

tour of the courtyard by the camera "on its own." When the shades roll up, we know that what we see is being presented by a "subjectivity reduced to nothing else but what the instrument can record"; this is quite different from later viewing that are filtered through the perception of Jeffries. At such moments, the visible details of the courtyard correspond to what Banfield, following Bertrand Russell, calls *sensibilia*: "those objects which have the same metaphysical and physical status as sense-data, without necessarily being data to any mind." That is, to any mind *inside* the fiction: they are, of course, data to the real audience in the movie theater, though data perceived at second hand. They are not seen or heard but rather overseen and overheard, as the "impressions" of an impersonal narrative agency. These images (Banfield might contend) would still exist even if no one had bought a ticket and the projectionist had gone out for a smoke: "Each gathering of sensibilia, as on the ground glass of the telescope, represents . . . a perspective definable independent of whether or not it is given to any observer."³⁶

Banfield's concern is literary, but she finds in the work of Gilles Deleuze a similar attitude concerning film. Deleuze reminds us that Dziga Vertov's "kino-eye" is not limited as a human eye is; it is ubiquitous, the product as much of montage as of cinematography. And its powers are, to use Banfield's terms, "private and subjective," yet "impersonal." Deleuze would argue that it is precisely the objectivity of the cinematic narrator that requires us to "construct," rather than just to "see," since what the kino-eye presents us with is a construction of views that no human eye *could* see.³⁷

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³⁶Banfield, "Describing the Unobserved," pp. 266-67.

³⁷Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma I: L'image mouvement* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), p. 117.

67.

KRISTIN THOMPSON THE CONCEPT OF CINEMATIC EXCESS

"No, no, I'll take no less, than all in full excess."

HANDEL's *Semele*

"Analytically there is something ridiculous about it."

ROLAND BARTHES¹

Recently certain writers have moved away from the traditional concept of criticism as an activity designed purely to explain the narratively functional aspects of the work. Following essentially, I believe, in the direction opened by the Russian Formalists, these critics have suggested that films can be seen as a struggle of opposing forces. Some of these forces strive to unify the work, to hold it together sufficiently that we may perceive and follow its structures. Outside any such structures lie those aspects of the work which are not contained by its unifying forces—the "excess." The term is used by Stephen Heath in his essay "Film and System: Terms of Analysis"; there he asserts:

Just as narrative never exhausts the image, homogeneity is always an *effect* of the film and not the filmic system, which is precisely the production of that homogeneity. Homogeneity is haunted by the material practice it represses and the tropes of that repression, the forms of continuity, provoke within the texture of the film the figures—the edging, the margin—of the loss by which it moves; permanent battle for the resolution of that loss on which, however, it structurally depends, mediation between image and discourse, narrative can never contain the whole film which permanently exceeds its fictions. "Filmic system," therefore, always means at least this: the "system" of the film in so far as the film is the organization of a homogeneity *and* the material outside inscribed in the operation of that organization as its contradiction.²

"Homogeneity" is here the unifying effect I have mentioned. Heath suggests that the material of the image in film creates a play which goes beyond this unity. A film depends on materiality for its existence; out of image and sound it creates its structures, but it can never make all the physical elements of the film part of its set of

¹Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," trans. Richard Howard, *Artforum* (January 1973), 11(5):47.

²Stephen Heath, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Pt. I," *Screen* (Spring 1975), 16(1):100.

smooth perceptual cues. The critic concentrates neither wholly upon the coherent elements nor wholly upon the excess; he/she deals with the tensions between them. I am using the Russian Formalist definition of narrative as an interplay between plot and story; plot is the actual presentation of events in the film, while story is the mental reconstruction by the spectator of these events in their "real," chronological order (partly on the basis of codes of cause and effect). Heath is talking about the classical Hollywood film, which typically strives to minimize excess by a thoroughgoing motivation. Other films outside this tradition do not always try to provide an apparent motivation for everything in the film, and thus they leave their potentially excessive elements more noticeable.

