'
Oren Stern, Bill Shankly and *Funeral at Parc de France*

Robert Edgar

Bill Shankly, (1913-1981) was the Scottish born manager of Liverpool Football Club in England. Famous for more than just his managing his quotes are often repeated amongst the footballing fraternity across the world. In essence he epitomises a 'philosophy of football' that is embraced by Baruch in *Funeral at the Parc de France*. As Shankly noted, 'people say football is a matter of life and death ... it is much more important than that.' Yet this is a philosophy that the main character in this film can only aspire to but never reach, for Baruch is a schlemiel and he represents something of contemporary masculinity. If Stern is placing these two alongside each other, then it is a statement that is as worrying as it is very probably true.

The structure of this 24 minute film is simple and effective through its simplicity. A day before a match between the French team and the Israeli team Baruch's father-in-law, Eli, passes away. The funeral is scheduled to take place the following day, precisely when the match is

supposed to be played. Baruch tries to persuade his wife to postpone the funeral. This is not helped by earlier refusals to Vivian, his wife, to attend the theatre because of the same match. At the core of the narrative is an old joke. As Baruch finds Eli's radio we know he is going to listen to the football match. As he listens to the match, perspiring under the hot Tel-Aviv sun we know he will cry out, but not when. As he convinces Vivian to return to him at the end of the film during another match we know he will again cry out, but not when. As Shankly noted to the (then) up and coming footballer Ian St John, 'If you're not sure what to do with the ball, just pop it in the net and we'll discuss your options afterwards.'

Baruch is certainly an intelligent and devious character, but who said that schlemiels couldn't be devious or intelligent. It is the facet of having a hand in his own downfall that raises Baruch to the status of schlemiel. Defining the schlemiel is always difficult but Leo Rosten's seven point definition is always an essential starting point: '1. A foolish person; a simpleton. 'He has the brains of a shlemiel.'¹ Certainly not many definitions of the schlemiel would contradict the notion of foolishness but deeming the schlemiel 'a simpleton' is limiting in the extreme. There are many cases where the schlemiel may have a hand in his/her own downfall and yet remains firmly an intellectual (the Woody Allen of *Annie Hall* or *Hannah and Her Sisters* being the

¹ Leo Rosten, *The Joys of Yiddish* (London: Penguin, 1978), pp.352-353. (I retain Rosten's spelling of schlemiel here.)

archetypical examples). Wisse states that 'the schlemiel is the Jew as he is defined by the anti-Semite, but reinterpreted by God's appointee.'² This statement addresses the origin of the character in sociological terms. The schlemiel when taken as purely a Jewish character was invented by and for a Jewish community.

The schlemiel is a comic character but the comic does not have to equate to funny nor does it have to equal frivolous. In many ways, serious issues can be identified in the comic in a way that they cannot be identified through the purely tragic. It is a theoretical reverence for Aristotle and his focus on tragedy in the *Poetics* that has led to an absence from critical debate of the kind of texts that might feature this character. It is the comic that can be identified as perhaps the most pertinent mode for contemporary expression purely in the way that it uncovers the inconsistencies in any discourse or mode of expression. It is schlemiels that typify this as they wade through contemporary life without any recognition that their (il)logical systems are so different from anyone else's. The function of the schlemiel is then not to just identify aporias in life but rather to show everyone else how to negotiate them. However in this instance Baruch is part of a team at the start. He is the schlemiel leader of a footballing team of unfit, overweight, football obsessed nebbishes. His team mates fail to raise themselves to his level because even they would not entertain the

² Ruth R. Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p.6.

possibility of listening to the radio during a funeral. Ironically Baruch is correct in his assertion that Eli would have wanted the mourners to wait and it is with genuine sincerity that he lays the whistle on the back fill. He is perhaps the only mourner who pays adequate tribute in listening to the football match as his father-in-law would have wanted. In his 'foolishness' for contradicting the social and religious rites he succeeds. His actions are far less ridiculous or sacrilegious than his son's mobile phone playing Hava Nagila.

The function that the schlemiel has is of a wider societal nature than being purely textual entities. This in itself necessitates a wider reading of the schlemiel in terms of his socio-cultural location, how his 'being' is constructed and also, in a sense, his history. A clear distinction can be made between different approaches to examining the importance of a historical development of the character, whether Hegel's account of a progression and development accurately describes the history of the character or whether Foucault's notion of epistemes is more applicable to where the character can be seen in the contemporary. If history is in effect cyclical then it is possible to see the schlemiel returning in both abundance and importance to a position that has largely been absent from both academic and social consideration for the last three hundred years. Rather than characters (more broadly) developing progressively there are distinct and identifiable epistemological breaks. This is why the schlemiel can be seen to be more dominant in particular periods than in others, rather than developing from relative obscurity. The

character remains largely the same throughout these periods; it is the society in which they are found that changes and it is a change that requires analysis. Traditionally speaking schlemiels appear in shtetl literature from Eastern Europe and later in all artistic and popular forms in America. What is of importance in Stern's work is that the schlemiel appears in Israel; a long way from the villages of Krakow and seemingly in the land where the schlemiel would not be needed. The positioning of this character in this location comes at a point of development of a new episteme, the period of Postmodernity.

Bill Shankly was in typical upbeat form after Liverpool F.C. beat their arch rivals Everton F.C. in the 1971 FA Cup semi-final, 'Sickness would not have kept me away from this one. If I'd been dead, I would have had them bring the casket to the ground, prop it up in the stands, and cut a hole in the lid.' It is this very notion of the absurd that the schlemiel embodies. They in one sense take the journey through the absurd for us and in another show us the way through should we ever have to follow them; and increasingly it seems that we will have to. This being said, it must be remembered that the schlemiel does not fit the patterns of received social signs in the way that philosophical and psychoanalytical theory suggests, and this psychological development is central to explaining Baruch's behaviour. When Harland analyses the absurd he comments on the difficulty of breaking with the socially constructed personality. Although it can be argued that the nature of the social construction of schlemiels is such that they have the ability to

accept the world as absurd, never as rational in the first place. They are firmly located within society as fools from the very beginning. He suggests that this is an extraordinary and desperate kind of experience, where it may be unexpected to suggest it is desperate to hold on to enlightenment notions of rationality.³ Whilst Freud may have isolated something genetic in the development of the social subject, which affects the construction of the self, the character serves a function for society; the schlemiel is recognisable by people from a variety of socio-cultural groups. Therefore, the character can be seen to have been constructed wholly from societal forces and yet operating in opposition to societal norms at all points. Adopting a psychoanalytic approach may suggest more about a society or societies that produce this character than the character themselves. There is a function for the character that denies the 'security' of the promised land from a director who lives in it.

A question needs to be raised: if the human condition in the late Twentieth Century is becoming increasingly absurd, then perhaps the schlemiel increasingly becomes a figure to aspire to rather than a figure who is the object of ridicule. He can negotiate the treacherous seas of twentieth century life quite unlike any other figure.⁴ This does not

³ Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.67. Harland goes on to suggest that Superstructural thinkers do not allow such a 'get out clause', but instead this is a function that is taken up by the fool for the rest of society. In this sense they can be seen to be sent as scouts through the absurd, guiding the way for the rest of society. See pp. 68-69 for this analysis.

⁴ The term 'absurd' is in itself problematic and pinning it down can be difficult. Rather than traditional notions of absurdity it is used here to denote a return to an acceptance of the human

explain the fact that although the contemporary period shows a resurgence of this type of character they have always existed and more often than not have existed more clearly, definably, and strongly within Jewish society. This seemingly points to a convergence between elements of the Jewish condition throughout the ages and the Western human condition today. This in itself would suggest a fundamental shift in attitude and ultimately a point of shared experience for the disparate Gentile communities of the 'enlightened' West with the previously rejected groups who also share the same geographical locations but inhabit a different cultural space. In this instance Stern uses football to identify this and more specifically uses a match between France and Israel with their respective geographical and cultural locations.

Schlemiels exist where society imposes a barrier to progression, and in not 'beating the system' they do not appear as fools but as those who can plough their own furrow safe in their faith. Baruch's faith is in football; his own 'team' devote some of their time to football but have to balance this with the conventions of society; how foolish. Baruch's wise qualities lie firmly in his ability to ignore the aspects of life that the rest of us see as being so important by raising the mundane to a level of importance never before seen – for Baruch football is not a matter equal to relationships with his partner or children, it isn't as

condition as it was pre-enlightenment, when science as a progressive and positive feature of society has gone and also where religion is not the dominant and ordering feature of society that it was.

important as religious rites, it is far more important than that. Baruch still has faith, but his faith is in football and the sense of belonging and community it brings him.

Perhaps the world would be a happier place if the contentment he has was our goal, with apologies for the pun. To end with someone who certainly was interested in goals; as Shankly commented to an interpreter regarding excited Italian journalists, 'Just tell them I completely disagree with everything they say.'

Selected stills from *Parc de France*



Stephanie Morgenstern

REMEMBRANCE

(Canada, 2001)

Stephanie Morgenstern***REMEMBRANCE***

(Canada, 2001), 35 mm, 19 minutes, color

Principal production credits

Director	Stephanie Morgenstern
Screenplay	Mark Ellis and Stephanie Morgenstern
Cinematographer	Mark Morgenstern
Editor	Vesna Svilanovic
Art director	James Cameron
Producer	Paula Fleck

Principal cast

Alfred	Mark Ellis
Aurora	Stephanie Morgenstern

Festivals and prizes include:

Best Canadian Short, Toronto Worldwide Short Film Festival, 2002
Best Short Film, Jutra Award, Quebec's Academy Awards, 2002
Certificate of Merit, Golden Gate Festival, San Francisco, 2002
Certificate of Merit, Chicago International Film Festival, 2002
Selected for "Great Expectations" Program, Telluride Int'l Film Festival, 2002
Selected for Toronto International Film Festival's 'Film Circuit'

Toronto International Film Festival

Vancouver International Film Festival

Festival international nouveau cinéma nouveaux médias de Montréal

Atlantic International Film Festival, Halifax

Rendez-vous du cinéma Québécois, Québec City

National Screen Institute's Film Exchange, Winnipeg

Local Heroes Film Festival, Edmonton, Commonwealth Film Festival, Manchester

Hollywood Women in Filmmaking Festival, Los Angeles

Best of Short Film Festivals, La Ciotat, Calgary International Film Festival

St. John's International Women's Film & Video Festival

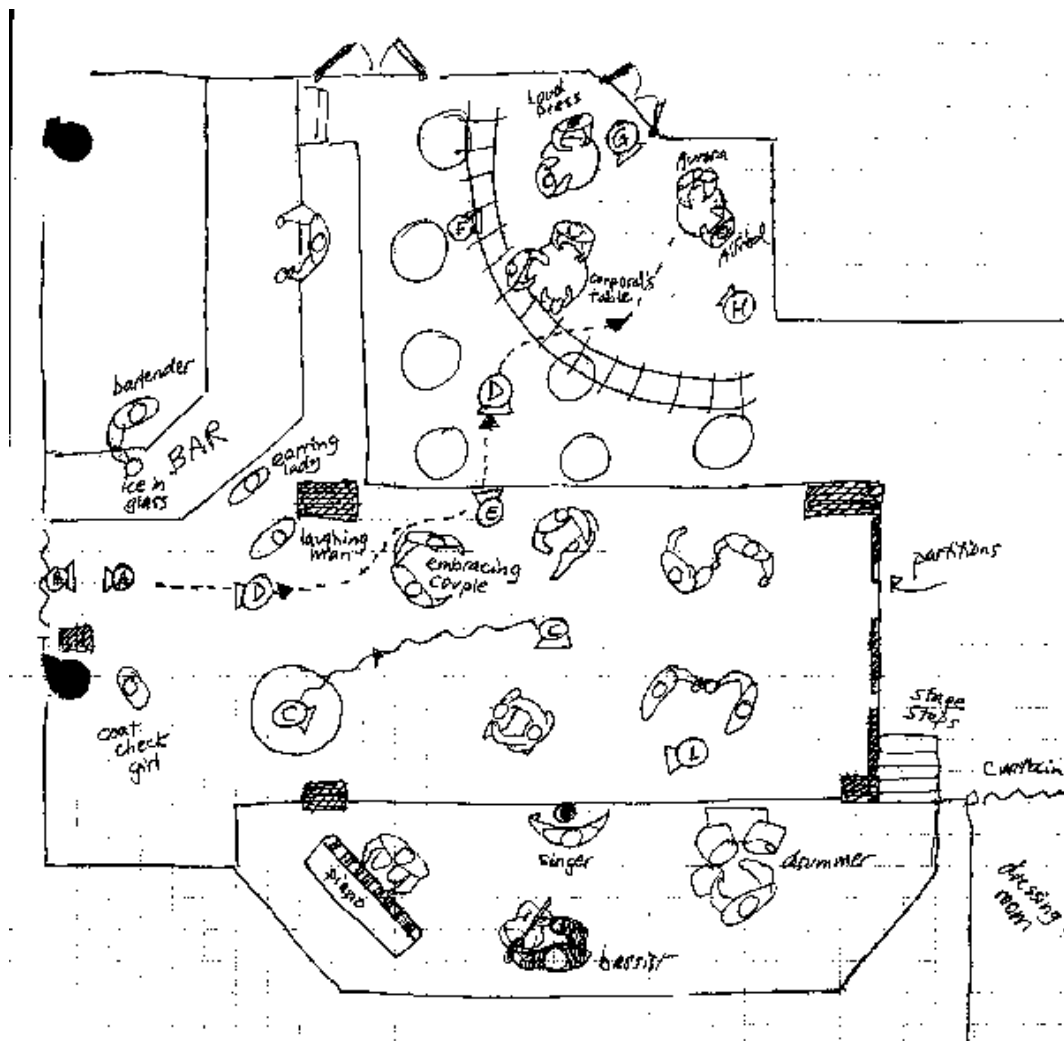
Stephanie Morgenstern

Born in Geneva and raised in Montreal, Stephanie Morgenstern began her career as a professional actor at the age of 15. While working in French and English television, film, and theatre, she got her BA in English from McGill University, and studied drama at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts; she then moved to Toronto to pursue her MA in York University's Graduate Programme in Social and Political