Roland Barthes' essay "The Third Meaning" ("Le Troisième sens") lays out a similar idea that the materiality of the image goes beyond the narrative structures of unity in a film. The choice of the term "meaning" is a misleading one, since these elements of the work are precisely those which do not participate in the creation of narrative or symbolic meaning; Barthes himself calls it "the obtuse meaning," and says: "it does not even indicate an *elsewhere* of meaning . . . it rather frustrates meaning—subverting not the content but the entire practice of meaning."³ For this reason I prefer to use Heath's term, "excess," rather than Barthes'.

But Barthes is ultimately clearer as to what he considers part of this filmic excess. Heath's analysis of *Touch of Evil* provides examples that tend to confuse his term rather than clarify it. He calls the scenes in Tanya's place in that film excess because they "have no narrative function,"⁴ even though this is clearly not the case. These scenes provide *relatively* little casual material to forward the proairetic, in comparison with the other scenes of the film. They do, however, contain a considerable amount of semic material about Hank Quinlan and hence provide motivation for his behavior in the rest of the film; Tanya's place provides the connection between Quinlan and Menzies that allows the latter to engage Quinlan in the final incriminating conversation. These are not the only narrative functions these scenes play, but they will serve to indicate that Heath has chosen a rather easy way out of the problem by dismissing whole scenes as excess when they are simply different from more casually dense portions of the narrative. Heath also resorts to a psychoanalytic explanation for excess, indicating that it is the material which must be repressed by the film; see, for example, his discussion of the character of the "night man" as a figure of excess.⁵ But none of this comes to terms with Heath's own claim (possibly derived from Barthes) that the excess arises from the conflict between the *materiality* of a film and the unifying structures within it. Heath, in fact, never analyzes a scene into its material and structural components to find examples of excess.

Barthes' entire essay, on the other hand, is based specifically on the material aspects of film as the source of its excess. He in fact analyzes only still photographs, but his conclusions are applicable to film (and also to the material qualities of the film's sound, which Barthes ignores). At one point, Barthes claims that excess does not weaken the meaning of the structures it accompanies: "if the signification is ex-

ceeded by the obtuse meaning, it is not thereby denied or blurred."⁶ This seems doubtful, however. Presumably the only way excess can fail to affect meaning is if the viewer does not notice it; this is a matter of training and background. Certainly a steady and exclusive diet of classical narrative cinema seems to accustom people to ignoring the material aspects of the artwork, since these are usually so thoroughly motivated as to be unobtrusive. But the minute a viewer begins to notice style for its own sake or watch works which do not provide such thorough motivation, excess comes forward and must affect narrative meaning. Style is the use of repeated techniques which become *characteristic* of the work; these techniques are foregrounded so that the spectator will notice them and create connections between their individual uses. Excess does not equal style, but the two are closely linked because they both involve the material aspects of the film. Excess forms no specific patterns which we could say are characteristic of the work. But the formal organization provided by style does not exhaust the material of the filmic techniques, and a spectator's attention to style might well lead to a noticing of excess as well. Elsewhere Barthes acknowledges that his "obtuse meaning" does indeed affect our perception of meaning in a distractive way; speaking of certain qualities of photographic image, he asks, "are they not a kind of blunting of a too-obvious meaning, a too-violent meaning? . . . do they not cause my reading to skid?"⁷ This image of a skidding perception is interesting, because it is not far from the kinds of metaphors the Russian Formalists chose to describe the effects of delaying devices in a narrative, such as "staircase construction." In each case, there is an attempt to describe a movement away from a direct progression through an "economical" structure. Barthes also speaks of the obtuse meaning as separate from the diegesis of the film; referring to a frame enlargement from *Ivan the Terrible*, he says:

The obtuse meaning is clearly counternarrative itself. Diffused, reversible, caught up in its own time, it can, if one follows it, establish only another script that is distinct from the shots, sequences, and syntagmas. . . . Imagine "following" not Euphrosinia's machinations, nor even the character (as a diegetic entity or as a symbolic figure), nor even, further, the countenance of the Wicked Mother, but only, in this countenance, that grimace, that black veil, the heavy, ugly dullness of that skin. You will have another temporality, neither diegetic nor oneiric, you will have another film.⁸

Probably no one ever watches *only* these nondiegetic aspects of the image through an entire film. Nevertheless, they are constantly present, a whole "film" existing in some sense alongside the narrative film we tend to think of ourselves as watching.

The idea that the critic's job might include the pointing-out of this excess may startle some. But we have been looking at the neat aspects of artworks so long that we may forget their disturbing, rough parts. As Barthes says, "The *present* problem is not to destroy the narrative, but to subvert it."⁹ For the critic, this means the realization that he/she needs to talk about those aspects of the work that are usually ignored because they don't fit into a tight analyses.

³Barthes, "The Third Meaning," p. 49.

⁴Heath, "Film and System," p. 67.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

⁶Barthes, "The Third Meaning," p. 47.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 50. Italics in original.

The concept of excess need not be used only in semiotic, structuralist, or post-structuralist analyses. It fits into a critical approach based on Russian Formalism as well. For, while the Formalists did not come up with the idea of excess as such, they did move in a direction that implied it. When Viktor Shklovski says, "the language of poetry is not a comprehensive language, but a semi-comprehensible one,"¹⁰ we must assume that the incomprehensible elements are so because they do not fit neatly into the unified relationships in the work; they must be explained as tending toward excess. Shklovski also makes a distinction between "material" and "form"; in speaking of music he says, "We have found, not form and content, but rather material and form, i.e., sounds and the disposition of sounds."¹¹ The process of "disposition" of materials into structures does not eliminate their original materiality. Thus the Formalists seem to have at least approached the realization that excessive elements provide a large range of possibilities for the roughening of form; the material provides a perceptual play by inviting the spectator to linger over devices longer than their structured function would seem to warrant.

Of course, no element in a work is strictly excessive to the degree that it has no connections to the other elements (except perhaps simple technical errors—the airplane in the sky of a biblical epic scene). As the Soviet filmmakers of the postrevolutionary period realized, simply to place two things together is to create a perception of them as related. This is one reason why excess is so difficult to talk about: most viewers are determined to find a necessary function for any element the critic singles out. For some reason, the claim that a device has *no* function beyond offering itself for perceptual play is disturbing to many people. Perhaps this tendency is cultural, stemming from the fact that art is so often spoken of as unified and as creating perfect order, beyond that possible in nature.

But if part of the difficulty of talking about excess stems from its novelty as a concept, the critic is also faced with the fact that excess tends to elude analysis. For example, take Barthes' description of Efrosinia given in the above quotation. That one *can* look at the visual figure in the images quite apart from her narrative function seems reasonably certain; we may go further and say with some confidence that one can perceive the visual figure even while following the narrative function it fills. But a discussion of the *qualities* of the visual figure at which we look seems doomed to a certain subjectivity. We may not agree that the texture of Efrosinia's skin has a "heavy, ugly dullness." The fact, however, that we can agree it has *some* texture opens the possibility of analysis. The critic and his/her reader must resist the learned tendency to try and find a narrative significance in every detail, or at least they must realize that a narrative function does not exhaust the material presence of that detail. Our conclusion must be that, just as every film contains a struggle of unifying and disunifying structures, so every stylistic element may serve at once to contribute to the narrative and to distract our perception from it.

¹⁰Viktor Shklovski, "The Resurrection of the World," trans. Richard Sherwood, *20th Century Studies* (December 1972), nos. 7–8, p. 46.

¹¹Viktor Shklovski, "Form and Material in Art," trans. Charles A. Moser and Patricia Blake, in *Dissonant Voices in Soviet Literature*, ed. Patricia Blake and Max Hayward (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 21.

Excess is not only counternarrative; it is also counterunity. To discuss it may be to invite the partial disintegration of a coherent reading. But on the other hand, pretending that a work is exhausted by its functioning structures robs it of much that is strange, unfamiliar, and striking about it. If the critic's task is at least in part to renew and expand the work's power to defamiliarize, one way to do this would be precisely to break up old perceptions of the work and to point up its more difficult aspects.

I shall follow Barthes' essay in drawing my examples from *Ivan the Terrible*. The act of "pointing" must be my principal tool here, since other means of analysis are designed for nonexcessive structures. (Barthes says in his essay, "I am not describing, I cannot manage that, I am merely designating a site.")¹² Analysis implies finding relationships between devices. Excessive elements do not form relationships, beyond those of coexistence. The Russian Formalists, however, give us a tool which may at least make the process of pointing somewhat systematic: motivation.¹³ Strong realistic or compositional motivation will tend to make excessive elements less noticeable; the perception of the narratively and stylistically significant will dominate. But at other times, a lack of these kinds of motivations may direct our attention to excess.