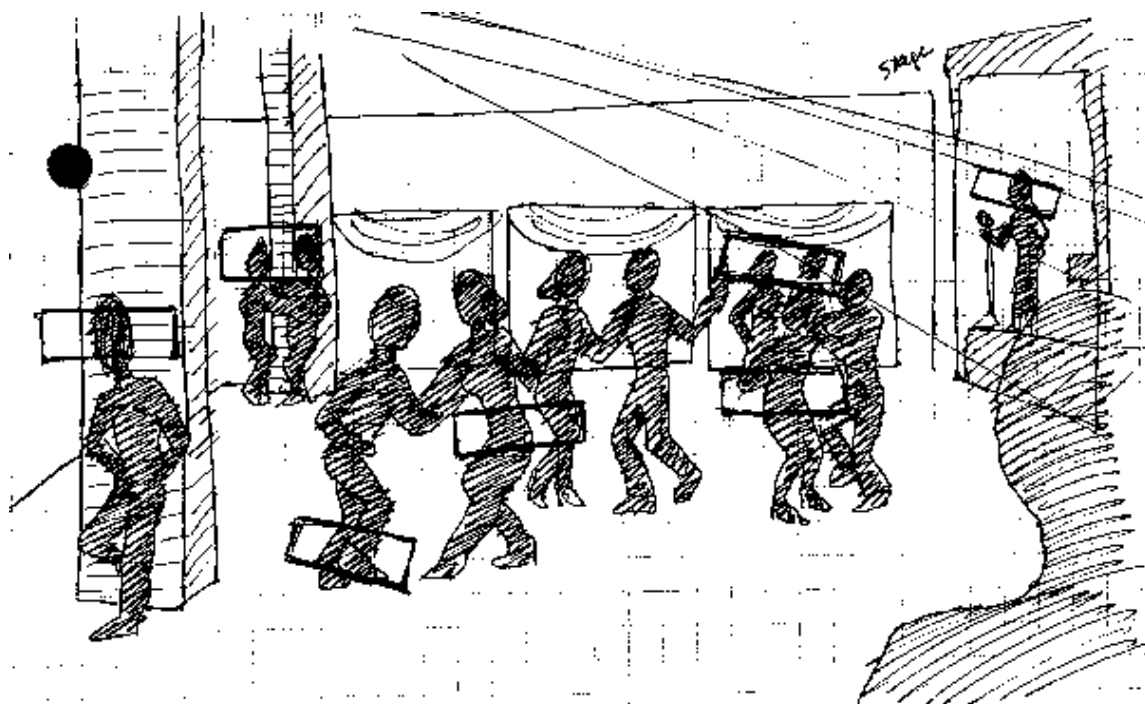
Thought. She was widely seen in the role of Alison, Ian Holm's airplane confidante, in Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter*. She has a distinguished career in stage, screen and television acting, and now as screenwriter and director. She is married to Mark Ellis, with whom she co-wrote and co-starred in *Remembrance*.

A selection of location plans and storyboard pages

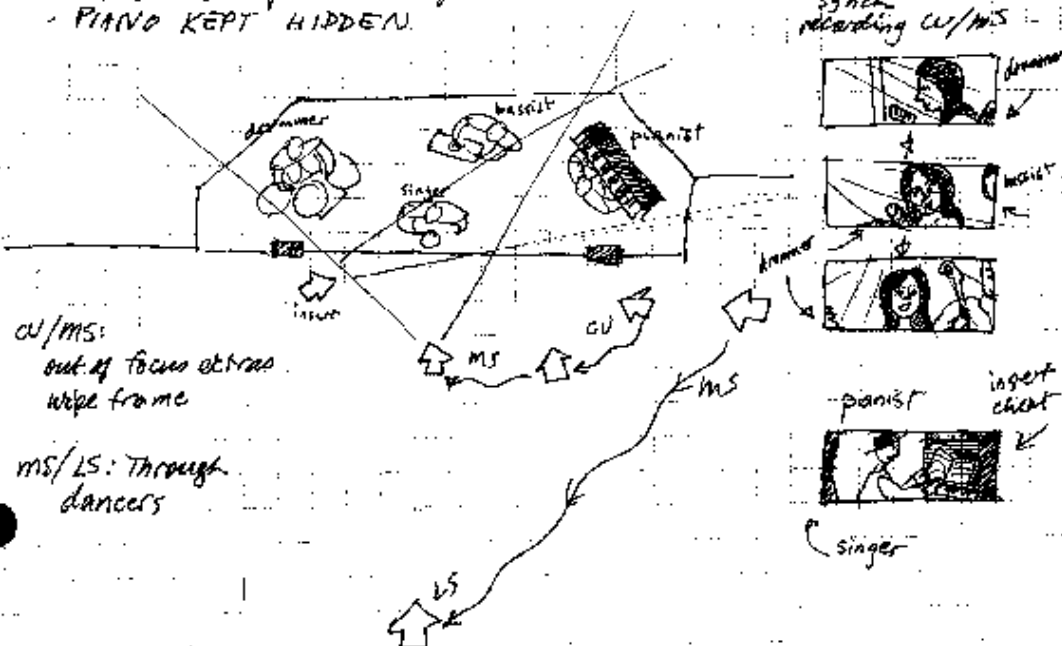
First floor plan of dance hall



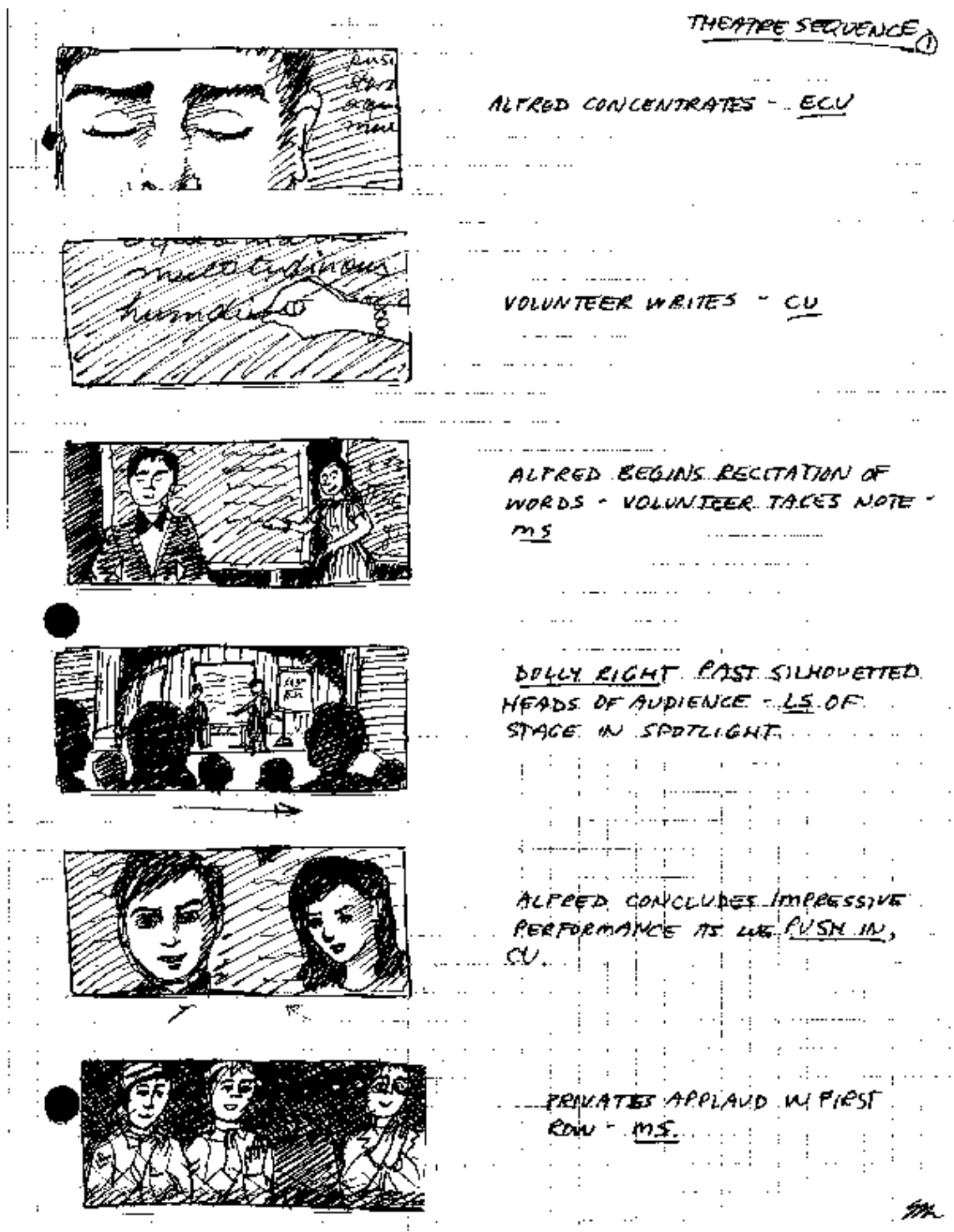
Sketch - dance POVs



- Various viewpoints as Alfred is overwhelmed
- PIANO KEPT HIDDEN.



Storyboard: Theatre sequence 1



Storyboard: Theatre sequence 2



MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE APPLAUDS.
MS.



"MR. GRAVES! BACKWARDS! COULD
YOU DO IT BACKWARDS?" MCU



"BACKWARDS." CU.



AVRORA WATCHES CLOSELY, MCU.



LOW ANGLE FULL BODY SHOT,
PUSHING IN: INTO CU AS
ALFRED RECITES BACKWARDS



RECITES BACKWARDS
FLAWLESSLY

SM

Storyboard: Theatre sequence 3



THEATRE SEQUENCE ③

DOLLY LEFT BEHIND AUDIENCE
HEADS, SPOTLIGHT ON STAGE.
ALFRED CONCLUDES.



AURORA IS IMPRESSED - CU.



"THANK YOU, CHARLOTTE
GROEVEY" - VOLUNTEER CURTIS
AND LEAVES STAGE. FULL
BODY SHOT.



AUDIENCE ENJOYS HEARING
THEIR NAMES NAMED, MS.



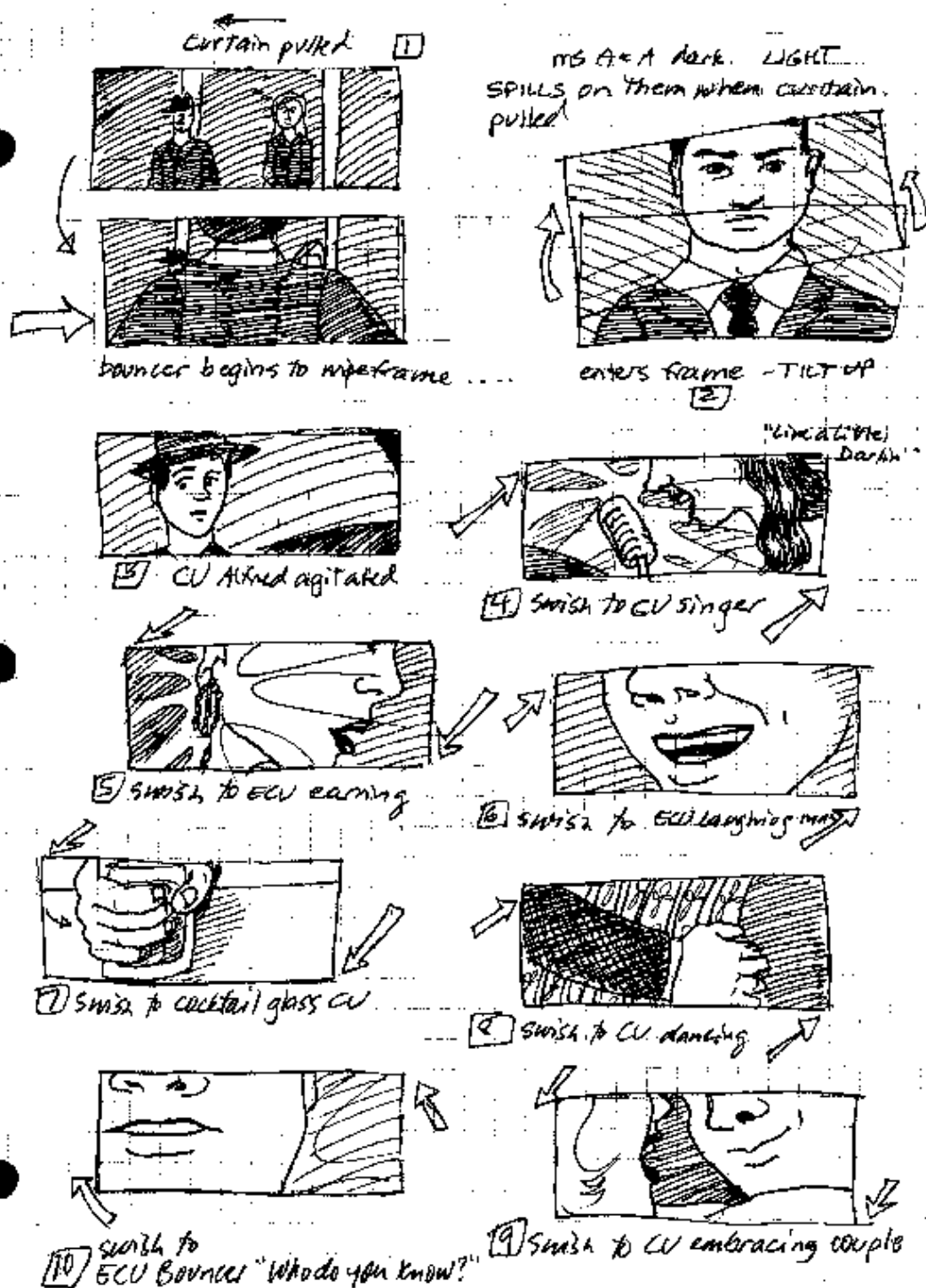
ALFRED FALTERS - CU.
"MISS... MISS ISAACS..."
PUSH IN.



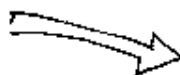
AURORA TAKES NOTE - ECU.
PUSH IN.

9/16

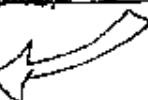
Storyboard: Entrance to dance



Storyboard: Jazz club sequence 2

JAZZ CLUB SEQUENCE 2

CU BASSIST -
SWISH TO SINGER -
SWISH TO HANDS



CU 2 WOMEN LAUGHING



CU ALFRED IS OVERWHELMED
IN DOORWAY



CU BOUNCER APPROACHES, ASKS
AURORA SOMETHING



CU AURORA NODS

REMEMBRANCE

A short film script

© Mark Ellis & Stephanie Morgenstern

SHOOTING DRAFT

OVER BLACK:

A distant military snare drum beats a march.

A shrill WHISTLE pierces the air. A RUMBLE of a train engine draws nearer, GASPING and HEAVING steam as it approaches. Brakes begin to SQUEAL.

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM -- NIGHT

The year is 1942. A man in his early thirties, ALFRED GRAVES, is standing alone next to a bench on a train station platform. He is wearing a slightly worn top-coat and a fedora.

The SQUEAL of brakes becomes sharper, painful, more piercing. Alfred is staring intently ahead into the LIGHT of the oncoming train.

QUICK FLASH: A WOMAN (AURORA) speaks to him in a busy nightclub.

AURORA

I guess that means you have to...
choose every thing very carefully--

Back to the platform. The train is nearer, the beam of light on Alfred grows brighter.

QUICK FLASH: Aurora extends her hand to him in a dressing room.

AURORA (cont'd)

My first name's Aurora.

Back to the platform. The train is still nearer, the light brighter, the sounds more overwhelming.

QUICK FLASH: Aurora stands near Alfred on the platform.

AURORA (cont'd)
Think it over.

Back to the platform: the train light dazzles his eyes, the sounds of brakes and hissing steam thunder around him. He takes a deep breath, closing his eyes. The station sounds vanish except for the final SQUEAL of brakes--

--which becomes the sound of CHALK SQUEAKING on a blackboard.

INT. SMALL THEATRE -- EVENING

Alfred is standing onstage with a blinding spotlight on his face, wearing a show jacket and bowtie. A voice from the dark audience calls out:

UNSEEN MAN
Aquamarine.

Sound of chalk writing on blackboard.

UNSEEN WOMAN
Multitudinous.

Sound of chalk again.

UNSEEN OTHER MAN
Humdinger!

Sound of the audience chuckling, and chalk on blackboard again.

Alfred opens his eyes. He is facing the audience, with his back to a blackboard, on which an obviously pregnant FEMALE VOLUNTEER from the audience has just finished writing "humdinger"; it's the last of a long list of unrelated words. He takes a deep breath and recites:

ALFRED

Goatee. Moccasin snake. Parliament.
Haddock. Eutrophication. Ipso
facto. Artie Shaw. Pusycat.
Vivisection. Sarcophagus. Nitty
gritty. Silver Dollar.
Appuntamento. Measles. Joie de
vivre. Ezekiel. Marshmallow.
Pusillanimity. Sforzando...

We now have a fuller view of the room, as Alfred continues the list. Though the spotlight on him is nearly blinding, we can make out a SCATTERED AUDIENCE silhouetted in the dark. Most are WOMEN, though there are two SERVICEMEN in uniform near the front row, and a few MEN over 50 with their wives.

Behind him on stage are several large blackboards on wheels. One is filled with random numbers in neat rows, another is covered with wildly complicated algebra and the closest one, still behind his back, has all the words on the list written by the VOLUNTEER. She stands by, astonished, ticking the words off as ALFRED remembers them.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
...Aquamarine. Multitudinous. Humdinger.

Applause and smiles break out all over the audience. AURORA ISAACS, the fair-haired woman in her late twenties from the earlier flashes, is among them.

PRIVATE
Mr Graves! Backwards.
Could you do it backwards?

A few laughs of good-humoured skepticism from the audience. Alfred shakes his head slightly. There's a hush.

ALFRED
Backwards.

He takes a breath and begins. As he recites, an excited chatter spreads through the audience ("How does he do that?" etc.).

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Rungidmuh Sunid-ooytih-itlum
Neeruh-maw-ka Oo-udna-strofs
Eetim-in-allis-ooyp Wollum-shram
Leh-EEK-eezee Rveev-euhd-oh-ajz
Zlzeem Otnem-atnupa Rullawd-rivlis
eetirg-eetin Suh-guf-awk-raws
Nush-kes-iviv Tak-eesup Awsh-
Eetraw Otcaf-Ospih Nush-ee-ehk-if-
fur-tooï Kuddah Tnum-uhl-rawp Kee-
ehns-Nissuc-awm Eetoag.

The chatter dissolves into laughter and enthusiastic applause. Aurora glances a few rows back to MAJOR STEPHENSON, a middle-aged man. Their eyes lock for a moment, STEPHENSON nods and prepares to leave. Aurora turns her attention back towards Alfred.

ALFRED (cont'd)

Thank you, that concludes my
demonstration. Thank you all for
coming.

He turns to the volunteer still standing behind him with her piece of chalk.

ALFRED (cont'd)

Thank you, Charlotte Greevey.

He bends down to address her pregnant belly.

ALFRED (cont'd)

Thank you, little
Greevey.

The audience laughs. Charlotte smiles, gives a little curtsy to the audience, and returns to her seat. He faces the audience and addresses each of them in turn to their obvious delight, picking up speed with each name.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Thank you, Roy Winters...
goodnight Janine Blake... Mr
and Mrs Charles Doherty,
Amelia Dorfman, Pino Goldoni,
Virginia Miller, Roberta
Madison, Theresa Lowry, Mrs

Rafael Horn, Private Donovan
& Private Lovell--Queen's Own
Rifles, Andre Tetrault...

Aurora is paying close attention as he approaches her name.
Alfred hesitates when he gets to her--

ALFRED (CONT'D)
Aur... Miss Isaacs... Ann
Underwood, Eugenia Hoskins,
Gabriella Martini...

Aurora is puzzled. Struggling, Alfred continues...

ALFRED (cont'd)
Victoria Barker... James Everton...

INT. SMALL THEATRE DRESSING ROOM -- EVENING (LATER)

ALFRED is packing his things: the show posters, programmes and performance suit. The room is strikingly barren: there are no flowers, souvenirs, good-luck cards or decorations of any kind.

There's a KNOCK on the door.

ALFRED
Yes, I'm almost ready!

AURORA (O.S.)
Mr Graves?

He looks up, startled, then recovers slightly.

ALFRED
Oh, Miss... Yes... Miss Isaacs... I'm
sorry. Come in.

The door opens and AURORA enters with a nervous laugh. She is holding the evening's programme.

AURORA
You even remember voices! I've... I've
already forgotten what I had for lunch.

ALFRED
You have?

AURORA

What's your secret?

ALFRED

(not joking)

What's yours?

There's a confused pause.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

I'm Alfred Graves.

AURORA

Yes... I know. And my first name's Aurora.

She extends her hand. Alfred doesn't take it. He is spellbound for a moment, and makes a flustered reply.

ALFRED

Yes. I know... I knew.

AURORA

Oh, you did?

ALFRED

Yes.

He tentatively takes her hand and shakes it. She's sure she's missing something, but continues awkwardly.

AURORA

Oh. I just wanted to say I enjoyed your performance.

ALFRED

Thank you.

They withdraw hands. Alfred holds his hands together. There's a pause.

AURORA

You were... unbelievable.

ALFRED

Thank you.

AURORA

(indicating the program)
I was... It... I gather this isn't
your home town, so, I don't know if
you know people around, or... if you
don't I was wondering if maybe you'd
have time to join me for a drink?...
Unless you have to be somewhere.

ALFRED

No.

AURORA

I understand. That's fine. I was
just-

ALFRED

I mean just a 12:20 train. Yes...
I'd like that.

Aurora smiles.

INT. DANCE HALL -- EVENING

A red curtain is swept aside. A thick confusion
of SOUND -- lively jazz, laughter, chatter and
clinks of glasses -- floods out.

Inside, on stage, a FEMALE SINGER with a rich, husky voice is
accompanied by a PIANIST, A DRUMMER and a BASSIST. The dance
floor is alive with motion. People are clustered at tables,
laughing, drinking, and flirting. Almost all the young men
are in uniform.

Alfred is distracted by the motion of the dancers--

--by a MAN's loud laugh--

--the CLINK of ice in a cocktail glass--

--a WOMAN's sparkling earring--

--the singer's VOICE in particular seems to unnerve him.

An imposing WAITER appears.

WAITER
(raised voice)

Who do you know?

Aurora takes off her coat and hands it to the Waiter.

AURORA
(raised voice)
Roy and Ginger.

WAITER
(taking off Alfred's coat)
Table by the dance floor?

The clutter of SOUND and MOVEMENT is too much for Alfred.
He'd rather be anywhere else.

ALFRED
Actually...

Alfred changes his mind. He spies a quieter corner, at a distance from the stage.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
...perhaps we could sit over there.

AURORA
Of course.

The waiter disposes of their coats and hats and leads them over to the more private table. Alfred braces himself and walks through the overwhelming barrage of noise and activity.

On the way to the table he is confronted by a CORPORAL, who glares at him. Alfred returns the look without malice or fear and continues.

They reach the table. The waiter pulls out a chair for Aurora and they sit.

ALFRED
I hope you don't mind...

AURORA
(a bemused smile)
Not at all.

ALFRED

It's just the music, it's a bit
... rich.

The waiter interrupts.

WAITER

What can I get you?

AURORA

What's your barkeep good
at?

WAITER

Roy and ginger. Roy and Coke. Roy
Mist. Roy and Lemon. Pink Squirrel.
Fluffy Duck.

AURORA

Fluffy Duck?

WAITER

Roy and Peach.

AURORA

Anyone here besides Roy?

ALFRED

(not getting any of this)
Roy?

AURORA

Rye.

ALFRED

Oh.

WAITER

Shh. I can do you a beer.

AURORA

I'll have the Duck.

WAITER

Sir?

ALFRED

I'll have the beer--the glass of beer.

WAITER

Sure.

He leaves.

AURORA

Are you alright?

ALFRED

I'm sorry. It's just... the music
already tastes like blue paint.
The waiter's voice is splintered
wood. "Roy" is the man from the
fourth row tonight. And Pink
Squirrel... well...

AURORA

I'm... not sure I follow you.

ALFRED

I can't see something without also
tasting it. I can't hear
something without seeing it. All
my... senses are...

He makes a very frustrated gesture of a messy tangling.

AURORA

That's why you'd rather sit here.
Where there's less... going on.
Where it's quiet.

ALFRED

It's hardly quiet. That lady's
wearing a very loud dress.

He gestures towards a LADY IN A LOUD DRESS sitting nearby in
a vibrantly coloured dress. Aurora laughs. Alfred doesn't
seem aware he's made a joke, but then catches on and joins
her in a smile.

The waiter reappears with their drinks.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

You haven't told me too much about
yourself, Miss Isaacs.

AURORA

You can call me Aurora.

ALFRED

What do you do?

AURORA

My story's pretty ordinary, I'm afraid. But I believe in doing what I can. For the cause. I work near Whitby. You know, secretarial work. Some translation.

Something doesn't seem right to Alfred. He looks at her mouth with intense concentration, listening. Aurora, flustered, changes the subject.

AURORA (CONT'D)

If I had your skills I wouldn't need shorthand! So all your senses... are actually a single sense? That's -- Is that how you remember things so sharply?

ALFRED

It's how I remember everything. I remember... everything.

AURORA

Everything?

ALFRED

Since the very first day.

Aurora is stunned.

AURORA

I... can't imagine.

ALFRED

I can't imagine forgetting. I've tried everything. How do you... how do you stop knowing something you know?

She has no answer--she's never thought of it that way.

AURORA

I guess that would mean... you have
to choose...everything... very
carefully because...

ALFRED

...because there are some things
you'd rather not always remember.
You see? It's dangerous sometimes
and it makes me... afraid...

Aurora follows his eyes toward the servicemen at the nearby
table, who are now laughing over a drink.

ALFRED

Sometimes you need to forget and I
can't. Ever happen to you?

Aurora is very moved by his simple, defenceless honesty. She
gives him an equally honest answer.

AURORA

Once or twice. Yes.

They have locked eyes.

All sounds seem to fade, the voices, the music, and an
unexpected warmth fills the spreading silence. All motion
seems to cease. The moment is still, pure and uncluttered--
peaceful for the first time. Alfred holds his breath.

Then sounds spill back in, and the room becomes normal again.
They both smile shyly and Alfred takes his first sip of beer -
- more like a big gulp.

AURORA (CONT'D)

How's the beer... sound?

ALFRED

A purring clarinet. How's the Duck?

Aurora takes a sip.

AURORA

A rusty squeezebox.

They laugh. The song has ended; there's a scattering of applause. The band begins a slow song. There's a pause; they look away from each other.

AURORA (CONT'D)

Do you dance?

ALFRED

No.

The singer begins a lazy, sensuous melody.

SINGER

One word and you've melted my defences
/ This isn't like me / One glance and
I damn the consequences / This isn't
like me ...

Alfred and Aurora are now standing on the dance floor, facing each other. She holds out her arms to him. He steps into them.

They are both very aware of their touching palms, the warm nearness of their bodies, his hand on her waist, her hand at his shoulder, the sound of their breath.

The distractions of the outer world fade for both of them. Their eyes close as they are both drawn into the sensuality of the moment. They feel the nearness of each other's lips and the warmth of each other's breath. Each aches to complete the moment with a kiss.

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM -- NIGHT

ALFRED, eyes closed, is still standing in the swirl of steam as we last saw him in the train station. The train is heaving its last HISS as it stops.

We hear voices at a distance; Alfred opens his eyes, turns and "sees" himself and Aurora, as if at the very same moment. The station is quiet. Alfred is carrying his suitcase and finishing a story.

ALFRED

So I said to him... If you don't let go
of that pig you'll be reading about
this in every column in the country.

They laugh.

AURORA
Why'd you stop?

ALFRED
It got too hard.

AURORA
The writing part or the reporting part?

ALFRED
I had a hard time thinking of things I
could write about.

AURORA
Plenty to write about now.

ALFRED
Yes. I guess that was the trouble.

She stops. He stops beside her.

AURORA (CONT'D)
It's a shame.

ALFRED
What is?

AURORA
You leaving tonight.

A pause.

ALFRED
Yes it is.

AURORA
I shouldn't... Alfred... I know it's
not good to rush things like this. It's
not 'done.'

She searches his face. He looks at her more directly and
tenderly than he has all night.

AURORA (cont'd)

But I feel sometimes you have to...
just...