More precisely, excess implies a gap or lag in motivation. Even though the presence of a device may not be arbitrary, its motivation can never completely control our perception of the film as material object. To a large extent, the spectator's ability to notice excess is dependent upon his/her training in viewing films. The spectator who takes films to be simple copies of reality will probably tend to subsume the physicality of the image under a general category of verisimilitude; that shape on the screen looks as it does because "those things really look like that." Another spectator, trained to look at films as romantic expressions of the artist, might attempt to see every aspect of every shot as conveying "meaning," "personal vision," and the like; the image looks the way it does because that is how the artist saw the world. At the other extreme, the "art for art's sake" viewer—the "empty" formalist—will tend to ignore motivation in favor of a totally free play of the "aesthetic" elements. All these approaches tend to vitiate the tension in the work between unified and excessive elements. The current study attempts to suggest an alternative.

A film displays a struggle by the unifying structures to "contain" the diverse elements that make up its whole system. Motivation is the primary tool by which the work makes its own devices seem reasonable. At that point where motivation fails, excess begins. To see it, we need to stop assuming that artistic motivation creates complete unity (or that its failure to do so somehow constitutes a fault). There are at least four ways in which the material of the film exceeds motivation.

First, narrative function may justify the presence of a device, but it doesn't always motivate *the specific form that individual element will take*. Quite often, the device could vary considerably in form and still serve its function adequately. Perhaps its color is vital, but its shape could be different. With an infinite number of

¹²Barthes, "The Third Meaning," p. 48.

¹³Boris Tomashevski, "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 78–87.

points in space, we must assume that there is some range of camera placements which would frame the scene adequately to its function. In *Ivan the Terrible*, Ivan must be an impressive character, but his impressiveness could be created in many ways. The actual choices are relatively arbitrary: a pointed head, a musical theme, closeups with a crowd in deep focus, and so on.

Second, the medium of cinema is such that its devices exist through time. Motivation is insufficient to determine *how long* a device needs to be on the screen in order to serve its purpose. (Indeed, for different spectators, the requisite time is probably different.) We may notice a device immediately and understand its function, but it may then continue to be visible or audible for some time past this recognition. In this case, we may be inclined to study or contemplate it apart from its narrative or compositional function; such contemplation necessarily distracts from narrative progression. (In Russian Formalist terms, the perception of narrative progression involves the spectator's mental construction of a chronological set of story events "behind" the concrete presentation of plot action in the film.) On the other hand, the device may be more obscure and require a longer process of interpretation to make sense; how can motivation determine the length of time necessary for this perceptual activity? Noel Burch's concept of "legibility"¹⁴ provides a rough guide. A large number of items within a single space will require a greater duration for complete scanning than a smaller number of items. But this determination can only be relative; the specific length must always be arbitrary to a certain degree. Repeated viewings of a film are likely to increase the excessive potentials of a scene's components; as we become familiar with the narrative (or other principle of progression), the innate interest of the composition, the visual aspects of the decor, or the structure of the musical accompaniment, may begin to come forward and capture more of our attention. The legibility has shifted for us; we now can simply *recognize* the unifying narrative elements, rather than having to perceive them for the first time. As a result, we now have time to contemplate the excessive aspects. The function of the material elements of the film is accomplished, but their perceptual interest is by no means exhausted in the process.

Third, a single bit of narrative motivation seems to be capable of functioning almost indefinitely. It may justify many devices which have virtually the same connotation, even though they may vary greatly in form. Thus Ivan's basic function in *Ivan the Terrible* is to formulate and embody the goal of unifying Russia. This symbolic position motivates the extremely redundant expression of Ivan's scenes in every cinematic channel; the film must confirm and reconfirm Ivan's adequacy to the goal he represents. This redundancy does not advance the narrative in every case; rather it tends to expand the narrative "vertically." After a point, the repeated use of multiple devices to serve similar functions tends to minimize the importance of their narrative implications; instead, they become foregrounded primarily through their own innate interest.