Her gesture says "spill it out;" they both laugh.

AURORA (cont'd)
There're two things I can say here.
One I want to say. The other I have to
say. Alfred, I need to know I can
trust you.

ALFRED
(softly)
You can trust me.

She hesitates.

AURORA
Alfred... I'm working for a branch of
the intelligence service... for the
war.

She decides to spill everything at once.

AURORA (CONT'D)
There's a training camp close to here,
near Whitby. It's new and it's run by
the best minds of the Allied countries.
There's something that's come up. And
every day that goes by is... They need
someone like you.

Alfred is stunned by this unexpected turn.

ALFRED
I... I don't understand.

AURORA
They need you but... they had to know
if you... well, if you were the real
thing.

Distant sound of the train beginning to approach.

ALFRED

The real thing... I see. And on that... subject. What exactly do you do?

AURORA
Well, I'm not a secretary.

ALFRED
I knew that. I could hear that.

Aurora changes the subject.

AURORA
I understand why you might hesitate.
Given... everything...

As she keeps speaking, Alfred remembers seeing a man (STEPHENSON) exchanging glances with her towards the end of his show...

AURORA (cont'd, O.S.)
But you wouldn't be exposed to -- well,
I don't think you'd have to... work in
the field.

He turns to her.

ALFRED
They sent you...

AURORA
I wish I could explain. This thing
that's come up. They think only
you... only someone like you...

ALFRED
They sent you to convince me.

He rises and takes a few steps away, towards the tracks. She hesitates, then rises to stand near him, speaking softly.

AURORA (cont'd)
I'm sorry. I mean, I wish... I know
what this looks like, believe me, and I
don't blame you for thinking -- if...

if that's what you're thinking. Not
that I...

She can't finish. Alfred turns to her after a moment.

ALFRED

And... what was the thing you wanted
to say?

The train's approach grows louder. She takes a breath, looks
for a moment as if she might speak, then stops herself, as if
her conscience won't let her.

The train whistle blows -- it's approaching the station.

AURORA

You're going to have to forget we had
this conversation.

Alfred looks up at her. Aurora catches her mistake.

AURORA (CONT'D)

Or at least... think it over. I'm
staying at the Winchester tonight...
in case you should reconsider and
want to... talk. Goodnight, Alfred.

She gives him a quick kiss on the cheek and walks away. The
sound of her high heels grow more distant as she nears the
corner and are covered gradually by the sound of the
approaching train. The train's light grows brighter on him,
echoing the film's opening scene.

He closes his eyes and inhales deeply, holding his breath. The
jazz singer's sultry song fades in.

INT. DANCE HALL -- EVENING (EARLIER)

Aurora and Alfred are dancing to the song that began earlier.
They are still surrounded by the same warmth and sensuality,
pleasantly lost.

AURORA

Alfred... what does my name
taste like?

Alfred opens his eyes. The question touches him deeply. He draws her slightly closer to him. He closes his eyes again. The DANCE MUSIC is invaded by a railway conductor's PEA WHISTLE.

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM -- NIGHT

Alfred stands alone, eyes closed, still holding his breath. The steam of the arriving train is still swirling around him. The DANCE MUSIC SWELLS.

He exhales, opens his eyes. The train has stopped.

Alfred has made his choice. Leaving his suitcase behind, he turns to follow Aurora. Scattered PASSENGERS begin to cross the platform to the train. A weary, solitary SOLDIER, just disembarked and carrying a duffel bag, crosses paths with Alfred. Alfred's silhouette is enveloped by the steam of the train and vanishes.

END

CREDITS -- accompanied by the final verse of the Dance Hall Singer's song.

"This Isn't Like Me"

theme song for *Remembrance*

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This Isn't Like Me ©Morgenstern & Ellis

Handwritten musical score for the theme song "This Isn't Like Me". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 12/8 time signature. The lyrics are written below the notes, and guitar chords are indicated above the staff.

Lyrics:

One word and you've melted my de-fences—
 This isn't like me— One glance and I damn the conse-
 quences This isn't like me— In other circumstances
 I would brush off all ad-vances— I'd re-fuse to lose my cool but
 look at me now I'm trembling at how I'm a-fraid to be made a
 fool— This isn't like me.

Guitar chords indicated in the score include: C#m7, G#9, C#m7, Bm7/c, C#m7/B, C#5/Bb, C#m7, Bm7/c, C#m7/B, F#m7, A, D7, B, G#9 sus, C#m7, B/D#, Em7, F#, G#9 sus, C#m7, G#9.

An interview with Stephanie Morgenstern and Mark Ellis on *Remembrance*

Richard Raskin

How did the idea for making Remembrance come about?

SM: A few years ago, I mentioned to a friend that I remembered phone numbers by their colour. He said "So you're a synesthete!" I hadn't heard of synesthesia (which means something close to sense-fusion) – I only knew that numbers seemed naturally to have colours: five is blue, two is green, three is red... And music has colours too: the key of C# minor is a sharp, tangy yellow, F major is a warm brown... We started reading more about it. Links like these between the senses are not that uncommon. But what's rare is the fusion of *all five* senses. We came across the case of a Russian man named Sherashevsky: he had the dubious gift of permanent memory, and it came directly from his extraordinary case of full synesthesia.¹

ME: We were intrigued by the emotional angle on his condition. How would you live, if the experience of every choice you make is locked into your senses, and every memory is experienced as vividly as it was in the present? It would be hard not to live in fear of regret – you'd be

¹ A note from Stephanie Morgenstern and Mark Ellis: " If any readers want to follow up on synesthesia, we recommend two books: the classic *The Mind of a Mnemonist* by A. R. Luria, which was the inspiration for Alfred; and *The Man Who Tasted Shapes* by Richard Cytowic, a very readable contemporary look at the subject.

haunted forever by every wrong move you made. We wanted a character like this as a protagonist, so we could feel the world through his heightened senses. And we wanted to give him the hardest possible choices to make: whether or not to join a war, and possibly just as frightening: whether or not to let himself fall in love.

I understand that you combined several stories in your film. Did that require making any significant changes in either one? Were any further changes made as the project advanced from screenplay to film?

SM: The real Sherashevsky was a performer who toured a memory show, just like our protagonist Alfred. Many ordinary situations were difficult for Sherashevsky – ordering a drink, entering a noisy room, even casual conversation – because they triggered intense tangles of sensation in him. So he had to lead a fairly cautious, sheltered life. The similarities end there: Sherashevsky was never approached to serve his country with his gift (as far as we know!). We transposed an early-twentieth century Russian into a WWII Canadian because of our interest in the second true but little-known story.

ME: During the Second World War, a training camp for secret agents was founded near a small Canadian town by 'the man called Intrepid,' William Stephenson, along with the British secret service. This is where the Allies trained North American and international recruits, and the successful graduates were flown behind enemy lines for covert wartime operations. The camp became unofficially known as 'Camp X.'

Aurora reveals only the bare minimum to Alfred in *Remembrance*, for obvious security reasons, so we didn't need to make any real changes to the facts. The only stretch was sending a woman to sound out and recruit a man... That would have been very unorthodox!

Stephanie, I imagine that directing yourself and your husband involves both advantages and special challenges. Would you care to tell about this aspect of the making of Remembrance?

SM: This film would have been impossible with any other actors in those parts. (For one thing, the budget would have forbidden it!) Since we had been writing the screenplay on and off over a few years, we had had the chance to develop a real intimacy with the roles. It meant we hit the ground running when the time for rehearsals came, and by the time we were on the set, with pressures and distractions all around, we were already pretty clear about what we wanted to do. It was a valuable head start. But it actually worked both ways – being so familiar with the story meant we took some parts of it for granted. We may have assumed some things were clear that in fact needed a little more clarity. We had help here from a theatre-director friend, Chris Abraham. We invited him to observe and question during rehearsals, and on set he became my reference point between the takes. He could offer the kind of insightful and undistracted feedback I needed, watching to make sure we stayed faithful to what we explored in rehearsal.

I have to admit Chris rescued at least one important moment, when my self-direction was taking Aurora dangerously close to self-pity... This was at the train station. I was losing perspective, and found myself dwelling on Aurora's guilt about her handling of Alfred, and her vulnerability, rather than on a forcefully felt conviction that she and he could change the world.

As for directing Mark, I only actually remember directing him once: in the theatre scene, I suggested he start his backwards words more tentatively, slowly, so that the speed he gradually picks up is all the more impressive – all part of Alfred's good showmanship. As it turns out, that's what Mark was about to do anyway.

A great deal of effort must have gone into the special look you gave the film, both with regard to costumes, hair-do, makeup, décor, and also the camera work and color range you favored, even tinting the images at certain points if I'm not mistaken. Could you comment on this aspect of the production?

SM: Funny you should mention the tinting. I think I know the scene you mean: when we're on the train platform, and flash back to a moment in the dance hall. It fooled me too, when I first saw it: I thought somehow the golden glow of the dance hall had been boosted for the flashback. But the picture had been treated no differently from the first time in the dance hall – it's just that the eye has adjusted by then to the cold greys and blues of the station...

All I can say about the 'special look,' or rather the film's succulent production values, is that it's the result of the work of a glorious team, and not something I 'gave' the film. Our producer, Paula Fleck, worked real magic in recruiting the allegiance, skills, faith and material resources of colleagues and strangers alike. This applied to everything, from getting unbelievable deals on the costumes to securing the perfect locations. The lush cinematography and the stylish use of the camera are the work of Mark Morgenstern, my brother. He's an uncom promising artist, and a director himself, though he was careful not to tread on my toes on the set. James Cameron was our art director, who had already worked on a short film my brother and I co-directed, called *Curtains*, and had won an award for it. James needed no instruction from me, and worked closely with my brother in setting the visual tone. There's the safe, cool, nearly monochrome world that Alfred chooses to live in; and there's the steamy, colourful, risky, sensual world that Aurora invites him into. They took it from there.

You opted for a flashback structure in telling your story, beginning with a shot of Alfred waiting for his train at the railroad station, and remembering. First there are three brief moments he recalls, and then the main flashback begins. And there are even momentary flashbacks within the main flashback. Could you comment on your choice to structure the story in this way?

SM: From the beginning, we knew this story was going to be built as a loop in time, told from Alfred's point of view. Or rather, shaped like a capital Q: a loop with a conclusion. Within this general shape, our premise about his perfect recall actually gave us license to play with

time: it meant we could use flashbacks, meta-flashbacks and even a moment when he turns and 'sees' himself in a conversation from ten minutes ago. The brief moments before the main flashback also serve to inspire a distant sense of *déjà vu* by the time the main body of the story repeats them... The idea was that he needs to replay the evening's significant moments, scan them for clues about whether or not he can trust this woman, and make a decision – all in the 30 seconds it takes for the train to pull in.

The final memory that seems to tip the balance for Alfred, so that he opts for staying, is the memory of Aurora asking him what her name tastes like. May I ask what your thoughts were in saving up this moment as the final decisive factor in Alfred's decision?

SM: One of the things that most intrigued us about Sherashevsky's story is that he did marry... The book mentions this in passing, but makes no mention of his *experience* of love. It's scary enough for an ordinary person to speak the name of their beloved for the first time, but imagine someone whose experience of that name spills into every sense... What moves Alfred about Aurora is that she has an instant, understated empathy for his condition. She's curious, but doesn't treat him like some human anomaly. She understands the quiet courage it takes for him to get through the most ordinary of days. Her question expresses this understanding in very few words, and at the same time confesses that she's aware something uncommonly sensual has been going on between them that evening. We don't know his answer, but

we know her bold question convinces him he'll never meet anyone like her again.

One particularly interesting aspect of your film is the degree to which decisive things are left unsaid. Even when Alfred asks Aurora, "And what was the thing you wanted to tell me?" her reply to him is non-verbal. Was it a deliberate principle on your part to let sub-text carry as much of the storytelling as possible in the film?

ME: We're big believers in the unspoken. What the viewer will imagine is often much more powerfully personal than any details we could have cooked up. The synesthetic experience of Aurora's name is a good example: it's better left unsaid. And if Aurora had actually said the thing she *wanted* to say, it would have swayed Alfred even further and compromised the integrity of his decision... But beyond the romance, the story deals with necessary secrecy and discretion. It's a time when too much talk can carry a heavy price.

SM: Of course this is all easy to say in retrospect. One or two of our earlier drafts included several superfluous pages of heavy exposition. Not so much about Alfred and his back-story, but more about the current state of the war, the nature of the camp and of Aurora's role in it. We wanted to be very clear. I guess at some level we wanted to prove we'd done our research... It's surprising how, when that stuff is trimmed off, you really don't miss it.

ME: There was only one spot where we felt we had to add a little exposition: some friends we consulted didn't know what to make of the silent standoff between Alfred and the corporal in the dance hall. We'd

hoped the subtext would carry that – and the fact that Alfred's the only able-bodied young man in the room out of uniform. But too many didn't 'get it' and we ended up adding the corporal's line in post-production...

Another special quality of Remembrance is the effectiveness with which the film engages the viewer's interest in and profound sympathy for the two main characters. Your comments on the way you chose to design the Alfred and Aurora characters?

ME: I think we just followed our own interest and hoped it would be contagious. We never designed them deliberately for audience sympathy, but if they earned it, all the better! We did have an advantage because Alfred's condition is something that people seem to respond to immediately. Everyone can empathize with the burden of painful memories and regrets. Beyond that, he's made more accessible by being written (and performed) more as a person than as a 'case' – he could have simply been a socially maladjusted idiot savant for instance. Maybe this is the answer: we think there's something naturally appealing about a person who navigates a difficult life without being its victim. He doesn't ask for pity, and doesn't pity himself. He's also a truthful and undefended person – that's a welcome trait in anyone – and as a bonus, carries a kind of sensuality in him that you rarely find in a male character.

SM: Aurora on the other hand... it's interesting that you found her equally sympathetic. She's written as a bit of an enigma, and she wasn't

intended (in writing or performance) to be very easy to 'read.' If she'd come across as a warm and completely honest person, Alfred might not have needed much time to think over his decision! But since the story's from Alfred's point of view, we (we viewers, I mean) should have no more insight into her than he does. Her apparent shyness and innocence could be all part of her job. In fact, so could what had felt like romantic sparks... Still, I'm happy to know that in spite of this you found her sympathetic. The ending could have a much darker edge to it otherwise: Alfred would be risking everything for someone who wasn't worth it.

Sound and silence are used very effectively in Remembrance. There is a wonderful moment of complete silence after Aurora says "Once or twice" at the dance hall. Would you comment on your choice to suspend all background sound at that moment?

SM: Imagine standing in a crowded home appliance store, where every television or stereo is blasting a different station... This is the closest image we can come up with to evoke the constant chaos going on in Alfred's senses. The thing he longs for, possibly even more than the secret of forgetting, is a moment of peace. When Aurora says "Once or twice, yes" she has matched his honesty with hers. It's a moment of simple, truthful defencelessness. He's so taken by surprise and so absorbed by her that for a moment she fills everything, and the chaos recedes. We thought that for Alfred, a precious moment of serenity like this would be what love feels like.

Remembrance is both a highly intellectual film and a wonderfully sensual one at the same time - an extremely rare combination. The film also encompasses both personal and national, individual and collective concerns. Would you agree with these observations and would you care to comment on the range of experience covered by the film?

ME: *Remembrance* is about a man whose world is defined by his extraordinary sensual perception. Its effect can be magical – when Alfred ‘tastes’ Aurora’s name, when he’s seduced by her touch and by the colours of the music in the dance hall. But it’s also an obstacle that ranges from a minor distraction to a hammering obstruction. We tried to paint a visual and aural world that does justice to that sensuality and also conveys a sense of how difficult it is for Alfred to navigate his way through the clutter of life.

It’s this sensuality that curses Alfred with an inability to forget. Here, in the writing, our thoughts took an intellectual turn. What situation could we place this man in that would resonate best with our audience? What, we wondered, are the things that we most often want to forget? Well, love is one. Or rather, failed love – love that is unrequited or betrayed or extinguished too early. Nearly everyone has some experience of this – and we, unlike Alfred, usually find ways to diminish or bury this pain in our memory. So love is our individual – our *personal* connection to Alfred and his story.

SM: Our national, collective concern, is the idea of war. It's too easy to say, "Never again." And "Lest we forget." What has our society's

memory of war really taught us? With the passage of time, our memories become selective, and our history becomes myth. We actually only remember that soldiers are brave, that it hurts to lose loved ones, and that it's better to win wars than to lose them. We see this all over again in today's American patriotic war films.

ME: But Alfred Graves is a man with an unerasable history. He carries with him a permanent responsibility for every action he takes. And so he's fully aware of the consequences of his choice to join a war. Unlike most war heroes, he has a sense of the stakes, of the dangers of pain and inescapable regret. We, as his audience, appreciate his choice, not at the end of a war, but at the beginning. In these troubled times, so should we all carry that awareness. Not at the ends of wars, but at the beginnings.

Unless I'm mistaken, the only music you use in the film is that played by the band and sung by the singer in the dance hall. Could you tell about your decision not to use background music at other points in the story?

SM: You're right, there's no additional music. I think there's always something inherently manipulative about background music, no matter how discreetly it's used. That's when you feel the presence of the omniscient director, giving you instructions on how you should be feeling. Alfred's attention, feelings and thoughts are guiding is through the story here – or more specifically, his senses. It would have been intrusive to the premise of complete sensual subjectivity if we'd

underscored a moment or two with something he couldn't actually be hearing. We cheat a little on the very last shot, since the music is heard as we see him turn and walk away, but that could be because the music's still in his memory right then...

That said, we chose the music that *happened* to underscore important moments in the film with a lot of care. Come to think of it, principles aside, there's actually nothing *less* manipulative about what we did! The first song at the dance bar, "Live a Little, Darlin'," was generously lent to us by Leslie Arden, adapted from her musical comedy *The Last Resort*. Its lyrics are not coincidental, and neither is its aggressive, borderline obnoxious delivery. On top of that, the sound was distorted to have an unsettling, slightly nightmarish effect. The second tune, "The Honey Hop" by our pianist Rob Rowe, had to be instrumental and fairly undramatic, so as not to interfere too much with the dialogue. (But you may notice that there's a playful call-and-response thing going between the drums and piano at one point, when Aurora and Alfred start to develop a rapport.) As for the theme song, we and our producer Paula looked for weeks for a song with the right feel to it, either with affordable rights or in the public domain, and came out desperate and empty-handed. We were running out of time. So Mark and I wrote "This Isn't Like Me," trying to match the music and lyric style of a more humble Cole Porter or Irving Berlin... Our pianist

arranged it, and Julain Molnar sang it so beautifully you'd never guess it was home-grown. And free.²

I understand that you are now developing a feature film, as an expansion of Remembrance. Do you see short films and feature films as involving essentially the same narrative strategies or as being fundamentally different in the ways they tell their stories?

ME: There are many similarities in the construction of short and feature scripts. They both require compelling characters, truthful dialogue and a satisfying story arc. But they are each uniquely different and difficult challenges... The biggest challenge in a short film is to find a way to grab your audience's interest quickly – to have them invest in your story and your characters in a very short space of time. You have few scenes in which you can deliver your story, so economy rules every choice.

To some extent the same could be said of writing a feature: economy is always important, no line should be superfluous, no character incidental... But of course there's more space. A greater multitude of events and characters and actions can be used to add up to a more complex and a more satisfying story. Structure becomes all the more important because you have to pace, control, shape the viewer's attention over longer stretches, and you can't take their interest for granted. *Remembrance* has a pretty conventional structure: three distinct acts (theatre, dance hall, and train station), and it has an end

² See p. 146 above.

that echoes and then extends the beginning, which usually brings with it a satisfying sense of closure. But shorts can tolerate more liberties taken with structure, because the chances are pretty good the viewer will be willing to watch attentively all the way to the end.

SM: Brevity is not a problem for films that are the equivalent of a good poem, an anecdote with a good punch line, an intriguing puzzle, or any story – dramatic or comedic – that sets up an expectation and then throws you a twist. What's much harder, by definition, is if your short's effectiveness depends on an element that takes *time* – like suspense or, more commonly, empathy. If it's important to you to touch your viewer emotionally, you have the special challenge of making the viewer care about what happens to someone they've just met. I think many shorts-makers use emotional shortcuts here. They hope it will quickly engage sympathy if a character is accessible, "just like me," any cute young kid, a quirky young guy next door (usually a stand-in for the filmmaker!), or an attractive but vulnerable woman (usually a stand-in for someone the filmmaker cares about!). And sometimes it does work. But in a drama, having a very familiar, recognizable protagonist can backfire and end you up with a stock character. If you as a filmmaker can't be bothered to set your character apart, make them their very own person – never mind what your audience thinks, why would *you* want to make a film about them?

Is there any advice you would give student filmmakers about to make their own first short films?

ME: See a lot of short films. Nothing compares. It'll probably teach you more than any course could – with models to inspire you and mistakes to avoid. Go to every shorts festival you can, treat them like an all-you-can eat buffet. If that strikes you as a great way to spend time, all the better. If it sounds to you like a chore, that should tell you something...

SM: Do what matters to *you*. Do what you can stay passionate about for many years – A) because it always takes longer than you might think to get it finished, and B) because if you're lucky, you get to keep talking and thinking about it for a long time, at an endless string of festivals, in the press, among peers, with industry people, in *P.O.V.*, at award show cocktails... If you chose a particular story or style for any other reason – like because that's what 'people' want to see – your honest enthusiasm will run dry before your journey's over and it'll be too late to turn back.

14 January 2003

Remembrance or "What does my name taste like?"

Michael Skovmand

The title of this Canadian short echoes the ambiguities of the film as a whole. Firstly, 'remembrance' is the noun form of the activity of remembering, referring to the profession of one of the two main characters: he is a performer who dazzles his audiences with his total recall of words and names. Secondly, 'remembrance' connotes memorial rituals commemorating those fallen in wars or other tragic events. Canada has official 'Books of Remembrance' listing all those fallen in that nation's wars. And that second connotation links up with the temporal setting of the film. *Remembrance* is an account of an episode one evening during World War II in a small Canadian town. It is a reconstruction of time past, of events remembered, a remembrance. The setting is true to period in every detail, be it dress, hairstyles, interiors, music, the railway station, sounds of an old train engine, etc. Furthermore, the film is shot in a tinted monochrome traditionally connoting old photographs – dark greenish for exteriors, lighter green and amber for interiors. In other words, *Remembrance* is a historical pastiche – an imaginative reconstruction of a particular episode in a small town in Canada during World War II. And thirdly, the title *Remembrance* relates to the narrative structure of the film, which is in itself an act of remembering by the main character, a flashback contained and framed by the mind of Alfred Graves, standing on the platform, waiting for the train.

The story, or *fabula*, is fairly simple. Alfred Graves (Mark Ellis), thirtyish, performs his total recall of words and names before a sparse, but impressed provincial audience. He is approached by blonde Aurora Isaacs (Stephanie Morgenstern) after the performance, who expresses her admiration and asks him to join her for a drink. The verbal exchange between them – “What’s your secret? – What’s yours?” is an early indication of an interest that goes beyond the polite or the professional. They go to a bar with live music and have a conversation about Alfred’s special talent. Not only does he possess the faculty of total recall, indeed he is unable *not* to remember everything, but this is combined with his *synaesthesia* – which means that one sensory faculty experiences the world in terms of another: taste is experienced as sound, sound as colour, etc. The two dance, and there is a sense of reluctant intimacy between them. She accompanies him to the railway station, and on the platform, waiting for his train, she reveals to him that she works for the Intelligence Service and is there to recruit him because of his special talents. She issues an open invitation to him to come back to the local hotel and discuss the matter, an invitation with ambiguous erotic implications, and leaves him. In the glare from the headlights of the approaching train, he makes up his mind and leaves the platform, presumably to join Aurora, and the Intelligence Service.

It is, however, when we look at the discourse, or *syuzhet*, (which is of course what we do whenever we watch a film) that the ambiguities

invoked by the title of the film start making themselves felt. The three opening cuts between Alfred and his recollection of Aurora saying: “we have to choose very carefully”, “my first name is Aurora”, and “think it over” are teasers initiating what turns out to be the three main interweaving themes of the film: remembering, love and commitment. These establishing cuts set up the contract of expectations between film and audience, thematically and dramatically in terms of establishing the axis of interest or conflict between Aurora and Alfred.

The ensuing match dissolves from the headlights of the oncoming train to the stage lights of the auditorium, establishing the flashback structure of the film – literally a “flash back”; is it just a transitional device, or is it a mark of the story being narrated from within the subjectivity of Alfred Graves? It is, and it isn’t – the point of view is that of a circling, semi-detached camera with Alfred as its pivot, which nevertheless picks up reactions beyond Alfred’s awareness, such as the significant exchange of glances in the audience between Aurora and, as we are reminded in a later explanatory flashback, her colleagues in the Intelligence Service.

But why does Alfred hesitate when, reiterating everybody’s name in the audience at the end of the performance, he comes to Aurora Isaacs, calling her Miss Isaacs. After all, as we learn in the following scene in the dressing room, he knows her first name. Is this simply indicative of him being struck by her as a woman – or is it perhaps the recognition of a soul mate? Alfred is presented as a slightly awkward, slightly

nerdy person, who hesitates to make personal contact – quite literally, when he hesitates to accept Aurora's hand, and offer of her company, the implication being that his peculiar abilities have isolated him as an individual. This impression is amplified in the next scene in the bar, the longest in the film, and a crucial one. As the two arrive in the bar, the camerawork and the editing becomes expressive of Alfred's subjective experience of the place: tight close-ups, wobbly hand-held camera, abrupt editing, shrill singing and intrusive ambient noise are indicative of Alfred's unease at being in this cramped, rowdy room.

We are given a further instance of Alfred's isolation as they move through the crowded room, when a soldier passing by asks him: "Are you afraid to put on a uniform?" In other words: what is an able-bodied young man like Alfred doing out of uniform in a time of war? We are indirectly provided with an answer as Alfred and Aurora find a quiet table at the back of the room. During their exploratory conversation we learn about Alfred's total recall, his inability to forget, combined with his synaesthesia. The effect of all this on him personally has been a tendency to withdraw, not to engage in life – since he is unable to forget, he'd rather not take any risks, the memories of which he would be stuck with for life. Aurora presents herself as a secretary in the military who does her small bit for the Cause – the War, a less than truthful presentation of herself, as it emerges. However, she is clearly fascinated by Alfred, and asks him: "Do you dance?" To which he replies: "No." The following shots find them on the dance floor –

the implication being that Alfred does not habitually dance, but that night he is making an exception. The exceptional character of the situation is underscored by the lyrics of the music from the band in the bar, which at this point change from being background noise to being a commentary on the action. Gradually the two move closer to one another, enveloped by the song of the female singer in the band. "This isn't Like Me" – a slow ballad in 1940's musical idiom, written by Ellis and Morgenstern – is a wistful first-person ballad about someone who meets someone and all of a sudden breaks with his/her habitual patterns of behaviour, breaks out of his/her shell and gives love a chance. My slashing of personal pronouns is not prompted by any desire for political correctness; there is a real ambiguity as to the gender of the crypto-addressee of that song. Is the song expressive of Alfred's subjectivity, or Aurora's, or both? Clearly the awkwardness and timidity of Alfred seems to point towards him as the most obvious candidate, the one who is in the process of breaking out of his solitary existence, of becoming a *mensh* (to quote Billy Wilder's *The Apartment*, another story of an anonymous human being who in the end chooses to engage with life). On the other hand, we find a parallel conflict in Aurora, who is with Alfred for professional reasons, in order to recruit him for the Intelligence, but whose professionalism is obviously undermined by her growing infatuation with Alfred.

The intimacy of their silent dancing is only broken once when Aurora asks him, "What does my name taste like?" – a question which

he recalls in a flashback in the final scene, and which appears to make him decide to stay. Her question is an obvious reference to his synaesthesia, but we need to look at the final scene in order to explain why that remark is so important to him.

The final scene returns us to the platform where the film started, with Alfred waiting for the train – but a few minutes earlier than the opening scene. The song from the bar segues into the platform clip, indicating how the memory of the bar lingers with Alfred. At this point the flash back catches up with the frame in what is the only overtly foregrounded auteured editing device of the film, an almost Magritte-like effect of Alfred turning at the sound of himself and Aurora entering the platform. Apparently Alfred is telling Aurora about his past career as a journalist and why he gave it up. There wasn't enough to write about, and now, with the War, there is too much. Then follows the crucial conversation, in which Aurora reveals her true identity as an intelligence agent, as well as her having been sent to check him out to see if he was “the real thing”, and, if so, recruit him.