Fourth and last, a single motivation may serve to justify a device which is then repeated and varied many times. By this repetition, the device may far outweigh its original motivation and take on an importance greater than its narrative or compo-

sitional function would seem to warrant. This kind of excess is extremely common in *Ivan*. The introduction of the bird motif, for example, is realistically motivated; a couple of the objects in the coronation ceremony have historically authentic bird emblems on them (the scepter, the little rug on the dias). But later the birds become less integral to the action at hand. They have associations, but these associations are relatively arbitrary; the birds on the wall behind Ivan's throne during his argument with Philip, for example, have minimal narrative connotations. We cannot say that the various instances of birds in the film are unmotivated, for they all relate to each other and hence form a unified structure. But they do draw attention to themselves far beyond their importance in the functioning of the narrative.

With these characteristics of excess in mind, let us look at some examples from *Ivan*. Some of these may seem trivial; they will certainly not always be the kind of thing the critic ordinarily points out. But taken together, they should suggest the wealth of excessive details which make the film a rich perceptual field.

Ivan's excess becomes readily apparent if we compare it with a more standardized usage like that of the classical Hollywood cinema. One critic whose approach is largely tied to the classical Hollywood narrative style, Pauline Kael, finds *Ivan* difficult to enjoy; while she admits its grandeur, she says, "we may stare at it in a kind of outrage. True, every frame looks great—it's a brilliant collection of stills—but as a movie, it's static, grandiose, and frequently ludicrous . . ."¹⁵ In our terms, this "outrage" is in part the rejection of excess, the reluctance to consider the uneconomical or unjustified. *Ivan*, with its broken rhythms of acting, its systematic mismatches of mise-en-scène at cuts, and its constant heightening of stylistic devices, stands in contrast to the Hollywood cinema. Here style becomes foregrounded to an unusual degree, necessarily calling attention to the material of the film.

The composition of visual elements within the frame may become a rich source of excess. Striking arrangements abound in *Ivan*; they become particularly prominent because Eisenstein uses so many static or nearly static shots to explore space and further the narrative. The long shots of Ivan's tent on the hill at Kazan would be an example of this; the arrangement of curved lines of soldiers and a group of banners provide a striking composition in which little movement occurs (part 1, 281–82).¹⁶ The series of shots of boyars and ambassadors in the courtyard at the beginning of the illness sequence in part 1 invites our attention to small shifts of space, to faces and textures of fur and brocade, to the changing visual overtone of the cathedral icon, and to the rhythmic chiming of the various bells. In the opening coronation scene, three bald European ambassadors speak and shake their heads, but of at least equal interest is the pattern formed by their heads in the center of three large white ruffs (1, 9).

The deep focus shots in the Alexandrov sequence of part I place Ivan in closeup with the crowd on the snow-covered plain beyond. In each shot, Ivan moves his head—up in the first, down in the second (796, 800). These head movements are unmotivated; they seem to exist only to play on shifting graphic relationships be-

¹⁵Pauline Kael, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (Boston: Little Brown, 1968), p. 288.

¹⁶Shot numbers are as given in Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

¹⁴Noel Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 52.

tween Ivan's profile and the curved shape of the crowd beyond, the amazing juxtapositions of space and volume, the texture of Ivan's hair and skin against the whiteness, and the vertical montage relations of sound and image.

The four shots of Ivan's return to Moscow in part 2 also play on formal values. Since all four shots show the same basic action—the galloping of the procession of Oprichniki and coach—we must conclude that one shot would convey as much narrative information as four (or six or eight). Formal interest rests in the rhythm of the fast music in conjunction with the swift movement and in the small shifts of the church spire in the background at the cuts. Shot 99 (the second of the segment) has almost the same setup as shot 98. Shot 100 shifts to a longer view of the whole scene, but shot 101 again has almost the same framing. These small changes (a violation of Hollywood's "30° rule" that every shot should be distinctly different from its neighbors in order to clearly motivate the cut) create variations that add nothing except as perceptual material.