The ambiguity inside Aurora of personal and professional agendas is still there. She tells Alfred that there is something she wants to say and something she has to say. When he asks her what it was she wanted to say, after he has taken offence at what he perceives as her doubledealing, she doesn't answer, but pecks him on the cheek, asks him to reconsider and leaves. At this point there is a flash back to the dancing scene, and Aurora's question: “What does my name taste

like?” What is it about this question that makes him change his mind? My answer would be that her question reveals to him that Aurora’s interest in him is not just professional, but personal – she is a soul mate who doesn’t see him as a freak, but instinctively relates to his synaesthetic experience of the world.

The interrelatedness of personal and political choices is underscored by the ending. The song “This isn’t Like Me” lingers as the credits scroll, and as the song is transformed from its diegetic role into an extra-diegetic anchoring function, it comes to signify the thematic closure of the film, underscoring the theme of personal emancipation, from fear, habit or limiting self-perceptions, towards commitment and a sense of purpose. This ties up with the underlying theme of ‘intelligence’ – the dichotomy between the barrenness and superficiality of Alfred’s demonstrations of mnemonic intelligence, and Aurora’s purposive and committed engagement with the Intelligence Service in the struggle against the forces of Hitler and his allies.

Remembrance is a truncated specimen of the well-loved genre of the Wartime Romance, a feature film in embryo, drawing on audience familiarity with the cinematic repertoire of such wartime romances as *Waterloo Bridge*, *Casablanca*, *To Have and Have Not*, *From Here to Eternity*, etc. The dominant thematic in all of them is the tension between the micro issues of individuals and the macro issues of war, the tensions of divided loyalties between patriotic commitment and personal attachments or concerns. One of the problems with WW II romances,

in contrast to most other wartime romances, is the fact that, unlike, for instance, the futility of WW I or the politically problematic nature of the war in Vietnam, WW II was, basically, and certainly retrospectively, a just war against identifiable evil. There is, consequently, no real dilemma for audiences to empathise with in characters debating with themselves whether to join or not to join the war effort – those who don't want to join up are beyond the pale of our sympathies. This is why practically all WW II romances tend towards the excessive black-and-white emotionality of melodrama – one of the most recent examples being the shallow and stereotypical *Pearl Harbor*.

Remembrance is an interesting variation within the genre of the WW II romance – a variation with a twist – the twist being the male protagonist's peculiar psychological make-up. Like most successful shorts, it is an intriguing combination of economy of narration, discipline of focus, and yet of vistas of perspectives potentially explorable, of stories untold.

The Past of the Future Body, Sensation, and Memory in *Remembrance*

Britta Timm Knudsen

The first image of *Remembrance* is a medium shot of a man standing in a railway station. The first words of *Remembrance* are those pronounced by a woman in a flashback scene, the first of a sequence of three flashback scenes, all with the same woman speaking three different phrases: “You have to choose everything very carefully,” “My name is Aurora,” and “Think it over.” After these flashbacks we return to the present narrative time of the film and the image of the man in the railway station, his eyes closed. The scene is now enigmatically illuminated and we return back in time to the beginning of the narrated time. We recognize from the clothes of the characters that the setting of this feature film is in the forties. Later on—in a restaurant scene—we are no longer in doubt. Soldiers in uniform and the threatening remark made by one of the soldiers to Alfred—“Would you not like to wear a uniform?”—tell us that the action takes place during World War II.

Four different kinds of locations frame the action. The locations are all public or semi-public: the railway-station, a dance hall, an auditorium, and Alfred’s dressing room just after his performance, where Miss Isaacs looks for him to thank him for his performance. Calling this “action” requires a broad definition of this term, as what is going on is not action in the narrative, goal-oriented sense of the word; the action taking place is either a dialogue between Alfred and Aurora—an intimate, close dialogue in which we pay more attention to the things not said than to the words that are spoken—or Alfred in the

lonely position of recalling the past. Alfred recalls certain scenes and this act of recalling causes him to make the decision to join the Allied Intelligence. The scene recalled is one in which Aurora asks: "Alfred: What does my name taste like? "

Taking a closer look at the scenes framing the story of *Remembrance*, we are able to discover what this film is about: time, memory, and sensation; it is about a man who is unable to forget (in the work of J. L. Borges, this seems to be the worst punishment of all). However, I don't think that this film is about deploring the ability to remember. Nor do I think it praises the ability of remembering (it seems rather painful for Alfred to remember all these details). This film shows us the connection between sensation and memory through the body as a membrane.

Alfred's body has several functions, depending on its situatedness in time and space. When his body is situated in space it has difficulties orienting itself: it becomes a surface or a receptive screen for all kinds of sensation, a kind of radar—overwhelmed by all the sensations possible in the near environment. Situated in space, his becomes one with its surroundings. The sensual body is absorbed in the moment and is unable to distinguish between itself and the things around it. But when the body is situated in time it is able—by recalling/representing the past—to position itself in space.

As a body only situated in space it is a body which functions like a camera; it documents the things taking place. On the other hand,

Alfred's body also possesses a "normal subjecthood"; it is a body that distinguishes itself from its surroundings enough to be attracted to them, capable of focusing on and choosing the worthwhile sensations. And the differentiation takes place through the memorial activity of representation.

Alfred's body also completes the formal function of translation: it translates one regime of sensation to another: "this dress is very loud," "this place is so... rich" show that the sensations cross over and transport signification from one regime to another. Thus, in conclusion we can say that the body not only documents the sensations, but also serves as a symbolic sign machine, able to translate from one register to another.

Memory

The way in which *Remembrance* as a film represents the mental activity of memory and the corporal activity of sensation can help us clarify the relation between them. The film viewer sees the whole film in flashback—through the memory of Alfred. What the spectator gets to see is the representation of some scenes in Alfred's memory. And the time represented deals in a thematic way with the effort of remembering: we see Alfred Graves giving his show in front of an audience, in an empty theatre, exhibiting his skill of remembering all the words that the audience utters—forward and backward. And we see him in the middle of an »ocean« of sensations, in a dance hall full

of people in which he is about to drown. And the only way he can keep from drowning is through remembering, representing to himself the sensations he has experienced. The ability to represent is a means of finding one's way through sensual chaos. Drowning signifies living only in the presentness of sensation, while representation through memory connects the past to the future. In the last illuminated scene we see Alfred recalling past scenes to decide what to do in the future. The senses are in this way directly connected to the existential or ethical choice he is going to make. The body located in space (in a phenomenological way) is also a body located in a concrete historical and cultural situation in which decisions have to be made. And the two sides—the sensual aesthetic side and the political ethical side—do not conflict. On the contrary: the sensual commitment is the reason why he joins the Allied Intelligence.

What did we learn about the relation between sensation and memory from the literary experience according to Marcel Proust in *A la recherche du temps perdu*? To remember something through a sensation is not only to repeat in the present something that was already there in the past (the traditional mimetic point of view), nor does a present sensation simply construct the past (the constructionist/postmodern point of view); on the contrary, Proustian remembrance does not remember anything but is rather an initial representation of the real, the real emerging to the conscious mind. Again: sensations can only be focused—felt as real—if they pass through the memory. It is in the

filmic repetition of a lived experience that the sensations appear as real, or it is only at that moment they become real.

The aesthetic experience

It is painful for Alfred to be this camera documenting everything. Being this camera is on the contrary a way of losing his body to space or becoming a transparent thing in space. Alfred has aesthetic experiences through memorial representations, experiences that we are invited to observe twice in the film. The first time is in the opening scene in which Alfred begins to recall the immediate past and we see him illuminated divinely. The viewer and Alfred get a vision (of the past), a vision that leads him to make a choice concerning the existential dilemma in which the encounter with Aurora has put him: shall he go on as before or shall he join the cause (and Aurora). And the second time takes place in the dance hall: Alfred and Aurora look closely at one another and suddenly the sound is removed from the scene. This sudden silence—which clearly affects the film viewer's sensation of the film—becomes a mute expression of his focus on her. Alfred is a camera who has been moved by the vision of Aurora. When Alfred sees Aurora for the first time, we witness him stumbling over her name, hesitating when confronted with her face. It is perfectly clear for the viewer that Alfred not only sees Aurora, he is also moved by his vision of her. This being-moved is expressed by the body. The choice that Alfred is going to make concerning whether he will continue using

his skills to do performances or he will use them in the service of the cause is not a choice between love and social responsibility—a choice we have often seen represented in films—because Alfred can have both, or more precisely, the cause presents itself through a loveable face (Aurora). In Lacanian terms this signifies that the symbolic Other (the instance which calls on the singular subject to commit to society) and the (beloved) other merge. Normally we witness the hero choosing between duty and love, but in this case Alfred's love of the face of Aurora comes to represent his love of the Cause. His sensual fascination of the face of Aurora makes him choose the Cause.

Remembrance thus seems to be about memory as a way to keep from sensually drowning in space. But on the other hand, memory as the faculty of representation reconnects us sensually and mentally to the world. Senses and ethical standards are not represented in the film as contradictory forces in the human mind; on the contrary, *Remembrance* combines affect and political commitment in a strong and direct way.

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Remembrance

Brian Dunnigan

I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.

Samuel Becket

In mental life nothing that has once taken shape can be lost, that everything is somehow preserved and can be retrieved under the right circumstances

Sigmund Freud

A man stands, stiff and still, on a station platform. He's dressed in a 1940's hat and overcoat. He seems oblivious to the cold and the falling snow. We can hear the melancholy whistle of a distant train. His eyes close as he remembers his encounter with a beautiful woman and the choice she gave him....

Set in a once-upon-a-time, wartime Canada of the 1940's, *Remembrance* is a stylish and atmospheric film that centres on a man who remembers everything but seems to have forgotten the most important thing; in other words it is a *love* story. It is also an erotic tale, with memory traces of earlier narratives of initiation, such as Cupid and Psyche, Adam and Eve. The film works best on this level, as fable and melodrama but is less convincing on the psychology and existential reality of its central character. The ending is therefore darker and more ambiguous than the redemptive ambitions of the narrative would like to suggest.

The film's protagonist is Alfred, a man in his early thirties. He is polite, emotionally withdrawn almost autistic, overwhelmed by his inability to forget anything and cut-off from the reality of the war. He lives nowhere and travels everywhere, a figure of pure asexual knowledge who will discover (a previously unknown?) erotic desire that will propel him out of his isolation. He earns a living as a stage performer not unlike Mr Memory in Hitchcock's *Thirty-Nine Steps*. And like Borges's *Fuentes the Memorious*,¹ (and like all of us) he suffers from too many memories. It is appropriate therefore that when we first meet him on the station platform, he is in the dark, isolated, almost frozen. Then as that image shifts into the recent past we see him now on stage, alone under the bright lights. His stance that of a young boy about to perform for his parents, a child man who presents his party piece to a half-empty auditorium, his eyes closed to the world. In the *fable*, Aurora² has been sent by the intelligence services to waken him from his dark night of the soul, to free the traumatised child and to encourage his engagement with the world of adult responsibility. She is a messenger of light (though she brings darkness too in the figure of the spymaster who sits unsmilingly nearby) and that is how we first see her, bathed in a roseate glow as she smiles in open admiration from

¹ "...the present was almost intolerable in its richness and sharpness, as were his most distant and trivial memories..." Jorge Luis Borges *Labyrinths* (London. Penguin Books, 1970).

² Meaning literally Dawn (L).

the audience. She is the only one whose name he hesitates in remembering, for a moment, she makes Mr. Memory forget himself.

It is this conflict between *memory* and *forgetting* that gives the narrative its thematic unity and structural dynamic. The main action of the film is itself an act of selective remembrance. Alfred on the station platform, recalling recent events, has become a good storyteller, selecting and ordering, remembering and forgetting. He is no longer the same man who cannot forget *anything*. He is now able to think and act, perhaps even plan for a future, no longer overwhelmed by his memories. Aurora for her part has to forget her real motivation for going backstage, in order to be an effective seducer. But when she finds herself attracted to Alfred, she has to remember her original purpose. Love can do that; make you forget your everyday self and remind you that self and life can be mysterious, astonishing. Later, a nightclub scene will underline this, time itself will stop and all sounds fall away, as they stare at each other in love-struck forgetfulness.

But Alfred cannot easily forget the *fear* that prevents him loving anyone (including you suspect himself). He is afraid that not being a soldier or engaged in the war effort might make him seem less of a man. He is afraid of what he knows but cannot forget; (unspoken) knowledge that could be dangerous to himself or others. And most particularly he is fearful of the unfiltered, chaotic reality that dominates his existence. There is only one sequence of shots that give us a subjective sense of how disturbing this might be. In the nightclub scene

we move from a cool, controlled (backstage) world into a brash and exuberant one of people enjoying themselves. The low angles, jerky camera moves and exaggerated sounds, all create a disturbing effect. The laughing faces, clashing glasses, saturated colour, suggest a world of sexuality and *jouissance*, a brief descent into Alfred's vertiginous world. (The film however quickly moves back to its narrative surface as if afraid of confronting this internal reality.) The only way Alfred can cope is presumably by moving on, by building the protective persona of Mr. Memory who entertains by remembering banal lists and trivial facts and by not entering into what must be terrifying relationship with Others. Aurora reminds him of his fear and the frightening truth of his life. Yet miraculously love transforms everything, as in a fairy-tale he overcomes his fear and dances with her. As he joins the dance of life, the intensity of his present torment vanishes, the singer is no longer threatening but still she expresses a final fear which sums up all the others "...this is not like me...I'm afraid to be made a fool."

It makes us think of how it must be to have his strange affliction. We wonder how Alfred can live with that ever-expanding, never-ending stream of memories. What must his life have been like? He must have been seen as a freak, teased, tormented, put on show; always and everywhere different from others who only wanted to be amused by, or make use of him. That is why his sense of *betrayal* when he learns the truth of Aurora's mission, must have reminded him of all

the other times when trust broke down. You suspect that he has forgotten none of them, nor his barely sublimated rage at not being able to live a full life.

Aurora however seems to have forgotten who this man is almost as quickly as she forgot what she had for lunch. She naïvely believes that having stirred his desire and now sealed it with a kiss, that Mr Memory will be able to forget they ever had this conversation. (This is presumably a line learned in Spy School, a pre-war spy school before such lines became clichés.) Alfred must know that you cannot trust a spy especially one who is so sincerely committed to a higher authority, but he has tasted of the forbidden fruit³ and is now a tormented man. All his senses including taste are heightened and focused through what he sees, and his most powerful memory is the vision and therefore *taste* of Beauty itself as he dances with Aurora. This is the decisive erotic remembrance that opens his eyes. He can no longer remain unconscious to the call of the world or his own impulses. Yet the ending remains ambiguous.

Alfred is standing once again in the snow, on that cold, lonely platform, ordering his recent memories, shutting out the terrible shriek of the train whistle. The romantic imperative of the narrative implies that Alfred, shaken by lust will now follow his conscience and play his part in love and war. A new and moral commitment to taking care of others

³ "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." *Genesis*, Chap 3, verse 5.

will flow from his realisation that he can change, that he has a choice. All this we might believe as he turns and follows Aurora, disappearing into the train smoke and a new life. And perhaps we might accept this hopeful outcome if we had been presented with a less complex character. But you cannot help fearing that it all might end badly. Alfred is a man of extreme sensitivity weighed down by a past, inhabiting an intense almost paranoid present, where relationship and authority could easily trigger a violent response. And in this sense at least, the film is true to its romantic roots. Alfred of course is only too aware of these dangers and perhaps he chooses otherwise, for in the last shot where Aurora had turned left, he turns right. Is this a deliberate ambiguity or did someone forget to remember how the film should end?

Other Contributions

Symmetry — the Forbidden Fruit of Picture Composition in Film

Louis Thonsgaard

The concept of symmetry sounds simple and familiar, yet symmetry is far more complex and difficult to apply in practice than one might think. The visual power of symmetry is so great that filmmakers often avoid or are advised against using symmetrical picture compositions. And this is not so odd, for if symmetry is used randomly and thoughtlessly, one runs the risk of creating visual disturbances in the narrative of the film. On the other hand, the filmmakers who master the art of symmetry wield a powerful visual aid capable of communicating complex meanings that cannot otherwise be conveyed visually.

For those interested in picture composition in film, either as filmmakers or analysts, here is an opportunity for taking a bite of the forbidden fruit of picture composition in film.

DEFINITIONS OF SYMMETRY

Symmetry refers to material being organized in such a way that it conveys a sense of unity through the repetition of one or more

elements. In film theory it is appropriate to speak of three kinds of symmetry in the two-dimensional picture.

Translatory Symmetry

Translatory symmetry is basically the repetition of an object based on the formula “1+1+...”. The displacement can vary in countless ways, as can the number of objects displaced. Translatory symmetry is fundamentally static and locked in a repetitive expression, yet by varying the concept it can be infused with a certain dynamic quality.



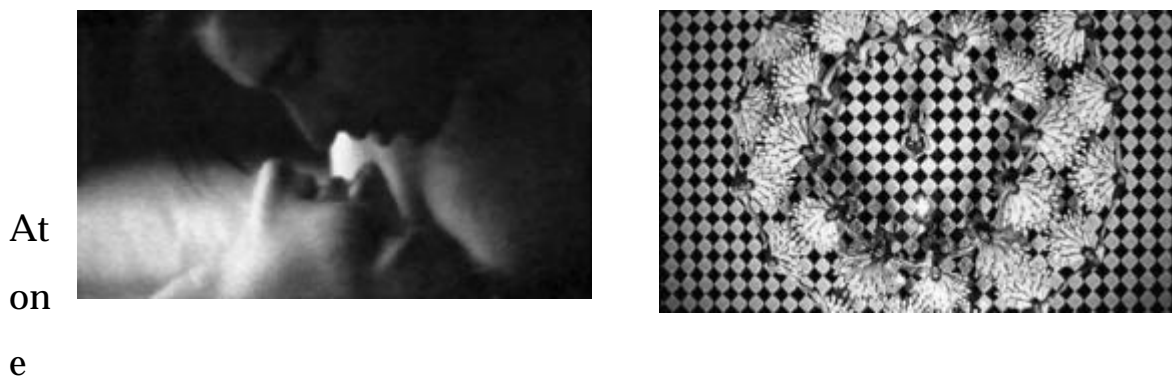
The composition of the picture from *Tombstone* (George Cosmatos, 1993), showing three sheriffs, is based on the principle of staggering an object (fig. 1). By means of non-linear

displacement, as well as of overlapping the objects, the objects in this example of translatory symmetry give the impression of a moving organism rather than appearing static. However, the expressive powers of translatory symmetry are not as evident as those of other forms of symmetry. Hence, for this reason among others, translatory symmetry does not have the same visual impact.

Rotational Symmetry

Rotational symmetry consists of similar, equidistant objects relating to a central point from equal distances. The objects in rotational

symmetry often create a visual centrifugal force around a marked or unmarked center. In rotational symmetry at least two objects relate to each other, such as for example Sailor and Lula in *Wild at Heart* (David Lynch, 1990; fig. 2).



point, depending on the number of objects, this becomes a kind of rotational symmetry where the impression of several isolated objects gradually disappears (fig. 3). As fig. 3 from *The Big Lebowski* (Joel Cohen, 1998) also shows, rotational symmetry does not conform well to the wide-screen format. The squarer the format of the medium, such as the 3/4 format of television, the better rotational symmetry will be able to develop without having to be trimmed. This is clearly one of the reasons rotational symmetry is rarely used in film.

Axial Symmetry (also called Bilateral or Mirror Symmetry)

Axial symmetry refers to the popular definition of symmetry as *mirroring in respect to an axis*. Axial symmetry primarily differs from other kinds of symmetry by containing objects that mirror each other.

Furthermore, the mirroring objects relate to each other across a given axis that is either marked or unmarked.

The axial symmetric picture consists of two mirroring parts which start out by counterbalancing each other compositionally, thus often creating compositions that are statically in balance. Yet as a closer look at axial symmetry will show, the concept has various expressive possibilities. The example from *Star Wars — Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983), showing the Emperor on his throne, demonstrates the manner in which a traditional understanding of axial symmetry can involve a complex mirroring space, transferring it to a person placed in the axis of symmetry (fig. 4).



The wide-screen format of film is well suited to axial symmetry, as it provides ample room for the mirroring parts when the axis is placed vertically in the center of the

picture. When it comes to film, axial symmetry is the most interesting and widely used form of symmetry; thus, when mentioned below symmetry refers to axial symmetry.

SYMMETRY/ASYMMETRY

A picture composition that is not symmetrical is by definition asymmetrical. This is a logical deduction that functions theoretically.

Yet how much of a deviation from total symmetry is acceptable in a composition before it must be termed asymmetrical? Ten percent or twenty percent or...?

No symmetries outside of exact science are totally symmetrical, which is of course also true for picture compositions in film. Offhand, this appears to be a problem, and it may well be one, but it can also be a strength: it is often the deviation from ideal symmetry that makes a composition interesting. It adds the possibility for artistic expression to the composition, which is not usually associated with symmetry. A basic observation may be phrased thus:

If a composition borders on being asymmetrical, yet can still be defined as symmetrical, it possesses other visual qualities than it would if it were completely symmetrical.

Filmmakers have the possibility of using different forms of axial symmetry to articulate different visual expressions.

In an attempt to locate the border between symmetry and asymmetry, I will now provide a number of examples illustrating borderline or near-borderline cases. In film, one of the most frequent forms of composition, often on the verge of being symmetrical, is a frontal medium close shot of a character. This is a compositional form appearing in almost all films with slight variations – the camera angle may be a little off, the person might be moving asymmetrically, or the background may not be particularly symmetrical, etc. – often leading

to the conclusion that the composition is not symmetrical. In order to define such a composition as symmetrical a number of mirroring elements are necessary, either on the person or in the background, as well as a minimum of asymmetrical disturbance.



The picture of Wyatt Earp from *Tombstone* (1993), fig. 5, is an example of a composition that can only just be defined as symmetrical, even if the person's body is slightly angled towards the spectator and it is only possible to see one arm, for his face is easily seen *en face* and there are no background elements disturbing his dominance of the picture composition. But the decisive element is his hat, the outline of which is very dominant, and which visual-

ly interacts with his mustache. The dominance of the hat in the picture composition is so decisive that if the hat were removed, the composition would become asymmetrical. To demonstrate this claim I have manipulated the picture and attempted to reconstruct the actor's head as it might have looked without his hat (fig. 6). Without the hat I find that the symmetry is weakened so much that the remaining

symmetrical elements are not adequate to define the composition as symmetrical.

The placement of the symmetry axis in the picture is also significant for the question of whether the composition is symmetrical, as well as for the expression of the composition. I have illustrated this by manipulating the picture yet again (fig. 7). When the mirroring axis is removed from the geometrical center of the picture, the composition changes radically and the picture becomes asymmetrical. This picture already bordered on being asymmetrally composed, yet even for very symmetrical compositions the camera does not have to be moved far before the compositions must be described as asymmetrical.

The following example from *Star Wars – Return of the Jedi* (1983) shows a composition apparently full of symmetrical elements but that must be defined as asymmetrical (fig. 8). The picture shows a pilot in a fighter plane on his way to attack the Empire. The cockpit is symmetrical, as are the pilot and especially his headgear. Yet because the pilot turns his head he upsets the symmetry. All attention is drawn towards the left side of the picture, and the distorted symmetry around the pilot stands out against the cockpit, which is symmetrical in relation to the framing of the picture, but not in relation to the rest of the composition. Hence, there appear to be two axes of symmetry in the same picture, and as they are not coordinated, and the most significant one is distorted, the totality of the picture lacks symmetry.

If the pilot had been facing straight into the camera, this composition would have been very symmetrical. Instead the composition is out of balance, and this illustrates how little it takes to upset or disturb a symmetrical situation.

Is this pilot capable of being the wedge of the attack that he is supposed to be?

The picture composition suggests something else, thus heightening the tension.



An example from *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) shows another composition at the borderline between symmetry and asymmetry (fig. 9). There is obviously a smaller part of the picture, around the table, which is symmetrically composed of several elements – the two duelists with headbands, the arms of the referee, and his placement in the axis of symmetry marked by his tie. The rest of the picture consists of an asymmetrical gray mass, uncontrolled by the symmetrical elements. The symmetrical composition simply constitutes too small a part of the picture for us to call it symmetrical. If the symmetrical elements had been placed in the central axis, they would

still have controlled only part of the composition, but because the symmetrical elements would then have controlled the most significant area, the center of the picture, the picture could have been described as vaguely symmetrical.

Actually, the composition reflects Nicky's situation exactly. In mental chaos after being tortured during his previous imprisonment, the only thing he can deal with is Russian roulette, which creates a kind of structure in his life. In this sense, the composition functions optimally, creating a weak, distorted symmetry in asymmetrical chaos.

Even if only details of a composition are symmetrical and the picture thus must be considered asymmetrical, the symmetrical elements can be so strong that they add significantly to the meaning of the picture composition. Yet the main rule must be as follows:

Whether the composition of a picture can be described as symmetrical depends on whether the overall structure can be considered symmetrical.

In a qualified discussion on symmetry and asymmetry, it is important not to disparage an asymmetrical composition. In film, the visual expression of the pictures should preferably be in accordance with the action of the film, and this makes asymmetrical compositions the primary component of a film's visual agenda.

ADVICE ON THE USE OF SYMMETRY

The following are a number of approaches to symmetry in film. They are formulated as advice to filmmakers, but should hopefully be just as interesting for other people interested in film.

Symmetry is a very obvious form of composition, which of course offers opportunities but at the same time can cause a situation to seem artificial, stilted, and thus shatter the illusion of the fiction. This is possibly the reason that a lot of filmmakers try to avoid symmetry. If this is a concern I think that a sophisticated use of symmetry could circumvent such problems. And whatever the approach, my advice is as follows:

Only use symmetry to a limited extent, and in every single case consider whether giving this exact shot extra visual strength will fit into the overall narrative and/or the specific situation.

Rather than accentuating insignificant events in the film, it is important to emphasize those that are important at the right time. In addition it is important to remember that like any other filmic device the effect of symmetry is weakened by frequent use.

a) Important characters

Symmetrical compositions focus the attention on characters appearing in them, and hence it is important to consider who should appear in them.

Only characters who are significant to the narrative of the film should be placed in the axis of symmetry.

Less significant characters can appear as mirroring objects; however, if they do not refer to a significant character in the axis of symmetry this should be carefully considered. To place an insignificant character in the axis of symmetry can be disastrous for the spectator's perception of the scene, which is why this is hardly ever done.

b) Basic use

Personal enlightenment

Symmetry can be useful as a visual marker of important events in the narrative of a film, emphasizing the shots that need to be given attention — for example, if one of the main characters of the film gains new insight and thus makes a choice that will be decisive for the further development of the narrative.

In connection with a personal enlightenment, which may be considered a significant moment in film narrative, it is possible to focus more attention on this shot by using symmetry.

In *Young Guns II* (Geoff Murphy, 1990) the camera moves in close to Pat Garret's face when he decides to betray Billy the Kid. The movement starts asymmetrically, but becomes symmetrical, and the second Pat Garret's face is seen entirely symmetrically the shot dissolves into a

shot of Billy; thus the symmetry is also used to show what Pat Garret is thinking and what he has decided to do.

Powerful characters

The visual control of the picture created by symmetry can be conveyed to the characters of the people depicted. Hence it is natural to take advantage of symmetry in certain situations.

Symmetry is often used to convey the high-status position of characters with, for instance, considerable power or physical strength.

Although this use of symmetry may be tempting to apply often in a film, it is not advisable.

Community

Since symmetry basically consists of several parts combined into a whole, it is natural to apply symmetry in situations where characters participate in some kind of community, one that may also contain animosity.

Characters sharing some sort of community may figure as the mirroring objects in symmetrical compositions.

This use of symmetry may be narratively expedient, and may be varied by placing an extra person in the axis of symmetry, thus creating an internal power structure between the involved characters.

Death

Characters or objects that can be connected to either conditions or actions in the symmetrically organized space of the Christian church are often placed in symmetrical picture compositions. Especially in connection with death, the use of symmetry is so extensive that spectators find symmetrical compositions natural, though usually this is unconscious.

Symmetrical compositions are often applied in scenes concerning death.