The textures, colors, and shapes of the costumes are frequent sites for excess in *Ivan*. For example, the glitter of light on the costumes of Vladimir and Efrosinia in the beaver lullaby scene becomes very prominent. The contrast of Philip's plain black cloth cassock with Ivan's heavy fur cloak provides the basis for considerable play in the scene of their argument early in part 2. In shot 213, Philip turns suddenly and moves to the throne to lean over and speak directly to Ivan; the shifting train swirls behind him and stretches into a series of diagonal folds as he moves. Later, as Philip stalks away, shouting his curse back to Ivan, the long shot frames the entire empty throneroom (216). First Philip moves away, turns briefly to shout back, then continues out; during this, Ivan moves right and then across left to follow Philip. The indirect, hesitating movements of the two men in black against the light flagstones on the floor set up swirling patterns of visual interest and excess. In the Livonian scene, Sigismund leans forward in closeup until his head seems to be suspended in the center of a set of radiating black and white lines (his ruff; shot 84, part 2). In the same scene, one knight wears armor decorated with huge, curling feathers, elaborately backlit (68).

Excess is present in the way things happen. The tassel of Pimen's rosary drags lightly over the carvings on the gold Bible in a closeup during the illness sequence (1, 455). Ivan's sweeping turn as he carries the poisoned cup to Anastasia is unnecessary in relation to the action. Efrosinia's behavior as she sings the lullaby is strange in a way which goes beyond the narrative connotations. Ivan's kiss on Maljuta's brow before the execution in part 2 slips away from the straightforward causal motivation of the scene.

The style of many devices is highly exaggerated in *Ivan*, compared to that in the classical narrative film. Elements of the acting like the sweeping gestures and the staring eyes stand out as strange; we may recognize their function in the filmic system, but this will not obliterate their peculiarity. ("Peculiar" and "strange" here have only positive connotations; these qualities are a large part of *Ivan's* appeal.) The Hollywood norm has accustomed us to clear, seamless space; now we are confronted with frequent, pointless shifts and gaps. Ivan's device of cubistic editing constitutes a perceptual game.¹⁷ If the spectator consciously notices the cubistic cuts, he/she

may indeed be drawn aside from the smoother structures to notice more and more subtle instances of this spatial instability. Indeed, any stylistic disjunction may lead the spectator into an awareness of excess—unless he/she strives too hard to recuperate them.

Problematic or unclear elements are likely to become excess. Many of the icons in the cathedral, for example, are never seen in their entirety. They are realistically motivated as portions of a reasonably authentic historical setting; but because they are only partially visible, they invite inspection in an attempt (necessarily fruitless) at identification. Half-glimpsed hallways, partially darkened corners of rooms, slightly out-of-focus backgrounds, and other similar visual presences may all tend to draw the eye, particularly on repeated viewings. What are we to make of the black-clad body that lies in the background of one shot of the execution scene of part 2 (285)? The body is not there in any other shot, nor is there the faintest narrative motivation for its presence; it is not one of the Boyars, nor is there any suggestion that an Oprichnik dies or faints in this scene. Beyond the frequent use of confused spatial cues in the cutting, there is also one point where the geography is flagrantly inconsistent. When Efrosinia leaves the wedding banquet to check on the progress of the riot, she goes out by a little door and emerges outside at the head of the stairway. Later, she receives Demyan's report in a little archway at the foot of this same stairway; yet when the pair go through the door in this archway, they (at least Efrosinia—Demyan has disappeared during the cut of the interior of the hall) are coming in the same little doorway by which Efrosinia has previously exited.

Certain props carry interest beyond their function in the narrative. The repeated closeups of the emblems of Riga, Reval, and Narva at the beginning of the poisoning sequence are only tangential to the narrative; we would undoubtedly be able to understand Ivan's speech without these "visual aids." But their carvings attract attention. Similarly, the coffin and its trappings in the scene of Ivan's mourning are striking and elaborate: Anastasia lies in a hollowed-out log, surrounded by a fan of shining decorations like a peacock's tail.

We may find some of the most extreme examples of excess in the Fiery Furnace play scene. The play's function in the narrative is clear, but its manner of execution tends toward excess. Barthes speaks briefly of this scene in discussing excess, pointing to the three boys and, "the schoolboy absurdity of their mufflers diligently wrapped around their necks."¹⁸ The mufflers work in with the general principles of the playlet's style, with a heightening of signification accomplished in the various channels by adding a symbolic device to the literal one: the boys stand over fire, but also light candles to imply that they are in the fire; they are tied together, but also wear mufflers to heighten the concept of "bound-ness"; they step into the furnace, but the Chaldeans also turn cartwheels to mark the moment (to suggest a sense of falling or confusion?). But beyond this function, Barthes' description seems to me right; there is something about those mufflers that goes beyond their symbolic participation in the playlet. Their individual decorative pattern and strangeness in this context convey a quality which is perhaps, as Barthes says "absurd," perhaps

¹⁷See Burch's comparison of *Ivan's* cutting to the painting style of Gris in *Theory of Film Practice*, pp. 37–39.

¹⁸Barthes, "The Third Meaning," p. 48.

amusing, touching, or all three. The same is true for other aspects of the scene: the Chaldeans' painted grimaces, the cymbal crashes, the boys' haloes, and the rest, all have qualities beyond their immediate functions.

I have said almost nothing about sound, but clearly it can have its excessive features as well. The strange, jangling bell toward which Vladimir glances in the courtyard scene of the illness sequence of part 1 would be one example. Birds are heard chirping in only one shot of the scene of the herald toward the end of part 1. Malyuta's repetitions of the word "pes" (pronounced "pyos," meaning "dog") in his conversation with Ivan before the executions in part 2 seem to me rather comic, mainly because of the sound of the word itself and the injured tones in which he delivers the lines. In general, music has a great potential to call attention to its own formal qualities apart from its immediate function in relation to the image track. The tendency of the actors to speak their lines in separate bits with long pauses between also tends, I suspect, to call attention to the sounds and rhythms of the dialogue.

A couple of obvious devices in the film that seem strongly excessive: the shifts between color and black-and-white stock, which inevitably must cause a perceptual shock dependent entirely upon the material of the images; and the use of two identical shots from the coronation sequence (1, 58-59) of two young women spectators in the Fiery Furnace scene of part 2 (334-35). In the latter case, we can recuperate the repetition logically by positing that the device helps create a narrative parallel between the two scenes; nevertheless the two shots stand out as disturbing elements because we know they are physically the *same* shots—they violate our expectations about the temporal distinctness of the two scenes.

These few indications from *Ivan* must suffice to help define the excess concretely. I can do no more than indicate; a systematic analysis is impossible. Why then bother with excess at all? What is its value? Beyond renewing the perceptual freshness of the work, it suggests a different way of watching and listening to a film. It offers a potential for avoiding the traditional, conventionalized views of what film structure and narrative should be—views which fit in perfectly with the methods of filmmaking employed in the classical commercial narrative cinema. The spectator need not assume that the entire film consists only of the unified system of structures we call form and style; he/she need not assume that film is a means of communication between artist and audience. Hence the spectator will not go to a film expecting to discern what it is "trying to say," or to try and reassemble its parts into some assumed, preordained whole.

An awareness of excess may help change the status of narrative in general for the viewer. One of the great limitations for the viewer in our culture has been the attitude that film equals narrative, and that entertainment consists wholly of an "escapism" inherent in the plot. Such a belief limits the spectator's participation to understanding only the chain of cause and effect. The fact that we call this understanding the ability to "follow" the narrative is not accidental. The viewer goes along a preordained path, trying to come to the "correct" conclusions; skillful viewing may consist of being able to anticipate plot events before they occur (as with the detective story, which becomes a game in guessing the identity of the criminal before the final revelation). This total absorption in narrative has some unpleasant con-

sequences for the act of viewing. The viewer may be capable of understanding the narrative, but has no context in which to place that understanding; the underlying arbitrariness of the narrative is hidden by structures of motivation and naturalization. A narrative is a chain of causes and effects, but, unlike the real world, the narrative world requires one initial cause which itself has no cause. The choice of this initial cause is one source of the arbitrariness of narrative. Also, once the hermeneutic and proairetic codes are opened in a narrative, there is nothing which logically determines how long the narrative will continue; more and more delays could prolong the chain of cause and effect indefinitely. Thus the initiation, progression, and closure of fictional narratives is largely arbitrary. Narratives are not logical in themselves; they only make use of logic. An understanding of the plot, then, is only a limited understanding of one (arbitrary) portion of the film. But if one looks beyond narrative, at both the unified and the excessive elements at work on other levels, the underlying principles of the film (such as the hermeneutic code and the patterns of motivation) may become apparent. The viewer is no longer caught in the bind of mistaking the causal structure of the narrative for some sort of inevitable, true, or natural set of events which is beyond questioning or criticism (except for superficial evaluation on the grounds of culturally defined conventions and canons of verisimilitude).