As the simplest form of symmetry can express peace, stability and eternity, it is natural to apply symmetry in these situations. Furthermore, this use has evolved so much that we now often see dying characters in symmetries with diagonal axes. The acceptance or expectation of symmetry in connection with death is so great that it may be described as one of the most developed areas in the creative use of symmetry, as will be illustrated by an example in the next section.

c) Advanced use

Transformation

Some of the most exciting symmetries in film are created when the composition of a shot is transformed from being asymmetrical to being symmetrical, or from being symmetrical to being



Fig. 10 Barbara — one shot

asymmetrical. When symmetry is applied this way, the possibilities for its use in respect to narrative transformations becomes obvious, as is evident in, for example, *Barbara* (Niels Malmros, 1997; fig. 10). When the civil servant Niels, who doesn't really seem like an official, has to have an important conversation with Andreas, he puts on his wig to indicate his authority. Visually, his putting on the wig creates a number of symmetrical variations in this shot, all of which point to Niels's transformation — from being a kind and natural man in asymmetrical compositions to at least attempting to appear the somber civil servant, tough and rigid of attitude. To be exact, no clear symmetries are used in this shot since the camera angle is not frontal, yet there seems to be a development from clear asymmetry to a number of symmetrical variations.

Asymmetrical symmetry

There are a number of symmetrical compositions that only occur in moving pictures. They are created by frames that may have symmetrical elements but that would not be described as symmetrical if viewed separately. These shots still give a symmetrical impression because the objects move over time, which may give the shot a visual quality that the separate frames do not contain.

In *Heat* (Michael Mann, 1995), after lengthy deliberation the main character Neil decides to take vengeance on the traitor Waingro. The camera follows Neil as he walks down a hotel corridor, which he cor-

responds to symmetrically, while other characters create disorder and asymmetry as they run past him and the camera in the opposite direction. In a film that all but avoids symmetrical compositions, this shot has a very powerful effect, charismatically emphasizing Neil's strength, decisiveness and control.

Prediction

An interesting example of the foreshadowing of a death is found in *Europa* (Lars von Trier, 1991), in which the lack of spirit and authority of Max Hartmann, the CEO of the train company, becomes obvious (fig. 11). The shot starts asymmetrically until Leopold sits down with Katharina, at which point they form the mirroring sides in a weak symmetry, with the door closing behind them as the axis of symmetry. As soon as the symmetry has been established the camera moves up along the axis of symmetry. Simultaneously, the CEO approaches from the left and stops outside the frame. In the one-tenth of a second before the door opens, the shadow of the CEO falls on the door opening/axis of symmetry in perfect symmetry. However, the doors are opened, and the shadow of the CEO and the symmetry completely disappear.



Fig.11 Europa – one shot

The frail condition of the CEO is indicated in this shot – he is now so weak that he cannot function as the axis in a symmetrical composition. Only his shadow can do so, but it is dissolved immediately. He commits suicide shortly thereafter.

Even if symmetries are often broken in film to indicate a lack of power or balance, it is rare to see compositions that predict the events of the narrative and thereby provide the attentive spectator with an extra experience.

d) Planning

The absence of symmetry

Each time symmetry is applied there will be asymmetry for a while up to the symmetrical shot – unless it is a matter of a series of symmetrical shots, which is very rare.

Because symmetry is a distinctive form of composition that draws attention to itself, the absence of symmetry helps intensify the visual effect and thus also the viewer's focus of attention when the symmetrical composition is finally applied. The longer the absence of symmetry, the greater an effect can be created. In *Ben Hur* (William Wyler, 1959) there is a forty-five minute break in the use of symmetry until the cross of Christ is suddenly erected in the picture's axis of symmetry.

Be prepared

Before planning to shoot a symmetrical composition one should be aware that it is probably not possible to cut back to this shot in the same scene without giving the impression of having failed to take enough shots during the shooting. The symmetrical shot is not to be considered a regular shot from which one can cut back and forth. It draws too much attention to itself for that.

A symmetrical shot where neither camera nor objects move does not lend itself to being used more than once in the editing of a scene.

There are however a few exceptions to this rule. A scene may for example be introduced and concluded with the same shot. Furthermore, the shot may appear several times if it is part of a series of symmetrical shots, but it will function best if there is a change in the visual expression of the symmetrical composition.

Thus, it is important to plan symmetrical compositions carefully, and preferably one should film the situation from an asymmetrical angle if the possibility of cutting back to this shot is to remain open.

PROPOSED METHOD

Hopefully, the review of symmetry in this article has given some insight into the complexity and uses of symmetry in film production.

Symmetry provides a good starting point for understanding how much influence such a relatively ignored area as picture composition can have on an audience's perception of a film.

The above may be considered a proposal for a method by which the registration (in analysis) or planning (in production) of symmetrical foci can help provide insight into the picture composition of a film, a task that might otherwise be impossible.

Inasmuch as the above discussion is by no means exhaustive, the guidelines proposed here should be considered as a starter kit for the understanding of symmetry.

Translation by Susanne Stranddorf

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An interview with Henning Bendtsen

On life in films and working with Carl Th. Dreyer

Nikolaj B. Feifer

Henning Bendtsen, born in Copenhagen in 1925, has shot about 90 shorts and 57 feature length films, including Carl Th. Dreyer's *Ordet* and *Gertrud*, and Lars von Trier's *Europa*. His many awards include two "Bodil" statuettes and a "Robert." Co-founder of the Danish Cinematographers' Society in 1954, he is now retired and lives in Rødovre.

How did you first get started in cinematography?

From the time I was a child, I wanted to be a cinematographer. This wasn't at all my family's idea. My father was an associate professor of German, and when I told him I wanted to go into filmmaking, he didn't understand at all, having been to the cinema himself only once or twice.

There was no need to waste time on going to high school, because I knew what I wanted. When I told my father, he

agreed, but on one condition: that I get some sort of diploma, certifying what I had learned. The only trouble was that there wasn't any education in cinematography as such, so instead I went to a photo school to learn the basics of the craft... I must have been around 15 or 16 at the time.

The theoretical teaching was okay, but I didn't learn much of a practical nature during my apprenticeship with a "practice company." Their biggest account was with a plumbing manufacturer, so the pictures I got to shoot weren't very challenging [...] We spent most of our days shooting toilets, morning and afternoon. Not very exciting.

So I had to make my own darkroom at home. We had a big apartment, and that's where I learned for example how to make portraits, which I obviously couldn't learn at the practice company.

I was also very active in a photographic society, where I attended lectures and slide shows. They had their own darkroom, and since we really wanted to learn, wanted to be the best, we often stayed there all night, experimenting with our cameras and developing our pictures. Then when dawn came, we just went straight to work at the practice company.

I've often thought about why it was that I wanted to become a cinematographer, and not learn one of the many other jobs in the film industry. But composing pictures just seemed to be what I wanted more than anything else; an urge I was born

with... Somebody must have chosen it for me. And for a reason. It's the only thing I ever wanted, and that's why I'm so very happy and satisfied today, because I've succeeded in this.

I never dreamt that all these prizes existed. But it was the milieu, the people (that attracted me). No two assignments are alike, even if the shoot takes place in the same studio. There are new challenges every day, new actors and new scenes. Everything is always new, and that's what I found so fascinating.

What's the first thing you consider when you start lighting a set?

The key light, definitely, always the key light. I think it's important, well I'd say half my job is creating a calmness and a balance in the picture.

The simplest to do is a portrait, but what's exciting about shooting movies is that much like an architect, you can get to design a space where people live.

I've often tried shooting a scene where the dialogue isn't what counts the most, and then you have to establish the environment, say the living room, very precisely. Because all rooms tell the story of whoever lives there, what kind of family it is. And then you have to find the things that fascinate you, and try to emphasize them. I find that very important, and I enjoy that when I occasionally see a movie now. In a feature length film, it isn't always the dialogue that holds our interest.

I find it pleasing when the room helps everything come alive, and helps your perception of the people there.

With both the ceiling and the fourth wall always missing on a film set, (the challenge is) to find the things to emphasize with what's left, without allowing these things to becoming to domineering, to find a balance between the people and the room.

Do you still find that cinematographers today can create rooms like that?

Oh yes, definitely. They're very good. Just think about the equipment we had back then. Shot in black and white, and with extreme amounts of light, due to the slow film stock. Sometimes we had to use ten times the amount of light used today to light a room.

They can even shoot a scene today with a street lamp as the only source of light. Totally unthinkable when I started out.

When did you first meet Carl Th. Dreyer?

What happened was that Dreyer was going to make *Ordet* (*The Word*), which was produced in 1954, although it is listed as a 1955 production. And I think that by that time, I was working

at Palladium¹ and had been Director of Photography on three or four movies, and was not that experienced.

And, well I don't know how it came about, but when it was announced that Dreyer was going to produce *Ordet* at Palladium, there was talk of using me, at least that's what Dreyer was offered. However, another cinematographer, Jørgen Myttschou, was also asked if he would be interested, if Dreyer should ask for him. It ended up with an agreement that Jørgen and I should each do a test for Dreyer, who would pick one of us to shoot the movie.

Meanwhile, Palladium got in touch with an American company and got a deal to produce the first Danish feature in color. I was picked to shoot that that, *Age of Tomorrow* (1954), which ended up running only two days in the movie theatres. That, of course, was a big challenge for me. I was only around 27 or 28 at the time. For instance we couldn't even develop color film in Denmark in those days, so every night the new footage we took was flown to England. Each day we worked until very late, and afterwards I stayed to make sure that the reels of film were properly packed for the plane trip.

I was still supposed to do the test for Dreyer but due to the immense workload of the color feature, I had to say to Palladium that I didn't see how I could possibly do any kind of

¹ Danish film production company founded in 1919, and with studio facilities in Hellerup, north of Copenhagen, until 1970. The company produced its last picture in 1976.

test. I was supposed to do the test at night, and for two or three nights Dreyer waited up for me to finish the packaging of the undeveloped reels, but each time I had to say I couldn't go through with the test.

Although I had given up on it, my contract at Palladium called for me to start right away on a new feature after the present one was finished, so I ended up having to shoot *Ordet* anyway, because it was their next film.

We started shooting, but after the first couple days I got extremely sick and was taken to the hospital with appendicitis. They operated during the night and the next day Dreyer sent over flowers. He said he'd seen the rushes and that he was very pleased.

We became very close very quickly, bonding very fast. I had a car back then, and each morning I picked Dreyer up in Hellerup where he lived. He didn't have a car, was very poor you know. He hadn't worked much since his return from France. Made *Vredens Dag/Day of Wrath* (1943) and a single short, but otherwise nothing.²

So I always picked him up, and during our trips we talked about his work in France, and his career in general.

After the filming was over, he said that he wanted to show his appreciation to me for a very successful collaboration. He had some very fine shoes, a bit small for him, and being the very shy

² Dreyer had actually made seven shorts, mostly documentaries, and an additional feature besides *Day of Wrath*, called *Two People* (Sweden, 1945).

man that he was, he didn't care to go back to the store with them. So he gave them to me, these very expensive Bally shoes, and that was in a way the confirmation of our friendship, you might say.

*What was it like shooting Gertrud*³?

I think it was Technicolor that wanted Dreyer to make *Gertrud* at Palladium, to see if he had gotten too old. He must have been around 75, but he didn't seem old to me; seemed very fresh actually.

When we shot *Ordet*, Dreyer was very impressed with my tracking shots, with how long I could make them last. I think for Dreyer it was a very interesting technical development, the whole dolly track thing, because if you compare *Ordet* or *Gertrud* with for example *Joan of Arc*, you realize that that picture consists almost entirely of close ups.

So in *Gertrud*, we used a lot of tracking shots. Because the script wasn't divided into scenes, but more like one unbroken string of action... In that respect, I remember very clearly how I often had to politely make him aware that we were running out of film, after shooting for 11 minutes which was the maximum reel length.

But it was a very nice way of working... because it meant we would do fewer takes and as a result could usually finish earlier than expected. So we only did one take per day. We rehearsed in

the morning, and then everybody took a lunch break, after which we could come back and finish shooting. Even the producer was happy because we used considerably less film than usual.

While filming *Gertrud*, there was a big problem one time with a tracking shot. We had to do a long take, and because of all the various positions from which the actors were supposed to say their lines, I couldn't put the fill light anywhere. The fill light is your secondary light, the light you use to soften up the edges created by the key light. Now I'd been in France and remembered how they shot it down there, or maybe I could tell by watching French movies. They simply put this 2 kw light on top of the camera, which was possible because the camera was in a square case.⁴ Then the gaffer⁵ would have a resistance device to regulate the brightness of the light, depending on how far from the lens the actors would be. That was one hell of a job, because sometimes we would have as many as 20 or 30 camera positions in one take, so he would have to be very accurate.

Oh, and after we finished shooting *Gertrud*, Dreyer came up to me again and said almost the same thing he had when we

³ Shot in 1964, this was to be Dreyer's last film. He died on 20 March 1968 in Copenhagen.

⁴ Also known as a blimp. "A soundproof housing in which a camera is placed to prevent the noise of its mechanism from being picked up by the microphone during sound recording." *The Film Encyclopedia*, Ephraim Katz (Harper Perennial, 1997).

⁵ Chief electrician.

finished *Ordet*. He had this very fine tuxedo, and he had never really worn it. So if I could use it, it was mine to have.⁶

How do you feel about the Danish cinema of today?

Well this will be a very short reply, because I don't really keep up with the new work. It's not at all because of the Danish films, I just don't really feel like seeing movies anymore. Maybe it's because I never wanted to direct, because I always knew that cinematography was my field.

Only rarely do I go to the movies. The last film I saw was *En Kort En Lang* (*Shake It*, 2001). A nice picture, but it didn't much appeal to me. But it's very exciting that people have started going to the movies again. That boom is fantastic.

But I often go with my wife to the local mall, and it's not just to hold her hand. It's to look at faces, for the excitement of seeing the landscapes, the stories in them. That never stops being interesting.

This interview was conducted on March 17, 2002 at the home of Henning Bendtsen in Rødovre, outside Copenhagen.

⁶ Both the tuxedo and the Bally shoes now belong to Lars von Trier. They were given to him by Bendtsen as a recognition of their collaboration on *Epidemic* (1987) and *Europa* (1991). *Europa*/a.k.a. *Zentropa*, was the last feature on which Bendtsen worked as a cinematographer, and he retired shortly after its completion.

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