One example of the result of a willingness to view films for excess as well as for unified structures is the genre of experimental films which examines already-existing films. These often consist of optical printer alterations of the original film, emphasizing the material of the image. Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (1969) is one such film, which takes a short silent film of the primitive period and blows up and repeats portions of the various shots to create a feature-length film. Narrative begins to break down and tiny gestures, grain, and individual frames become foregrounded. Joseph Cornell made *Rose Hobart* (late 1930s) by taking an obscure American adventure picture (*East of Borneo*, 1932) and turning it into a play on the concept of narrative by isolating individual shots, cutting them together out of order, and repeating shots. He substituted a musical track for the original sound and specified that the film be shown through a purple filter. The result hints obliquely at the original narrative, but generally concentrates on the gestures and appearance of Rose Hobart, a minor Hollywood actress, and on the absurdly exotic studio jungle settings. These, as well as some of Stan Lauder's loop films, suggest the structural possibilities an awareness of excess can create. I don't mean to imply that the spectator and critic will be led to aesthetic creations of their own as a result of watching for excess. But Jacobs' and Cornell's films demonstrate the kinds of perceptual shifts which might take place once one becomes aware of excess.

Once the narrative is recognized as arbitrary rather than logical, the viewer is free to ask why individual events within its structures are as they are. The viewer is no longer constrained by conventions of reading to find a meaning or theme within the work as the solution to a sort of puzzle which has a right answer. Instead, the work becomes a perceptual field of structures which the viewer is free to study at length, going beyond the strictly functional aspects. Each film dictates the way it wants to be viewed by drawing upon certain conventions and ignoring or flouting others. But if the viewer recognizes these conventions and refuses to be bound by them, he/she

may strive to avoid having limitations imposed upon his/her viewing without an awareness of that imposition. Obviously there is no completely free viewing situation; we are always guided by our knowledge and cultural tradition. But a perception of a film which includes its excess implies an awareness of the structures (including conventions) at work in the film, since excess is precisely those elements which escape unifying impulses. Such an approach to viewing films can allow us to look further into a film, renewing its ability to intrigue us by its strangeness; it also can help us to be aware of how the whole film—not just its narrative—works upon our perception.

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PETER WOLLEN

GODARD AND COUNTER CINEMA: VENT D'EST

More and more radically Godard has developed a counter-cinema whose values are counterposed to those of orthodox cinema. I want simply to write some notes about the mean features of this counter-cinema. My approach is to take seven of the values of the old cinema, Hollywood–Mosfilm, as Godard would put it, and contrast these with their (revolutionary, materialist) counterparts and contraries. In a sense, the seven deadly sins of the cinema against the seven cardinal virtues. They can be set out schematically in a table as follows:

| Narrative transitivity | Narrative intransitivity |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Identification | Estrangement |
| Transparency | Foregrounding |
| Single diegesis | Multiple diegesis |
| Closure | Aperture |
| Pleasure | Unpleasure |
| Fiction | Reality |

Obviously, these somewhat cryptic headings need further commentary. First, however, I should say that my overall argument is that Godard was right to break with Hollywood cinema and to set up his counter-cinema and, for this alone, he is the most important director working today. Nevertheless, I think there are various confusions in his strategy, which blunt its edges and even, at times, tend to nullify it—mainly, these concern his confusion over the series of terms: fiction/mystification/ideology/lies/deception/illusion/representation. At the end of these notes, I shall touch on some of my disagreements. First, some remarks on the main topics.

1. *Narrative transitivity v. narrative intransitivity.* (One thing following another v. gaps and interruptions, episodic construction, undigested digression.)